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Impact of orientation programs on nontraditional students' perceived academic success in adult education programs

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2016

Abstract

Impact of Orientation Programs on Nontraditional Students' Perceived Academic

Success in Adult Education Programs

by

Marsha Webster

M.Ed, University of the West Indies, 2007

BA, University of the West Indies, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Many administrators and faculty within higher education institutions have grappled with identifying and employing effective strategies to facilitate student success and persistence. The current study focuses on assessing nontraditional students' self-efficacy beliefs and their perception of the orientation program at a 2-year continuing education program in a Caribbean nation. The study is important as the findings have the potential to increase nontraditional students' persistence and learning. Bandura's social cognitive theory and the theory of self-efficacy served as the theoretical frameworks of this sequential mixed-methods design study. The quantitative research questions examined the reported self-efficacy levels of 77 participants and nonparticipants in the orientation program. The qualitative research questions focused on 10 nontraditional students' perceptions of how the orientation program they participated in impacted their ability to complete and succeed in their course of study. A survey that combined 2 preestablished instruments was used in the quantitative phase and follow-up face-to-face interviews for the qualitative phase of the study. A $t$test analysis showed no statistically significant difference between the self-efficacy of participants and nonparticipants in the focal orientation program. A pattern coding of the interviews revealed 5themes from the qualitative phase, ranging from nontraditional students' challenges to self-efficacy and persistence in the program. A policy recommendation in the form of a white paper was used to convey the findings of this study to the major stakeholders at the target institution. The recommendations from the study may contribute to positive social change as they can improve nontraditional students' performance, increase completion rates at the institution, and positively impact economic growth of the wider community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my family and the persons that have guided and motivated me through every step of this journey. To my Heavenly Father that bestowed on me the grace, patience, and spirit of perseverance throughout this process. My daughter, Sasha, I also dedicate this work. You are my light.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Improving student completion rates is a major objective of administrators and faculty of higher education institutions (Brown, 2012). School administrators have employed various strategies to encourage student persistence and success in their academic endeavors. Orientation programs are one of those established strategies (Conley, 2010; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon,& Hawthorne, 2013). Researchers examining orientation processes from an institutional perspective asserted that providing comprehensive and ongoing student advisement can facilitate student success (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Kolenovic, Linderman,& Karp, 2013; Sindhu, 2012). However, there has been a paucity of research addressing learners' perception of orientation programs and their influence on those students' learning and persistence.

The conceptual framework of this study was grounded in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and the theory of self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Bandura (1989) asserted that individuals are essentially self-regulated and proactive agents in their psychosocial development. Adult students with well-defined educational goals tend to remain motivated and persist in their studies (Bandura, 2001; Converse, Pathak, Depaul-Haddock, Gotlib,& Merbedone, 2012). Consequently, institutions that encouraged an environment of support, feedback, and involvement benefitted from increased student motivation and persistence (Tinto, 2005).

In the current study, the 2-year continuing education program in a Caribbean nation catered to adult students. According to an annual report, many enrollees had not participated in formal education for significant periods of time. Additionally, a number of students in the program did not complete secondary education and were seeking qualifications to improve their career prospects or to be able to matriculate in other tertiary institutions.

The purpose of this study was to focus on (a) the potential impact of the program on nontraditional students' self-efficacy beliefs; (b) how they perceive the purpose of orientation procedures; and (c) how the orientation program influences nontraditional students' learning and persistence in their course of study. The research assessed the student perspectives of an orientation program in contrast to the institutional focus explored in previous studies (Drake, 2011; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Sindhu, 2012).

Definition of the Problem

The research problem in this study addressed the fact that nontraditional students at the program under focus continued to struggle to complete their courses of study. Since its inception in 2003, the 2-year continuing education program has catered mainly to older learners. Registration data for the academic year 2011-2012 indicated that 68% of students registered at the institution were over the age of 21. Between 2007 and 2013, the institution enrolled approximately 300 students annually and had an average course completion rate of 55%. Students enroll in between one and three subject courses and must receive a final passing grade of A, B, or C in the external examinations to

successfully acquire the requisite qualification. A significant problem has been that over the last 4years an average of 43% of the initial cohort has left the program without a passing grade in at least one of the subjects taken.

The institution has an orientation program in place that occurs at the beginning of the academic year. The single-session orientation provides student with information regarding the mission of the institution and courses offered. The orientation also includes motivational speeches, introduction of faculty members, and registration for courses. The information is usually presented from the institutional perspective with limited opportunity for student interaction and feedback.

Nontraditional students face a number of challenges that are not typical of traditional students. Managing and completing the demand of family and work is among these challenges (Brown, 2012). These challenges can result in nontraditional students not succeeding in their educational pursuits without adequate and targeted support (Gayle, 2014; Hollins, 2009).

Facilitating student success is an objective of the institution and is articulated in the school's mission statement. It is critical then that the perspectives of the students, the beneficiaries of the program, are incorporated into an analysis of the strategies for student and institutional development and improvement. This study focused on assessing nontraditional students' self-efficacy beliefs and their perception about the impact of the orientation program on their ability to effectively learn and persist in their classes.

Several orientation programs in higher education continue to fail to address the needs of nontraditional learners. In 2102, 33% of students enrolled in higher education in

the United States were over the age of 25. The National Center for Education Statistics (2014) projected this number to increase by 23% by 2019. Indeed, it has been suggested that formerly small nontraditional student populations will continue to increase as many more older adults embark on higher education (Newbaker, 2012,p. 2).

Many higher education institutions offer orientation programs that last from 1day to 1week (Brown University, 2014, Colombia University, 2014; University of Utah, 2014; University of the West Indies, 2014). However, the programs are targeted to new students that are transitioning from high school or transfer students from other tertiary institutions. The objectives of these programs include acclimating students to the academic programs of the institution (Bucknell University, 2014; Colombia University, 2014), as well as introducing the students to the institutions' culture, resources, and services (Brown University, 2014; University of the West Indies, 2014). Nevertheless, the majority of these institutions have failed to address the needs of nontraditional students in their orientation programs.

At the program under study, there have been discussions among the faculty and administration regarding the rate of student completion and the need to implement relevant strategies to improve student experience and success. In a memo to the faculty and staff, the institution's director highlighted the concerns of the faculty regarding student persistence and attainment. He proposed that strategies should be identified to address this important issue (program director, personal communication, December 6, 2013).

This study provided insight into the students' perceptions concerning the impact of the target program's orientation session on their self-efficacy beliefs and learning. The next sections will provide more details on the local context of the problem and similar problems described in the professional literature.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The rationale of this study was to examine the perceptions of a group of nontraditional students regarding the impact of an orientation program on their self-efficacy beliefs and their ability to learn and persist in their classes. Previous research has investigated student transition into further education (Conley, 2010; Giancola, Grawith, &Borchert, 2009; Scott & Clayton, 2011) and the importance of orientation programs (Karp et al., 2012; Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clark, 2012). However, assessing the perceptions of nontraditional students about the impact of orientation on their learning addresses a gap in research. The purpose of this study was to assess how nontraditional students at a small higher education institution perceive the potential impact of an orientation program on their self-efficacy beliefs and the influence of the orientation program on their learning and persistence in their course of study.

In his introductory comments on The Cayman Islands Strategic Plan for Education 2012-2017, the Minister of Education of the Cayman Islands noted that a critical goal of effective education is enhancing skills for lifelong learning and work (A. McLaughlin, personal communication, August 23, 2012). The objective of the strategic plan is ensuring that individuals complete training programs with the relevant skills to

compete for job opportunities (A. McLaughlin, personal communication, August 23, 2012). In this regard, orientation programs can be regarded as an institution's effort to assist students to make successful transitions into higher education (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

The Education for All Regional Report for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/UNESCO, 2011) affirmed that although enrolment rates for tertiary institutions in the Caribbean region have increased over the last decade, access to relevant information relating to postsecondary education has remained a significant barrier to persons interested in acquiring further education. A comparison of gross tertiary graduation rates, expressed as a percentage of the given population that finishes a first degree, indicated that the Cayman Islands had a graduation ratio of 2.89 compared to the United Kingdom at 39.23 or Finland at 88.12 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2012). Other countries in the region also had modest ratios. Trinidad and Tobago was at 4.94 and St. Lucia at 4.16 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2012), suggesting that many students in small Caribbean nations experience limited success in completing their programs of study.

A major local tertiary institution indicated that despite increases in the last 3 years, graduation rates remained at approximately 31%. These data demonstrate the low rates of course completion at the local level compared to other regions. Consequently, stakeholders, such as administrators, faculty, and staff of local higher education institutions should recognize the need for relevant and timely strategies and policies that can facilitate improved learning and persistence among nontraditional students.

As a result, the rationale of this study was to examine the perceptions of a group of nontraditional students regarding the impact of an orientation program on their self-efficacy beliefs and their ability to learn and persist in their classes. The information uncovered from this study has the potential to help the administration and faculty of the target program to develop and implement strategies that meet the needs of nontraditional students and improve their learning and persistence in their classes. On a larger scope, I hope that the findings will also assist other similar institutions with large nontraditional student populations to develop similar strategies.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The professional literature highlighted that many administrators of higher education institutions have grappled with the problem of improving student retention, persistence, and academic success (Brophy, 2013; Brown, 2011; Hope, 2015; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Valentine et al., 2011).Many tertiary institutions use orientation procedures to provide students with the skills to navigate the rigors of further education and to confront the challenges of studying, employment, and family life (Conley, 2010; Drake, 2011; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Scott- Clayton, 2011).

Tinto (2005) asserted that student attrition is often at its highest level during the first year of study as students struggle with competing roles and academic expectations. At the 33rd Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience in 2014 (National Resource Center, 2014), one of the main topics was transforming orientation, retention, and transition programs to support the success of students. Recommendations to administrators and advisors included fostering communities, creating new possibilities

and pathways, having supportive and encouraging systems, and developing clear and common expectation (Harrington, Altman, McMahon,& Patel, 2014).Discussions in higher education have continued to involve the need for efficacious strategies to promote student success and completion rates. A paper presented by McGlynn (2013) at the 2013 International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association Conference identified the lack of appropriate orientation and intervention strategies that prepare students to succeed as a critical factor in students' failure to persist, especially in the initial stages of their academic programs. Additionally, previous researchers have indicated that factors such as the learning environment, student attributes, institutional strategies, support systems, and goal orientation should guide the development of orientation programs (Brown, 2011; Ellis-O'Quinn, 2011; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Hollins, 2009; Karp et al., 2012; Wyatt, 2011).

The need for social learning. It is imperative that adult students have well-defined educational goals to remain motivated and persist in their studies (Converse et al., 2012). Providing students with relevant guidance and knowledge is important for their success. One aspect of fostering positive learning behaviors is emphasizing social learning through the promotion of meaningful social interactions within the learning environment. The needs of the learners should be the basis of a broad and complex social process within the institution. There must be programs in place that encourage students to develop learning skills and techniques by actively observing and acquiring the tools and strategies necessary for successful navigation of the learning environment (Walters

&Hoops, 2015). Institutions can provide a framework for meaningful learning by facilitating social interactions among members of the school community.

The institution's social structure can promote student motivation and persistence by engendering autonomy among learners and providing them with the information to decide what to do and how to do it (Brophy, 2013). Developing the skills to adequately manipulate and control their learning environment will help students to foster beneficial relationships and affiliations with others and feel more connected to their colleagues and the institution (O'Quinn, 2010). Social learning is a critical component of adult education as it can impact their motivation, interpersonal interactions, and academic performance (Wright et al., 2013).

The need to consider the challenges to students. In their study on factors that keep at-risk students in school, Valentine et al. (2011) stated that many students enroll in postsecondary education with the intention of improving their employment prospects. School administrators need to understand the various educational and personal transitions these students must undertake, such as finances, family, and work commitments and develop relevant strategies that assist learners to confront these challenges (Brown, 2012). Examining learner characteristics and student persistence, Brown (2012) posited that factors such as family attributes, financial commitments, and student motivation had a significant influence on persistence. Brown concluded that institutions should consider these factors in developing orientation sessions. Additionally, when compared to students pursuing more academic qualifications, students enrolled in vocational training programs tended to leave the institution unsuccessfully due to factors such as weak individual

aptitudes, family obligations, and financial stress (Brown, 2012). As Hollins (2009)

explained, adult learners must navigate various roles while pursuing educational goals.

These often include full-time employment, responsibilities as caregivers and spouses, as

well as community involvement that can impact the time and effort available for their

studies (Drake, 2011).

Additionally, these many personal and social obligations can overwhelm adult

learners and result in less-than-satisfactory academic performance. High levels of

stressors and the demands of adult learners' numerous roles and responsibilities can result

in a higher negative perception of their educational experiences (Nelson & Clark, 2015).

Having full-time jobs, parental and spousal responsibility, as well as other family

obligations can challenge the learners' dedication to their academic pursuits (Young-

Jones et al., 2013). It is advisable that orientation programs align with the needs of the

target population and promote key attributes such as positive decision making and

institutional commitment (Brown, 2012, p. 838).

The type of students enrolling in vocational and community colleges is a factor

that affects student persistence in these institutions. Indeed, more underprepared students

tended to enroll in vocational programs (Giancola et al., 2009; Nelson & Clark, 2015;

Nelson et al., 2012). These programs usually offered an open-door policy that allows

them to take advantage of developmental and remedial courses (Hope, 2015).

Consequently, administrators and staff in vocational programs are encouraged to develop

effective strategies targeted to their student population.

The need for relevant strategies and support systems. Institutions that encourage an environment of support, feedback, and involvement benefit from increased student motivation and persistence (Tinto, 2005). Examining the impact of a comprehensive approach to student orientation, Drake (2011) asserted that the objectives of orientation programs should include academic preparation, personal adjustment, and making students aware of the transition process of continuing or returning to formal education. The study also concluded that there is great potential in increasing student success through offering student orientation programs that focus on these factors. Preparing learners both socially and academically can improve their abilities to adjust to the myriad of demands associated with pursuing further education.

Furthermore, promoting academic strength via organized, inclusive, and comprehensive support can meaningfully improve graduation rates (Kolenovic et al., 2013). Additionally, the presence of facilities for ongoing and officious advisement can promote positive outcomes among student. Providing timely and relevant orientation strategies can assist nontraditional students, with multiple and conflicting roles and responsibilities, to better transition into academic life and improve their opportunities for success (Sindhu, 2012).

In addition, institutions should invest in preparing staff with the information and skills to effectively support students. Sindhu (2012) suggested that institutional factors, such as faculty members and staff, can have a meaningful impact on guiding students' decision making. Faculty members, administrators, and the institution as a whole have a critical role in fostering persistence among minority students (Espinoza & Espinoza,

2012, p. 38). Learners' social interactions influence commitment to the institution and

goal setting, which consequently increases persistence in the academic environment.

Academic personnel that promote positive interaction, encourage student participation,

and provide pertinent feedback influence students' success positively. Wyatt (2011)

posited that having a sense of community promoted institutional commitment and was a

positive predictor of student persistence (p. 15). Support and encouragement to

participate in school activities and develop bonds with fellow students and faculty had a

significant impact on student persistence and goal orientation.

Students' goal orientation. Goal orientation and self-efficacy were also found to

be major factors influencing student achievement and success (Wright et al., 2013).

Academic success is associated with students' perceptions of their abilities to complete

tasks and their motives for completing tasks, including how they are guided in developing

and improving their skills (Ranellucci, Hall,& Goetz, 2015). Consequently, teachers and

administrators should provide guidance to students with negative and maladaptive

concepts about their learning patterns, such as feelings of inadequacy in their academic

abilities and role management (Sullivan &Guera, 2007, p. 460). Relevant guidance and

knowledge on how to foster positive goal orientation through pertinent learning

experiences can prevent students from sabotaging their ability to succeed in their

programs of study (Nitecki, 2011; Ranellucci et al., 2015).

Another important factor in goal orientation is incorporating students' needs as

drivers of their academic success (Ayers, 2011). As Ayers suggested, professionals

engaged in providing adult education have to critically examine the expressed needs of

learners in order to find strategies that challenge learners to achieve their desired goals (p. 343). Providing students with the opportunity to have input in the development of support systems can be beneficial to their success. Administrators, advisors, and educators may incorporate present and potential students' perspectives into orientation program planning to facilitate the transmission of effective and relevant skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, personal factors, such as family, friends, work, society, and learners' skills and abilities, could directly affect how the learner viewed higher education and determined if students successfully completed their courses of study (Sindu, 2012). Cho and Karp (2013) affirmed that these factors facilitated student success and found that maximizing learner satisfaction by offering quality student services, including relevant orientation sessions and opportunities for quick response to problems and queries, can enhance completion rates.

Definitions

The following are definitions of unfamiliar terms that can facilitate comprehension of the study:

Goal orientation: Students' views and beliefs concerning their own capabilities to accomplish given tasks and the factors that motivate them to work towards particular goals (Wright et al., 2013).

Nontraditional students: The National Center for Educational Statistics acknowledges that there is no single definition for nontraditional students. However, part-time status and having a significant gap between finishing high school and entering postsecondary institutions are common characteristics of this type of student. For the

purpose of this study, I defined nontraditional students as learners who are 21 years old and over who have not participated in formal education for at least 3years. They attend school part time, and most likely engaged in part-time or full-time employment (Gilardi&Guglielmetti, 2011).

Orientation programs: The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2102) defined orientation programs as a wide range of social and academic activities organized by institutions to welcome new students. These programs usually take place at the beginning of the academic year and introduce students to life at the institution, acclimate students to the new surroundings, and provide opportunities for them to meet members of the school community.

Self-efficacy: The process in which students employ self-monitoring techniques and engage in positive behaviors that allows them to achieve academically (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Students regulate and monitor their actions and incorporate strategies that will promote successful task completion.

Student persistence: The ability to successfully complete courses or programs of study despite obstacles and challenging circumstances (Hart, 2012). Student persistence is inextricably related to the actions the student and the institution take to ensure that the student stays with the system of higher education from beginning to completion (Simmons, 2010).

Significance

This study is significant as there has been a paucity of research to address learners' perception of orientation programs and their influence on learning and

persistence. Improving student persistence and achievement through institutional strategies such as orientation programs is a critical aspect of adult education (Conley, 2010; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Sindhu, 2012). However, assessing the perceptions of nontraditional students regarding the impact of orientation on their learning represented original inquiry in this educational area and addressed a gap in the research. This study assessed nontraditional students' self-efficacy beliefs and their perceptions about the impact of the orientation program on their ability to effectively learn and persist in their programs of study.

Given the importance of this institution for providing educational opportunities to nontraditional learners in the community, there was a concern about the completion rate of the students (program director, personal communication, December 6, 2013). On a broader level, many higher education institutions have been faced with high rates of student attrition (Brown, 2012; Conley, 2010; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012). Research has indicated that there are important learner and institutional factors that can promote effective learning and persistence. These include students having clear academic and career goals and institutions providing timely and relevant support (Brown, 2012; Cho & Karp, 2013; Nitecki, 2011; Robinson &Gahagan, 2010; Schreiner, 2010). These factors assist adult students to realize their personal and professional objectives.

Wright et al. (2013) asserted that individuals without postsecondary education have significantly decreased opportunities to pursue various career options (p. 293). Indeed, persons over the age of 25 that have successfully acquired postsecondary qualifications earn approximately 40% higher median incomes than persons who did not

complete tertiary qualifications (U.S Census Bureau, as cited in Wright et al., 2013). It is therefore incumbent on higher education institutions to develop effective strategies to promote student success and completion rates (Mullin, 2012).

Many higher education institutions use orientation programs to help students transition into further education (Brown, 2012; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Hollins, 2009; Hope, 2015). However, this study has provided unique insight into students' perception of an orientation program and allows the institution to develop strategies that specifically cater to the needs of nontraditional students. The target program and other similar institutions' faculty and staff can use the findings from this study to implement strategies that will provide nontraditional students with critical information to facilitate positive academic outcomes and completion rates.

Guiding/Research Questions

A major responsibility of higher education administrators and faculty is to adequately assist students to transition into the new learning environment (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Kolenovic et al., 2013; Sindhu, 2012). In doing so, orientation programs may include elements of academic preparation, personal adjustment, and increasing student awareness during (Conley, 2010; Hollins, 2009; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Wright, Jenkins-Guarmieri, & Murdock, 2013).Previous research has demonstrated that developing effective orientation procedures that provide comprehensive support and relevant information can encourage positive academic outcomes (Cho &Karp, 2013; Ellis-O'Quinn, 2010; Kolenovic et al., 2013). This targeted support provides learners

with the skills to make informed decisions regarding their academic goals (O'Gara,

Karp,&Hughs, 2009; Nitecki, 2011).

The program that was the focus of this study is a small tertiary institution with an

average enrolment of 300 students. A significant percentage of the students are

employed, pursuing their academic qualifications on a part-time basis, and are considered

nontraditional. Between 2010 and 2013, approximately 43% of students did not complete

their courses of study.

The institution offers a pre-enrollment orientation program for new students.

During orientation, new students receive information regarding the mission of the

institution, courses offered, program guidelines, and study tips. Although it is advised

that students participate in the orientation program, attendance at the orientation program

is not compulsory. On average, the organizers estimate that approximately 25% of the

new student population elects not to participate in the orientation program.

Considering the overarching focus of this study was assessing student perceptions

regarding the impact of an orientation program on their self-efficacy beliefs and their

learning and persistence, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Is there a significant difference between the self-efficacy levels of students

    that participated in the orientation program at the target program and those

    who did not participate?

    $H1_0$:   There is no statistically significant difference between reported

             academic self-efficacy levels for students that participated in the

orientation program at the target program and those students that did

not participate in the orientation program as measured by AE Scale.

$H1_1$: The students that participated in the orientation program at the target

program have higher reported academic self-efficacy levels than the

students that did not participate in the orientation program as measured

by AE Scale.

2. For students that participated in the orientation program, is their self-efficacy

levels as measured by the AE Scale correlated with their self-efficacy levels as

measured by the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program?

$H2_0$: There is no statistically significant correlation between the self-

efficacy levels of students, as measured by the AE Scale, and their

self-efficacy levels, as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the

orientation program.

$H2_1$: There is a positive correlation between the self-efficacy levels of

students, as measured by the AE Scale, and their self-efficacy levels,

as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program.

For the students that participated in the orientation program, the following

research questions pertained to the qualitative portion of the study:

3. What aspects of the orientation do nontraditional students find useful in

assisting them in improving their learning in their classes?

4. To what extent do nontraditional students perceive that the orientation program of the target program will impact their ability to complete their program of study?

5. Does the perception of the impact of the orientation program differ for students with low self-efficacy levels as opposed to those with high self-efficacy levels?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was grounded in the Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. Bandura theorized that persons learn within a social realm and frame new information through current and prior experiences. Learners can also be proactive in their academic development and self-regulate their cognitive and social performances (Bandura, 2001).

Zimmerman (1990) further expanded on the concepts of self-efficacy and self-regulation as key components of Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura (1989) asserted that individuals are essentially self-regulated and proactive agents in their psychosocial development. Persons can learn to develop skills that regulate their intellectual performance through motivational, affective, and social factors (Bandura, 2001).Having a robust and efficacious sense of one's capabilities is crucial to positive cognitive and social outcomes, as persons become confident in embarking on the paths to goal attainment. Self-efficacy is the process through which students regulate and monitor their motivation in their academic pursuits. It involves the development of mechanisms for self-monitoring, applying personal standards, and achieving success (Zimmerman

&Bandura, 1994). Promoting learner self-regulation involves providing cognitive and metacognitive guides and strategies to improve motivation and goal setting (Zimmerman &Schunk, 1994).

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1977) asserted that the social cognitive theory is rooted in students' experiences. New patterns of behaviors are reinforced through observation of others while learners proceed to select and adapt those types of behaviors that may produce favorable effects in their academic pursuits (p.3). Students acquire the skills and strategies to undertake the tasks required to achieve their goals. This process promotes learner self-efficacy that guides and motivates their actions.

Academic staff members have a central role in assisting students to acquire the tools that will help them to be engaged learners and develop their full academic potential (Alderman, 2012). A fundamental theme of social cognitive theory is that cognitive and environmental factors are interrelated (Bandura, 1997). Invariably, social and environmental factors, such as incentives and institutional programs and strategies, can impact students' emotions and beliefs about ability (Alderman, 2012). Through the reciprocal interactions between personal and environmental facets, students can become more proactively involved in their development and success (Schunk& Usher, 2011).

Wright et al. (2013) examined the link between social learning and adult learners' career interest, options, performance, and persistence. They affirmed that orientation programs can be an important tool to provide students in vocational training programs with the knowledge and skills to succeed in their educational pursuits. Providing students

with the relevant information and guidelines to promote positive decision making can influence confidence in goal setting and increase commitment to said goals (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).Having clear goals can motivate students to achieve in school and persist in their educational goals (Bandura et al., 2008; Walters & Hoops, 2015). Supplying learners with efficacious strategies to make positive decisions regarding their educational goals is critical to their success (Converse et al., 2012).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is understood as a person's self-belief in their own competencies and academic abilities (Bandura, 1997). Within an educational context, this concept is directly related to students proactively generating thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that direct them in attaining their academic goals (Zimmerman, 2002). Having a clear sense of one's academic goals is a crucial attribute for life-long learners as this will assist students to develop self-reliance and attain the self-discipline to persist in their academic pursuits (Zimmerman, 2000). Schunk (1984) affirmed that self-efficacy relates to an individual's ability to implement action in a particular situation or context to achieve a desired objective.

Characteristics of self-efficacious students include being hard working, persistent, and willing to persevere in the face of challenges (Schunk& Zimmerman, 2008). These are important cognitive variables that influence students' motivation and engagement in their academic pursuits (Nelson & Clark, 2015; Schunk & Mullen, 2011).High-efficacy students tend to monitor their academic progress more closely, utilize more self-

regulatory techniques, and are better conceptual problem solvers that their low-efficacy counterparts (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008).

Research has suggested that having high self-efficacy can positively influence student engagement and achievement through the individual's choices of activities, effort, and persistence (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Usher, 2012). Institutions can help students experience success by creating facilities that foster the development of learning strategies and skills, as well as clear and positive future plans (Schunk & Mullen, 2011). Additionally, students tend to be more engaged and perform better academically in a supportive environment where they believe their academic and professional needs are being met (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012).

Learners that possess clear educational goals have more successful academic outcomes (Ranellucci et al., 2015). These goals are related to their belief that that the skills they develop in a program of study will be useful in their careers and therefore promote self-efficacious characteristics, such ashigher academic achievement and persistence (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). Receiving relevant information that affirms and persuades students that they are able to perform and succeed at tasks is fundamental to promoting engagement, persistence, and confidence (Bandura, 1997). This social persuasion is effective when the persons providing the information are considered knowledgeable and the information is relevant and realistic (Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011).

Communicating confidence in a person's abilities can be as important as the individual's innate competencies and consequently linked to students' abilities to be

successful in their educational endeavors (Barry & Finney, 2009; Wright et al., 2013). Practical information provided at orientation programs can promote student confidence through the provision of relevant skills to improve their self-reliance and work ethics. Consequently, the social cognitive and self-efficacy theories offer a broad framework for assessing student self-efficacy and the effectiveness of orientation procedures on student success.

For this reason, facilitating improved student performance through positive social environments and promoting high self-efficacy levels are fundamental objectives of effective higher education institutions. The theoretical framework supports creating strategies that are conducive to improving student learning, goal attainment, and persistence. The research questions and subsequent data collection and analysis for this study were centered on the theoretical foundations of adult learners being proactive agents in their academic development. Developing effective institutional strategies that facilitate student learning and persistence is critical to promoting positive social change.

Search Strategies and Sources

I utilized several strategies to find relevant, appropriate, and credible sources for the review of literature. The key search terms for the literature review were associated with orientation programs, student success, and student persistence. During the search process, various search terms emerged from the use of Boolean operators and the examination and synthesis of results. These terms included *orientation strategies, orientation procedures, orientation programs, higher education, student success, student perceptions, student retention, attrition, persistence, career advisement, institutional*

support, goal orientation, goal achievement, social learning, self-efficacy, self-regulation, learning environments in many combinations. Peer-reviewed, primary source journal articles and books were mainly assessed and evaluated for credibility and relevance to the research problem. Sources that were credible, unbiased, and presented diverse settings were selected for review. Additionally, the reference list from each source was reviewed and provided valuable suggestions for sources to extend the literature review and achieve saturation.

Website and database searches facilitated the selection of relevant literature. During the review process, I examined many websites related to higher education, college graduation and completion rates, and orientation strategies. These included The Cayman Islands Strategic Plan for Education 2012-2017, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, UNSECO Report of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean, World Bank data, and The University College of the Cayman Islands Annual Reports. Additionally, I used a variety of online journals in the literature review, such as *Adult Education Quarterly, About Campus, American Education Research Journal, Community College Review, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, Journal of Education Psychology, Journal of Experiential Education, Journal of Psychology and Law, Journal of Vocational Behavior, New Directions for Student Services, Review of Education Research, The Journal of Virginia Community Colleges*. The electronic databases utilized to conduct the research included, among others, ERIC, Education form SAGE, and PsycINFO. The results of the analysis are presented in the critical review of literature.

Review of Literature

The review of literature provides a synthesis of the current literature related to orientation programs, student persistence, and self-efficacy. This section is organized around factors that can impact student learning and persistence. These factors include student self-efficacy, types of orientation programs, student populations, and the support offered.

Students' Self-Efficacy

Researchers found that students' perception of their abilities and their self-efficacy proved to have a significant impact on their academic success and persistence (Cho & Karp, 2013; Walters & Hoops, 2015; Wright et al., 2013). Utilizing regression analyses on a sample of undergraduate students, Wright et al. (2013) suggested that increased levels of college self-efficacy at the beginning of a college career were associated with greater odds of persisting into the subsequent semesters and of being academically successful. From their quantitative study of over 23,000 community college students, Cho and Karp (2013) further concluded that there was a noticeable gap between orientation session participants and those that did not participate as it related to student persistence. Participation in these courses was particularly beneficial to students considered academically underprepared as it provided them with useful knowledge to identify strategies that could improve their educational outcomes.

Utilizing a longitudinal analysis approach, Bandura et al. (2008) examined the impact of perceived self-efficacy on academic persistence and achievement. The conclusions affirmed that students with clear and defined goals tend to possess higher

efficacy and were more meticulous in their approach to learning and problem solving. Student self-efficacy hasalso been linked to their confidence in college. A psychometric investigation purported that favorable psychological attributes, such as confidence and a strong sense of competence positively, correlated with high self-efficacy (Barry & Finney, 2009; Nelson & Clark, 2015; Ranellucci et al., 2015).

The relevance of self-efficacy in students' learning and persistence is evidenced by research that suggested self-efficacious students perform better due to augmented levels of effort and persistence (Bandura et al., 2008; Breso, Schaufeli, & Salanova, 2010;Schunk& Usher, 2011; Wright et al., 2013). Developing strategies to address students' underperformance and lack of persistence has been discussed by the administration and stakeholders of the program that was the focus of the study (program director, personal communication, December 6, 2013). Programs that provide interventions to promote student self-efficacy and relevant support can improve student performance and diminish instances of negative thoughts and anxiety in students with regards to their academic capabilities (Breso et al., 2010).

Historical Overview of Higher Education Orientation Programs

In the United States, colleges such as Yale and Brown were among the first to be aware of students' academic and personal challenges. From the 1870s, these colleges began to implement processes for academic advisement to address the concerns of students (Drake, 2011). Academic advisement and orientation programs have evolved and continue to play a pivotal role in acclimating learners to the rigors of higher education (Box, Callan, Geddes, Kemp, & Wojchieszek, 2012).

By the 1970s, students required more personalized and direct attention as the size and types of tertiary institutions increased (Box et al., 2012;Grites, 2008). Consequently, academic advisement continued to change to respond to a number of economic, political, and social factors (Hirsh, 2013). Among Caribbean higher education institutions, there has beena growing movement towards incorporating holistic academic advising and orientation to improve the student experience (Greenidge & Daire, 2010; Zunker, 2006). For many Caribbean students, embarking on higher education is a social and personal transition, accompanied by unique challenges and novel decisions (Greenidge & Daire, 2010).

University orientation programs can focus on assisting students to achieve their career and academic goals by offering developmental advisement and information (Gayle, 2014). Many educational, psychological, and social factors can have an impact on students' academic performance. Effective advisement can facilitate a smoother transition of higher education.

Guiding Factors for Higher Education Orientation Programs

The research indicated that many higher education institutions usedvarious strategies to provide students with information to facilitate their transition in postsecondary education (Conley, 2010; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Karp et al., 2012; Padgett & Keup, 2011; Scott- Clayton, 2011). However, questions still persist about their implementation, outcomes, and relevancy to the needs of the student populations (Karp et al., 2012; Mullin, 2011; Wright et al., 2013).

As mentioned earlier, previous research suggested factors such as student attributes, institutional strategies and support systems, and goal orientation should guide the development of orientation programs (Brown, 2011; Ellis-O'Quinn, 2011; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Karp et al., 2012; Young-Jones et al., 2013). Providing adult learners with the skills to define their educational goals will engender the autonomy, confidence, and motivation to invest more in their academic outcomes (Brophy, 2013; Converse et al., 2012; Schreiner, 2012).

The orientation session of the target program provides a general overview of the institution's history and mission, course information, and study skills. However, it is also critical that the institutions have systems in place to address the needs of specific students (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Hollins, 2009; Karp et al., 2012; Kolenovic et al., 2013). Orientation strategies should incorporate and respond to the various roles and challenges of the adult learner (Brown, 2012; Valentine et al., 2011).

Target Populations of Orientation Programs

The majority of the reviewed studies involved quantitative research designs and often included samples from first-year college students, indicating a consensus that orientation procedures tend to be offered to students commencing their higher education journey (Cho & Karp, 2013; O'Quinn, 2010; Wright et al., 2013). Brown (2010) developed a freshman orientation survey utilizing Tinto's student integration model to determine the relationship between student retention and selected variables. The research indicated that strong relationships exist between goal attainment, family attributes, academic intentions, and self-knowledge and student retention. Allowing students to

develop clear academic and career trajectories, though relevant advisement, was found to be crucial to student persistence.

The student population at the program that was the focus of the study consisted of a large number of older learners, many over the age of 30.Formulating and providing targeted academic advisement and information has the potential to offer valuable support to older learners (Brown, 2012; Conley, 2010; Kolenovic et al., 2013). Nontraditional students can benefit from policies and programs designed to meet their specific needs and challenges (Nitecki, 2011).

There are fundamental challenges to students who enter further education without the requisite skills for academic success (Robinson & Gahagan, 2012). Institutional practices provide students with opportunities to ameliorate negative and deficient concepts of learning and academic planning (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Indeed, the social, economic, and academic attributes that students bring to a higher education institution should inform institutional policies and programs (Hope, 2015; Wyatt, 2011). Programs developed to meet the needs of the school's target population have the potential to create a unique institutional subculture that improved academic performance and retention (Nitecki, 2011).

Studies examining the impact of orientation programs on student persistence have suggested that participation in orientation courses and advisement can influence student persistence and learning. Ellis-O'Quinn (2010) conducted a quantitative analysis of a group of students that participated in an orientation program and another that did not take part in the program. The research concluded there was a significant relationship between

participation in orientation procedures and student achievement. In general, participation in orientation programs or group advising demonstrated a positive relationship as reflected in a higher grade point average (Young-Jones et al., 2013). According to Schreiner (2010), effectively advising students and providing them with relevant knowledge related to coping with academic pressures and challenges, builds hope in the learner (p. 6). This resulted in students believing that they are the ones responsible for their own academic outcomes; therefore, they approach instructional tasks with more confidence and are willing to invest more in their educational pursuits.

Student Support

Supporting nontraditional students was the focus of a qualitative study by Nitecki (2011). Utilizing detailed interviews and observational notes, the researchers found that the institution must demonstrate to students a dedication to collaborating with them in attaining academic and social integration. Empowering students through consistent academic advising and detailed and transparent information concerning their degree helped with their program progress and completion (Hope, 2015; Martinez, Sher, Krull,& Wood, 2009).

The impact of personalized support for at-risk students was analyzed utilizing a qualitative case study approach by assessing the perspectives of an associate dean who advised and helped to create policies and programs to support underrepresented students (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012). The conclusion of this study was that institutions must demonstrate to students a dedication to helping them attain academic and social integration through relevant and individualized support. Furthermore, providing well-

implemented student success courses gave students the opportunity to learn and practice the skills and habits necessary for college success (Wyatt, 2011). Using data from interviews and observation notes, the results from Nelson et al.'s(2012)study affirmed that participation in an orientation course had a positive impact on student readiness for the rigors of higher education. Of note, the qualitative research undertaken by Karp et al. (2012) corroborated the conclusions that orientation programs and student success courses contributed to student success and persistence. The findings maintained that orientation procedures facilitated learning about the college, classes, and study skills as well as building important relationships with professors and peers.

Finally, a review of program evaluations provided insight into the practical applications of programs that were developed to promote student success. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012) assessed promising practices for community college student success and outlined various programs that promoted student achievement, including orientation strategies. Attaining a goal becomes drastically easier when the goal and the path to achieving it are well defined and clear. Defining this trajectory is the function of academic goal setting and planning, of which orientation programs are an important component (Robinson & Gahagan, 2010; Schreiner, 2010).

The literature review identified a predominance of quantitative research related to orientation procedures and student success. The studies that utilized a qualitative design focused on traditional students often entering tertiary institutions directly from secondary schools. Consequently, there was an emphasis on student support strategies directed towards younger adults. There is a need to conduct further research on the development

of orientation procedures that are relevant to nontraditional students who often have to confront additional challenges. Furthermore, the majority of the research was undertaken in large institutions with numerous participants. Therefore, the literature review indicates a need for further research on the impact of orientation programs on nontraditional students at a small training institution.

Implications

This study presents a number of implications for social change. Specifically, it provides both the local institution as well as other interested institutions with information that can help to develop strategies that directly cater to the needs of nontraditional students that can facilitate positive academic outcomes and completion rates. Offering programs that assist students in making a successful transition into their higher education experience is an important function of effective institutions (Karp et al., 2012; Upcraft, & Farnsworth, 1984 as cited in Hollins, 2009).

Additionally, targeted student support and advisement is associated with positive learner outcomes including increased student persistence and completion rates (Espinoza, & Espinoza, 2012; Martinez et al., 2009; Nitecki, 2012). Indeed, completing their programs of study is an important indicator of student success (Schreiner, 2010). Continued success may allow adult learners to gain access to increased job opportunities and improved standard of living (Wright et al., 2013). The findings of this study offer valuable insight into specific concepts and information that are specifically relevant to the needs of nontraditional students and assist in engendering positive academic outcomes.

This project study is particularly relevant at this time due to the concern of the administration and faculty regarding the low percentage of students successfully completing the program without acquiring the requisite qualifications. The recommendations from the study's findings are presented in the form of a white paper(Appendix A). The white paper provides insights into the students' perceptions about the impact of the orientation program on their learning and persistence. Consequently, this information can facilitate the development of strategies aimed at improving the learning experience of nontraditional students at the institution.

Summary

This research problem provided the opportunity to use applied research to investigate nontraditional students' self-efficacy beliefs and their perceptions of the impact of an orientation program on their ability to learn and persist in their classes. There is evidence of the problem at both the local and international levels based on data from various agencies involved in tertiary education.

The literature review identified an array of factors that should be considered when developing and implementing orientation programs, such as, student experiences, goal achievement, and student self-efficacy. Additionally, orientation programs serve the critical role of assisting adult learners to navigate the numerous challenges associated with continuing their education. These include providing relevant and timely support, encouraging social interactions and institutional commitment, and promoting the development of clear academic and professional goals. The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory and Zimmerman's concept

self-efficacy. This theoretical base is particularly relevant to understanding the role of

self-regulation and positive beliefs on one's own capabilities and learning outcomes.

Research of this problem can be beneficial to the individual nontraditional student

as well as their institution as this study gives voice to nontraditional students and

provides the administration, faculty, and instructional support staff of the target program

with useful information to assist students to effectively learn and persist in their programs

of study.

The next section provides an overview of the research methodology, design, data

collection methods, and data analysis strategies. There is also a description of the

population and how the sample was selected, as well as the criteria for selecting

participants for this study. Additionally, the strategies for ensuring the reliability,

validity, and credibility of the data are discussed.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In this study, I used a sequential mixed-methods approach incorporated in a case study design to investigate nontraditional students' perception regarding the impact of an orientation program on their learning and persistence. A two-phase sequential explanatory strategy was employed, with the collection and analysis of quantitative survey data in the first phase and qualitative data in the second phase. There was an emphasis on the qualitative investigation phase in this study as it is efficacious in capturing and understanding the participant's experiences in a particular context (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2014). The results of the quantitative data analysis helped identify the appropriate respondents to interview to generate the qualitative data that were required to ascertain detailed insight into the topic (Creswell, 2012).

This chapter comprises sections on the research design and population. The quantitative and qualitative sections are separated and include explanations of the sample and sample size, data collection methods and instrument, and data analysis methods, and a description of the strategies for participant protection and ethical consideration for this study. The final section outlines the data analysis and results of both the quantitative and the qualitative phases of the study.

Research Design

There are distinct advantages to following mixed-methods procedures in research. Creswell (2012) affirmed that combining quantitative and qualitative research increases the perceived legitimacy of the study, employs the strengths of both approaches, and

addresses multiple aspects of the study that could not be adequately covered by either approach by itself. In this study, the combination of quantitative and qualitative designs provided a broader understanding of the research problem and strengthened the study by increasing the validity and reliability of the data (Creswell, 2009; Katzenmeyer, 1997; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). One major challenge of a mixed-methods design is the time-intensive nature of collecting and analyzing both numeric and narrative data (Creswell, 2012). However, the advantage of expanding the understanding of the research topic through more than one approach outweighs the challenge of additional time. Creswell (2012) asserted that a fundamental advantage of mixed-methods research is that it produces substantiated and credible research results. A mixed-method approach was appropriate for this study as it created both depth and breadth in the findings of the research.

The sequential mixed-method approach used in this study was integrated in a case study design. Case studies seek to investigate and gain in-depth insight and understanding of a particular individual or group (Lodico et al., 2010).Lodico et al. (2010) further asserted that case studies are denoted by the focus on a bounded system in which there is a limit to the number of persons who can be involved in the study. This type of research seeks to gain detailed understanding of specific individuals or groups (Yin, 2014). This study focused on assessing a group of nontraditional students' self-efficacy beliefs and their perceptions about the impact of an orientation program on their ability to learn and persist in their classes at the program under study.

Data for this study were gathered sequentially, with the quantitative phase undertaken first. This was followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase, which built on the findings of the quantitative phase. The final phase of the study involved the integration of the quantitative and qualitative data to ascertain the major findings of the study. Due to the inductive approach of the study, there was an emphasis on generating themes from the study. Consequently, the weighting of the mixed-methods design gave priority to the qualitative phase of the research. The analysis of the data in the quantitative phase was used to identify participants for the qualitative data collection. Figure 1 outlines the sequential form of the data collection indicating priority of the qualitative phase of the study.
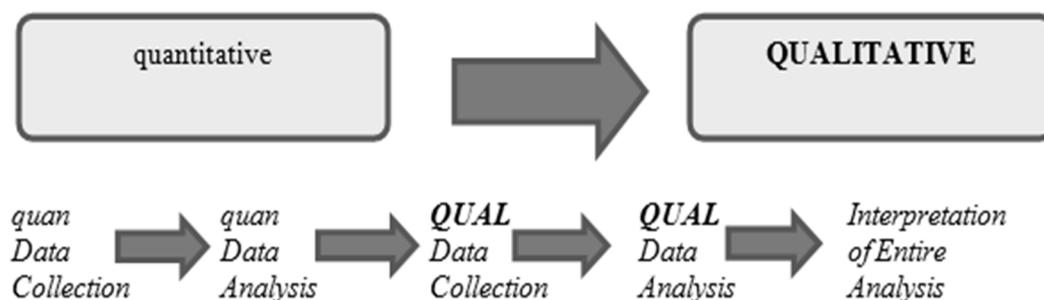
Figure 1.Mixed methods sequential design of the study. Adapted from *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Approaches*, by J.W. Creswell, 2009, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

The mixed-method sequential design allowed for the participants in the qualitative phase of the study to be purposefully selected based on the results of the quantitative survey (Creswell, 2012). The quantitative phase of the study used a preestablished instrument, the GSE Scale proposed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). For the qualitative phase of the study, I utilized the results of the analysis of the quantitative

survey data to select 10participants: five that exhibited high self-efficacy and five that exhibited low self-efficacy. I conducted detailed face-to-face interviews with each participant to ascertain their views and perceptions regarding the impact of the orientation program at the target program on their learning.

The remaining structure of the methodology section describes the mixed-method sequential explanatory design of the study. Each segment of the methodology was addressed separately within the context of the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase, as the qualitative phase depended on the results from the quantitative phase. This separation of the two phases also emphasized the sequential nature of selecting the sample and sample size, data collection methods, and data analysis.

<div align="center">**Methodology for the Quantitative Phase**</div>

Setting and Sample for the Quantitative Phase

Population. The research questions and the site of the study prescribed the population and sample for the study. Therefore, the purpose of this study was not to generalize the findings to a wide population but to develop a detailed understanding of the perspectives of nontraditional students regarding their self-efficacy levels and impact ofan orientation program on their learning and persistence in their academic program. The average population at the program that is the focus of the study was 250 students, with the majority being over the age of 21. Many students are returning to formal studies not having completed secondary education or being unable to matriculate to other tertiary institutions due to a lack of requisite qualifications. The target program offers 10 two-year courses in various subject areas in both Year 1and 2, with class sizes of

approximately 15 students. As a result, the approximate size of the population was 250 students.

      Sampling and sample size. I utilized a convenience sample based on the class groupings already in place at the institution at the time of this study. Given that there were a specific number of participants available to me, about 250, it was critical that I identify a relevant sample size for the study. The sampling error formula (Fowler, as cited in Creswell, 2012) was utilized to determine the size of the sample based on the probability that the sample could be equally divided on a question, confidence interval, and sampling error.

      I selected a proportion of 50/50 signifying that I estimated that the population was evenly split on the self-efficacy characteristic that was being surveyed. Fowler's (1988) Sample Size Table indicated a 95% default confidence interval, which was a rigorous standard (Fowler, as cited in Creswell, 2012, p. 609). Due to the limited population available for this study, I set a sampling error of 12% indicating there was a 12% chance that the sample mean would be different from the population mean. Although this was not the smallest tolerable sampling error indicated on the table, it was below the maximum of 17% error that could be tolerated in a study. Consequently, based on Fowler's Sample Size Table, the sample size had to be at least 75 students for the sample mean to have an equal opportunity of differentiating among students at an error of 12% and a confidence interval of 95% (Fowler, as cited in Creswell, p. 609). Consequently, given the average population of 250 students at this program, I selected six classes with a total of approximately 100 students whom I invited to participate in this study.

After selecting the class groups, I informed the participants of the type of research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality measures selected for this study. Additionally, because I was an instructor at that institution, I ensured that I selected students I did not teach or would teach at the time of the data being collected. I then eliminated all classes that had any of my students registered. Consequently, there was no opportunity for control, bias, or coercion of participants.

The quantitative phase of the study also employed a single stage sampling as I had access to class groups and the class registers for each group. Additionally, because the research focused on the perspectives of nontraditional students, the study involved stratification of the population to ensure that the specific characteristic of nontraditional students were represented in the sample and indicated the actual proportion in the population of individuals (Fowler, as cited in Creswell, 2012). Therefore, I achieved the stratification by examining student enrolment in the various classes across the program to ensure that there was adequate representation of nontraditional students. The inclusion criteria for participation in the survey were that students were 21 years old and older and engaged in full-time or part-time employment.

Data Collection Method and Instruments for the Quantitative Phase

Data collection method. This study examined how nontraditional students at a small adult training institution reported their self-efficacy beliefs and their perceptions about the impact of the school's orientation program on their learning and persistence.

For the quantitative phase, I used a survey design to provide a quantitative description of the participants' self-reported self-efficacy levels. Accordingly, the

purpose of this phase was to make informed inferences regarding students' self-efficacy belief levels (Fowler, 2009).The survey was cross-sectional as the data for this study was collected in one step (Creswell, 2012).

For this purpose, I selected those classes scheduled at the end of the school day. I entered the classes and made contact with potential participants during the last 10 minutes of those classes to introduce the research study and request their participation. Students who were willing to participate in the survey were asked to report to an assigned room at specified times during the period of data collection. I then met the participants in the assigned room and distributed the consent forms and then the surveys for completion. As a result, this provided the prospective participants with sufficient time to consider participation in the survey. A total of 82 students reported to the assigned room and completed the survey during the data collection period. Of this number, 77 surveys were fully completed.

This was the most convenient and logical procedure for the collection of the quantitative data, as multiple questionnaires were able to be completed and collected at one point in time. Additional benefits included low cost, as the site was readily accessible to me as the researcher, and there was no need for additional technological expertise or equipment to complete the questionnaires. Finally, the data were immediately available for evaluation and analysis.

Data collection instrument. In this phase of the study, I used a survey instrument that was a combination of two preestablished instruments, the AE Scale(Midgley et al., 2000) and the GSE Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

The construct of the AE Scale consisted of five items adapted from Midgley et al. (2000). The construct was a subsection of the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) previously validated by the same author group (Midgley et al.,1998). I requested and received a license for use of this scale from the University of Michigan, the copyright holder of the instrument. This instrument used a 4-point Likert scale with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 4 being *Strongly Agree* (See Appendix B). They were the first items on the survey and addressed students' perception of the competence to do their coursework and their ability to perform well in class.

The next construct on the survey was specific to the orientation program self-efficacy and was adapted from Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) GSE Scale and presented in Appendix B. This scale was available under open access. The phrase *orientation program* was included in a few of the items to facilitate responses that were directed to the target population and the impact of the orientation program. Hence, the structure and the phrasing for the items were not significantly changed. Moreover, I followed the detailed guidelines provided by Schwarzer and Fuchs (1996) to adjust these items for my specific research needs. The eight items for this construct were adapted from the GSE Scale(Schwarzer& Jerusalem, 1995) that had been used and validated in a number of studies (Scholz, Gutierrez, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). These items also used a 4-point Likert scale with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 4 being *Strongly Agree.*

Only the respondents that indicated that they participated in the 1-day orientation session answered these eight items of the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program and provided their self-efficacy belief range. Consequently, the scale measured a general

sense of perceived self-efficacy. The items on the scale measured concepts related to students' beliefs concerning their ability to master tasks and accomplish goals in the classroom within the context of their participation in the orientation session. Additionally, beliefs about their capacity to solve problems and confront challenges and hassles were also measured. The construct of the self-efficacy scale was based on an optimistic self-belief; therefore, the items reflected an internal-stable attribution of success and coping (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

Likert scales are useful in placing research participants along an agreement continuum that evaluates a particular attitude or view (Kerlinger, 1992). For this study, as previously indicated, the scale ranged from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. The range was from 1 to 4, with 1= *Strongly Disagree*, 2= *Disagree*, 3= *Agree*, and 4= *Strongly Agree*. Responses were made on this 4-point scale and students were asked to select one response that best expressed their opinion on each statement in the self-efficacy construct. All participants responded to the first five items and demographic questions. However, only those students that participated in the orientation program were required to respond to the subsequent eight items. Therefore, the responses for the self-efficacy constructs were summed up separately to yield distinct final composite score ranges.

The institution that was the focus of this study required that students attend a 1-day orientation program at the beginning of their programs of study. During the session, students could attend lectures and workshops on motivation, study skills, and course expectations. However, at the time of this study, attendance at the orientation program

was not a condition for enrolment in the courses offered at the school. Therefore, although students were advised to participate in the orientation program, some students did not participate due to various reasons.

A total of 82 students from six classes at the institution who had completed at least 6months of their programs of study and had received instruction and feedback in their respective courses reported to the assigned room to participate in the survey and were invited to complete the self-efficacy survey. Both students that attended the orientation program and those that did not attend were asked to complete the survey. However, those that participated in the orientation program were prompted in the survey to respond to specific items on the survey. The reliability of the both self-efficacy scales had been ascertained in previous research with various samples (Midgley et al., 1998; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

Instrument reliability and validity. In descriptive-survey research, it is imperative that reliability of the survey instrument is established through various strategies (Lodico et al., 2010).Midgley et al. (2000) stated that the PALS had been progressively refined by the group of researchers utilizing the theory of goal orientation to assess various factors, including student motivation, self-efficacy, affect, and behavior.

The AE Scale was utilized in various educational institutions to measure the perception of students regarding their competency and mastery of their class work (Midgley et al., 2000). Accordingly, the construct of the PALS provided appropriate and valid measures of these goals (Midgley et al., 1998). The scales had been validated through confirmatory factor analysis examining the factor structures of the various sets of

items. These included academic efficacy, academic press, and academic self-handicapping strategies (Midgley et al., 2000). According to Midgley et al. (2000), The AE scale had typically yielded Cronbach's alpha of .78 and Standard Deviation of 0.71.

The second scale, the GSE scale was utilized in a number of research studies and had typically yielded internal consistencies between Cronbach's alpha= .75 and Cronbach's alpha= .91utilizing a unidemensional scale (Scholz et al., 2002; Schwarzer& Jerusalem, 1995). Additionally, Luszczynska, Scholz, and Schwarzer (2005) affirmed that the scale was configurally equivalent across some 28 countries that established reliability and stability of the GSE Scale.

To this end, evidence of the GSE Scale validity had been shown in previous studies (Leganger, 1999; Scherbaum et al., 2006; Scholz et al., 2002). The high level of validity evidence supporting the construct of the GSE Scale was strengthened by studies and comparisons of the scale with other similar scales (Scherbaum, Cohen-Charash& Kern, 2006). Also, research using item response theory that examined the nonlinear relationships between traits and individual difference variables had indicated that the items on the GSE Scale demonstrated strong relationships and sufficiently discriminated between individuals with analogous but differing levels of the self-efficacy trait (Scherbaum et al., 2006). This was important in demonstrating the construct validity of the scale's scores. Additionally, I ran Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale to analyze the value of the measure for the items that had been slightly adjusted. This analysis indicated the reliability statistics for the five items on the AE Scale was $\alpha = .83$. The internal reliability for the eight items on the GSE Scale was $\alpha = .74$.

Data Analysis for the Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase of this study sought to respond to the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the self-efficacy levels of students that participated in the orientation program at the target program and those who did not participate?

2. For students that participated in the orientation program, is their self-efficacy levels as measured by the AE Scale correlated with their self-efficacy levels as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program?

The target institution had approximately 250 students enrolled. Given that there was a limited number of participants available to me, I was able to identify a relevant sample for the study by utilizing The Sampling Error Formula to determine the size of the sample based on the probability that the sample can be equally divided on a question, confidence interval, and sampling error (Fowler, 2009 as cited in Creswell, 2012). Based on specified calculations, Fowler's Sample Size Table asserted that the sample size should be 75 students.77 nontraditional students adequately completed the survey at the target institution.

After the data was entered into a Microsoft Excel document, it was found that all 77 participants completed the AE Scale. I utilized Microsoft Excel to sort and organize the data base because I needed to sort and rank the data into two groups. I did not have additional data to sort or run, therefore this software was the most appropriate. Of these, 62 participants attended the institution's orientation program and therefore, completed

both the AE Scale and GSE Scale specific to the orientation program. The remaining 15

participants completed only the AE Scale as they did not attend the institution's

orientation program.

It is imperative to establish the internal consistency of survey items before

employing statistical tests in quantitative research to guarantee the validity of the findings

(Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). According to Midgley et al. (2000), The AE Scale has

typically yielded Cronbach's alpha of .78 and Standard Deviation of 0.71. Cronbach's

alpha of .70 is considered good internal consistency (Wigley, 2011). Utilizing the

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), I conducted the internal reliability

analysis of the items for the AE Scale and the GSE Scale specific to the orientation

program of the survey. Table 1 indicates the reliability statistics for all five items on the

AE Scale (5 items; α = .83.). The internal reliability for the 8 items on the GSE Scale was

α = .74.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics for the AE and GSE Scales

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	*N* of items
AE scale	.833	5
GSE scale	.740	8

Consequently, the scales utilized for the study's quantitative sample validated the

internal reliability of these instruments established by the original researchers. After

determining the internal reliability of the scales, I proceeded to determine if there were

any outliers in the data and also test for normality of the data sets. There were five items on the AE Scale and eight items on the GSE Scale. Each of the questions was scored on a Likert scale with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 4 being *Strong Agree*. The level of self-efficacy on the AE Scale was calculated as the mean of the individual scores for the five items in this scale. Similarly, for the eight items in the GSE Scale that is specific to the orientation program, the self-efficacy level was also calculated as the mean of the individual scores. Therefore, the self-efficacy level scores resulted as a continuous range from one to four for each scale.

I utilized SPSS to analyze the quantitative data for this study. I was able to identify two outliers on the AE Scale using the Van Selst and Jolicoeur's *z*-score moving criterion (Cousineau & Chartier, 2010). Consequently, a Windsorized mean procedure was used to replace the two lowest values with the adjacent values. This procedure prevented the data from becoming too distorted by the lowest extreme values.

Using SPSS, I generated Q-Q plots of the means of both the AE Scale and the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program.

Figures 2a and 2b illustrate the Q-Q plot of the mean values of both scales. These two plots were determined after eliminating the outliers utilizing the Windsorized mean procedure.
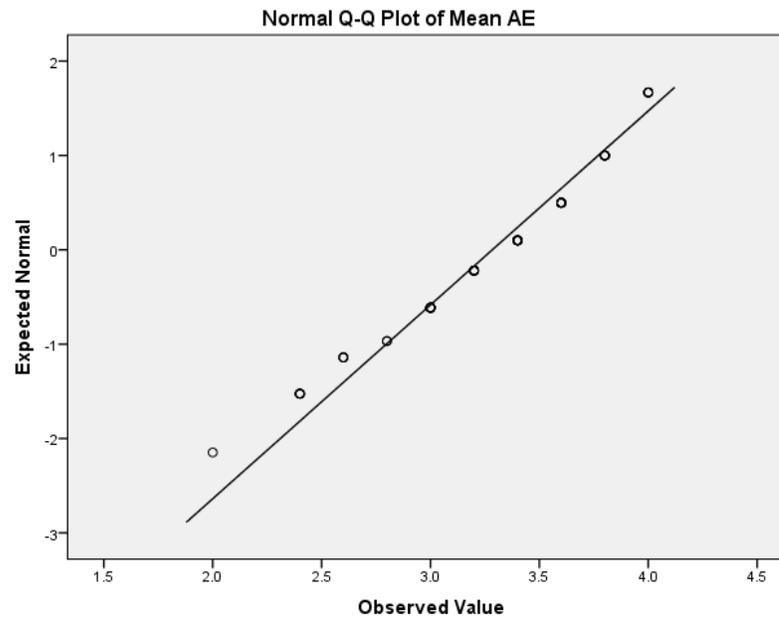
Figure 2a.Normal Q-Q plot of mean AE.
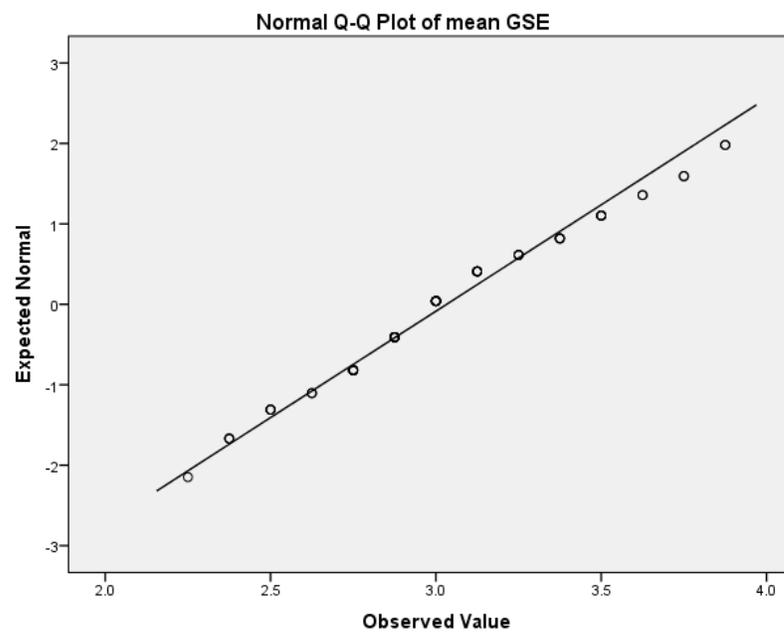
Figure 2b.Normal Q–Q plot of mean GSE.

Next, I analyzed the quantitative data utilizing the Shapiro- Wilks tests of
normality. The mean values of both the AE and GSE measures were analyzed to
determine if the data sets exhibited normality. Table 2 displays the results of the tests of
normality.

Table 2

Tests of Normality

Value	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
GSE mean	.129	62	.012	.945	62	.142
AE mean	.345	77	.001	.942	77	.002

*Note*a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results of the tests of normality indicated that the Shapiro- Wilks sig. value
for AE mean deviated from the normal ($p = .002 \leq .05$). However, the values for the GSE
mean ($p = .142$) indicated normalcy. Additionally, I conducted tests utilizing the
measures for skewness and kurtosis for the means of both measures. Table 3
demonstrates the skewness and kurtosis for the means of the AE scale and the GSE scale.
Additionally, Figures 3 and 4 illustrated the frequency distribution of both scales.

Table 3

Skewness and Kurtosis for the Means of the AE and GSE Scales

		Skewness		Kurtosis	
Value	N	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
AE	77	-.506	.274	-.510	.541
GSE	62	.277	.304	-.199	.599
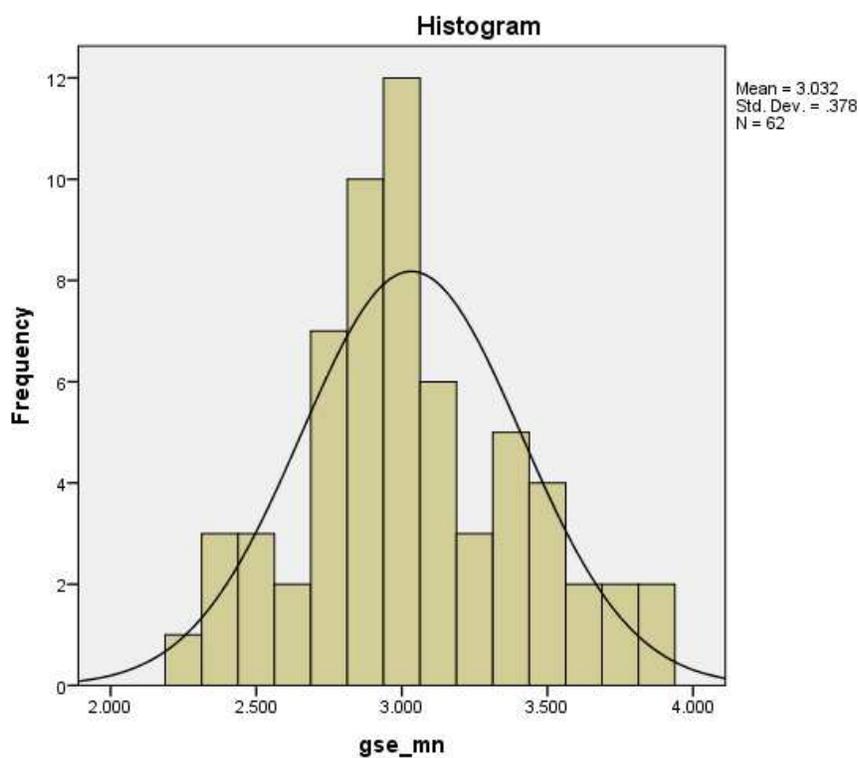
Figure 3.Frequency distribution of GSE mean.
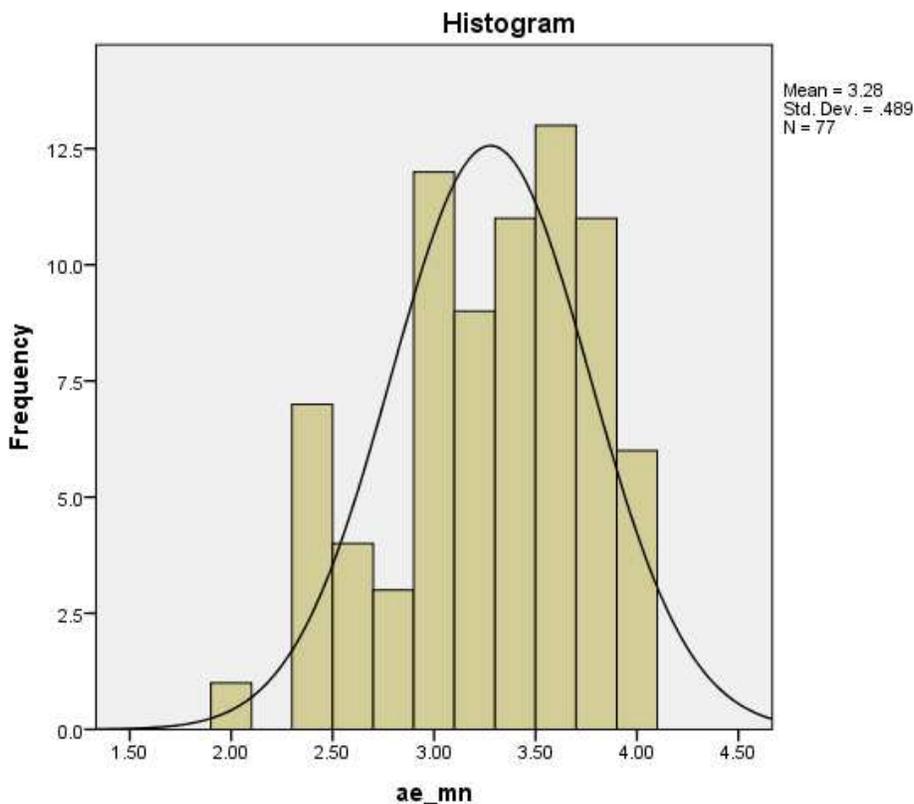
Figure 4.Frequency distribution of AE mean.

According to Triola (2012), when analyzing skewness$z$- scores, the rule of thumb is to conclude that the value is not normal if it is more than 2 standard deviations from the mean. Ordinary values typically are those between z-scores -2.00 and 2.00(-2.00 $\leq z \leq$ 2.00).

Consequently, I determined the degree of skewness by comparing the numerical value of the skewness with twice the SE of Skewness (Price, 2000).Table 3 indicated that the SE for the AE measure is .274; therefore, the acceptable range is -0.548 > z < 0.548. The GSE measure fell within the accepted range of skewness with a SE of .304, and indicated an ordinary value.

Methodology for the Qualitative Phase

Setting and Sample for the Qualitative Phase

  Population. The population for the qualitative phase of the study consisted of

participants in the quantitative phase that completed the survey and indicated that they

participated in the orientation program. A total of 77 students acceptably completed the

survey in the quantitative phase. Based on the information from the orientation program

organizers, about 70% to 75% of the total number of students had typically participated

in the orientation program. Therefore, the expected population for the qualitative phase

ranged from 54 to 58 students. From the 77 participants that completed the survey, 62

indicated that they participated in the orientation program and therefore made up the

population for the qualitative phase of the study.

  Sampling and sample size. The most common sampling procedure used in

qualitative research is purposeful sampling (Lodico et al., 2006). A purposeful sampling

technique was also relevant for this study as I selected participants based on their

responses on the self-reporting GSE Scale specific to the orientation program. To this

end, the quantitative data facilitated the selection of the participants for the qualitative

phase of the study based on their self-efficacy levels on the GSE Scale specific to the

orientation program. Self-efficacy, a fundamental element of social cognitive theory, is a

significant variable related to students' motivation, persistence and learning (Dinther et

al., 2011). The levels of the survey respondents on the GSE Scale facilitated the selection

of those with highest and lowest self-efficacy levels. A key theoretical premise of this

study was that certain aspects of human agency, such as motivation, self-regulation, and

achievement were linked to self-efficacy (Dinther et al., 2011). Therefore, self-efficacy levels of students on the GSE Scale were considered a critical indicator of their learning and persistence.

During the quantitative data collection phase, I presented a package with the consent form for the survey and assigned an alpha-numeric code to each survey. Because the consent form included contact information for the participants, I was able to identify those that matched the requirements for being invited to participate in the qualitative phase.

After completing the quantitative data analysis, I selected a sample of 10 participants, five that exhibited low self-efficacy levels from the GSE Scale and five that demonstrated high self-efficacy levels (Merriam, 2009). Since the selection for the interview process was based on utilizing willing students, I started by choosing five students from each of the two extreme levels of the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program. When there were selected individuals who did not agree to participate in the interviews, I continued to the next individual by moving down or up the list until I recruited five willing participants that reported higher self-efficacy levels and five that reported lower self-efficacy levels based on the GSE Scale. A minimum sample size should be selected based on the ability to provide reasonable coverage of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002 as cited in Merriam, 2009). An objective of the qualitative phase of the research was to present an in-depth overview of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

Data Collection Method and Instrument for the Qualitative Phase

Data collection method. For the qualitative phase of the study, I conducted semistructured interviews because I was interested in collecting students' views and experiences.

Over a period of four weeks, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10participants from the target institution. The participants were selected after collecting and analyzing the data from the quantitative phase of the study. Only nontraditional students were asked to complete the student survey on the AE Scale and the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program.

For the qualitative interview phase, I selected only participants that indicated that they participated in the institution's orientation program and consequently completed the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program. As a result, the scale provided a general sense of the perceived self-efficacy of the respondents after completing the orientation program. There were eight items on the GSE Scale. The responses were made on a 4-point Likert scale and students were asked to select one response that best expressed their opinion on their self-efficacy beliefs. Subsequently, the mean of the responses for each participant were calculated to ascertain their mean self-efficacy score. The scores were then ranked from the highest to the lowest in a continuum to determine the participants with the highest and lowest self-efficacy scores.

From the calculated mean scores, I proceeded to select a sample of 10 participants, five that exhibited low self-efficacy levels from the GSE Scale and five that demonstrated high self-efficacy levels. Since the selection for the interview process is

based on utilizing willing students, I started by choosing five students from each of the two extreme levels of the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program. When a selected individual did not agree to participate in the interviews, I continued to the next individual by moving down or up the list until I acquired five willing participants that reported higher self-efficacy levels and five that reported lower self-efficacy levels from the GSE Scale.

The interview data collection process began by contacting by phone the initial 10 participants that were selected. Since the interviews took place at the end of the academic year, some classes had finished and many students were completing external examinations. Consequently, some of the contacted participants were not willing or able to participate due to extremely busy schedules. I continued to the next individuals by moving down or up the list until I attained 10 willing participants.

After selecting and contacting the participants, I arranged a date and time to conduct a face-to-face interview with each of the 10 participants (Creswell, 2009). Detailed face-to-face interviews were sufficient to answer the research questions for the qualitative portion of the study as this data collection method garnered detailed perspectives and opinions of the participants related to the research questions. The responses allowed for the development of themes in the final data analysis.

At the beginning of the interview, I asked each participant to read and sign a consent form. The participants were also told that the interviews were being audio recorded and that they will be requested to check the transcripts at a later date. During the interview process, the participants and I engaged in a conversation focused on the

research questions (DeMerrais, 2004). The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder.

Additionally, during the interviews, I made handwritten notes that described the participants' reactions to various questions. I used a computer software, Listen N Write that assisted in the transcription of the interview data. I subsequently entered the transcripts into a Microsoft Excel document to begin the data analysis process.

Data collection instrument. I used an interview protocol (Appendix C) to ensure consistency in asking questions and recording the respondents' answers during the qualitative interview (Creswell, 2009). The self-developed interview protocol contained questions and probing questions focused on the participants' perceptions regarding the impact of the orientation program on their learning and persistence in their program of study (See Appendix C). The discussions took place around the following questions:

1. What is your opinion of the orientation program?

2. What expectations did you have about the orientation program?

3. Do you believe that information provided in the orientation addressed your educational needs?

4. What are some of the challenges you faced in your educational program?

5. Do you think the orientation program presented skills and tools that you can use to confront the challenges that you will face in your educational pursuits?

The protocol included a heading with the date, location, interviewer, interviewee, and the interview questions. Probing sub questions were also used to stimulate

participants to elaborate on what they had said (Creswell, 2012). There was also a final thank you statement. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

The interviews were digitally recorded to facilitate the efficient transcription and analysis of the data (Merriam, 2009). I also took limited manual notes during the interviews to record interpersonal reactions and made note of what the informants perceived as important. Further, after each interview, I made detailed analytic memos of the interviews for quick and easy referral.

I ensured that all interviews took place in a private room where participants could express themselves freely and confidently. Once I received and collated all the agreements of participation with available times from the prospective participants, I reserved adequate rooms at the institution.

Each participant was assigned an alpha-numeric code to ensure confidentiality. On the interview protocol, there was also ample space to record observations and notes. However, I made an effort not to take lengthy notes during the interview to not disturb the interview process and to allow the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed. Furthermore, I kept a log of all activities related to the interview process, including all correspondence with participants in setting up an interview time, interview dates and locations.

After each interview, I transcribed the data using the Listen N Write computer transcription software. I also checked the transcriptions to ensure that they were verbatim. The hardcopy of the interview protocol with notes and observations were digitally scanned so that backup copies were available on my computer.

Credibility and transferability. Ensuring that the interpretations and findings from the data collected are accurate is critical for meaningful qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2009) affirmed that the researcher should utilize multiple validating strategies to enhance the accuracy of the findings. The credibility of the findings of this study was determined through member checking and peer debriefing.

Following the interviews and initial data analysis, I communicated with each participant so that they could discuss any concerns related to the interview with me. Additionally, I emailed the individual transcript of the interview to each interviewee and solicited feedback through member checking. This process was critical to clarifying any misunderstandings on what the participant said or perceived (Merriam, 2009). The participants had the opportunity to reexamine the responses recorded by the researcher to make clarifications and adjustments, if needed.

The second strategy utilized to ensure the credibility of the study was peer debriefing. Requesting colleagues to review and ask questions about the study adds credibility to the interpretations and findings as they are able to assess the data from a different perspective and assess the plausibility of the findings based on the data (Merriam, 2009). I presented the results of the qualitative data analysis to a peer debriefer who holds a Ph.D. and was a colleague with whom I have discussed the study. The peer debriefer did not have access to identifiable data. Consequently, the peer debriefer examined the interview transcripts, researcher's notes, and the qualitative data analysis and results. The peer debriefer's role was to examine the researcher's notes, reexamine assumptions, and consider alternative ways to look at the analyzed data. To this end, the

peer debriefer received the materials without any information that could allow him to identify the respondents. All codes and any information that could provide an opportunity to identify the respondent were removed from the transcripts before the debriefer received the material.

In qualitative research, the concept of transferability relates to the researcher providing enough detail in the study to allow the findings of one specific situation to be transferred or generalized to other similar situations (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in Merriam (2009) posited that a rich, thick description of the study's findings allows someone in a receiving context to adequately evaluate any similarities with their own context and consequently facilitate transferability.

I utilized very detailed descriptions to allow other researchers to decide if the findings of this research were transferable to other settings. I ensured that along with a description of the setting and the participants, I provided a detailed and exhaustive description of the findings with adequate quotes from the interviews.

Role of the Researcher

As an instructor at the target program, I was able to engender an atmosphere of confidence and comfort while working with the participants in this study as they were familiar with my experience as an educator at the institution and other school environments. However, a possible threat was that the participants might provide responses that overstated their optimistic self-efficacy beliefs and positive impacts of the orientation program to impress me and to not be critical of the programs associated with the institute. To avoid these biases, I endeavored to maintain a professional, respectful,

and open relationship with the participants so that they felt comfortable to express their true beliefs, perceptions, and opinions.

I also emphasized the confidential and voluntary nature of participation in the study. Furthermore, I provided opportunities for the students to ask questions and receive answers about the study. The students were reassured that they would not be penalized for any decision to withdraw from participating in the study. Additionally, I informed them that I would be solely responsible for handling all data collection and data analysis. I put in place various strategies to ensure the validity and credibility of the study's findings by using reliable data collection instruments, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Participant Protection

It is imperative to establish safeguards that will protect the rights of the participants (Lodico et al., 2006). I received IRB approval from Walden University to carry out the research. Walden University's approval number for this study is 04-27-15-0307381.The IRB document outlined the research problem, rationale, proposed methodology, possible implications from the findings, and benefits to the institution. Furthermore, when soliciting participants for the study, I created consent forms for participation in the survey and the interview that included an introduction of the researcher, a detailed description of the study, the participant selection process, discussion of any benefits or compensation associated with participation in the study, discussion of any risks, and a section that stated that participation in the study was consensual, confidential, and voluntary (Lodico et al., 2006).

For this study, I ensured that I did not teach or would teach at the time of the data being collected any of the students selected. This ensured that there was no opportunity for control, bias or coercion of participants. I guaranteed informed consent by providing a detailed description of the study to the participants and requiring signed consent for participation. Additionally, I carefully considered the participants feelings and addressed all queries during the interview process to assure the participants that they were in a safe environment where they were able to respond to questions without fear of any repercussions. Moreover, I guaranteed the confidentiality of the participants by ensuring that I personally handled all written responses and audio recordings related to the interviews. Faculty and staff at the institution did not have access to recorded data.

In addition, I ensured that all documentation, including the Mp3 player used to record the interviews was kept in a locked desk in my home office. This was preferable as the faculty room at the institution is a communal space for the entire faculty. Even though locked desks were available, I preferred to secure the documents in my home. As mentioned before, all participants were assigned alpha- numeric codes that were known only to me. I did not divulge the names of any of the participants to other persons to assure the confidentiality of all participants.

Finally, both my personal and work computers that I used in the research process were password protected with no other persons having access to my passwords. Additionally, all information, such as audio recordings, transcription data, and scanned documents were saved to my personal password protected external hard drive as a backup.

Data Analysis for the Qualitative Phase

Creswell (2009) indicated that data analysis in qualitative research should incorporate a hierarchical but interactive approach where the various stages are inevitably interrelated by constantly validating the accuracy of the information collected. Subsequently, the analysis of the qualitative data in this study commenced with ensuring that the data were organized in a form that facilitated analysis (Lodico et al., 2006).

Therefore, after the interviews were completed I conducted member checking of the interview data by e-mailing the document that contained the individual's specific verbatim transcript to each of the participants. I requested that they carefully review the transcripts for accuracy and provide any feedback on my initial findings.

Next, I copied the data into an Excel document where I could organize the responses to each interview question in a clear and logical format and begin the analysis of the data. I classified the transcripts into interviews with high self-efficacy participants and lower self-efficacy participants. As a result, I was able to assess all the transcripts as a whole, as well as compare and contrast the transcripts within groups and with the other group. This procedure allowed me to review all the transcripts without any bias as to the participants that I identified as having high or low perceived self-efficacy. It is advisable that data analysis should be guided by research questions and has a theoretical foundation (Yin, 2011). I used Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory and the theory of self-efficacy as the conceptual framework of the study. Consequently, I developed the interview questions based on the research questions and considering a series of

guidelines, including the influence of the orientation program, self-efficacy, student learning and persistence (Table 4).

Table 4

Interview Questions Related to the Research Questions

Interview question	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
1	x		
2		x	x
3		x	x
4		x	
5	x		
6		x	
7			x
8	x		x

Note: RQ = research question; RQ1 = What aspects of the orientation do nontraditional students find useful in assisting them in improving their learning in their classes; RQ2 = To what extent do nontraditional students perceive that the orientation program of the target program will impact their ability to complete their program of study?; RQ3 = Does the perception of the impact of the orientation program differ for students with low self-efficacy levels as opposed to those with high self-efficacy levels?

The coding process. Next, I began the coding process by importing the transcripts into Microsoft Excel document to organize and color code emerging codes and themes. Utilizing Microsoft Excel allowed me to write notes and comments in order to begin recording general ideas about the information in the interviews. Also, each interview transcript was associated with an alphanumerical code to replace the respondents' names and to ensure participant confidentiality. I utilized a method

proposed by Merriam (2009) in which all identifying information pertaining to the date, location, and respondent codes were listed at the top of the page. I numbered the lines on the left-side of the page for easy referencing. Additionally, I put the interview questions in bold to facilitate the effective reading of the transcripts. Ample space was left on the right-side of the pages to add notes, comments, and codes as the analysis progressed.

As I examined the data, I looked for themes that indicated the participants' perception of the impact of the institution's orientation program based on the identified guidelines. For example, I requested that the participants reflect on the orientation program and if they thought they were provided with the skills and tools to confront the challenges that they faced in their educational pursuit in order to assess their perceived self-efficacy and the influence of the orientation program.

During the coding process, I looked for words and phrases that the participants utilized to express their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences about the institution's orientation program and their own ability to remain motivated and persist in their educational program. By utilizing pattern coding, I looked for patterns in data and subsequently color coded the emerging themes in the Excel document. I created a new sheet in the document with the codes and the emerging themes that I identified. I also transferred the themes to a Word document with a table where I inserted various quotes from the participants under the themes. I was able to clearly visualize the participants' responses under each theme.

After reviewing the codes I identified during the coding process, I removed overlaps and redundancies and selected 20 codes related to the research questions.

According to Creswell (2009), it is important to eliminate common codes. I reviewed each code for consistency to ensure that they aligned to research questions and interview protocol guidelines.

Data Analysis Results

The research study employed a mixed-method sequential approach. Therefore, I will present the findings from the quantitative phase of the study first. The results of the quantitative phase helped to inform the findings of the qualitative phase.

Data Analysis Results from the Quantitative Phase of the Research

Test of the hypotheses related to the quantitative research questions was a first step needed to support the results of this phase of the study. I used SPSS statistical analysis package to analyze the data in the quantitative phase of the research.

For the first research question, the independent samples t test ($p < .05$, two-tailed) was performed to ascertain if there was a difference in the means of the self-efficacy levels (dependent variable) of the group that participated in the orientation program and the group that did not participate (independent variable). The first hypothesis is as follows:

$H1_0$:   There is no statistically significant difference between reported academic self-efficacy levels for students that participated in the orientation program at the target program and those students that did not participate in the orientation program as measured by the AE Scale.

$H1_1$:   The students that participated in the orientation program at the target program have higher reported academic self-efficacy levels than the

students that did not participate in the orientation program as measured by

AE Scale.

A total of 77 students participated in the survey at the target institution. All of the

respondents completed the AE scale of the survey. From the total number of respondents,

62 participants indicated that they participated in the institution's orientation program and

15 responded that they did attend the orientation program.

Consequently, the two groups were not equal as the group that participated in the

institution's orientation program was four times larger than the group that did not

participate.Table 5 displays the results of the Levene's test of equal variances that

indicated that the two population variances were not equal. This option was used to select

the appropriate *t* test results.

Table 5

Levene's Test for Equality of Variance

Measure		F	Sig
AE	Equal variances assumed	9.520	.003

As stated in the data analysis section, the two groups of respondents represented

the independent variable used to answer the first research question while the academic

efficacy was the dependent variable. After the data was transformed and normalized as

described in the data analysis section, I conducted the independent-samples *t* test ($p < .05$,

two-tailed) to determine if there is a significant difference between the reported self-

efficacy levels of students that participated in the orientation program at the target

program and those who did not participate.

The Independent Samples *t*test (p < .05, two-tailed) was done considering 95%

confidence intervals (CI = 95). Table 6 illustrates the *t*test results for the reported level of

academic efficacy for the group that participated in the orientation program and the group

that did not participate in the orientation program.

Table 6

Independent Samples tTest for Academic Efficacy

Measure	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	M	SD
AE Equal variances Not assumed	-.483	15.591	.635	-.1011	.2090

Note. N= 77 (Participants: *n* = 62; Non participants: *n* = 15)

Based on the results of the *t*test (Table 6), no statistically significant difference

was found between the reported level of academic efficacy of the group that participated

in the institution's orientation program and the group that did not participate, $t(15.591) =$

-.483, *p* = .64. The *t*test results indicated that nontraditional students who participated in

the orientation program at the target institution did not have a higher level of reported

academic efficacy than those who did not participate.

Therefore, the test is not considered significant and the hypothesis H_1 is rejected

at the .05 level of significance.

An examination of the group means indicated that the means for both groups were almost identical, with a 0.1 difference (Table 7).

Table 7

Group Statistics

Group	N	AE Mean	SD
Participants	62	3.032	.3780
Non participants	15	3.133	.7880

The second hypothesis tested was:

$H2_0$:   There is no statistically significant correlation between the self-efficacy levels of students, as measured by the AE Scale, and their self-efficacy levels, as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program.

$H2_1$:   There is a positive correlation between the self-efficacy levels of students, as measured by the AE Scale, and their self-efficacy levels, as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program.

A bivariate Pearson Correlation coefficient ($p < .05$) using SPSS was conducted to ascertain if the self-efficacy levels of the students that participated in the orientation program as measured by the AE Scale correlates with their self-efficacy levels as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the orientation program. A number of 62 participants indicated that they participated in the institution's orientation program. Figure 5 represents a scatterplot representation of the AE mean that has been adjusted for normality and linearity and the GSE mean that indicate the level of correlation of the two

measures for the group of respondents that participated in the institution's orientation

program.
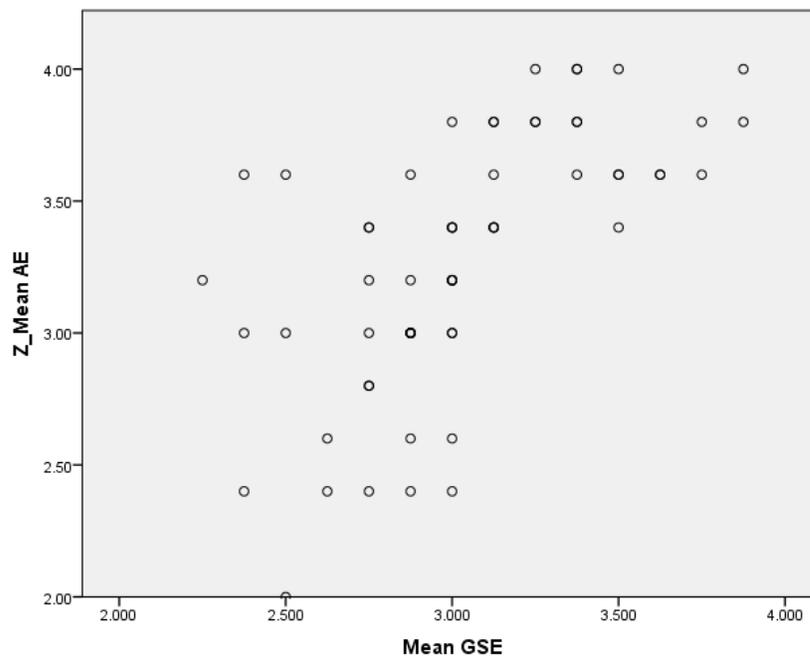
Figure 5. Scatterplot of Z mean AE and mean GSE.

Table 8 presents the Pearson Correlation coefficient, the significance value and

the sample size upon which the calculation is based on. The Pearson product-moment

correlation was conducted to determine the correlation between the reported self-efficacy

levels of the students that participated in the orientation program as measured by the AE

Scale and their self-efficacy levels as measured by the GSE Scale specific to the

orientation program.

Table 8

Bivariate Pearson Correlation for AE and GSE

			Pearson Correlation	
Measure	Sig. (two-tailed)	N	AE mean	GSE mean
AE	.000	62	1	.642**
GSE	.000	62	.642**	1

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the Pearson Correlation coefficient was $r(62) = .642$, ($p < 0.001$). The test indicated a strong, positive correlation between the dependent variables; reported academic efficacy and self-efficacy specific to the orientation program. Therefore, hypothesis H_2 was accepted.

To summarize, the Independent Samples *t*test proved that there was no statistically significant difference between the means of reported academic efficacy levels of the students that participated in the orientation program and those that did not. Furthermore, a Pearson Correlation coefficient analysis ascertained that there was a strong correlation between academic efficacy and self-efficacy specific to the orientation program. These results concluded that participation in the institution's orientation did not significantly impact the reported self-efficacy levels of the respondents.

The quantitative findings suggested that a single orientation program at the beginning of the academic year does not significantly impact on the reported self-efficacy levels of nontraditional students. The mixed-method design of this study allowed me to

further explore the thoughts of nontraditional students in the qualitative phase interviews to ascertain their perceptions of the impact of the institution's orientation program.

Data Analysis Results from the Qualitative Phase of the Research

After completing the data analysis, five themes emerged. These were *nontraditional students' challenges, evidence of motivation, evidence of self-efficacy, evidence of persistence, and learning new skills.*

Table 9 identifies the resulted themes and delineates their relationship to the research questions stated in Section 1.

Table 9

Identified Themes Related to the Research Questions

Themes	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
1. Nontraditional students' challenges		x	
2. Evidence of motivation		x	x
3. Need for self-efficacy	x	x	x
4. Evidence of persistence	x	x	x
5. Learning new skills	x	x	

Note: RQ = research question; RQ1 = What aspects of the orientation do nontraditional students find useful in assisting them in improving their learning in their classes?; RQ2 = To what extent do nontraditional students perceive that the orientation program of the target program will impact their ability to complete their program of study?; RQ3 = Does the perception of the impact of the orientation program differ for students with low self-efficacy levels as opposed to those with high self-efficacy levels?

Next, I expanded the themes to incorporate the respondents' views according to each identified theme. Table 10 illustrates the summary of the themes that follows associated with each group. In accordance with ethical issues related to protection and confidentiality of participants, the names of the students have been replaced with alpha-numeric codes. The codes HSE and LSE represent the participants with high and low self-reported self-efficacy levels in the quantitative phase of the study.

Table 10

Summary of Themes Associated With the Groups

Themes	Number of responses	
	High SE	Low SE
1. Nontraditional students' challenges		
Few challenges	0	0
Many challenges	5	5
2. Evidence of motivation		
Orientation program was motivational	5	3
Orientation program was not motivational	0	2
3. Evidence of student self-efficacy		
Highly motivated	5	4
Not motivated	0	1
4. Evidence of persistence		
Willing to persist	5	5
Not willing to persist	0	0
5. Learning new skills		
Learned new skills	5	3
Did not learn new skills	0	2

Theme 1: Nontraditional students' challenges. The challenges of being an older student resonated throughout the majority of the students' responses. Research question one was addressed with this theme. The responses to interview questions two and four provided insights into some participants' preoccupation with engaging in formal education later in life. For instance, participant HSE2, an individual over the age of 60, explained that many persons of a similar age would not typically think of returning to school: "Many people my age wouldn't really be thinking of coming to school." More often, as HSE3 reported, there is still a stigma attached to older persons continuing their education.

Several participants expressed a general sense that the orientation program provided an opportunity to hear about the experiences of persons that have participated in the program and have been able to overcome various challenges. For example, HSE5 commented that hearing the testimonials of past students was motivating and encouraging. According to HSE5, knowing that other persons of a similar age successfully completed the program was particularly comforting and offered the impetus that she needed to start the program, "the speakers motivated us by telling us about past students' experiences and even their own experiences coming from a poor environment". Five participants expressed that they believed that the messages imparted during the orientation program helped them to accept that age was not a barrier to further education. On this line, participant LSE5 emphasized that she had a genuine fear of attending school before commencing the classes. However, much of this fear was allayed on realizing that many persons in the classes were in a similar age group, "I felt a little better when I went

to class and saw quite a few older students, in my age group range." Furthermore,LSE6 stated that some of the challenges he faced were self-imposed as he had a fear of not being able to succeed in school because of his age. As he reported: "Even though my fear had somewhat subsided over the year, it has not completely disappeared."

Engagement in the workforce presented several unique challenges to the nontraditional students. All the participants were over the age of 21 and engaged in either full-time or part-time employment. Balancing the responsibilities of school, family, and work was a recurrent factor related to their motivation and persistence. Participant HSE4, for example, asserted that having to work on shifts impacted greatly on her attendance and study time, "when you work on shifts like I do, if you don't get the time off from your employer, it can hinder you from coming to school and succeeding in what you want to do." Another participant, LSE3, also discussed the difficulties of having employers who were not supportive of their employees' efforts to improve their academic qualifications, "I know of employers who change the person's schedule and give many obstacles when they know they are going to school." However, some participants, including LSE6, emphasized that despite the challenges of balancing family, work, and study time, it was worth the sacrifice as family members would ultimately benefit from the improved career prospects that can accompany further education.

In addition, many of the participants commented on the significant gap between the last time they engaged in formal education and enrolling in this program. These gaps ranged from two to twenty four years. Some stressed that they knew that the time gap

was a significant. To demonstrate, participant HSE5 expressed that returning to school was "like being a new born baby. Learning to creep again."

In conclusion, some participants acknowledged that although they faced many challenges in their pursuit of further education, some to their apprehension were alleviated by the motivational speeches and the conversations with teachers and other prospective students. To this end, one participant, HSE4, summed it up by saying, "when I left the orientation, I felt that I wasn't alone. I knew that many persons were having the same difficulties as I was. It was time to do what I needed to do. Go back to school." By that token, the orientation program facilitated less anxiety and increased positive engagement for some students before starting the classes.

Theme 2: Evidence of motivation. The theme of student motivation was highlighted in research questions two and three and supported by respondents' input on the interview questions two, four, and six. Interview question two assessed if the information provided at the orientation program addressed their education needs. Questions four and six explored the challenges of returning to school and the strategies that the participants used to keep motivated. Collectively, the interview questions offered a general insight into how the participants perceived the importance of taking part in the program to their personal, academic, and professional goals.

Some participants identified that attending the orientation program was significant to remaining motivated throughout their courses. The participants' responses offered some insights into their perceptions of the value of the orientation program, as well as its role in motivating them to embark on and persist in the program. To this end, participant

H3 emphasized that the messages of the speakers focused on the importance of education and that age should not be a barrier to achieving one's goals, "they emphasized that there should be no barriers that prevent us from achieving our goals." On reflection, HSE3 explained that the information was inspirational and motivating as the messages addressed some of the apprehension that an older student may have, "when you hear all of those stories of persons excelling, you realize that age doesn't matter." LSE3 reiterated that the speakers' messages encouraged the students to view further education as a means for not only academic and professional advancement but also personal development.

Participant L6 further underscored this view by explaining that: "The program gave me a little opportunity to meet some interesting people and the teachers before I started school. I maintained those contact throughout and some were very helpful." Not attending the orientation program would have resulted in the inability to take advantage of that particular opportunity.

Additionally, HSE2, HSE5, LSE4, and LSE6 commented on how their own personal struggles and challenges motivated them to continue their education. As an illustration, participant LSE6 stated: "I am motivated by just knowing that I am not satisfied with where I am. Anytime you are satisfied, you become comfortable. It's like having a mediocre mentality." LSE4 also said: "My mom is a single mother and she had so many struggles. My aim is to make her proud and that also motivates me." Finally, participant HSE5 remarked that in spite of being a janitor, family members and colleagues constantly encouraged and motivated her. These motivational factors

emphasized that motivation is indeed fluid and it can be difficult to identify the source of motivation at particular times.

Conversely, only one interviewee expressed dissatisfaction with the presentations and delivery of the sessions in the orientation program. That is, participant LSE3 explained that the information provided was too generic and did not address the needs of individual students. This participant stated that many of students were unsure of their future plans and ill equipped to make serious educational decisions independently. Therefore, the information should have been more specific to various career paths. She concluded that "at times the orientation program felt like a waste of time when I could be focusing on something else." LSE3 further stated that the orientation program was not particularly motivating and the decision to embark on the program was more self-motivated as completing the program could be beneficial to her in the future.

To sum up, The evidence from this theme revealed that the orientation program appeared to be motivating and encouraging to the participants in the study. Moreover, some of the respondents suggested that the information provided in the orientation program encouraged them and had an impact on their ability to persist in their studies.

Theme 3: Evidence of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy within the educational context is directly related to students proactively generating thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that direct them in attaining their academic goals (Zimmerman, 2002). Responses for this theme covered research questions one, two, and three and assessed the participants' perceptions of their self-efficacy in relation to their ability to confront challenges,

strategies they use to keep themselves motivated, and whether they believe that they had been sufficiently prepared for success in their programs of study.

Having a strong sense of purpose was a recurring strategy for maintaining motivation and engendering positive thoughts regarding achieving their academic goals. For instance, interviewee HSE2 noted that being unsatisfied with one's professional and academic status was critical to generating optimistic thoughts about school and facilitates persistence. "I want to be able to get a better job. I know I cannot do that without furthering my schooling," explained participant HSE2.

Furthermore, participant H5 emphasized the need to make her family and friends proud and achieving planned academic goals would facilitate this. To this end, interviewee HSE5 emotionally said: "The place where I work, they have such faith in me. Every single one of the people there. I would like to prove that I can do it." Additionally, participant H3 mentioned being able to assist and relate to her son in high school as being a positive and welcome effect of returning to school, "each time my son asks me a question, I can relate to him. I don't have to say let me go and find out because my mind is in school mode." The participant explained that this was a source of pride as she did not feeling intimidated by new information and modern teaching techniques.

Another factor for maintaining a strong belief in one's self stemmed from some participants spiritual beliefs. For example, interviewee LSE3 stated: "I motivate myself by trusting God. I am now a Christian, so using God's word and promises had helped." LSE1 also explained, "Well, I pray a lot. Sometimes, I feel as if I want to give up but I keep praying."Similar sentiments were expressed by participant LSE4 who maintained

that having deep spiritual faith stimulated a "hunger for knowledge" and this desire helped to propel the need to succeed.

Each interviewee was able to identify at least one important strategy that they utilized to maintain their self-belief in their ability to successfully complete their program of study. However, the orientation appeared to have had a limited role in continuously generating thoughts and behaviors responsible for persisting in the program. Responses indicated that although the information provided during the orientation program was encouraging and motivating at the time, they relied more on personal factors that were present and relevant in their everyday lives. As interviewee HSE4 summed up, "the orientation program was ok. It was good, but it was my family and the teachers that helped me."

In summary, both students with low self-efficacy and high self-efficacy levels did not identify the orientation program as having a significant impact on their self-belief and their ability to be motivated and positive about their abilities. Interestingly, more of the students with higher reported self-efficacy levels reported that the need to improve themselves professionally and to make their friends and family proud were important factors in believing in themselves. A significant number of lower reported self-efficacy students expressed that they relied on spiritual faith for guidance and encouragement.

Theme 4: Evidence of persistence. The ability to complete their program of study is a critical indicator of the student's and the program's success. The theme of persistence covered research questions one, two, and three. As a result, interview questions three, four, and seven addressed the factors that could affect students'

completion of the program. As stated earlier, some of the challenges identified that could affect program completion included being an older student, feeling of intimidation, work, and family obligations. To that end, interview question seven addressed the factors that could cause the participants to drop out of their program of study. Many interviewees explained that only serious situations such as the death of a family member, serious illness, extreme emotional stress or having to leave the island would result in them not completing their courses. To illustrate, participant HSE2 affirmed: "I believe the only thing that could stop me is a serious sickness." Furthermore, LSE4 highlighted that "a lack of financial support could result in me having to stop." Finally, interviewee said: "If we had to migrate to another country. That could be a factor."

A recurrent argument used by some of the interviewees was that of wanting to pursue further education and being determined to accomplish this goal in spite of the challenges that they may face. For instance, HSE1 commented that he had wanted to return to school for a long while but there were many obstacles, such as finances and family obligations, "I had a few obstacles in my life. Mainly financial and being a new parent." However overcoming those obstacles by making up his mind to go back to school in spite of the challenges allowed him to be where he is now, completing a useful program of study. In a similar fashion, participant LSE6 also noted: "The biggest obstacle is often you. As an older person, you want to find many excuses not to return to school but you have to tell yourself that you can do it." Having a clear sense of purpose appeared to be an important factor in not just starting the program but also completing it. Some of the participants explained how confronting obstacles in their lives helped to motivate

them to continue attending classes so that they could prove to themselves and others that they were able to attain the qualifications. For example, HSE4 explained that: "The biggest obstacle for me is work. When you have to work and go back to school, it is very hard. But I know that completing this course will help me get an even better job." Other interviewees cited the desire to matriculate to other professional programs after completing their courses, such as nursing and teaching. Participant L4 affirmed: "I want to become a teacher. I love to teach and I know I will be very good at it. But I need the additional qualifications so I am working on it."

Additionally, the majority of the interviewees explained that they were mostly satisfied with the information provided at the orientation program and believed that it encouraged them to proactively confront challenges that they faced during the program. However, they commented that the information could have been more specific and offer more concrete advice and tips. For instance, HSE3 opined, "I felt that they were telling us we can do it but not how we can do it. I don't know. Maybe that is too much to ask."

In summary, the evidence of persistence theme addressed research questions one, two, and three as the students' willingness to persist in the program determines their ability to complete their programs of study. Students commented that they utilized various strategies to persist in the program and complete their courses. These included overcoming the challenges of work and family responsibilities and maintaining that only extremely serious circumstances would prevent them from completing the program. Some participants also highlighted that although the orientation program provided

valuable and encouraging information, it lacked specificity to their particular personal contexts.

Theme 5: Learning new skills. A fundamental tenet of pursuing further education is the opportunity to learn new, relevant, and marketable skills. The theme of learning new skills encompassed research questions one and two. Through responses to interview questions five and eight, the participants explained whether the information provided at the orientation had helped them to develop their learning skills and sufficiently prepared them or success in their programs of study.

Specifically, some interviewees commented that their experiences in secondary school were not particularly productive or positive. Participant HSE1 noted that in high school he was more interested in sports and socializing with friends than engaging in class work, saying "when I was in high school, I wasn't too focused at that time. I was more interested in my friends and sports." Additionally, LSE4 stated that: "I knew I had to do Computer Studies here but I felt I could not do it. Well, back in high school, I did that subject but the teacher was horrible and I was so scared of her." The above mentioned participants noted that the persons who spoke at the orientation session affirmed that the fact that they were there at that time signified that they had made a conscious decision to improve their lives and that fear or post mistakes should not hinder their progress. To this end, participant HSE1 stated: "The persons giving information at the orientation program reminded us that this was an opportunity to learn new things and improve ourselves professionally. We only needed to take the next step."

Subsequently, the responses of the participants to the relevance of the orientation program in developing their learning skills were varied. To illustrate, HSE3 noted that although there was no specific emphasis on learning skills during the orientation, the presenters spoke about the importance of time management. As HSE3 stated: "They told us that we should try not to do more subjects than we can manage because to be successful we will need to dedicate a certain amount of time to each subject." Furthermore, interviewee HSE1 commented that, "during the orientation program I felt like I had been snoozing in my life and they woke me up. I got some more drive and determination." However, interviewees HSE5, LSE3, and LSE6 remarked that they did not believe that the information provided at orientation program contributed to the development of their learning skills. To clarify, LSE3 noted that while the speeches were encouraging, in her opinion, they did not provide any useful strategies for monitoring and improving their learning. She said, "You ask an interesting question there. I don't think they said anything about what to do to improve learning. Maybe that was for class. I don't know. But the speeches were generally good."

However, many of the participants proceeded to comment on the skills they learned in their classes and the effectiveness of the teachers. Interviewee HSE3 mentioned the research skills that she acquired and how this has inspired her to engage in additional research. Additionally, LSE5 explained that: "The teachers applied the topics and concepts to practical and everyday ways. I learned to connect what was in the book to real life." Therefore, she expressed that it was easier to relate to the concepts she learned in class. Working with others was an important learning skill for participant

LSE6. She emphasized: "I got a chance to work with persons who were serious about learning and going through similar challenges as me. For me, it was definitely a positive experience." HSE5 reiterated the importance of group work as through cooperative learning, members of her class were able to analyze and interpret various problems in class. She affirmed: "During class we did a lot of group work. I liked that because in group study, you can say what is on your mind and the group interprets it and we come up with an answer."

In sum, this theme addressed research question one and two regarding whether the students found aspects of the orientation useful in assisting them in improving their learning in class. The learning new skills theme supported these research questions as some students explained that limited information was provided during the orientation program regarding learning skills and improving learning. However, participants underscored that they believed that they acquired relevant and useful learning skills in their different courses.

Summary of Findings

The quantitative phase of the study involved the use of a survey instrument that was a combination of two preestablished instruments, the AE Scale (Midgley et al., 2000) and the GSE Scale(Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to ascertain the perceived self-efficacy of nontraditional students who attended and did not attend the one-day orientation program at the target institution. Additionally, the findings from the quantitative survey demonstrated that there was no significant difference in the reported self-efficacy levels

of nontraditional students that attended the institution's orientation program and those that did not attend the orientation program.

For the qualitative phase of the study, five themes emerged from the findings. They were challenges of being an older student, evidence of motivation, evidence of self-efficacy, evidence of persistence, and learning new skills. Consequently, the findings demonstrated that although the respondents identified the content of the orientation as motivating and encouraging, many did not attribute the orientation program to having specific impact on their persistence and self-efficacy levels. The participants posited that their ability and willingness to complete their programs of studied were influenced by their desire to improve themselves personally and professionally, make friends and family proud, and their spiritual faith.

Regarding the theme of motivation, the analysis found that the orientation program was significantly motivating and encouraging to the students that attended as many interviewees expressed that they believed that the speeches were motivating and effective. However, the participants noted that they did not believe that the orientation program significantly contributed to the learning in their classes and emphasized that they thought the teachers were responsible for improvements in their learning skills. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the students encountered challenges being older students, such as balancing study with work and family obligations and the psychological anxieties associated with returning to school. A number of interviewees stated that the orientation program was useful in allaying some of their initial fears.

From the analysis, I was able to determine that the orientation program at the target institution would be more instrumental in facilitating the success of nontraditional students by:

1. Providing information that is specific to the needs and career goals of the students

2. Having sessions that address the development of study and learning skills focusing on the challenges of being an older student

3. Providing motivational and study skills refresher sessions intermittently during the school year to facilitate student persistence and positive self-efficacy beliefs.

4. Developing an institutional strategy for the continuous advisement of nontraditional students.

These findings will enable me to develop a comprehensive project to facilitate amendments to the target institution's orientation program to improve the impact of the orientation program on nontraditional students' success at the institution. Section 3 comprises a detailed description of the project.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of the project is to disseminate the findings of this research within a collaborative and communicative platform. It is intended to develop effective orientation strategies to promote the success of nontraditional students at the target institution. The findings from this study will provide the staff and faculty with valuable insights into nontraditional students' perspective of the impact of the institution's orientation program on their success in their programs of study. This information is intended to provide the framework for meaningful discussions on the approaches needed for the effective implementation of policies and guidelines that will facilitate student success.

This section includes a description of the project, its goals, and the rationale of the project. The strategies for developing an initiative to facilitate improved student success through orientation programs will be presented in a white paper. White papers are typically used to convey specific information about solutions to a problem. Consequently, a white paper was appropriate to present the project as it is able to advocate that the recommendations of the project study are valid and suitable solutions to the problem of nontraditional students' persistence and academic success. The white paper is included in Appendix A. The white paper includes an informative and concise outline of the research study, including the methodology, data analysis, and data analysis results. Also, the white paper includes a description of the project, its timeframe, and the proposed recommendations for the implementation of the project.

Additionally, this section contains a review of literature supporting the format and content of the project. I also discuss the implementation of the project, potential resources and support, potential barriers, the proposal for implementation and timetable, and the roles and responsibilities of students and others.

Project Description and Goals

The major objective of this project is to make the relevant stakeholders, such as the director, faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators at the institution, aware of nontraditional students' perceptions of the institution's orientation program, both positive and negative. This information is intended to provide the pathway for collaborative discussions to facilitate the implementation of strategies to improve the orientation process and better align the program to the needs of nontraditional students.

The proposed project addresses the local problem that, over the past 7years, course completion at the target institution has averaged 55%. Of note, registration data for the academic year 2011-2012 indicated that 68% of students registered at the institution were over the age of 21. Strategies that focus on addressing the needs and challenges of nontraditional students in orientation programs can assist them in successfully persisting in their programs of study and consequently achieving their academic and professional goals.

A project that is collaborative will promote buy-in from the stakeholders. The faculty, instructional support staff, and school administrators at the target institution are aware of the study and are supportive of my plans for the dissemination of the results. However, providing ample opportunity for the staff and faculty to give their input and

collaborate may encourage their acceptance of the proposed changes that may arise from the project (Dufour, 2011).

I will present the research and the findings in the form of a white paper to the faculty and instructional support staff. A special staff meeting will be dedicated to the presentation of the white paper. This is the most appropriate forum as these are scheduled meetings that all staff and faculty are aware of in advance. The allotted time for the meeting will provide adequate time for both the presentation and follow-up discussions.

Additionally, another meeting may be scheduled if more time is required for collaborative discussions. After the preliminary discussions with the faculty and instructional support staff, working focus sessions will be scheduled with the institution's director and administrative staff involved in the instructional process to discuss the implementation of the identified strategies.

The white paper to be presented will inform the faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators at the target institution of the findings of the mixed-methods case study research related to nontraditional students' perceptions of the impact of the institution's orientation on their academic success. Essentially, the project offers an overview of the results of both the quantitative survey on nontraditional students' report self-efficacy beliefs and the qualitative interviews focusing on their perception of the institution's orientation program. These findings provide the basis for a comprehensive discussion on strategies for amending the current orientation program to better incorporate the views of nontraditional students.

Consequently, the recommendations include providing segments with information that is specific to the needs of nontraditional students, providing study and learning skills, and increasing the number of sessions provided during the academic year. Additionally, the project provides a plan for the implementation of the recommendations.

The objectives of the project are to inform the faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators at the target institution of the findings of the case study research and to propose recommendations for the amendment of the institutions orientation program to better address the needs of nontraditional students. The recommendations suggested by the interview participants provide insightful guidelines that can be used as a basis for a collaborative initiative to improve the institutional strategies and policies related to addressing the needs of nontraditional students and facilitating students' persistence and success in their courses.

Rationale

The project for this research is designed based on the findings of the quantitative and qualitative results of the mixed methods study that consisted of a survey and interviews of nontraditional students that completed at least two semesters at the institution. A literature review related to the effectiveness of white papers, facilitating change, and orientation strategies also assisted in defining the project for this research.

The study revealed that the institution's orientation program did not have a significant impact of nontraditional students' perceived self-efficacy beliefs. Also, the interviewees from the qualitative phase of the study expressed that the orientation program should be more specific to the needs to older students, facilitate some career

advisement, and provide information on study and learning skills. The research offered an understanding of the institution's orientation program through the eyes of nontraditional students that attended. Their perceptions and views will form the foundation of the recommended changes to amend the orientation program, thereby giving these students a say in improving institutional policies. Furthermore, the faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators will have the opportunity to assess the orientation program. Essentially, the project will employ a collaborative approach to effectively develop strategies to meet the needs of nontraditional students.

To this end, a policy recommendation in the form of a white paper is the most appropriate format to present the findings of this research study. Utilizing another format, such as professional development training for faculty and staff, does not align with the research questions, findings, and the program. The focus of the study was not on the instructional structure of the orientation program. The study assessed the perceptions of only nontraditional students of the orientation program at the target institution and did not look at instructional strategies. Consequently, a white paper will be used to present the findings of the study and suggest the recommendations for the implementation of the project.

I will utilize a white paper to present the project as white papers can be persuasive documents that lead decision-makers to take relevant action. Essentially, white papers are an effective format to present a certain position or a solution to problems to specific audiences that can influence decision making in an organization. Additionally, white papers allow for the presentation of the findings of the study and the consequent

recommendations to be done visually appealing ensuring that the information presented is clear, concise, and engages the audience.

Consequently, a position paper in the form of a white paper is the most appropriate format to present the project as it presents a set of recommendations related to a support program at the target institution. The project is not related to instructional strategies orto professional development but offers recommendations for the orientation program. The white paper synthesizes the recommendations for the improvement of the orientation program at local target institution.

Literature Review

The literature review establishes the suitability of the use of a white paper to present the findings of the research study. Additionally, the review addresses the importance of facilitating students' success and explores the principles of project management within an educational context.

I searched various databases accessed through the Walden University Library. These included ERIC, Ebscohost, ProQuest, among others. I also reviewed books and searched Google Scholar for peer-reviewed articles. The key words and phrases I reviewed included the following: *white papers, white papers in education, writing effective white papers, adult learning, student success, higher education, training programs, project management, change management, project implementation, educational policy* and *evaluation.*

White Papers

Sakamuro, Stolley, and Hyde (2015)defined white papers as authoritative and informative documents that advocate a specific position or offer solutions to particular problems. They are also considered effective and persuasive as they can influence decision makers on selecting specific solutions to problems (Stelzer, 2010). It is imperative that new ideas are dispersed over channels that are clear and accessible. Rogers (2003) asserted that any form of innovation can be effectively diffused given that the innovation is timely and relevant and the communication channels are effective and accessible. For the purpose of this project study, the white paper format is appropriate because it is a clear and concise medium for sharing information.

Subsequently, a white paper is an effective means of conveying the findings of the study in a succinct manner as it creates a persuasive document that can lead decision makers to take action. To this end, the white paper should take an educational approach, be fact driven, and contain expert opinions and ironclad logic (Graham, 2013). Usually, white papers mainly consist of text; however, charts, diagrams, and appropriate illustrations can be useful and are regularly included (Naidoo, 2014; Stelzer, 2010).

Therefore, the function of white papers is to help people make decisions (Cals & Kotz, 2013; Naidoo, 2014; Sakamuro & Stolley, 2010). The attractiveness of white papers lies in their ability to reach specific types of audiences directly, such as executives and key decision-makers. Indeed, white papers can be an extremely powerful tool in nurturing prospects and building mindshare for new ideas (Graham, 2013).

According to Stelzer (2010), white papers are the vanguard of an educational-marketing revolution. They have the capacity to lure readers and to powerfully persuade their decisions. Indeed, the white paper writer's responsibility is to "establish the long-term context within which decisions-makers should think about the problem your product or service was created to solve" (O' Brien, 2008, p. 43). Writing a white paper is not an easy task (Nidoo, 2014). Bly (2010) asserted that "the white paper writer must walk a fine line between selling and educating" (p.38). Experienced and skilled writers have the ability to objectively educate the target audience and assist them to make intelligent decisions about the product or service.

White papers are often used to promote thought leadership. The purpose of this project, a white paper, is to exhibit forward thinking and to encourage the readers to accept the proposed recommendations and to persuade decision-makers to accept a future vision (Freeman &Maybin, 2011). Some of the important steps taken in writing this white paper were ensuring that the topic was clear, identifying the target reader or audience, and deciding on an objective. The other steps entailed undertaking detailed and meaningful research and engaging in the writing process (Graham, 2013). A well-written white paper can be highly persuasive and lead decision-makers to take relevant action.

Facilitating Student Success

The results of this research study form the framework for amending the orientation program at the target institution to improve the persistence and success of nontraditional students. Indeed, student success can be measured through various variables, such as academic achievement, self-efficacy, satisfaction, persistence, and

attainment of educational goals (Kuh, 2009; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). For the purpose of this project, student success is related to student self-efficacy beliefs and their intention to persist in their programs of study.

To this end, success and persistence at the target institution can be facilitated through academic and social support, goal realization, and involvement in productive institutional activities (Harper & Quaye, 2014). Consequently, student engagement then becomes a critical indicator of success. Therefore, because students' effort and involvement are important determinants of persistence and success, the target institution should implement strategies, through their academic, advising, and interpersonal offerings, that encourage student engagement and persistence (Kuh et al., 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The recommendations of this project may provide the relevant strategies that can improve students' positive self-beliefs and persistence. Essentially, the institution will be able to utilize effective policies and practices to persuade students to actively engage in their college experience and achieve their educational goals through the implementation of targeted orientation program.

A number of factors can influence student success. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) asserted that career development courses, targeted advisement, or other related institutional interventions can significantly increase students' career development and success. The amended orientation program proposed in the project can offer targeted advisement to nontraditional students, consequently improving the students' ability to complete their academic goals successfully.

Additionally, Tinto (2007, 2012) affirmed that the relationship between the higher education institution and the students was critical in determining student achievement and ensuring student retention. Therefore, the target institution should implement some of the necessary conditions to create a supportive college environment, such as advice, support, involvement, and learning (Kaufman, 2015). Academic advisement can assist in molding students' learning experiences, thereby facilitating the achievement of professional and personal goals (Kaufman, 2015; Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Accordingly, Tinto (2012) affirmed that students are more likely to persist and complete their programs of study at institutions that provide clear, relevant, and consistent information about expectations and requirements. The orientation program recommended in this white paper can provide the institution with the effective strategies to deliver quality advising through an effective orientation program. That is, relevant academic advising can promote achievement and academic self-confidence by providing meaningful information and social support (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

In summary, it is essential to lay out a clear path to student success at the target institution that includes early engagement, teaching about academic culture and expectations, and focusing on under engaged and at-risk students (Harper &Quaye, 2014; Nelson & Clark, 2015). Indeed, Kuh (2011) recommended higher educational institutions should require that students attend orientation and advising sessions. The amended orientation program recommended by the project study can address the needs of nontraditional students and communicate with them ways to address the challenges they may be encountering.

Project Management

Strategic planning and effective management of relevant projects are essential in guiding the target institution to achieve a critical objective of facilitating student persistence. Hence, efficient project management strategies can provide the organization with strategic tools to effectively plan how to utilize its people and resources (Javed, Mahmood & Sulaiman, 2012). The project management process involves project planning and project implementation that would organize and direct the organization's resources to achieve a desired objective (Shi, 2011).Consequently, project planning usually involves facilitating necessary changes within the organization. The faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators at the target institution need to be intricately involved in the project process to encourage buy-in and to reduce resistance (Amade, Ogbonna & Kaduru, 2012).

Increased student persistence is a part of the target institution's immediate strategic planning. A timely and effective implementation of an orientation program targeted to a significant cross section of the student population, nontraditional students, will assist in achieving this objective. To this end, having a project that can be measured in terms of meeting planned objectives, customer benefits and satisfaction will make it more easily accepted by the relevant authorities (Shi, 2011).

Furthermore, Turner (2014) stressed that certain factors should be considered when designing effective projects. These include clearly defining the objectives of the project, allocating responsibility for the various stages, coordinating activities, and staffing the project. Additionally, including client views in the project planning and

ensuring that client satisfaction is formally measured is important to determine the

perceived failure or success of a project (Amade et al., 2012; Kerzner, 2013). The

findings of this project study are derived from the extensive quantitative and qualitative

data garnered on nontraditional students' perspectives of the impact of the orientation

program on their success. Therefore, the proposed project has the potential to

significantly improve students' persistence and success.

Of note, projects should not be undertaken within a vacuum in the organization

and should be a part of the overall strategy and mission of the company. The project

should become a subsystem of the organization and the project manager or administrator

must carry out his or her responsibilities within this framework (Heagney, 2012; Turner,

2014). Accordingly, extensive consultation regarding the recommendations and

implementation of the project study will take place with the faculty, instructional support

staff, and administrators.

Project management, especially in educational settings, also often requires the

buy-in of key people. These may include the principal or director, school superintendent,

and other stakeholder who have an interest in the planning process (Caffarella, 2010).

Having strong verbal and written commitments from mid-level and upper level

administrators and leaders is critical as this active endorsement will undoubtedly allow

for the smooth transition of the project from the planning to the implementation phase

(Kerzner, 2013; Munson, 1992; Wiggenhorn, 1996 as cited in Caffarella, 2010). The

institution's director and administrative have been supportive of the project study and are

aware of the plans to disseminate the findings of the study. Indeed, building

organizational support for the project is imperative. Vella (2010) affirmed that this can be accomplished by embracing the mission and goals of the organization, incorporating standard operating procedures, getting the support of the organizational authority.

In summary, project development involves careful management of the project processes, as well as planning for the effective presentation of the project document and the consequent implementation. The literature review for the project outlines the fundamental factors taken into consideration for the development of a relevant white paper. The white paper will facilitate policy change at the target institution. These include critical information on project management, design, and presentation.

Project Description

The director, administrators, faculty, and instructional support staff at the target institution are aware of the research study that I had undertaken focusing on nontraditional students at the institution and the impact of the orientation program on their academic success. I have received support at various levels of the organization and persons seem to be willing to be engaged in discussion on the proposed project. Once I receive the final approval for the project study from Walden University, I will begin the process to formally schedule the consultation meetings and begin to add the amendments to the content of the institution's present orientation program.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The administration, faculty and staff at the target institution are aware of the research study that I have undertaken. Also, I have received strong support during discussions with the director and peers. Furthermore, for the current academic year, the

director has indicated that he plans to spearhead a number of initiatives aimed at reevaluating some of the systems that are in place at the institution to help to improve student persistence and achievement. Therefore, the presentation of my research would be in keeping with this general theme.

After the approval of my doctoral study by Walden University, I will make a formal request to present the white paper at the next available staff meeting. As mentioned before, the institution's administration is aware of the study and has indicated that they will make every effort to provide the necessary resources and accommodate my presentation at the earliest possible time once I receive approval. The auditorium where staff meetings are held is equipped with multimedia equipments for the presentation. Additionally, I will be able to use the stationary and other supplies at the institution to publicize the presentation and prepare supporting documents.

Potential Barriers

The potential barriers may include effectively managing and developing the collaborative endeavor of getting meaningful and timely feedback from faculty and instructional support staff to further explore potential amendments to the orientation program. Additionally, amending the orientation program would involve increased workload for the limited administrative staff and the program developer as adjustment will need to be made to the format of the program and the resource materials provided. As a result, I expect that discussions and collaboration will encourage buy in of the relevant staff to the prospective benefits of implementing the necessary amendments.

Nevertheless, the potential solutions to these barriers include providing the faculty and the instructional support staff with adequate notice of the scheduled consultation sessions. The consultation meetings will take place during time allotted for regularly scheduled staff meetings, therefore, the presenter will not experience scheduling difficulties for delivering the presentation and receiving feedback.

With regards to the additional workload for the administrative staff, the project developer will propose that the administrative staff responsible for collating documentation for the institution's orientation program be allowed to start the process earlier than usual for the implementation of the amended orientation program at the beginning of the new academic year. This will allow the administrative staff sufficient time to review and collate the documents for distribution.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

After the consultation and feedback from the faculty and staff, I will present a formal proposal to the administration of the institution that will present the findings from the study, the guiding theoretical framework, relevant literature review, along with the suggested amendments for the institution's orientation program. I will make this presentation after my doctoral study has been approved and I am able to schedule the consultation meetings with staff, faculty, and the administration.

The consultation process will include presenting the white paper at the next convenient staff meeting. In this setting, the faculty and instructional support staff will have the opportunity to become familiar with the study's findings and recommendations. After, I will schedule a series of focused sessions in order to facilitate more detailed

discussions with each group of stakeholders before presenting the final recommendations

to the administrators. Table 11 illustrates the specific timeframe for the project.

Table 11

Timeframe for the Consultation Process and Implementation of the Project

Timeframe	Actions
March, 2016	Receive approval of the project study from Walden University.
April, 2016	Schedule the first consultation meeting with the faculty and instructional support staff.
	Review feedback.
May, 2016	Schedule the second consultation meeting with the faculty and instructional support staff to discuss the feedback and synthesize the recommendations. Small focus group format will be utilized here to enhance discussions.
June, 2016	Present the final recommendations to the institution's director and administrators for discussion and approval.
July, 2016	Prepare the new documentation with the recommendations for the amended orientation program for the upcoming academic year.
September, 2016	Present the amended orientation program to the incoming cohort of students.

Roles and Responsibilities

As the researcher, I will be responsible for conducting the presentation and

consultation of the research study and the white paper (Appendix A) to the faculty and

instructional support staff. Additionally, I will facilitate the incorporation of the

recommendations resulted from the interactions with the major stakeholders into the

orientation program by working with its planners and other administrative staff

associated with this program. Upon approval of my project study, I will contact the

administrative assistant responsible for scheduling and planning the agenda for the

monthly staff meetings to schedule a session at the next scheduled meeting. The use of

venue and the multimedia equipment are a part of the regular monthly meetings at the

institution.

After scheduling the consultation sessions, I will work with faculty and

instructional support staff to develop the recommendations for the amended orientation

program using the findings of the project study as the framework. I will also work with

the administrative staff responsible for the planning of the orientation program to

facilitate the effective implementation of the adjusted program. The next section will

focus on the project evaluation (Appendix D).

Project Evaluation Plan

After the amended orientation program has been presented at the next orientation

session, all students over the age of 21 will be requested to complete a summative

evaluation survey (Appendix D) to assess their views on the usefulness of the orientation

program. Creswell (2012) affirmed that the audience will assess the efficacy of the

study's findings based on their standards and how meaningful the information is within

their specific contexts. The survey will be used to evaluate the opinions of the

participants after the first orientation program with the recommendations. Consequently,

the results of the evaluation survey (Appendix D) will help to plan follow up meetings

and to work on future amendments for the orientation program.

Additionally, the results of the evaluation may confirm the benefits of the program to the faculty, instructional support staff, administrators, and students. Furthermore, the data obtained from the evaluation survey can be used to encourage further discussions on additional policy changes directed at improving the experiences of nontraditional students at the institution.

Project Implications

Social Change: Local Context

This study sought to address the issue of providing nontraditional students at the specified institution with targeted information and guidance through an amended orientation program. The white paper will offer information to the administration, faculty, and staff on the underlying issues affecting the achievement and success of nontraditional students at the institution. The recommendations for the amended orientation have the potential to increase nontraditional student persistence, completion rates, and improve their academic experience.

The amendments to the structure and content of the institution's orientation program will have mid-term and long-term benefits to the institution. The amendments will result in the implementation of effective orientation strategies that will directly address the needs of nontraditional students. Consequently, social change will be evidenced in improved persistence, program completion rates, and success for nontraditional students as they achieve their academic goals.

Additionally, the presentation of the white paper to the faculty and staff will promote a collaborative and consultative process within the institution. Meaningful

discussion and collaboration on topics that can impact the organization provide the opportunity for members of staff to come together and listen to the views of personnel from different areas of the institution. These interactions can promote camaraderie and positive social interactions among colleagues at the institution.

Social Change: Larger Context

This study assessed the impact of the target institution's orientation program on nontraditional students' success and persistence. The findings identified limitations and strengths of the orientation program as perceived by this group of students. Consequently, the white paper presented recommended amendments to the current orientation program that can be used to initiate collaborative discussions on revamping institutional policies that will not only promote the success of a significant segment of the student population but also include the students' voice on policy changes. To this end, the recommendations presented in the white paper can be beneficial to similar institutions that have a large or growing nontraditional student population, resulting in similar organizations designing and implementing comparable amendment to their existing orientation program to better facilitate and promote the success of nontraditional students.

In the long run, an increased number of nontraditional students will successfully complete their programs of study. This will result in these individuals being able to improve their professional prospects and use their additional skills in the workforce. Students will be able to achieve their academic and professional goals, and therefore, contribute to the economic and social development of their community resulting in positive social changes in their society.

Conclusion

I presented the findings and recommendations for this project study utilizing a white paper format. The project was based on the perceptions of nontraditional students at the target institution of the impact of the orientation program on their success and persistence in their programs of study. I employed a mixed-methods sequential design to allow for in-depth investigation of the impact of the orientation program on nontraditional students and their views and perceptions of the orientation program. The results from the qualitative phase of the study supported the findings derived from the quantitative phase and identified various factors that nontraditional students believed contributed to their success.

The presentation of the white paper will inform the relevant stakeholders, namely the faculty, staff, and administration of the target institution, of the findings of the research paper. Consequently, the white paper will provide recommendations for the amendment of the institution's current orientation program to incorporate the views of nontraditional students who are a significant segment of the student population. In Section 4, I discussed the strengths and limitations of the study, my reflections, and also recommendations for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The research study focused on the low student completion rates and academic success of nontraditional students at the target institution. According to the institution's registration data for the academic year 2012- 2013, students over the age of 21 accounted for more than 60% of the student population. I followed a mixed-methods sequential design to investigate nontraditional students' perception of the impact of the target institution's orientation program on their academic success. Indeed, I am passionate about student success, and assessing the views of this specific segment of the student population provided these students with a unique voice and the ability to contribute to institutional change that incorporates their particular needs. In this section, I reflect on the project's strengths and limitations, my scholarship during the doctoral journey, the projects' development, and the impact of the project on social change.

Project Strengths

A strength of this project involved identifying and developing an initiative directed towards improving student success at the target institution. The project focused on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collected from nontraditional students. Nontraditional students comprise a significant proportion of the student population at the target institution. Therefore, this project, the white paper, addresses the needs of a specific group of students and incorporated their perspectives on the impact of the institution's orientation program on their persistence and success. In the white paper,

I identified the major themes that emerged from the research study and suggested recommendations for the implementation of the project.

Another strength of the project is that it gives students, faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators at the institution a voice in developing institutional policy. The research study that informed this white paper provided nontraditional students at the target institution with the opportunity to give their views and perceptions of the impact of the orientation program on their success and persistence in their programs of study. Next, the proposed collaborative discussions during the presentation of the white paper to the faculty and instructional support staff of the institution will allow these key stakeholders to share their thoughts, as well as listen to the views of others, thereby promoting corporation among colleagues.

Finally, another strength of this project is its format, the white paper. White papers are informative documents that succinctly outline the problem and provide solutions to the problems. They are also one of the most effective means of helping people to make decisions (Stelzer, 2007). The white papers offered practical recommendations for the amendment of the current orientation program to reflect the views of a significant segment of the student population. The amendments are able to be incorporated into the present orientation program with limited additional human or financial resources. Also, the recommendations are able to be adjusted and applied to orientation program of other similar institutions.

Limitations

A major limitation of the project is that the results of the research study that informs this project are based on small sample sizes. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized as the study utilized convenience sampling in the quantitative phase and purposeful sampling for the qualitative phase. The project and its recommendations are based on the views of a particular group of students at one institution. Therefore, the findings may not be easily and directly transferable to other institutions.

Additionally, a further limitation of the study was using a single and limited group of participants. Only nontraditional students, 21 years and older, participated in the research study that informed this project. Consequently, the findings of the study and the recommendations of the projects are limited to a specific group of students and may not be easily transferable to other types of students.

Remediation of Limitations

The small sample size was a limitation of the project study. To surmount this limitation, I utilized convenience sampling to acquire participants for the quantitative survey. This allowed for the selection of wide range of participants at the institution that matched the sampling criteria for the quantitative phase. I then was able to use purposeful sampling to choose participants at both extremes of the self-efficacy range calculated from the survey data. Consequently, this particular case study presented the views and experiences of an extensive range of nontraditional students at the target institution. Therefore, the project is based on findings from a comprehensive mixed-methods

research design that generated different types of data and student views on the phenomenon that was investigated.

Another limitation of the project was the inability to generalize the findings and recommendations to other settings and other groups of students. To overcome this limitation, I reviewed research literature on students' self-efficacy, orientation programs in higher education, target populations, and students support. Furthermore, I explored literature on the effectiveness of white papers and project management for the development of the project for this study. Therefore, the use of current literature may allow the project to be transferred to other similar institutions seeking to stronger rationale for orientation policy amendments.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Recommendations for alternative approaches may include a professional development seminar or a full evaluation report. A professional development program may be appropriate if the study focused on instructional strategies and not only nontraditional students' perspectives of the impact of the institution's orientation program. Focusing on the details of the program, such as instructional strategies, support mechanisms, and investigating how students feel at the end of the program or if they believe that their needs were met, would facilitate a professional development session.

Another alternative approach may involve an evaluation report to estimate the benefits of the research study based on student performance. To this end, the program would be evaluated based not only on student perceptions but on the instructional strategies employed in the classes and a review of assessments for learning in their

classes. An evaluation of the program would provide an overview of the general effectiveness of the program.

Scholarship

After examining the student registration and program completion rates for the last few at the target institution, I noticed that there existed a problem with student success, especially among nontraditional students, who accounted for more than 60% of the student population. I embarked on the doctoral program at Walden University with the desire to expand my knowledge in my chosen field and to contribute more extensively to the development of my students. As a faculty member at the target institution, I observed the phenomenon of the lack of student success and low completion rates and, therefore, I felt the need to investigate the impact the institution's orientation program had on nontraditional students' success and persistence.

My knowledge of many facets of higher education has greatly expanded during the doctoral journey. While undertaking my research study, I have been exposed to many subject areas, research articles, and theoretical works. For my study, I delved into the works of renowned educational and psychological theorists, including Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory (1989), along with Zimmerman's (1990) work on self-efficacy. Additionally, I researched scholarly articles on a wide range of topics that allowed me to have a deeper appreciation of the contemporary directions of higher education.

During the development of the project, I engaged in scholarly research on various areas related to effective project development, including white papers in education,

writing effective white papers, student success, higher education, project management, change management, and project implementation. This information allowed me to develop an informative and succinct project that incorporates the views of students, faculty, and administrators. Indeed, I have acquired skills that will be beneficial in the long term as I engage in future research and develop other projects

Essentially, at the end of the doctoral journey, scholarship has become a very real and relevant concept to me. I believe scholarship involves a systematic and disciplined process to investigate a meaningful problem utilizing appropriate research designs and rigorous data collection strategies. Researchers should use relevant, current, and peer-reviewed sources to develop their conceptual frameworks and constructs, as well as to corroborate their findings. Meaningful research must not only follow rigorous methodology, but it must also be free from bias and seek to protect participants from harm. The acquisition of these skills has allowed me, as a nascent scholar, to undertake this project study and will be beneficial in my future research.

Project Development and Evaluation

After analyzing the data and compiling the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, I proceeded to design the project that I will use to disseminate the information to the faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators. This project design phase required that I describe the project and outline the objectives and rationale. The next step involved conducting a literature review that presented valuable information on the use and effectiveness of white papers, project development and management, as well as facilitating student success. I was then able to elucidate the

additional aspects of the project, including how it will be implemented and the timeframe for implementation, potential resources and barriers, and the roles and responsibilities of the persons involved.

Given the findings of the study and the subsequent recommendations, I decided that a policy recommendation with the detail was the most appropriate type of project. Utilizing another format, such as professional development training for faculty and staff, does not align with the research questions and findings. Consequently, a white paper will be used to deliver the research methodology and findings. White papers are persuasive documents that describe problems and give information on how to solve problems (Stelzer, 2010). Additionally, the white paper format allows for collaborative discussion among the relevant stakeholders and promotes reflection and focus on the problem and the solutions.

The white paper presents the findings and recommendation of this doctoral project study. Based on the recommendations of the project, the current orientation program at the target institution will be amended to include the provisions to address the needs of nontraditional students. Following the delivery of the amended orientation program, I will distribute an evaluation survey to the nontraditional students in the audience. An analysis of the results of the survey will help to determine if this group of students believed that the orientation program sufficiently addressed the needs of nontraditional students. Consequently, these survey results can provide valuable feedback for a framework for future research and suggestions for additional amendments.

Finally, I learned some valuable lessons in program planning, development, and implementation. I know these will be important in my professional path as I undertake further research. While creating the white paper for the project, I learned that task of selecting the project format, developing the project, and enlisting the support of key stakeholders, and implementation of the project is systematic and iterative process. I believe that the finished amended orientation program will contribute to the student success.

Leadership and Change

An important aspect of leadership is the ability to unlock the potential of persons by providing information that is solution oriented. The policy recommendations that I presented in the white paper have the potential to significantly improve the academic success and program completion rates of nontraditional students. By undertaking a rigorous and meaningful research study, I was able to identify data-driven recommendations that can be used to amend the current orientation program. As I progressed on my doctoral journey, I acquired the knowledge and skills to identify an important problem at the target institution and, through scholarly research, find effective solutions to the problem, and develop a relevant project for its implementation.

Indeed, I ensured that the institution's administration was aware of the research and I received overwhelming support for the study. During the project development phase, I engaged my colleagues and the administration in collaborative discussions on the findings of the study. Facilitating a respectful environment for open dialogue is an essential characteristic of good leaders. Additionally, the faculty and staff were given the

opportunity to learn more about an issue that was greatly impacting the success of

significant segment of the student population. To this end, they will be able to effectively

contribute to the discussions and help add momentum to policy change aimed at

improving student experiences. Through effective leadership, I sought solutions to an

important institutional problem, undertook meaningful research, developed a relevant

project, facilitated synergetic discussions with faculty and staff, and promoted

consequential institutional policy changes.

Reflections on the Importance of the Work

The research study investigated an increasingly important problem at the target

institution. Certainly, the institution's administration has indicated that it will facilitate

strategies aimed at improving student persistence and achievement as a part of the

institution's strategic improvement plan. Consequently, this study is important and

relevant as the recommendations of the project have the potential to increase

nontraditional student persistence, completion rates, and improve their academic

experience. A compounding effect is the benefit that this work may have in the wider

society as qualified individuals add additional skills to the workforce and positively

impact the economic growth of their community and country.

While undertaking the research for the doctoral project study and developing the

subsequent white paper project, I learned that is imperative to systematically identify

problems within one's professional environment and then undertake relevant research to

find solutions to these problems. Additionally, I ascertained that novel ideas and

strategies must be communicated through channels that are accessible and relevant to the

stakeholders and decision-makers. Consequently, by incorporating these strategies, the recommendations of the project could have the potential to reach a wide audience and impact the society as a whole.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

The pursuit of lifelong learning has always been an important aspect of my life. As a result, I have sought to develop myself academically by engaging in a variety of educational activities and programs. The decision to pursue a terminal degree came after serious thought and the desire to contribute to student development in an even more meaningful way.

As I completed the courses during the initial phase of my doctoral program at Walden University, I learned about various aspects of higher education and adult learning. I did extensive research on learning theories, educational trends, program development, among others. Additionally, I learned how to undertake effective research and evaluate sources of information. This was particularly salient as I understood sources must be evaluated and found to be peer-reviewed, current, unbiased, and accurate to guarantee the authority and quality of the resource. Utilizing references that fall within these categories will ensure that the researcher has high- quality scholarly references that can frame and contribute to the problem statement and literature review of the study.

Furthermore, I learned that scholarly writing at the doctoral level was extremely rigorous and required the mastery of a variety of skills and techniques, such as the correct APA (American Psychological Association) format for writing and displaying tables and figures. Indeed, I learned that scholarly writing involves synthesizing information and

align ideas so that they flow in a logical and coherent manner. The numerous rewrites and the assistance of my committee chair and second chair allowed me to hone my scholarly writing skills and develop as a scholar. It is my intention to continue to undertake meaningful research that will contribute to positive change in my professional and social spheres.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As an educator for over 15 years, I have experience in various teaching and learning environments, learning management, and administration. Invariably, my practice as an educator has been influenced by my desire to impact student academic success and develop positive relationships with students. As an adult educator, it is critical to constantly reflect on and refine my views and beliefs about my practice (Zinn, 2004).

Throughout the doctoral study program, I researched, reviewed, and analyzed numerous books and scholarly articles. I was able to expand my knowledge and develop clear and logical ideas, as well as critical thinking. The engaging discussions I had with my classmates and my instructors improved my ability to articulate my thoughts in a concise and academic manner. As a result, I have become much more confident in engaging in scholarly discussion with my peers and other academics. I now believe that I have the knowledge and enough expertise in my field of study to defend my ideas and conclusions.

Finally, while pursuing my studies in this doctoral program, I have had many opportunities to reflect on my own practice as an adult educator. Indeed, I have adapted my philosophy of education and how I plan and execute lessons to integrate the learning

theories, trends in adult education, and the extensive additional research that learned in my courses. Additionally, I have been able to undertake meaningful research on an aspect of student success about which I am passionate.

Analysis of Self as a Project Developer

Initially, I was unclear how to proceed in the development of the project for the study. I did not have any experience in project development and the task seemed daunting. As a result, I began by doing extensive research on various types of projects and under the guidance of my committee chair; I developed a proposal for the project assessing the purpose, problem, methodology, and findings. After examining and discussing the different types of projects, I decided on a policy recommendation with detail in the form of a white paper.

As the project developer, I learned that I was responsible for not only creating the project documents but also identifying the audience and implementing recommendations. Consequently, I proceeded to identify the relevant audience that included the faculty and staff of the target institution. While I developed the white paper, I tried to always have in mind the context of the institution and how the audience would react. It was imperative that the presentation of the white paper be a collaborative process where the views and expertise of the audience would also be considered. To this end, the white paper had to be written and presented in an informative, concise, and interactive manner.

I found white papers to be very versatile and effective. Indeed, according to Sakamuro and Stolley, 2010, white papers are effective in helping people make decisions. They are able to directly reach specific audiences as they focus on information that is

useful to the persons involved (Stelzer, 2007). Also, I was able to include not texts, diagrams and charts into the presentation to make it more interactive, concise, and interesting.

Potential Impact on Social Change

The potential impact on social change of this research study and the proposed project are extensive. It has implications for not only the success of nontraditional students, a large segment of the student population at the target institution, but also the institution as a whole, and the wider community.

After presenting the white paper to the faculty and staff and engaging in a collaborative process, the recommendations for the orientation program will be incorporated into the next orientation session. These recommendations have the potential to increase nontraditional student persistence, completion rates, and improve their academic experience. Indeed, the findings derived from the doctoral project study have given nontraditional students a voice in adjusting the content of an important institutional activity that has the potential to greatly impact their preparedness for higher education and persistence in their programs of study.

Additionally, the amendments to the current orientation program will add to the institution's efforts to improve student retention and persistence. With the implementation of an orientation program that is more targeted to the needs and expectations of nontraditional students, the program completion rates of these students have the potential to significantly increase. Consequently, the improved completion rates

can add to the success of the institution that can result in increased enrolment and a more positive image of the school by the wider community.

Finally, with improved student complete rates and potentially improved enrolment, more students will be able to advance in their academic and professional pursuits. Qualified individuals add additional skills to the workforce and positively impact the economic growth of their community and country as a whole.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications

There is consensus among the institution's staff and faculty that student success needs to be central to any school improvement plan. However, discussions on the issues had not risen above general dialogue in departmental and staff meetings. Also, any recommendations had been rudimentary and did not assess student perceptions in detail. This doctoral project study offers rigorous data and research-based findings of the nontraditional students' perceptions of the impact of the institution's orientation program on their success.

Consequently, the major implications of this study involve providing the target institutions with an innovative approach to addressing a fundamental problem of student persistence and success. Additionally, the project will allow students, faculty, instructional support staff, and administrators to cooperatively assess an institutional problem and give their views and recommendations.

Applications

The doctoral project study provides clear and meaningful recommendations to amend the current orientation program to better incorporate the needs of nontraditional students. The project's recommendations can be applied to the institutional strategies aimed at improving student persistence and success at the target institution and other similar institutions. The mixed-methods design of the study employs the strengths of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches and addresses multiple aspects of the study that could not be sufficiently covered by a single approach. This results in the findings being able to be applied to other institutions with a similar problem.

Directions for Future Research

Future research on the impact of orientation programs on student success may attempt to investigate the impact of orientation programs on other groups of students and other types of institutions. Additional research could also assess specific aspects of the orientation program available at other institutions. Apart from mixed-methods design, future research could employ a qualitative design to ascertain more in depth understanding of the phenomenon or a quantitative design to construct relevant survey questions that can investigate the views and needs of various groups of students.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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The study utilized a mixed-methods sequential design with the quantitative phase being undertaken first. This was followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase that built on the findings of the quantitative results. Seventy-seven nontraditional students completed the quantitative survey assessing their self-

efficacy beliefs. For the qualitative phase, I selected a sample of 10 participants, five that exhibited low self-efficacy levels from the GSE Scale and five that demonstrated high self-efficacy levels. The results of the study provided specific recommendations that can be used to amend the current orientation program to better incorporate the needs of nontraditional students.

Developing a relevant, concise, and targeted project for the study is critical to presenting the findings in a persuasive manner. A white paper format was selected as the most appropriate format for the presentation as white papers are effective in helping persons make decisions. Indeed, the white paper delineates the problem of the study, the methodology, and the findings of the study. In the final section of study, I outlined the project's strengths and limitations, development, scholarship, leadership, and self-analysis. Additionally, I described the implications of the research study and directions for future research.

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Appendix A: The White Paper

**Improving Nontraditional Student Success
Through Targeted Orientation Programs**
By Marsha Webster

The goal of this paper is to:
- ❖ Provide an overview of nontraditional students' perspective of the impact of an orientation program on their academic success and persistence.
- ❖ Inform the faculty, staff and administration of the findings of the study.
- ❖ Encourage the institution's administration to amend the current orientation program to incorporate the perspectives and needs of nontraditional students.

Introduction

Improving student completion rates is a major objective of administrators and faculty of higher education institutions (Brown, 2012). School administrators have utilized various strategies to encourage student persistence and success in their academic endeavors. Orientation programs are one of those established strategies (Conley, 2010; Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Hollins, 2009). Research examining orientation processes from an institutional perspective asserted that providing comprehensive and ongoing student advisement can facilitate student success (Espinoza & Espinoza, 2012; Kolenovic, Linderman, & Karp, 2013; Sindhu, 2012).

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) and the theory of self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). The findings of the study gave a comprehensive overview of how the orientation program impacted nontraditional students' learning and persistence in their courses of study.

The Problem

The research problem addressed in this study is based on the fact that nontraditional students at the program that is the focus of this study continue to struggle to complete their courses of study. Since its inception in 2003, the two-year continuing education program has catered mainly to nontraditional students over the age of 21. Registration data for the academic year 2011-2012 indicated that 68% of students registered at the institution were over the age of 21. A significant problem exists as over the last four years, an average of 43% of the initial cohort has left the program without a passing grade in at least one of the subjects taken.

Nontraditional students face a number of challenges that are not typical of traditional students. Among these challenges is managing the competing demands of family and work (Brown, 2012). These challenges can result in nontraditional students not succeeding in their educational pursuits without adequate and targeted support (Hollins, 2009). It is critical then that the perspectives of the students, the beneficiaries of the program, are incorporated into analysis of the strategies for institutional development.

The Research Study

The purpose of this study is to assess how nontraditional students at a small higher education institution perceive the potential impact of an orientation program on their self- efficacy beliefs and the influence of the orientation program on their learning and persistence in their course of study.

The study utilized a sequential mixed-methods approach incorporated in a case study design. A two-phase sequential explanatory strategy was employed with the collection and analysis of quantitative survey data in the first phase and qualitative data in the second phase. The results of the quantitative data analysis assisted in identifying the appropriate respondents that were interviewed to generate the qualitative data that was required to ascertain detailed insight into the topic (Creswell, 2012).

Methodology for the Quantitative Phase

I used a survey instrument that was a combination of two pre-established instruments, the Academic Efficacy Scale (AE) (Midgley et al., 2000) and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Both students that attended the orientation program and those that did not attend were asked to complete the AE scale of the survey. However, those that participated in the orientation program were prompted in the survey to respond to the GSE scale on the survey. The research questions for the quantitative phase focused on ascertaining if there is significant difference between the self-efficacy levels of students that participated in the orientation program and those that did not.

Data Analysis for the Quantitative Phase

A total of 77 nontraditional students adequately completed the survey at the target institution. Of these, 62 attended the institution's orientation program and therefore, completed both the AE and GSE scale specific to the orientation program. The remaining 15 participants completed only the AE scale as they did not attend the institution's orientation program.
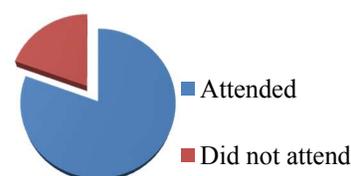

Figure1.Participants that attended and did not attend orientation program.

SPSS® was used to calculate the internal reliability of the scales that resulted in a Cronbach's alpha for the AE scale of $\alpha = .83$ and for the GSE scale, $\alpha = .74$. Additionally, I utilized SPSS® to identify outliers in both scales, generate Q_Q plots of the means of the AE and GSE scales, and test for normality.

Results

These results concluded that participation in the institution's orientation did not significantly impact the reported self-efficacy levels of the respondents.
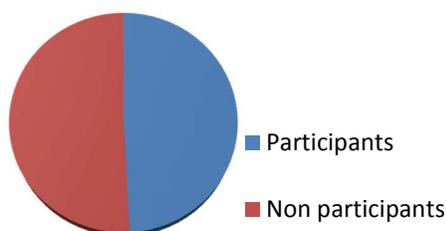
Figure2. Academic efficacy means for orientation program participants and nonparticipants.

Methodology for the Qualitative Phase

A purposeful sampling technique was utilized to select participants based on their responses on the self-reporting GSE scale specific to the orientation program. I selected a sample of 10 participants, five that exhibited low self-efficacy levels from the GSE scale and five that demonstrated high self-efficacy levels.

Data Analysis for the Qualitative Phase

The data analysis followed the recommended steps from interviewing the participants to identifying the themes from the participant's input. I ensured the quality of the research with appropriate trustworthiness strategies, including member checking and peer review.

Findings

After completing the data analysis, five themes emerged that were associated with the proposed research questions. The research questions were:

- RQ1 - What aspects of the orientation do nontraditional students find useful in assisting them in improving their learning in their classes?
- RQ2 - To what extent do nontraditional students perceive that the orientation program of the target program will impact their ability to complete their program of study?
- RQ3 - Does the perception of the impact of the orientation program differ for students with low self-efficacy levels as opposed to those with high self-efficacy levels?

The identified themes were ***challenges of being an older student (RQ2), evidence of motivation (RQ2, RQ3), evidence of self-efficacy (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3), evidence of persistence (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3), and learning new skills (RQ1, RQ2).***

Theme 1: Challenges of Being an Older Student

The challenges of being an older student resonated throughout the majority of the students' responses. Some participants' highlighted their preoccupation with

engaging in formal education later in life. For instance, an individual over the age of 60 explained that many persons of a similar age would not typically think of returning to school, *"Many people my age wouldn't really be thinking of coming to school"*. Also, engagement in the workforce was viewed as a challenge as there was limited time to pursue further education.

Additionally, several participants expressed a general sense that the orientation program provided an opportunity to hear about the experiences of persons that have participated in the program and have been able to overcome various challenges. The students explained that knowing that other persons of a similar age successfully completed the program was particularly comforting and offered the impetus that she needed to start the program, *"the speakers motivated us by telling us about past students' experiences and even their own experiences coming from a poor environment"*.

Theme 2: Evidence of Motivation

Some participants identified that attending the orientation program was significant to remaining motivated throughout their courses. The participants' responses offered some insights into their perceptions of the value of the orientation program, as well as its role in motivating them to embark on and persist in the program. *"They emphasized that there should be no barriers that prevent us from achieving our goals"*. Nevertheless, the students emphasized other factors that contributed to their motivation. *"I am*

motivated by just knowing that I am not satisfied with where I am. Anytime you are satisfied, you become comfortable. It's like having a mediocre mentality". Another participant noted, *"My mom is a single mother and she had so many struggles. My aim is to make her proud and that also motivates me"*.

Theme 3: Evidence of Self-Efficacy

Having a strong sense of purpose and self-efficacy was a recurring strategy for maintaining motivation and engendering positive thoughts regarding achieving their academic goals. For instance, one interviewee noted that being unsatisfied with one's professional and academic status was critical to generating optimistic thoughts about school and facilitates persistence. *"I want to be able to get a better job. I know I cannot do that without furthering my schooling"*. Indeed, each interviewee was able to identify at least one important strategy that they utilized to maintain their self-belief in their ability to successfully complete their program of study.

Theme 4: Evidence of Persistence

The ability to complete their program of study is a critical indicator of the student's and the program's success. As stated earlier, some of the challenges identified that could affect program completion included being an older student, feeling of intimidation, work, and family obligations. The students discussed the factors that could cause them to drop out of their program of study. Many interviewees explained that only serious situations such as the death of a family member, serious illness, extreme emotional stress or having to leave the island would result in them not

completing their courses. To illustrate, a participant affirmed: *"I believe the only thing that could stop me is a serious sickness"*.

With regards to the orientation programs impact on their levels of persistence, some interviewees explained that they were mostly satisfied with the information provided at the orientation program but it was not specific to dealing with the challenges that they may face. *"I felt that they were telling us we can do it but not how we can do it. I don't know. Maybe that was too much to ask."*

Theme 5: Learning New Skills

A fundamental tenet of pursuing further education is the opportunity to learn new, relevant, and marketable skills. Of note, some interviewees commented that their experiences in secondary school were not particularly productive or positive. A participant noted that in high school he was more interested in sports and socializing with friends than engaging in class work, *"when I was in high school, I wasn't too focused at that time. I was more interested in my friends and sports"*.

Furthermore, the responses of the participants to the relevance of the orientation program in developing their learning skills were varied. Indeed, one student commented that *"during the orientation program I felt like I had been snoozing in my life and they woke me up. I got some more drive and determination"*.

Summary of Findings

The findings from the quantitative phase of the study demonstrated that there was no significant difference in the reported self-efficacy levels nontraditional students that attended the institution's orientation program and those that did not attend the orientation program. The analysis of the qualitative findings revealed that the students encountered challenges specific to older students, such as balancing study with work and family obligations and the psychological anxieties associated with returning to school. A number of interviewees stated that the orientation program was useful in allaying some of their initial fears.

Consequently, the findings demonstrated that although the respondents identified the content of the orientation as motivating and encouraging, many did not attribute the orientation program to having specific impact on their persistence and self-efficacy levels.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research study, the researcher recommends that the current orientation at the target institution be amended to incorporate the identified needs of nontraditional students. This can result in improved student self-efficacy beliefs, success, and persistence in the program. The recommendations for the amendments to the current orientation program involves three areas: (1) including segments with information that is specific to the needs of nontraditional students, (2) strategies for monitoring and improving their

learning, and (3) increasing the number of sessions provided during the academic year.

Targeted Information

The results of the study provided information on nontraditional students' views of the impact of the institution's orientation program on their success and persistence. The analysis of the interview data identified some critical issues from the students' perspectives. The themes of challenges of being an adult learner, motivation, and persistence are central to formulating and delivering targeted information to nontraditional students. The students emphasized the challenges of balancing work, family and pursuing higher education. Consequently, it is important to provide advisement on balancing these challenges and develop an institutional framework that supports students with a myriad of responsibilities. To this end, some of the student's recommendations include support from family members and friends, having clear professional goals, and spiritual faith.

Study and Learning Skills

A recurrent view of the students was that while the speeches during the orientation program were encouraging, they did not provide many useful strategies for monitoring and improving their learning. The recommendation asserts that nontraditional students are provided with study techniques and advice on learning that will benefit them in their programs of study. The participants affirmed that they acquired some study skills during the course of their programs from the teachers and classmates; however, they did not receive advice during the orientation. Consequently, enhancing relevant study skills strategies at the beginning of their program of study can result in improved academic success.

Recurrent Refresher Sessions

A key finding of the study's quantitative survey is that there was no significant difference in the reported self-efficacy levels nontraditional students that attended the institution's orientation program and those that did not attend the orientation program. Consequently, it was ascertained that participating in the one-day orientation session at the target institution did not have an impact on students' positive self-efficacy beliefs. The recommendation affirms that recurrent refresher sessions should be scheduled during the academic year to encourage students and provide relevant information at the various stages of their academic program. Invariably, this will allow students to evaluate their progress, maintain motivation, and facilitate positive perceptions of their programs of study and the institution.

Implementation of the Project

Support and Resources Needed

Having discussed presenting the findings of the research study with the director of the institution, a scheduled staff meeting will be used to present the white paper to the staff and faculty of the institution. The director, faculty, and staff of the institution are aware of the study and supportive of disseminating the findings.

Potential Barriers

The potential barriers may include effectively managing and developing the collaborative endeavor of getting meaningful and timely feedback from faculty and staff to further explore potential amendments to the orientation program. Additionally, amending the orientation program would involve increased workload for the limited administrative staff and the program developer as adjustment will need to be made to the format of the program and the resource materials provided. As a result, discussions and collaboration will encourage buy in of the relevant staff to the prospective benefits of implementing the necessary amendments.

Proposed Timetable

The proposed timeframe for the project is as follows:

Timeframe	Actions
March,2016	Receive approval of the project study from Walden University.
March, 2016	Schedule a meeting with the administrative staff in charge of planning the orientation session to sensitize them to findings of the project and inform them of the consultation process.
April,2016	Schedule the first consultation meeting with the faculty and instructional support staff. Review feedback.
May,2016	Schedule the second consultation to discuss the feedback and synthesize the recommendations. Small focus group format will be utilized here to enhance discussions.
June,2016	Present the final recommendations to the institution's director and administrators for discussion and approval.
July,2016	Prepare the new documentation with the recommendations for the amended orientation program for implementation in September, 2016.

Significance of the project

The recommendations for the amended orientation program have the potential to increase nontraditional student persistence, completion rates, and improve their academic experience. Indeed, the findings derived from the project study have given nontraditional students a voice in adjusting the content of an important institutional activity that has the potential to greatly impact their preparedness for higher education and persistence in their programs of study. Consequently, the improved completion rates can result in increased enrolment and a more positive image of the institution by the wider community.

Conclusion

The white paper emphasizes the need to for all stakeholders to work collaboratively and to incorporate the voice of nontraditional students in institutional policy change. The proposed recommendations for the amendments to the current orientation program require the support of the faculty and staff of the institution. To this end, the findings of the study provided the basis for the recommendations for the amended orientation program, as well as well as considerations for implementation of the project.

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Appendix B: Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine the factors that influence your views regarding your level of self-efficacy and your perception of the impact of the orientation session on your academic success. Please circle the number that best describes what you think. All surveys will be kept strictly confidential.

Academic Efficacy

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I'm certain I can master the skills taught in this course	1	2	3	4
2. I'm certain I can figure out how to do the most difficult course work	1	2	3	4
3. I can do almost all the work in this course if I don't give up	1	2	3	4
4. Even if the work is hard, I can learn it	1	2	3	4
5. I can do even the hardest work in this course if I try	1	2	3	4

6. Did you participate in the Orientation Program of the CXC Volunteer Education Programme?
   1.Yes   **2**.No

In you answered **NO** to question 6, please proceed to question **15**. If you responded **YES** to question 6, please continue to question **7**

Orientation program self-efficacy

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. The orientation program provided me with strategies to figure out how to solve difficult problems in class if I try hard enough	1	2	3	4

> *In accordance with the terms of the permission letter agreement, only one sample item will be offered for publication.*
>
> Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. **(1995)**. Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, England: NFER-NELSON.

15. Please indicate your age range.

    1.21 – 30

    2. 31 - 40

    3. 41- 50

    4.51 – 60

    5.Over 61

16. Please indicate your type of employment.

    1. Unemployed

    2. Temporary employment

    3. Part-time employment

    4. Full-time employment

<div align="center">

THANK YOU

</div>

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Title of study: Nontraditional Students' Perceptions Regarding the Impact of Orientation
Programs on their Academic success in Adult Education Programs.

Time of Interview:
Date:
Method:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Script:

My name is Marsha Webster and I am conducting a sequential mixed-methods research
study as a part of my doctoral requirements for Walden University. Thank you again for
your willingness to participate in my study. The purpose of this interview is to ascertain
nontraditional students' perception of the effectiveness of the orientation program at
XYZ Education Volunteer Program in preparing them for academic success. In order to
protect your identity, please refrain from using your name at any point in this interview. I
will be recording this interview in order to obtain a permanent record. Is it okay with you
if I begin recording now? (Action: Record the meeting)

Questions:

1. What expectations did you have about the orientation program at the XYZ
    Education Volunteer Program? (Influence of orientation program).
        Probe: Can you elaborate on what you found particularly useful.

2. Do you think that information provided at the orientation addressed your
    educational needs? (Influence of orientation program)
        Probe: Can you give me some additional detail on how the
        information was helpful?

3. After reflecting on the orientation program, do you think you were provided with
    the skills and tools to confront challenges that you face and will face in your
    educational pursuit? (Influence of orientation program)
        Probe: Please elaborate by specifying any particular skill or tool.

4. Please describe the challenges you face upon returning to school. (Persistence)
        Probe: Can you provide more details?

5. Do you believe that the information provided at the orientation has helped you to
    develop your learning skills? (Learning)
        Probe: Can you provide more details?

6. Based on your experience, please describe some techniques or strategies that you use to keep motivated and do well in school. (Self-efficacy)
> Probe: Can you please provide an example?

7. What factors do you believe would contribute to you dropping out of your program of study? (Persistence)
> Probe: Can you elaborate more on your reasons?

8. Do you think that the orientation program has sufficiently prepared you for success in your program of study? (Influence of orientation process on self-efficacy)
> Probe: Can you explain in what ways?

Appendix D: End of Orientation Program Evaluation Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine your opinion of the information provided during the just concluded orientation provided at this institution. Please circle the number that best describes what you think. All surveys will be kept strictly confidential.

Please indicate your choice by selecting one of the options:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I acquired new knowledge during this orientation program	1	2	3	4
2. I learned study skills and new strategies for learning	1	2	3	4
3. I was given information on how to manage my time as an adult learner	1	2	3	4
4. I learned techniques for dealing with the work, family, and financial challenges that I will encounter during my studies	1	2	3	4
5. I felt that the information provided was tailored to my needs as an adult learner	1	2	3	4

6. I believe that refresher sessions during the school year would be beneficial.
   1. Yes   **2**.No

Please write any additional thoughts and comments about the orientation program in the space below: