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Online Learning Challenges for our U.S. Veterans Unable to Physically Attend College

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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Abstract

Many veterans pursue college degrees using their inservice higher education benefits and enroll in universities around the world. However, many of these veterans also begin their higher education with mental and physical disabilities that limit their ability to attend brick and mortar college classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore veteran students' experiences in collegiate online learning. The veterens in this study were restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons. The conceptual framework included Tinto's student integration model and Knowles' andragogy. The research questions in this study inquired about (a) the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning, (b) the tools within LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree, and (c) the online obstacles which hindered student veterans from completing their degree. Six veterans recruited through online communities, who completed their degree online and had enlisted after 9-11, participated in the interviews. Data were analyzed using an open-coding process to find themes that answered the research questions. Key results were that all veterans had positive experiences in communicating effectively with faculty online; however, they had difficulties working online with other nonveteran students. Recommendations for future studies are to evaluate the way student veterans collaborate, and their perceptions of how to collaborate with students who do not have a military background. This study produces positive social change in providing evidence that veterans may benefit more from an online classroom to complete their college degrees thereby reducing the challenges faced in the traditional classroom.

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Dedication

For my daughter…

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The goal of this qualitative research study was to explore veteran students'
challenges with collegiate online learning who were restricted from the conventional
classroom for various reasons. Many college students that were enlisted in the U.S.
military have come home with mental and physical disabilities, injuries, and recurring
traumatic experiences that limit them from attending the brick and mortar college
classroom. This study focused on student veterans from around the United States, who
were enlisted in the military, and have returned to civilian life with challenges that
prohibit them from going to a conventional college. This chapter encompasses the social
change, background of the study, problem of the study, purpose of the study, theoretical
framework, nature of the study, research questions, assumptions, limitations, significance
of the study, and finally the summary.

Many veterans use their their educational benefits for college that were earned
while in the service (Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009) and enroll in universities around
the world. In recent years, many different types of online technologies have assisted the
military distance learner to ensure that virtual learning environments equal or even
surpass the collegiate education received in the conventional college classroom
(Ramaswami, 2009). Online learning can be an alternative for student veterans who had
circumstances that prevented them from attending the conventional classroom. Since
many military learners had experience with distance education in the service, online

learning was a viable alternative for those veterans that needed to stay home and take online courses.

A significant number of veterans may have physical disabilities, such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other emotional disorders that may make it difficult to attend college classes. Many veterans may also have other learning problems that may cause issues in the college classroom such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities (LD) that may have been present before entering military services (Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009). Distance learning has become a viable solution for those student veterans and has enabled many veterans that have needed to study from home or remove themselves from the conventional classrooms due to physical or mental limitations. Entering the military at 18 can be a vastly different experience from the experiences of an average student freshman in college. While many freshmen in college endure stressors as they learn to become college adults and become functional outside of their parent's support, colleges tend not to integrate college students relative to how the military expects their recruits to acclimate to the military lifestyle. A person's introduction to military life begins when they enter basic training and mental and physical demands can be greatly different from those entering college for their 1st year (Baechtold & Sawal, 2009).

Veterans who may or may not have learning or physical disabilities enter colleges as students using their GI Bill or educational benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Over 2,000,000 military veterans qualified for these educational benefits provided by the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Act of 2008. More than

1,200,000 service members may be considered disabled veterans with mental, physical and learning disabilities (Miller, 2013). The disabled veteran is a significant student population in U.S. colleges and they represent a population that often needs more assistance, understanding, and tolerance as they complete their college degrees (Miller, 2013).

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research available on the veteran population in collegiate settings, especially surrounding the need to determine which learning management systems (LMSs) are assisting veterans working on their college degree. This study examined the student veteran's success, by utilizing different LMSs while attending college online. Since the average student veteran has challenges and disorders such as PTSD, and other physical or mental disabilities resulting from their active duty, the veteran may have issues attending the face to face conventional classroom but may also struggle with online learning.

Background

The GI Bill of Rights, initially called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, was implemented to be a comprehensive benefit to help returning military personnel readjust to a civilian life (Kowalski, 2016). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was created to assist veterans to obtain skills through college education. However, there was also a need to create a program that would create an alternative for servicemen that wanted to enter the workplace with manufacturing skills. The post-World War II job industry was slowing down, and the stress of many injured servicemen additionally created a need to retrain veterans to new positions. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act

of 1944 also provided other benefits not related to finding jobs for the former soldiers. The benefits included education benefits, medical care for those servicemen that were disabled in combat, unemployment insurance, and pensions for disabled veterans (Kowalski, 2016). The idea was that the war disrupted the younger soldiers' educational process, so the benefits would help veterans get back on track.

The Administration of Veterans Affairs implemented the program of providing services relating to soldiers' education and other benefits. Colleges around the country saw a great influx of student veterans, and in some case accounted for over 49% (Kowalski, 2016) of the population on college campuses. For five generations after World War II, many veterans went to colleges around the country and also seemed to have academic superiority over the conventional college students. Mass veteran participation in college courses and systematic education not only increased the skills of U.S. veterans in the 1950s, but it also made it easier for these veterans to find a job and over time, resulted in an influx of millions of veterans into the labor market (Kowalski, 2016).

The Vietnam War brought a whole new student veteran body with benefits to colleges around the United States. While post-World War II and Korean veterans who utilized their GI Bill education benefits obtained better jobs with their college educations, Vietnam veterans had a different experience finding jobs after college. Vietnam veterans had lower prestige than past war time veterans and were labeled as such in college and after graduation (Cohen, Segal & Temme, 1992). Many veterans that served in Vietnam found their lives disrupted for lengthy times, giving their nonveteran counterparts a

considerable advantage in economic status. Another potential reason why Vietnam veterans struggled after service was that employer and civilian discrimination caused employers and some colleges to choose nonveterans over veterans. The veteran screening process for the first time in history was a negative mark for a potential employee (Cohen et al., 1992).

Another problem facing the Vietnam student veteran was the high potential for depression while in college after service. This caused problems for students studying and finishing their degrees, in respect to students that had no military experience (Cohen et al., 1992). Military recruiters of that era sought recruits from lower income and less educated families, thus this may show that those veterans had less inclination to obtain a college education. This, in turn, created fewer college educated veterans after Vietnam compared to their previous counterparts from World War II and the Korean War.

During peacetime, the GI Bill continued to assist veterans after completing their first tour in the U.S. military and resembled the same benefits that Vietnam Veterans had, but seemed to be utilized more. The Post 9/11 GI Bill, however, was different than other educational bills and had modifications that were needed by veterans returning to college after service after September 11th. The Post 9/11 and Veterans Educational Assistance Act, also called the Post 9/11 GI Bill, provides eligible veterans with significant financial support that includes a housing allowance, funding for books, and payment of other college fees for education (Osborne, 2014). This program was modified and seemed to have suited the needs of more than 2 million veterans that had endured over 10 years of fighting in the Middle East and other stressful military sorties around the world.

While the veterans who went back to college after 2008 seemed to be treated with more respect than Vietnam Veterans 30 years before, the struggle to integrate into college life and relating to nonmilitary students was the same. Combat related physical and mental disabilities further hindered the Post 9-11 veteran from being successful in college (Osborne, 2014). These challenges were made more complex by veterans' understanding that college instructors and administration may not understand their past military challenges or not understood the difficulties in transitioning to college life after military life. In addition, most veterans find that when discharged from the military they may have many physical and emotional challenges while adjusting to life after the military (Osborne, 2014).

Many students that have served in the military may require support with issues that may not be endured by other students at the college (Herrmann et al., 2009). For example, many veterans working to adjust to college life may endure learning how to become a student, sleeping issues, stress while trying to adapt to college life, depressive disorders, and PTSD (Cass & Hammond, 2015). The military learner or veteran that has had experience in hostile environments is different in the classroom. Engaging these students that have had life changing experiences is challenging for the instructors as well as students working in group environments. According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (2012b), engaging online learners with military experiences poses challenges, but predominantly poses opportunities. Military veterans are entrepreneurial, and they exhibit a strong desire to achieve and feel at ease with uncertain situations (Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2012b). Veterans are also most likely to

have experienced different cultures throughout the world and have a different skill set due to their military training.

A veteran that has returned from wartime environments and deployments may have issues studying in a collegiate classroom and may need an alternative learning platform in which to learn (Ruminn & Hamick, 2010). To retain student veterans, college administrators have focused on programs to educate all types of veterans with online or distance education programs (Ruminn & Hamick, 2010). Colleges and universities were directed by the first Morrill Act to prepare their faculty to learn how to educate military personnel and, more recently, to help veterans looking to complete their degrees (Ruminn & Hamick, 2010). Many college campuses provide online instruction for their military students and provide housing for on campus Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs (Ruminn & Hamick, 2010) as well as other military students.

Distance learning took off in the 1990s but received a bad reputation initially due to 'diploma mill' schools. Some colleges taking advantage of the ease of enrolling and producing graduates with less than stellar educations and results. While these colleges still exist, there are also a great deal of universities that utilize distance and online learning to deliver instruction through the use of LMSs (Star-Glass, 2013).

While most people consider online learning mainstream and a conventional way to obtain an education or take courses, some still consider the brick and mortar schools superior. Initially, the U.S. military was slow to catch on and had a bias against online learning,(Star-Glass, 2013). The conventional brick and mortar classroom suited the typical classroom learning environment that the military historically used. However,

veterans who had experiences in war and stressful environments needed to engage differently, many outsides of the brick and mortar classroom. Students who took online classes or obtained online degrees seemed to meet with resistance when trying to submit transcripts for senior military positions or be considered for Officer Candidate School (OCS).

For those in the military wishing to embark on their college degree through higher education – whether during their service time or afterwards – the move into higher education can be a complex cultural, social, and administrative process (Star-Glass, 2013). Veterans can use their GI Bill benefits which covers college expenses 10 years after their release from active duty. However, the process of completing college can be daunting to some students who may need more personal or financial assistance than others. This study is needed not only by the veteran population, but also by the college administrators who assist veteran students in obtaining their college degree.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this general interview qualitative research was to explore the veteran students' experiences with collegiate online learning for veterans that are restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons. When a military person leaves service they may be 33 years old and may not have completed a school test or written a research paper since their high school years (Cass & Hammond, 2015).

Many veterans juggle family life, jobs, and mental and physical impairments that may make it difficult to attend a traditional brick and mortar 4-year university and may find the flexibility of online learning more feasible and a logical solution to their desire to

obtain a college education. Many veterans entering college hope to transfer course credits they obtained while on active duty through courses they took while in the service. However, nontraditional student veteran learners are considered a sub population of college campuses may also endure unique challenges that conventional college students may not experience (Heineman, 2016). College administrators and instructors need to be aware that the typical academic situation that may be challenging for the average college student may be entirely a different experience for student veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Many college instructors report that their veteran students bring a whole new level of experiences and strengths into the classroom. (Blaaw-Hara, 2016). Many colleges can develop programs that may help any potential issues veterans might have rather than focusing on their strengths (Blaauw-Hara, 2016).

There have been few studies that focus on the military learner and what type of support they may need while learning online, and most have concluded that collegiate support and past positive learning experiences in the military can determine the effectiveness of their distance and online learning (Downs & McAllen, 2014). Colleges that provide student and academic services through the online technology support programs are aware of the challenges of the veteran student transition to college life after leaving military service (Cass & Hammond, 2015). However, there is very few research studies that evaluate what types of online learning platforms assist the veteran that is unable to physically attend the conventional face-to-face classroom.

This study addressed the gap in the literature by finding answers from veterans who have completed online courses towards working on their 2- or 4-year degrees from

colleges in the United States. There is a need to research military students' challenges due to their military experience and their relation to completing their college degree (Southwell, Whiteman, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Barry, 2018). The differences between the conventional college student versus the student veteran has been missed in current research with the focus of the support they might need at college campuses for online classes (Currier, McDermott, & Sims, 2016). There is also a need for researchers to be aware of a veteran's military experience that might enhance different characteristics that challenged the traditional and conventional college student (Southwell et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general interview qualitative research was to explore the veteran students' experiences with collegiate online learning for veterans that are restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons. This research discovered, through phone interviews, types of online learning that assisted student veterans to overcome their struggles. Online learning may be an acceptable venue for many students to receive a degree; however, online learning may not provide the best alternative for a student with disabilities. Veterans often are enrolling in classes on campus without the basic academic skills for a college course. Military education and the way each veteran mastered their military skills may not transition to college courses and adapting to college life, which may cause further challenges (Cass & Hammond, 2015). Not only is the veteran experiencing a change from military to civilian, but also in many cases they must learn new technologies in order to begin a college course.

While in the service, military men and women are put into a team environment, taught how to rely on each other, and and instructed to leave no one behind. Soldiers at many units are taught to depend on eachother and their jobs and responsibilities and assist eachother in the military. The military focuses on teamwork and assigns mentors and a chain of command in which to gain knowledge and support, but these supports are not present in the university setting where a student is expected to learn on their own after leaving the classroom. Student veterans may often find leaving the military lifestyle and moving into a college environment challenging and difficult (Cass & Hammond, 2015). In addition, the platform of the LMS provided by the instructor may also be difficult to navigate by the veteran who is used to hands-on learning.While all veterans have served their country, their experiences and backgrounds are tremendously different and they may resent being categorized as a typical military learner.

The completed study addressed input from male and female veterans, enlisted veterans, disabled and wholly fit veterans in hopes to find a nonbiased result in what collectively works for everyone. The study interviewed veterans that have left military service after September 11, 2001 and used their GI Bill benefits after being enlisted personnel in order to ensure all veterans in this research served around the same time period.

Research Questions

This general interview qualitative study focused on the lived experience from the student veterans who had attended an online university or their college through online courses. While there are many studies evaluating the experiences of the student veteran in

their challenges of learning online and in the classroom (Downs & McAllen, 2014), there were very few if any that have examined the online experience of the veteran studying from home. This qualitative interview study focused on the lived experience of the student veterans that had attended an online university or their college through online courses. This study included interviews of disabled and nondisabled vets as well as investigating the effectiveness of the tools in LMSs for these veterans. This qualitative research focused on the veterans' subjective views allowing the researcher to evaluate the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the student veteran (Yilmaz, 2013).

Little is known about the specific types of support systems that might best assist these military men and women through the transition after military service and through their academic path to college graduation (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). The completed study will answer the three research questions:

The completed study answered three questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?

Subquestion 1a: Do disabled student veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the average nondisabled student veteran? If so, how?

Subquestion 1b: Do nondisabled veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the disabled veteran? If so, how?

Research Queston 2 (RQ2): How have the tools within LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?

Subquestion 2a: What type of online learning experiences have helped veterans to reach their educational goals?

Subquestion 2b: What specific tools that are part of learning management systems (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) have student veterans successfully used to obtain their college degree? How have they used these tools?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What specific obstacles in the online environment hinder student veterans from completing their degree online?

Subquestion 3a: What military experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

Subquestoin 3b: What veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

Theoretical Framework

The two educational theoretical framework models that contributed to this research include the student integration model (Tinto, 2007) and Knowles' andragogy that Knowles defined as the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1970). The student integration model by Tinto details that each student enters higher education with different attributes, family models, and experiences that add to the student challenges of being a successful college student and whether or not they integrate into the college system (Tinto, 2007).

Tinto's student integration model is relevant to this study as the student veteran has a diversified past and enters college with diversified experiences. The veteran that has experienced drama during their military service brings a different view of the world to the

college classroom than the conventional college student who has just graduated from high school. Many veterans enter college with the responsibility of families and other commitments that can affect their educational endeavors. By addressing specific obstacles that may challenge the veteran, college administrators can develop support systems to aid the student veteran in completing their college studies. The Tinto framework was considered when the research questions were designed about the veterans experiences in college. In addition, the Tinto framework would assist in the question of why disabled veterans may have different perceptions from the general college student. In addition, specific parts of LMSs have assisted student veterans successfully. Finally, the Tinto framework is ideal to establish if online learning has assisted student veterans to reach their collegiate goals. The Tinto framework will be further detailed in Chapter 2, including how online learning has assisted other students and how drama and injury may impact the veteran learner online.

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles'theoretical model of andragogy explored how the human can learn through infinite learning possibilities. The components of Knowles' theoretical learning model was learning in a group, leadership, andragogy, self-directed learning, and lifelong learning. These elements of the Knowles model were integral and andragogy was portrayed as the 'glue' that held the learning process together (Henry, 2011). As far back as Knowles' 1950 book *Informal Adult Education*, Knowles expressed that the adult learner has to focus on what is happening in their 'real life' and address the needs and experiences of the learner that has many life challenges.

Knowles' andragogy applies to this research as online learning incorporates group dynamics within the online classroom. The student veteran also enrolls in the college classroom with very different experiences from their time in service. This enables the student veteran to have leadership experience and a collective desire to engage with other learners. The perceptions of online student veterans that have towards online learning can be evaluated utilizing the Knowles framework. Chapter 2 will go further into detail about the Knowles' andragogy and how the veteran may be impacted from previous experiences in the service.

The Knowles framework applies to the research questions in order to discover how veterans learn in an online classroom through group dynamics, how their history impacts how they learn, and how veterans can engage with other learners online as they would in a conventional classroom. The Tinto framework applies to the research questions as how the veteran enters the classroom with a different perspective than the high school graduate in the college classroom, and how that may change the environment for the veteran.

Nature of the Study

This general interview qualitative study explored the different experiences of student veterans by utilizing a qualitative interview approach. Participants in this study were six student (disabled and nondisabled) veterans, who were enlisted personnel (persons that enlisted by choice, and not attended a military academy) and hadcompleted their college degrees through online learning (these participants were selected from a

larger pool of student veterans). Denzin and Lincoln (2002) recommend a sample size of five to seven participants, or as many as needed to reach saturation.

The data was collected after IRB approval through two live phone interviews with each student veteran conducted by myself. Data saturation occured as a matter of identifying redundancy in the data from the information gathered from the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The rationale for this type of qualitative interview study was that while other qualitative methods (case study, etc.) might apply to this research, the interview method was overall the best fit. Many veterans, whether disabled or not, had moved onto other careers and lives so phone interviews with open scheduling to suit their needs and time requirements in order to be flexible for the veterans was important for this study. The case study qualitative approach was not selected because the case study design is best suited for a study in which the researcher wants to know how and why a situation exists (Yin, 2014). This is not a case study, but a general interview qualitative study to learn about the general experiences of the student veteran. It is also not a phenomenological study. The phenomenological approach is identified as the science of describing what one understands, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience (Moustakas, 1994). It was also not selected as this does not apply to veterans online learning experiences.

Enlisted male and female participants in this study had obtained their associates, bachelors, master's and doctorate degrees. Veterans that met the criteria and filled out the survey were contacted to schedule convenient phone interviews and further introduce them to the study. Two interviews (about 30 minutes each) for each veteran were the

sources of data, as each interview protocol was around 30 questions. The data was collected from phone interviews through the use of interview protocols, which were designed to address the research questions through recorded telephone interviews. Data collection consisted of a two semistructured interview protocols (see Appendix B and C).

The key phenomenon that was researched was the impact that online learning for veteran students to complete their college degree. As the researcher, I was a student who conducted the live interviews and imported all data into the NVivo database through transcriptions from the interviews collected from the recordings. While transcribing the data I found that hand coding to be the most effective method to evaluate the key phenonmenon in the study.

Operational Definition of Terms

Incongruence: When a college student fells they do not belong and does not feel like he/she has integrated into college life.

Information Networks: The networks in which people may participate and could include either college professors or classmates, and strong enough to promote remote information gathering and working together online (Karp et al, 2008).

Learning Management System (LMS): The Learning Management System for a college, online educational strategy, and desired goals for the online learner. The most common use for LMS learning software is to deliver and track online training courses and the student's efforts as assets. Assets are goals within a course in the Learning Management System, which makes courses available for remote learners and keeps track of their progress and goals.

Military service members: Individuals who have been officers or enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard or Reserves.

Officer Candidate School (OCS): A military institution which trains enlisted personnel and civilians in order for them to gain a commission as officers in their branch of service.

Student Integration: Students that integrate into college life that may become attached to the intellectual and social life that create relationships with other students inside and outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1985).

Student veteran: The very broad category of individuals who are serving and/or have previously been in the U.S. military (Iverson et al, 2016) and that are attending college.

Student Veteran's Associations: A student program directed by a student or a faculty member that works within student affairs. This association is designed to support veterans' college life which may include academics and collaboration with other veterans.

Transactional distance gap: The space of potential miscommunications and understanding between the instructor and the learner.

Veterans: Military personnel that were enlisted or officers who have served in any of the military services who are no longer serving in the military.

Assumptions

This research study assumed that all student veterans entered the college atmosphere with a general knowledge from high school and has each obtained a high

school diploma or GED before enrolling in college. Therefore, ensuring that each student

has a high school degree that prepares them for the college environment after their time

in the service. In addition, each student veteran was treated the same regardless of

whether or not they were an officer or enlisted when entering and completing their online

college education. Distance learning has been recognized and utilized in many of the

military branches, thus the majority of veterans had experienced online learning before

being released from the service (see Downs & McAllen, 2014). Finally, it was also

assumed that each student veteran had experienced some learning, either online or in the

classroom while in the service. This is important because it will provide a reference for

comparison of learning experiences in the service compared to in college.

In addition, the research study assumed that colleges would benefit from learning

about the results of this study in relation to helping student veterans learn online. This

study also assumed that administrators can implement the results and effectively make

changes to their online learning environments that will assist student veterans and other

nontraditional students. The reason these assumptions are necessary in this study is to

ensure that the data collected is reliable and concise and the research question apply to

each participant in the study.

Scope and Delimitations

This was a general qualitative interview study. This study evaluated lived

experiences, natural settings, descriptions of how each veteran learned online, what kept

them from attending a brick and mortar classroom, what resources they found valuable,

and what they did not find rewarding. Individual semistructured in-depth interviews were

conducted to gather data on the veteran's perceptions of their educational journey. I recruited12 potential interviewees through online platforms; the first six were selected with the rest as alternate participants. The population that was studied was six disabled (either physically or mentally) or nondisabled (those veterans that do not consider themselves disabled) veteran students who have graduated and completed their college degrees online (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants were selected through surveys submitted through online groups (Facebook Veterans), and the first six applicants that showed interest, either disabled or not disabled, and that had completed their degrees online were then offered an opportunity to participate in the research study.

Purposive sampling was used to identify veterans for interview to ensure that the sample included individuals of both sexes and various ages. The inclusion criteria was; women and men aged 18 to 80 years. Ideally, half of the participants in the study were considered disabled and the other half nondisabled for comparison, however four of the veterans were considered disabled and two were not disabled. In addition, having different members of the different military branches (Navy, Coast Guard, Army, Air Force, and Marines) as enlisted personnel for my study was my intention. The veterans selected for the study were enlisted personnel from the Coast Guard, Army, Navy and Air Force.

The reasoning behind choosing the student veteran population is that this population can vary greatly in their age and experiences. Attending college for the first time as an older population with more diverse experiences can be challenging. The phenomenology of learning by Tinto and Knowles defined in Chapter 2, speaks to the

population of students at the collegiate level and further investigates other populations other than the conventional college student. Student veterans that learn online are also a newer college student population to study. Whiteman, Mroczek, Macdermid, Wadsworth, and Barry (2013) examined emotional support methods for student veterans in college, however their has not included why veterans learn online. Tinto's framework of social integration in learning generally does not favor students learning online and becoming integrated, because students who learn online generally live off campus, may work full time and have family that may prevent them from engaging fully into college life (Tinto, 1993).

The appropriate strategies to establish transferability in this research was to ensure all interview protocols were exactly the same with each interview. When a participant went into further detail or remarked in a long answer thus answering possibly another interview question, the questions still proceeded in order. Any additional information was recorded in my journal that may not address the question but was still considered important information. The variation of the participant selection was from different service members the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, and Army. As a result, my study's findings were based on a unique sample and not transferable to other contexts.

Limitations

Limitations of this study involved andragogical concepts that considered all adult learners to have the same experiences regardless of their cultural background or history (Bashir & Fournier-Bonilla, 2016).While many veterans were alike in their experience, differentiating the learning experience between the officer and the enlisted person was

not part of this research. This research only addressed veterans that had attended college

online, not through a mix of online and face to face methods, nor through solely

conventional brick and mortar classes that utilize LMSs. Another limitation of this study

was the population of the study (six student veterans that were learning online). This is a

small sample of veterans that may not represent the whole student veteran population.

Every veteran selected for this research was interviewed two times. The need for two

different interviews was established in order to build rapport with the veterans and

engage in reflection and awareness while building on their existing experiences

(Guillemin and Heggen, 2009). The use of two interviews provided me with time to

catch up with the interviewees and reestablish a connection with each veteran, thus going

over previous information from the previous interview.

The qualitative study should have five to seven participants in order to acquire

saturation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A variety of codes were analyzed from the

interview responses. Creswell's thematic analysis research approach was utilized in the

development of data (Shoko, & Naidu, 2018). The data was garnered from live telephone

interviews into codes or descriptions, then organized to establish and categorize themes

(Shoko, & Naidu, 2018).

A limitation of this research was the different learning experiences of officers

versus enlisted persons. Because most officers already have a bachelor's degree before

they enter service, officers will not be selected for this research. There also is a lack of

research on the student veterans' perspective, thus another limitation (Cass & Hammond,

2015). While this study addressed the difference in difficulty of the disabled and

nondisabled veteran, it did not compare different disabilities, but reference whether or not their disability hindered their ability to study in a conventional classroom. This general qualitative interview study also did not have the insight that might be provided with a qualitative case study or a phenomenological approach as interviews were conducted on the phone and not addressing one phenomenon. This limitation was resolved by completing the interview questions, and thus addressing the research questions. An effort was made to obtain rich, thick descriptions of the interviewee's experiences during the interview process.

Another limitation of this study was self-reported data that can be limited and not independently verified. Bias in this research was avoided by ensuring that interviews were kept in a professional context and not revealing personal information about myself. This was a challenge because I am a disabled veteran and was an online student during my master's and Doctoral degree, and I worked from home. Strict adherence to the interview script assisted in ensuring my bias would not enter the results. In order to address these limitations, I succeeded in finding saturation of themes after conducting two interview protocols with each veteran student in a 2-week period. To establish transferability in this study, descriptions of the interview protocol and expectations were essential to the research and are provided. Additionally, all interview protocols were exactly the same, as well as each interview protocol began and ended the same way. When a participant went into further detail or remarked on an event, everything was recorded in the journal for further evaluation and consideration. The variation of the participant selection was from of most of the departments of the US Military. Participants

were from the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, and Army. Although my findings were transferable to the specific contexts mentioned above, they are based on a unique sample and not transferable to other contexts.

Significance

A great many military men and women are leaving their military careers, and enroll into colleges with their educational benefits. Military service members are rewarded with various benefits after serving in the military that include monthly housing and living stipends and tuition payments that assist to ease the movement from military life to successful lives outside of the military (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). There is a continuing need to study military students and study how the military learner succeeds in college and utilizes online learning to help veterans reach their educational goals. Many veterans have expressed concerns with dealing with higher education administrators and the challenges they have experienced after leaving military life and returning to civilian life (Cass & Hammond, 2015). Despite some recent attention to the changing requirements of the student veteran population, a gap remains in research that may focus on the requirements of veterans in college (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017).

For many veterans that decide to go to college after service, this can be most challenging decision to be made when returning to civilian life (Ackerman et al., 2008). Military life is consistent and has clarity and direction, and the move to civilian life can be complicated and loaded with many decisions that may be difficult for the average veteran; the decision to attend college can be challenging. Consequently, veteran students present a different set of requirements that will challenge college staff, faculty and

administrators to create a positive and constructive learning environment for combat veterans (Cass & Hammond, 2015).

The student veteran has been called an underserved learner in many research studies, thus requiring additional educational venues, technologies, and support that the civilian learner may not require in order to complete their college degree. A study that would delve into exploring why some student veterans succeed in online learning environments and other students struggle to complete their online learning goals would hopefully answer some of these questions. While veterans' administrators and college administrators are experienced with their average student body, the ever-changing population of the student veteran needs to be studied for results that can be implemented in the online college classroom. College administrators are well versed in how to help the general student body, but since the military population is so diverse, serving the student population is ever growing, challenging and changing. The theory of student success can be derived from many different theories that revolve around the environment, situation, and institution. There is a significant lack of current research that addresses the veteran student that learns successfully through online learning and obtain the same skills as they would with the face-to-face conventional college classroom.

There exists a great importance to study what educational technologies work best for this struggling population that will not only affect social change by ensuring the military student succeeds, but also assist those institutions that can put programs into place to assist those military college students. Veterans' administrators, college instructors and administrators, and coursework designers, should all be aware of how the

veteran students respond in their online learning environment. This study provided answers to those administrators and designers to what type of learning environment tools work for this student population.

In order to support veteran learners in college, there is a need to conduct research to determine which educational technologies are assisting veterans in college. The potential for important social change for student veterans in the collegiate environment is significant, and while this population changes from generation to generation, lessons that can be gained by such research will be valuable and hopefully promote further research in future generations. Many veterans have different experiences while taking college courses. With the information gathered from this research, administrators at colleges and support personnel from the VA can help guide a veteran on his or her journey online, or in the classroom in order to complete his or her degree.

Summary

Individuals attending college may simultaneously be college students, combat veterans, and currently serving in the armed forces. Additionally, many military personnel serving in the Military Reserve may be enrolled in college courses or degree programs may sometimes have conflicts with their college schedule between activations and deployments and may miss classes. Past research has provided examples of a small population of how recent veterans have learned in college by utilizing, case studies of student veterans (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017).

Colleges have spent a great deal of money and resources initiating LMS into their college learning environments. While colleges focus on technology-based learning

strategies, there is more movement towards online learning that attempts to mirror traditional classroom resources (Malm & DeFranco, 2013). There is limited research to show how to help those veterans struggling in institutions of higher learning. It can be considerably more difficult for soldiers with combat stress or other mental or physical disabilities (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). When service members leave the structure of military order for civilian life, often can be readjustments that may be challenging for the average veteran. This transition will be challenging for some veterans entering college and others will have little or no difficulty (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). While student veterans may choose online learning versus the brick and mortar classroom in order to decrease their stress on campus, there have also been limited studies conducted to evaluate what types of online learning platforms assist the veteran that is unable to physically attend the conventional face-to-face classroom (Miller, 2013).

Chapter 2 will address the literature and research studies that were completed in the past few years about veterans in the college environment to identifytheir challengesof learning in the classroom. This chapter will support through an extensive literature review why studying the student veteran population is needed. While a few studies touch on the distance learning and online learning aspect, no research study as of yet has fully addressed the component of the veteran learning solely online. Chapter 2 is divided into different sections to address the literature around distance learning and the student veteran.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores the various challenges that affect U.S. veterans who attend the conventional brick and mortar college. It also evaluated studies that have examined college military students who have served but have chosen to pursue their education through online learning. My goal was to evaluate the needs of student veterans who learn online. In addition, I researched different aspects of online learning, attrition with college students, veterans with learning disabilities, and military learning opportunities and experiences. The purpose of this general qualitative interview research was to explore the student veterans' struggles through collegiate online learning for veterans that are restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons.

In this literature review, I outline the following topics using different peer-reviewed research articles. First, I provided a detailed description of the theoretical foundation explaining the conceptual models of Tinto (2007) and Knowles (1970). Then, the subsequent sections of the literature review included the following topics: student veterans needs in the collegiate classroom; comparisons between student veteran and the conventional college student; reasons why a student veteran would stay at home and study online; veterans with obligations and family issues preventing them from attending college on campus; physical disabilities that require a student veteran to learn online; invisible wounds that require a student veteran to learn online, and online learning and collaborative technologies that aid the remote student that takes collegiate classes online. The major sections of this chapter are the literature search strategy, the theoretical

foundations, the literature review of research within the past 5 years, as well as a summary of the findings.

Literature Search Strategy

This study reviewed literature within the past 5 years. I utilized electronic databases such as Education Research Complete, ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, Computers and Applied Sciences Complete, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and EBSCO Host through Computer and Applied Science Complete. Many aspects of this research approach revolved around learning challenges for U.S. veterans with some type of disability. With that in mind, I also utilized Google Scholar and the Walden Library to retrieve articles that were not readily available. In addition, I reviewed psychological resources, computer science databases, and information technology databases regarding different learning disabilities and educational technologies. Search terms included *veterans' online learning, student veterans in college, veterans learning with disabilities, student veteran, service member or military undergraduate, traditional and non-traditional military student, online educational technologies, current generation military learner, military online training, online assisted learning technologies, military students as single parents, military disabilities that may require additional assistance with learning online, student issues in classroom after military life, learning technologies for online learning, cloud based learning,* and *college retention*.

Theoretical Foundations

Two educational models contributed to my conceptual framework: the student integration model (Tinto, 2007) and andragogy (Knowles, 1970). Together, they formed

a comprehensive theory of adult learning. Since this research is technology based, how technology aids the online learner, the Knowles research applies. The Knowles andradogical theory is important in the theory on how technology and contexts from that theory are tied (Henry, 2011). The rationale for this theory was to encompass the integration model by Tinto, as well as andragogy by Knowles, that applies to adult learning, thus was important when developing the research questions.

Student Integration Model

Tinto's integration framework (1993) is most applicable to 4-year institutions as the social integration at a 4-year university does not happen at the typical community college. The student integration model by Vincent Tinto detailed how each student begins their typical 4-year university with different attributes, family models, and experiences. A freshman college student typically enters a 4-year university with pride and adapts to become part of the university's community. This model is important as this research involves how an online student becomes a successful college student. In addition, as student veterans enroll in 4-year and community colleges, the integration model relates to the research questions.

Many background characteristics and experiences add to the challenges of being a successful college student and whether or not they integrate and succeed in the college system (Tinto, 2009). Other research has found that retention in college depends on different factors, most importantly the attitudes and behaviors of the students each year they stay in college (Sutter & Paulson, 2016). While college students' integration

programs are more common in 4-year universities, other colleges are now implementing comparative programs as well.

Tinto had been researching student retention since the 1970's, when his student integration model changed from the former perspective of the student (e.g. how students perceived their success and reasons to stay in college) to that of the college (e.g., how the college could provide support for the student for each year they stay in college) (Sutter & Paulson, 2016). The environment of the college, and whether a student chose to remain at the college or leave for personal reasons, was the new challenge of student retention (Tinto, 2009). Tinto was not the first researcher to study the retention model in relation to the college environment, however he triggered other college retention research such as research by Hutto (2017) that studied the relationship the faculty's employment status and how it impacted whether or not a student remained studying in a community college taking the required courses. Hutto's (2017) research evaluated how community colleges are educating a more diverse and growing population, findings were significant on how faculty at the college considered their employment status, whether faculty were adjunct (part time faculty) or tenured faculty. While Tinto's studies are relative to the environment in the colleges from 2009, there is still significant research to be completed as to why students leave and how to make colleges more inviting for all students so they graduate and obtain their degree.

Tinto's student integration model was also utilized to examine students' experiences with their education and work history before college and even before military service (Tinto, 2007). Tinto studied student's military background, family background in

the military and college, college experiences before and during deployment, and individual educational goals. The student integration model evaluated how support from administrators affects their studies, and if work and family support the student through their collegiate years.

Tinto noted in two of his research articles (1975, 1987) that the concept of integration of support programs into college academic support programs is essential to the student integration model. Also, the patterns of how the student and other members of the institution communicate, specifically with instructors, is also key to his support model. Students' access to information about programs that help in retention and support at the college and beyond can be important for the student making it through their first year of college (Tinto, 2007). The importance of Tinto's research also addressed how a student needs to engage in the college classroom.

Tinto's studies from 1985 through 2007 continued to explore not only the internal and external impacts of college life on the student body, but also the significance of students engaging in the college classroom. Tinto concluded that student involvement in the classroom is very important, for many students the college classroom is the one place where students and faculty meet each other face to face (Tinto, 2007). Students who live off campus, that may have work and family obligations, the college classroom where education in the formal sense is experienced. This may be the only place for remote students to meet and engage with others. For those students that live off campus, the classroom is the essential setting where they mix the academic setting and their social

setting. If academic and social engagement or integration is to occur, it must occur in the classroom (Tinto, 1997).

Tinto primarily focused his future research on the older non-conventional student's immersion into college life and their support and communication habits and outside of the classroom (Tinto, 2007). Tinto found colleges that implemented a variety of new student support programs to integrate and initiate the first-year college students, with orientation programs, freshman support groups, and many different clubs and student driven activities were successful in retaining college students (Tinto, 2007). Most freshmen activities in the colleges were unified within the introduction of college and academic life. Many colleges utilize additional engaging activities, such as first-year seminars that create social situations to introduce students to others on campus. These programs were initiated at colleges around the country after Tinto and data from the National Center of Educational Statistics showed how programs may assist to keep college students supported and to remain learning in college.

Another problem that occurs in many colleges and universities throughout the country is that they assign the least experienced faculty to the core freshman courses (Tinto, 2007). The use of part-time adjuncts and junior faculty for these typically large freshmen classes is common for most colleges (Tinto, 2007). However, these part-time and junior college instructors can be the first impression for students on college life and can be the critical part of the decision on whether the new student stays or leaves the program (Tinto, 2007). This can be frustrating for the older non conventional student who may need more assistance with technology or academics.

College instructors may not be as comfortable with new technology in the classroom or online environments in which to deliver their lesson materials (Tinto, 2007). The implementation of new materials and technology into online and classroom courses, may not be well utilized or completely understood by all faculty. In other situations, even when fully integrated, many new technology programs (that are designed to enhance the lesson) do not endure (Tinto, 2007). After a few years, like other programs before them, may fade away and can cause technology issues and frustrations for online learners and new faculty. Tinto knew the common causes of students dropping out of college to be lack of studying skills and motivation for them to reach their goals. In short, administrators would not have a retention "problem" if the admission office only enrolled students that were prepared for the collegiate experience (Tinto, 2007).

Knowles Andragogical Theory

Knowles andragogy involves how contract learning and self-directed lifelong interact. Knowles had the vision that person's meaning in reaching their educational goals that people set for themselves. In addition, students were not required to study certain college subjects per se; and as students they were allowed to evaluate completion of those courses and how they might overcome obstacles to reach those goals (Henry, 2011). Knowles (1950) considered that the adult learning theory would assist students to learn a deeper understanding of their personal goals; and acquire a revolving aspect towards their life goals and an learn the fact that all things change; learn to react to issues not to the symptoms; acquire the skills they have obtained in order to achieve the potential of their personalities; understand the essential challenges and values in the

heritage of the tradition and knowledge that bind people together in education; and understand society and recognize their contributions to social change (Knowles, 1950).

Although Knowles stressed how important to learn with others as the introduction of self-directed learning, his thinking was ahead of its time, since distance and online learning did not become popular until the 1990s. Collaborative learning remained important to Knowles as learning would not occur in isolation and instructors would be the informal learning guide. Knowles recognized self-directed learning as being intensified in experience by others; the learner would engage with peers, faculty, and computer support personnel as needed. Knowles (1950) found that the standard method of adult learning was learning through real life experiences, and became a process of trial and error. Unfortunate findings of this method were limited findings of opportunities for interacting with others seeking the same outcome. Knowles solution was seeded in group discussions. He interpreted as the basic learning method of adult education and one which is recognized as a high degree of collaboration between students and the college instructor (Henry, 2011).

Knowles (1970) introduced the three frameworks for adult education which included the theoretical frameworks for andragogy, the methodology for andragogy (the technology of andragogy) and adapting the technology for learning by the adult educator to suit the adult student. The four andrological pedagogical assumptions were: experience, readiness to learn, self-concept, and orientation to learning (Henry, 2011). Overall, the major aspect of Knowles (1970) adragogy specified that the adult had

specific learning characteristics that distinguished them from children, thus must be applied to meet the requirements of the adult student.

The enormous increase of nearly 8 million veterans enrolled in colleges after World War II, caused a great influx of interest in adult education (Knowles, 1962). Knowles (1970) considered that the needs of the adult student were emerging in the 1960's as society in the United States went into an explosive change. In the early 1960's President Johnson's War on Poverty focused on the importance of training for the future of our generations. Once employed, workers had to be continually educated in order to be gainful in growing complex positions (Henry, 2011). The need for adult education programs grew not only to employ those who were unemployed, but to also address the needs of many social problems not only for the general society, but also those of military personnel returning from War.

After World War II, veterans enrolled in college courses and vocational schools throughout the country. By 1955, there were over 49 million participants in all forms of adult education (Knowles, 1962). The post-war veterans enrollments showed that adult learners had both the academic ability and scholarly intent to finish their college education. Up to this time, college educators had not considered the adult learner as a serious student and were astounded by the eagerness of military veterans that were beginning their college education, for such desire for learning was not found in the conventional younger student. Thus, the non-conventional college student changed how educators now had to educate adults of all ages and backgrounds.

Literature Review

Student Veterans' Needs in the Collegiate Classroom

Little is known about how past military experiences affected the veteran's adjustment from combat to the college classroom. Military veterans represented a high risk for developing opiod abuse, substance abuse and other mental disorders after time in the service and this risk may increase with the stress of college and other obligations (Schonfeld, Braue, Stire, Gum, Cross, & Brown, 2015). With service members returning home and enrolling in college courses, academic and integration problems are an increasing focus for veteran students entering college after service. The research conducted by Schonfeld, et al, was a cross-sectional design using survey methodology for their exploratory study. They collected surveys from 200 veteran respondents regarding their military service, where they were in their collegiate education, trials they had during service and after in college. The results of the study indicated that although most veterans appear to be well adjusted, a sizeable percentage reported in this study had experienced recent mental and emotional problems with PTSD and depression most commonly reported (Schonfled, et. al, 2015).

Johnson, Graceffo, Hayes, and Locke (2014) conducted a qualitative research study designed to assess the mental condition of students with past military experience. With the increasing numbers of student veterans enrolled in colleges throughout the United States, there are many challenges that student veterans must endure in order to be successful in college (Johnson et al., 2014) which may include physical limitations, psychological issues and PTSD. While the average for students that graduate from a four-

year university in the United States is approximately 57%, graduation rates for student

veterans from the same institutions is estimated only at 3% (Johnson et al., 2014). The

results of their research compared the results of students that were in the military versus

students that were not military that had experienced a traumatic experience. The research

showed that students that had experienced a traumatic experience in the military were

more susceptible to stressors that may impact their success in college. Student veterans

that have experienced trauma are more susceptible for using alcohol, having personal

issues with family, or other problems that impacted the student veteran's post-secondary

learning (Johnson et al., 2014).

Mark Blaauw-Hara (2016) conducted a qualitative case study with six student

veterans at North Central Michigan College, Petoskey, Michigan. His research explored

tribulations of student veterans that were studying at a community college and their

retention and success. This research expanded on six student veterans in a case study who

were at different levels of their college journey (Blaaue-Hara, 2016). The framework on

this research was collected from research into community-college student-veterans'

transitions such as Wheeler's (2012) case studies; Rumann, Rivera, and Hernandez's

(2011) research; and Persky and Oliver's (2010) work. Six student veterans were selected

from their previous skills they had gained from the military. This research suggested

outcomes that combined social connections with other students and support from

instructors might be effective in helping student veterans integrate into collegiate life and

be successful at the community college (Blaauw-Hara, 2016). It is important that military

personnel have received the tools to work and study hard while in the military in order to

become successful in college afterwards (Blaauw-Hara, 2016). Although this study did not include female students that were prior military or student veterans from all branches of the military, it was a strong qualitative study that provided direct answers from each veteran on what LMSs helped them in college.

Persky and Oliver's research (2010) utilized the globalization and holistic spirituality framework that defined education as an essential part of globalization that embraces the market economy and thus, education of the populace is critical to the economic well-being of the country (Persky & Oliver, 2010). Their mixed methods design involved six qualitative data collection methods: pre-interview questions about demographics, interviews, observations, field notes, a focus group, and document reviews. The findings in the study were related to how to assist veterans in reaching their goal of obtaining a college degree. The Persky and Olivery (2010) research found that streamlining military experience and courses while on active duty will count towards course credit is one of the most important benefits a college can provide. In addition, programs and services for veterans should be advertised and readily available. Furthermore, training and support for faculty and administrators, and a college campus that is veteran friendly were all important findings of the study (Persky & Oliver, 2010).

Another qualitative study by Iverson, Seher, DiRamio, Jarvis, and Anderson, (2016) investigated female student veterans' experiences about transitioning between the military and college. The data in this study was collected from interviews with 12 women from two public research universities. Their study was completed to help higher education administrators and support personnel who work with student veterans provide

support through their transition (Iverson et al, 2016). They utilized a semi-structured approach; participants were asked questions about their experiences as women in the military. Surveys and interviews contained questions regarding their experiences as women in the military, their decision to leave the military and to enter college, their experience in college, and their use of support services from the college (Iverson et al, 2016). Findings were similar to their non-veteran female peers on campus and in the classroom. Female veterans had problems related to sexual assault, mental health issues, and, if they were parents, to the challenges of child care (Iverson et al, 2016) while being a student on a college campus. Women were more likely to be separated and responsible for childcare than their male counterparts, thus potentially causing scheduling and attendance problems for college courses.

Student veterans are generally misunderstood and may have trouble openly communicating in the college brick and mortar classroom (Vaccaro, 2015). While there are studies that analyze the different type of students on campus, Vaccaro's 2015 research implied that there are limited studies showing the diversity within their own ranks (e.g., officer versus enlisted personnel). A qualitative study using the 'student veteran academic and social transition model' (SVASTM) which described the four positions on veteran re-enrollment in college: two "cornerstones" or prior influences, auxiliary aid, and the environment. Vacarro's research utilized a constructionist grounded theory approach which also identifies both participants in the study and researchers engaging data in theory generation, data collection, and analysis, (Vaccaro, 2015).

The Vacarro (2015) study took place on a midsized public research university in an urban community. The total sample comprised 31 adult learners and 11 of those participants as student veterans were selected for the study. Results showed that many student veterans believed that their instructors would assume that veterans were all the same and had the same experiences and background training (Vaccaro, 2015). Another finding consistent with this belief was that college instructors often would pair up veterans with one another in class projects and student veterans would resent the pairing. Vaccaro (2015) found that veterans in the study felt that instructors considered and treated all veterans to be the same, despite the fact that many student veterans felt that their service experience was different than others who served (Vaccaro, 2015).

The mixed-methods research by Richardson, Rucke, and Marion (2015) focused on student veterans' usage of degree maps. Degree maps were defined as students' learning tools that were created for the student and their advisor. A degree map is often provided as an integral tool of the university's support system and to influence the student to complete their degree. Richardson et al. examined 260 undergraduate college and 440 graduate who used degree maps to complete their college degrees. The students in the study were non-traditional students who were learning fully online. Richardson et al. researched if degree maps help the average student veteran succeed in their college education.

Richardson et al. utilized the qualitative coding process as an iterative approach, resulting in a series of themes and subthemes describing the impact of the degree maps. For the quantitative portion of the study, a 13-question survey was sent to 1,046 students

and 211 students responded, for an overall response rate of 20%. Of the 211 respondents, 89 (42%) were civilian students, 53 (25%) were actively serving military, and 69 (33%) were military veterans. The findings suggested that student veterans have are successful and recognize the importance of the degree mapping designed by the university advising staff to aid the student. The findings also suggested that degree maps need to be personalized, succinct, and simple for the online student veteran population to help them reach their goals of finishing courses and completing their degrees. Richardson et al. (2015) concluded that veteran online students may benefit from receiving a degree map so that they know which course to register for when as well as how long it will take them to complete the program. Degree maps were helpful to the student veteran population since it established a comfort and framework that was easy to follow and understand (Richardson et al, 2015).

Comparisons Between Traditional College Students and Student Veterans

The veteran student is classified as nontraditional in that they are more likely to be first-generation college students, older than their classmates, may have dependents, be more career-focused, and have served in the military after high school (Osborne, 2016). The student "veteran" is best defined to be the very broad category of individuals who are serving and/or have previously served in the U.S. military (Iverson et al, 2016) and are currently attending college. Student veterans may have military-related injuries that may negatively impact their educational performance in college (Gonazales & Elliot, 2016). There is a great divide between veteran-students and non-student veterans on today's

college campuses (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). This type of experience separates the conventional college student from the student veteran.

The goal of the 2014 qualitative study by Schiavone and Gentry, was to discover and understand the challenges that veteran-students face during their transition from the military into different colleges. The study evaluated six veteran students at a large research university in the Midwest. The study employed a qualitative case study approach as the guiding methodological framework in order to describe the veteran-students' lived experiences and to describe the soldier-to-student transition as lived and experienced by six veterans. This study found that student veterans are a group that includes historically higher proportions of women and disabled individuals (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014) than their male veteran counterparts. In addition, when combat student veterans returned to campus after a difficult tour of duty, they found they could not relate to the traditional college students (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

The results of the 2014 Schiavone and Gentry's study were consistent with other research, like the 2016 research from Gonzales and Elliott. These studies had similar findings as most student veterans reported feeling that their experiences increased their personal growth, how they perceive others and the world as a result of their deployments in the military (Gonzalez & Elliot, 2016; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). However, most of the student veterans in the Schiavone and Gentry (2014) study reported that they all went through identity changes: the veterans transformed from military personnel to college students. This experience was vastly different than the personal growth that most traditional college students experience. According to Gonzales and Elliot (2016), students

that were in the military had relatively low completion rates of their post-secondary programs compared to the traditional college student. There is also limited research that exists that reveals that experiences that some women veterans are not sharing with others, such as sexual assault, mental health issues, and, if parenting, the challenges of child care (Iverson et al, 2016).

The average veteran may also feel uncomfortable in crowded auditoriums, feel unfairly judged in a college classroom, or feel different than younger college students (Gonzales & Elliot, 2016). The same researchers explored faculty members' perceptions toward student veterans on how to assist the student veteran in their classrooms. Gonzales and Elliot (2016) used structural equation modeling to explain the associations among faculty members' and their attitudes toward military students. This study investigated instructors' willingness to assist student veterans and their regard of military-related issues in the classroom (Gonzales & Elliott, 2016). Their research showed that instructors' prior contact with student veterans, instructors' perceptions of student veterans and willingness to assist them, and instructors' treatment of military-related issues and discussions in the classroom determined how they treated their current student veterans. Interestingly enough, instructors reported that when student veterans take history courses relative to their own military experiences, they may feel uncomfortable when their professors' version of military history is greatly different from their firsthand experience. The findings were significant in that faculty members at community colleges were in general more willing to help student veterans than those of four-year college instructors and professors (Gonzales & Elliot (2016).

Reasons why a student veteran would stay at home and study online. Colleges are seeing a growing subpopulation of non-traditional students – military students that may have different experiences and requirements than the conventional college student (Downs & McAllen, 2014). Downs and McAllen (2014) conducted a study that evaluated the exchange that exists in a student's academic performance in relation to their time in the military and how it applied to distance learning and courses delivered entirely online. They utilized a quantitative study, utilizing the student's grade point average in online classes and the veteran demographic as a theme. Their study at a midwestern college within the College of Technology, where every core course is offered exclusively online. Their research found that there was a significant number of male student veterans than female students enrolled in the program. They also found that student veterans had a 3.765 mean GPA compared to the non-student veteran who had a mean 3.17 GPA. This research showed that student veterans share some traits that allow them to excel in online programs. It is important to note results from this research must be understood that due to restraints from the academic offerings studied and the focus on the student's grades rather than other variables such as motivators from the student veteran population (Downs & McAllen, 2014).

Veterans with obligations and family issues preventing them from attending college on campus. All college students endure great change after they enroll in college courses and many outcomes are due to home-to-college stressors. In addition, many risks are greater for students living with a mental illness or physical injury from military service (Kranke, Jackson, Floersch, Townsend, & Anderson-Fye, 2013). College

stressors may include living on campus with people they may not know, balancing workload of courses and work schedules, relationship problems, peer pressure from other students, and preparing for life after college. Kranke et al (2013) explored the experiences of college students diagnosed that were diagnosed with a mental illness. Their study particularly focused on treatment perspectives of students and how their recovery impacted students' school experience, either through online or in classroom experiences. Since the early 2000's, and with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) amendment of 2008, there have been an increasingly number of students with mental disabilities that feel more comfortable working with their administrators, instructors, club members, and other peers. The ADA legislation is intended to outline the conditions and regulations in which all college students have equal opportunity to succeed during their college years.

The researchers recruited 17 undergraduate students at a four-year university and were interviewed once a semester for two years. The majority of college students had supportive family influences, improved functioning, and low shame associated with mental illness (Kranke et al., 2013) while on medication. Overall, the study recommended further research to evaluate how to examine college students in different settings not limited to online programs, but also at different types of secondary learning institutions.

College students that have served in the military whether during peace time or war time, have endured different experiences than the average college freshman, and thus may need different types of support. Romero, Riggs, and Ruggero (2015) examined the

positive factors of a family social support system for student veterans that impacted symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. They investigated how student veterans' family support networks impacted learners' coping styles and psychological symptoms. The study analyzed 136 military veterans who were undergraduate students attending southwestern universities. Through their research, they found communication issues among both student and nonstudent veterans following military service. The research found that veterans' prior exposure to combat made focus in the college classroom very difficult. It also found that military personnel deployed as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) are at great risk for the development of psychological issues (Romero, Riggs, & Ruggero, 2015) which is defined as a set of symptoms and a medical condition. Their research showed that anxiety and depression can be related to lack of social support among married men and women but is associated with lower family social support among students in college. Their findings also indicated that that lack of family social support had a great effect on symptom expression that impacts the students' success (Romero, Riggs, & Ruggero, 2015).

Physical disabilities that require a student veteran to learn online. According to a collegiate study conducted by the Department of Education in 2013, it is estimated that 11% of college students in the U.S. have physical disabilities. Spenceley and Wheeler (2016) conducted an empirical research study that examined the use of extended time needed for college students with disabilities. The two questions in their study were related to the typical time it takes for students with disabilities to take exams, and does the time differ between different disabilities (Spenceley & Wheeler, 2016). College

students with learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and/or psychological and psychiatric conditions are entitled to a variety of academic supports through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This law specifies that disabled individuals must be given reasonable special accommodations to access these major educational challenges, including academic accommodations either online or in the college classroom. While the Spencely and Wheeler (2016) research established that individuals with psychiatric disabilities on average used the highest percentage of class time and require time outside of the classroom, the research did not take into account if online college courses would be an alternative for disabled students.

Many colleges have an administrative staff that assist college students with disabilities called disability support services (DSS). DSS is an analytical component of student success as it supports faculty training to assist students by providing training on technology that is required in the college (DeLee, 2015). Universal Design (UD) is the standard for developing online courses through a content management system, that not only assists students with disabilities but students in general. Many colleges implement online course design for all accessible courses that are consistent with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. By adding UDL principals to online courses, DeLee's (2015) research shows that UDL allows disabled students to complete the same online course as other college students.

College Support Programs for Veterans

The continuing research of student veterans has shown that colleges have created and integrated programs to support veterans and their requirements in college. Still there is a need for increased attention to the student veteran as they must continue to be an institutional priority, especially for community colleges (Caton, 2018). Caton provided information on support for veterans for two programs that included Faculty Development & Institutional Change Program and Holistic Student Services & Institutional Change Program. Both programs have a focus on engaging the campus culture, specifically the faculty and staff, in veteran student culture (Caton, 2018). In addition, these programs offer access to all veteran student services with a focus on individualized focus for each veteran student, which can include educational planning and tutoring.

Karp & Klempin (2017) identified four types of support services typically provided to student veterans: benefits-focused, academic, nonacademic, and career to assist them in their collegiate journey. College support programs that may be nonacademic include the development of veterans-focused student success introduction and new student orientations that are focused on the adult and veteran learner. Many college administrations also create relationships among student veterans and between college personnel by hosting special events, support groups, networking opportunities, and workshops (Karp & Klempin, 2017). Many colleges that have a significant veteran student population may have a calendar of events for the college. This may be a veteran group for student veterans to allow opportunities to network with veterans on and off campus who understand the experience of being a military veteran in higher education.

Invisible wounds that require a student veteran to learn online. The student veteran as a nontraditional student entering college has numerous challenges, including reintegrating into the society. Many find postsecondary education with a disability additionally challenging and may prevent them from attending a conventional brick and mortar classroom (Osborne, 2016). Cognitive difficulties can be the most common diability that our veterans are enduring from current war injuries and traumas. Osborne (2016) reports that service members have as much as a 40% chance of acquiring a cognitive injury by the time they complete their military service, and thus may have significant issues when trying to attend college. In addition, many veterans that have just returned home from war find that they are unaware of their course of treatment, and how to ask for help. This may also apply to how they may ask for assistance from administrators and/or faculty. Osborne (2016) investigated how an elective course for veteran students would help them integrate into the collegiate environment. Osborne (2016) reported that 85% of the population of the US military is male and the environment can be intensely masculine. In addition the culture in the military is to be self-sufficient and suppress emotions. This mentality of student veterans integrating into collegiate life presents challenges for educators to assist and connect with both male and female veterans. Thus, one size does not fit all when dealing with veterans in the classroom. The course was a safe haven, described by many veterans that took the course in the program. Many of the veterans in the study had no idea of additional support they could request and find through the college. Osborne (2016) reported that the college program was useful for veterans and implemented an immediate like support community

for new student veterans. In addition the program providied them with an synopsis of administrative support and a course map that helped them reach their educational goals.

Self-compassion refers to how a person may relate to oneself when the present is a painful memory or action (Dahm, Meyer, Neff, Kimbrel, Gulliver, & Morrisette, 2015) which is defined as someone enduring struggles that affect their physiology and affect their day to day activities. Dahm et al, (2015) completed qualitative research that evaluated whether mindfulness and self-compassion were commonly associated with PTSD, TBI and other functional disabilities. Participants included 115 trauma-exposed war veterans from U.S. Iraq/Afghanistan with severe PTSD symptoms and functional disabilities. Mindfulness was associated with less emotional distressed and a marked increase quality of life and less physical distress including PTSD flareups (Dahm et al, 2015). Clinical psychologists and master level technicians utilized structured interviews in gathering data through assessments. Their research found that mindfulness and self-compassion may impact how veterans relate to stress caused my past trauma and how one might regulate the effects of traumatic experiences on veterans' overall health (Dahm et al, 2015). The impact of a veteran that struggles in the classroom can be critical to his/her success in learning.

Lehavot, Litz, Millard, Hamilton, Sadler, and Simpson (2016) conducted a mixed methods research project that recruited women veterans. Their research was divided into three parts to help women with PTSD, and the study used semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and women Veterans. Fifty-three women Veterans were screened for the qualitative research and interviewed. After the first set of qualitative data was analyzed,

women Veterans in the study were given access to a program called Delivery of Self Training and Education for Stressful Situations (DESTRESS). This program allowed access to online intervention and communication tools with clinicians. Both clinicians and women Veterans were interviewed after working with the program. This study identified barriers that provide care to women Veterans, that may include various physical and psychological challenges, including long wait time to receive medical care, work and family obligations, lack of specialized women-specific care programs, and discomfort with using VA services. The use of the online program DESTRESS allowed these women Veterans with PTSD to have access to care and counseling from their homes. The study found that women veterans that utilized the DESTRESS online program did find some assistance for their problems and overcome their discomfort of confiding to counselors online (Levahot et al, 2016). This is interesting research that can assist a student veteran that may have issues leaving the house and still may need care.

How instructors aid student veterans in the classroom. Whiteman, Mroczek, Macdermid, Wadsworth, and Barry (2013) examined the development and benefits of emotional support for student service members/ veterans from peers. Their study longitudinally tracked changes in emotional support from peers among student service members and veterans to their civilian counterparts across three consecutive semesters. Whiteman et al., (2013) examined whether changes in peer emotional support were related to changes in mental health and potential barriers (e.g., psychological distress, alcohol use) and academic success (e.g., grade-point average, academic motivation, educational self-efficacy). Data was collected from 20 different higher education

institutions from enrolled students attending and within one Midwestern state. Three rounds of questions were centered around each student's emotional support received from peers, their frequency of drinking, and their self-belief of their academic functioning. Questions were sent by secure web based survey. Given the developmental changes in social support and relationship intimacy in early adulthood, the researchers expected to find that emotional support from peers would increase over the course of the three semesters. One finding in this research found that student service members/veterans were more likely to be enrolled full time (90%) as compared with civilian students (Whiteman, Mroczek, Macdermid, Wadsworth, & Barry, 2013). Other results showed that student veterans reported less emotional support from university peers compared to the traditional college student.

Attending college can be challenging for many veterans who may be first time college learners who may have little input on how college life will be and what type of support they may have. Graf, Ysasi, and Marini (2015) completed research of 215 military and student veterans and their perception of the support not only from their university, but also instructor support and perception of the military student versus the civilian student. Not only did the study evaluate how PTSD influenced how the military student responded in the classroom, but also evaluated how physical and mental disabilities required assistance from the instructor. While their study showed that over two-thirds of the military students had difficulties in the classroom, many military students had profound experiences while attending higher education due to life changing events that happened during their military career. Graf, Ysasi, and Marini (2015) found

military students may have difficulty with stress, difficulty managing multiple college assignments and prioritizing school work. Students may not engage with other students well, may hesitate to approach instructors to ask for help and may be overly sensitive to negative feedback and criticism on assignments. Challenges for the military student may occur due to unexpected changes in coursework, intense stress resulting in academic challenges, unexplained absences, problems with dark thoughts, and a distrust of college or anyone in authority.

Many veterans still had social issues that prevented them from interacting with not only their instructors but fellow students. In addition, many student veterans felt uncomfortable with being asked by civilian students and instructors about their time in the service. In their study veterans also reported the need to be constantly alert, needed to be seated against the wall of the classroom and have a clear view of the door) and resented to be forced to another seat by their instructor or paired up with a student they may not interact with successfully (Glover-Graf, Miller, & Freeman, 2010).

LMS and online tools that aid the remote student. Learning Management Systems (LMSs) can engage a student in learning that will bring students and faculty together in a personalized and motivating online learning environment. Keane and Russell (2014) conducted a study that used a custom built LMS to bring a disabled student, faculty and writing coach together in a personalized and engaging learning environment which assisted the neurologically impaired student. The goal of this case study was to sharing information in digital learning environments for those students with disabilities (Keane & Russell, 2014). The case study was completed at Empire State

College in New York and conducted with one learning disabled student from the college. This student had a neurological disability that affected his speech, slowed his typing considerably, and required him to need significant reassurance and direction for his writing. Kean and Russell found that utilizing Cloud technologies resulted in the transactional distance being reduced to the extent that the student would transfer his words to the page quickly through another's typing (Kean & Russell, 2014). In addition, the Voice in the Cloud technologies tool allowed the researchers to establish greater understanding of the student's overall learning capabilities, allowing the participants in the study to establish a "feeling of trust and caring in the affective domain" and forestalling attention fatigue (Kean & Russell, 2014). This type of tool can close the transactional distance gap which is defined as the space of potential miscommunications and understanding between the instructor and the learner. Collaborative activities can enhance the online learning experience for students and teachers and can allow collaborative engagements and allow students to rely on each other (Kean & Russell, 2014). What was interesting in this study was the student recommended the technology that would help him to communicate to his instructor and coach, and they adapted to the student's request.

Tritt & Heatherly (2017) reported after their case study of online learning with numerous colleges, that the key of online learning is good communication from the beginning and is the key to student support in an online environment. While the study showed that there were issues with student distance, there were important rules established for all the students in the study, for example making sure their was a quiet

place to attend class during collaborations. Students in the study conversed about the challenges of working together in an online environment before the course began and come up with solutions for effectively communicating and helped to mitigate distance learning (Tritt & Heatherely, 2017).

Online collaborative learning has become a popular learning method in most college environments that provide online or mixed method or hybrid courses (an in class and online course). Blended learning has become a challenge for college instructors as digital technologies are consistently changing the college student's expectations and experiences, teaching and learning models are more dynamic, and digital and online learning is strategically and educationally essential (Ellis, Pardo, & Han, 2016). A blended learning environment for all intents and purposes are learning strategies that enable students to take in-class and on-line learning environments effectively in the same course. The study conducted by Ellis, Pardo, and Han (2016) hoped to understand why there are relative differences in success between groups of students in the same course, and how differences are identified in how they collaborate with each other. The frameworks utilized were the university student experiences in blended learning and the Student Approach to Learning (SAL), Social Network Analysis (SNA). The SAL is explained as students who perceive that teaching of the material is to be of high quality, who understand the goals of the course clearly, who report cohesive conceptions of learning, also tend achieve higher grades and understanding of the course and materials. The SNA is defined as a process of learning about social structures through the use of network mapping, networking with others and graph theory. The study conducted by

Ellis, Pardo, and Han (2016) evaluated the students' collaborative learning activities during the course and required them to research and investigate the course material, both online and in the classroom. The study centered on clusters of collaborative students working together in learning environments. The study had different results as some students reported a positive experience that added to a greater understanding to the course material through collaboration. However, other students reported negative perceptions of the integration of the online learning environment thus having lower achievement in the course. Many students that were required to collaborate in activates and work online with other students, still worked alone, however the majority of students did choose to collaborate with others online, working in pairs, triads or larger groups (Ellis, Pardo, and Han, 2016). While this research proves that collaborative online work environments work for some, it still does not fully explain why others still choose to work alone.

The research questions that were addressed in part by the above research were about the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning, and ow disabled veterans' perceptions differ from those of the average non-disabled student veteran? If so, how? The second research question addressed in this literature review is how a LMSs may have assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree. As well as the type of online learning experiences have helped veterans to reach their educational goals. The specific parts of the learning managements system (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) were addressed and how veterans used these tools. Finally, the third research question asks what specific obstacles and struggles exist in the online environment to student veterans completing their degree online? The research above addresses how veteran

experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals. As well as what veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals. Finally, if there were any specific parts of the learning managements system (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) hindered them from reaching their educational goals.

Conclusion

This literature review was completed with regards to the limitations, struggles, and challenges that a student veteran may face in college. My research for this chapter encompassed not only the struggles that a student veteran may encounter completing conventional classroom college courses, but also any potential issues that may occur while enrolled in the online learning platform offered by most colleges. My research in this chapter showed one of the largest challenges collegiate educators have to face with their student veterans is to understand that one size does not fit all, and every veteran is different. In addition, many colleges have implemented programs for student veterans to not only collaborate with each other, but also to incorporate the nonmilitary student. College administrations have also educated their faculty and administrators to prepare them for this type of nontraditional student.

Other research discovered that colleges all around the country are implementing more and more online courses for the non-traditional student that needs to stay home or study remotely. This includes many veteran or active military students. The challenge remains however, how to integrate the student veteran into a collaborative online learning

environment with respect to potential learning disabilities and other issues that may hinder a student veteran from completing their college courses.

Gonzales and Elliott (2016) investigated instructors' willingness to help student veterans in the classroom. The instructors' previous experience with student veterans or current military students determined how they evaluated and interacted with them in the classroom. Their study utilized modeling that integrated structural equations that explained the affiliation among faculty members' and their attitudes toward student veterans.

Chapter 3 will entail the research design and rationale, which will encompass the three questions this dissertation is hoping to answer. The role of the researcher will be addressed as well as the methodology of the study. Instrumentation will be included which will entail the technology required for this study. The data analyses plan, with the use of NVIVO software is also included in the following chapter. Dependability, flexibility of the research design, limitations and ethical concerns are also addressed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this general interview qualitative research was to explore the veteran students' experiences with collegiate online learning for veterans that are restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons. The major sections of this chapter that follow are research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary.

Research Design and Rationale

This general qualitative interview study focused on the lived experience of the student veterans who had attended an online university or their college through online courses. The research method for this study is the qualitative interview methodology. This qualitative research focused on the veterans' perspectives, meanings, and subjective views allowing the researcher to view the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants (Yilmaz, 2013). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), utilizing a small purposeful sampling strategy for in-depth studies, such as qualitative research utilizing interview methods may address the research questions. This qualitative method involved the analyses of interview data and was chosen because it provided the scope for evaluating the lived experiences of veterans that completed their college degree online (see Shoko & Naidu, 2018).

While there were many studies that evaluate the student veteran in the classroom and their challenges, there were very few research studies that examined the online experience of the veteran studying from home. Student veterans with disabilities and

challenges brought on by military service are attending colleges at an increasing rate, yet limited research is completed by state agencies on the characteristics, needs, and challenges of this student population. Further research is needed to examine the extent to which their mental and physical disabilities played a role in how student veterans completed their online education (Groah et al., 2017).

For this qualitative study, the case study was not selected because it is best suited for a study in which the researcher wants to know how and why a situation exists (Yin, 2014). The phenomenological approach was also not selected, which is defined as a way of explaining what a person understands, senses and perceives in their own immediate experience (Moustakas, 1994) as this does not apply to their previous experience of their online learning experiences. The mission of this general interview qualitative study is to learn about the general experiences of the student veteran.

The completed study answered three questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?

Subquestion 1a: Do disabled student veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the average nondisabled student veteran? If so, how?

Subquestion 1b: Do nondisabled veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the disabled veteran? If so, how?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How have the tools within LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?

Subquestion 2a. What type of online learning experiences have helped veterans to reach their educational goals?

Subquestion 2b. What specific tools that are part of learning management systems (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) have student veterans successfully used to obtain their college degree? How have they used these tools?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What specific obstacles in the online environment hinder student veterans from completing their degree online?

Subquestion 3a. What military experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

Subquestion 3b. What veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

The research questions were created to address student veterans' experiences with collegiate online learning when they are restricted or removed themselves from the conventional classroom for various reasons. The interview protocol was established to find out the individual technology requirements that each veteran found helpful, as well as their past history in the military that may have or have not hindered their success in college. The interview protocol was also separated into two different categories, one for disabled veterans and one for nondisabled veterans.

The potential social change of this study might evaluate how veterans were successfully completing their online education and how their disability or other limitations required them to learn from home. This will help veterans to be more

successful by evaluating whether or not studying online will be a fit for them and finding associations with other student veterans that have completed their college degrees online.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher and observer in this qualitative study played a neutral role in the interviews. While the researcher was known by the participants to be a fellow veteran, this did not enter the interview process by way of bias or influence. The researcher's role in this study was not only to coordinate the interviews, but also conduct each interview in a scheduled time with each participant twice. The number of interviews with each participant is important as student veterans that have served in combat or other stressful events may have different routines that may influence their collegiate studies.

The population of students in this study were recruited through social media through Veteran Facebook groups and/or Twitter networks and will have no previous contact with the researcher. While the researcher does teach at an University in Maine and works with veterans on campus, any past or current students from that college were not be selected for the study. The participants to be selected in this study were recruited through online methods of social media. The researcher did not have any past history and/or professional relationships with participants.

Bias in this research was avoided by ensuring that interviews were kept in a professional context and not revealing personal information about the interviewer. Since the interviewer is not only a disabled veteran but an online student during her master's and Doctoral degree and worked from home, this presented a challenge. Strict adherence

to the interview script assisted in ensuring bias or personal stories and understanding did not enter the results.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The population of this study is veterans who have completed their college degree completely online, served at least four years of active duty, are either retired or honorably discharged, and been an enlisted person. Also, half of the participants had have some sort of disability that was incurred during their time of service. In order to find appropriate veterans, purposive sampling was utilized. Purposive sampling strategies are commonly utilized to attempt to understand selected groups of individuals or groups in research (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

Student veterans were recruited through Facebook Veterans groups, Military.com boards, and Hadit.com through a posting asking for veterans that might be interested in participating in a research study. Every veteran that replies was sent a short questionnaire (see Appendix A) asking about their length in service, enlistment type (officer or enlisted), if they attended college and where, whether they attended college online, if they have a disability from their time in the service, and if so, what kind of disability. Recruiting continued until 12 veterans were found that met these criteria and agreed to participate in this study. The first six of those that met these criteria became the study participants. The relationship between saturation and sample size should was met with 6 participants being interviewed twice with the same protocol.

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments was the two interview protocols located in Appendix D and E and shown here. Creswell (1998) stated that the telephone interview can provide a great source of data when the researcher does not have direct and personal access to individuals they are researching. Creswell (1998) also states that one on one interviews with participants that share ideas and speak of their experiences are ideal, however if the participant is hesitant, this may present a challenge to collect adequate data (Creswell, 1988 p. 24).

First Interview for Both Sets of Veterens

I separated two sets of questions, one for disable veterans in the study and one for veterens who were not disabled. For disabled vets, I addressed RQ1 (What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?) with the following questions:

1. What did you hear about online learning before you enrolled in your first online course?

2. What were the online or distance learning courses you took while on active duty?

3. What type of program were you looking for? Ex: Education/Criminal Justice etc.

4. Was the course required for advancement, job certification, or another reason?

5. During enrolling in the course what were you told about the expectations? For example; how long it would take, what computer hardware and skills you would need, a deadline in which this course had to be taken.

6. For what reason(s) did you chose to study online? Accessibility etc.? Disability?

6a. Do disabled student veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the average non-disabled student veteran? If so, how?

7. If injured in the service, what changes did you have to make in your job or career after you recovered?

8. Describe your main disability from the service.

9. If you were told you needed to change jobs because of your injury in the service, what type of training did you have to go through?

10. If disabled, how do you think your disability is viewed by other students in the classroom?

11. What type of other military students were in the classroom? Other services, ROTC, Reservists etc.

12. What other disabilities do you recognize or see with other student veterans?

13. What type of experiences did you have working with other student veterans?

14. What type of experiences did you have working with other students that were NOT veterans?

15. What instructions to access and complete the course did you receive from the instructor prior to taking the online class?

16. What challenges would you foresee in the conventional brick and mortar classroom in terms of your disability? Accessibility, etc.

17. What did you find accommodating in the online classroom to help with your disability?

18. While you were in the course, what type of computer platform did you work on? Ex: MacBook, PC etc.

19. What sort of family responsibilities did you have while taking courses online?

20. What was your daily schedule for logging into your courses and working on homework?

21. When you registered for your course, what were some of the things the administrator or instructor told you to expect in the course?

For disabled veterens, I addressed RQ2 (How have the tools within the LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?) with these questions:

22. What type of introduction to the online course materials did the professor provide? Ex: A tutorial, examples of completed projects etc.

23. While learning online, did you feel connected to the other students through chats, forums, etc.?

24. When/if you needed assistance with your course or tools where did you turn?

25. What tools did you utilize during your online course? Ex: MS Word, Excel, Visio etc.

26. What type of support or training did you need to master the tools in the online course?

27. What programs did you experience for the first time during your online

courses?

28. Do you have anything to add about the previous questions?

These first 28 questoins comprised thefirst interview for disabled veterans in the study.

I asked nondisabled veterens a slightly different set of interview questions. To address RQ1 (What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?), I asked the following:

1. What did you hear about online learning before you enrolled in your first

    course?

2. What were the online or distance learning courses you took while on active

    duty?

3. What type of program were you looking for? Ex: Education/Criminal Justice

    etc.

4. Was the course required for advancement, job certification, or another reason?

5. During enrolling in the course what were you told about the expectations? For

    example; how long it would take, what computer skills you would need, a

    deadline in which this course had to be taken.

6. For what reason(s) did you chose to study online? Flexibility, etc.?

6a. Do non-disabled veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those

    of the disabled veteran? If so, how?

7. What was the main reason why you chose to study from home?

8. What type of experiences did you have working with other student veterans?

9. What type of experiences did you have working with other students that were NOT veterans?

10. What type of other military students were in the classroom? Other services, ROTC, Reservists etc.

11. What was your daily schedule for logging into your courses and working on homework?

12. What sort of family responsibilities did you have while taking courses online?

To address RQ2 (How have the tools within the LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?), I asked the nondisabled vets the following:

13. What type of introduction to the online course materials did the professor provide? Ex: A tutorial, examples of completed projects etc.

14. What type of computer platform did you work on? Ex: MacBook, PC etc.

15. What if any problems did you have with accessing your online course?

16. While learning online, did you feel connected to the other students through chats, forums, etc.?

17. When/if you needed assistance with the course or technological issues where did you turn?

18. What tools did you utilize during your online course? Ex: MS Word, Excel, Visio etc.

19. What type of support or training did you need to master the tools in the online course?

20. What programs did you experience for the first time during your online

courses?

21. Do you have anything further to add to the previous questions?

Questions 22-28 did not exist this set of interview questions for nondisabled vets.

Second Interview for Both Sets of Veterans

RQ2a: What type of online learning experiences have helped veterans to reach

their educational goals?

30. Which college did you take the majority of online classes from?

31. What type of learning management system did the college(s) use (e.g.

Blackboard, Angel, Canvas, etc.)?

32. How friendly did you find the LMS to be when first logging in?

33. What sort of support did you have during your use of this LMS?

34. How do you think this LMS helped you reach your goals?

35. What things might you have changed in the LMS environment?

RQ2b: What specific tools that are part of learning management systems (wikis,

discussion forums, blogs, etc.) have student veterans successfully used to obtain their

college degree? How have they used these tools?

36. Think about your online class, what tools did you find useful that helped you

with your course? (If interviewee does not suggest specific tools, then ask specific

questions about their use of wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.)

37. What sort of computer problems did you have when trying to work on your

classwork?

38. Where were you able to access high speed connections?

39. When you had computer problems who did you turn too?

40. If you ever needed an extension to complete your course what challenges did you discover?

41. What sort of software did you need to complete your courses?

42. Were you provided a laptop or funding for equipment through the VA or another program?

43. What sort of software did your college provide to you either free of charge or at a discount?

44. What sort of guidance on new software from your instructors or recommend help when needed?

45. What experiences did you have with the IT department at your college?

46. When you first began each online course, what were your biggest concerns?

47. What was your biggest challenge of finishing your coursework on time?

48. What type of collaboration did you have with other students in the course?

49. What sorts of problems did you have with other classmates during a collaboration on a project?

50. How do you feel the instructor responded to you if you had questions in the course?

51. How do you feel about finishing your college education?

52. What skills do you have now that you did not have while in the service?

RQ3: What specific obstacles in the online environment hinder student veterans from completing their degree online?

53. While in the military, were you interested in taking online courses and why?

54. Was there a difference in college educated enlisted personnel versus non educated at your unit? Explain.

55. How long after you left the military did you enroll in school?

56. What specific obstacles in the online environment hindered you from completing your degree online?

RQ3a: What military experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

57. While taking online classes did you write about an experience in the military? What was it?

58. What past experiences while in the service created learning problems for you while taking courses?

59. When you spoke about being a veteran in class how did the other students respond?

60. What military experiences during your time in the service hindered you from reaching your educational goals?

3b. What veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

61. How did you feel you were treated while registering for your classes?

62. Were you asked by a counselor or administrator about where/when you served in the military? Were you proud or reserved?

63. Do you have a resource at the VA to help you with your student loans and benefits? Do you feel they take care of you well?

64. While visiting your college where you introduced to the Veterans affairs administrator or group?

65. Do you have any information to share about anything that happened after leaving the military that did NOT help you in college?

66. What veteran experiences after your time in the service kept you from reaching your educational goals?

67. Do you have anything to add to the interview questions?

The interview protocols were validated by a veteran who would have qualified for the study and was someone the researcher is familiar with. The purpose of these protocols is to test the research questions and complete interview protocols as indicated above for flow and practicability. An additional purpose of this validation method was to ensure that I am gathering the data that is directly related to these research questions. This also ensured that I received valid answers and that the questions were not ambiguous but are probing exactly the content I am focusing on. This clarity of questions resulted after the completing both interviews. This validation process was not recorded and analyzed, and just utilized for the content of the questions and their effectiveness to obtain results. After validation, changes to questions were completed, reviewed and then implemented.

Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Purposive sampling strategies were utilized by selecting veterans that had completed their college course online, were enlisted at the time of their service and needed to study remotely instead of the conventional classroom. This sampling strategy was used by choosing "information rich" cases, that are individual people, organizations, or behaviors that may provide the greatest result into each research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

After IRB approval (see Appendix B), a recruitment survey link through Google Forms was utilized and posted on Facebook Veteran group pages. The link provided brief information about the research study, criteria for participants in the study, permission to forward the survey onto other applicants, and information including my email address and phone number. The link to the survey was live for one week, and after that point I will selected 12 interviewees that meet the criteria and number them from 1-12 of viable interviewees that meet my criteria. If there were not 12 interviewees that met the criteria, the link to the survey would have been sent out to other Facebook Veteran pages that are subgroups from the initial Facebook pages with permission from those administrators from those pages. There were more than 12 replies to the survey and an email was sent to those not selected stating that their response was appreciated but have selected others for the research study.

Participants in this study ranged from associates, bachelor, master and doctoral degree students. Both male and female students were selected for this research, however were only limited only to enlisted personnel, since most officers have already had their

college education from the academies or other universities before receiving their commissions. Veterans that met the criteria and filled out the survey were contacted to schedule convenient phone interviews and further introduced them to the study. Participants selected for the study were sent the consent form and asked to date and sign and send back through electronic email. All participants sent in the consent forms, they in turn were signed by the researcher and were returned to each participant as a copy.

The two interviews (about 30 minutes each) for each veteran were the only sources of data, as each interview protocol was 30 or so questions that answered the research questions. Each participant was interviewed twice within a one week period, thus gaining a breadth and depth of their perspective of online education. Each participant was presented different time slots for interviews, allowing some room for changes and scheduling conflicts.

It was the researcher's intention that if any phone interviews were missed, each interview would be re-scheduled as soon as possible. In addition, the researcher had three extra participants on hand for alternate participants. All communications were recorded phone interviews with each of the participants. The researcher recorded all data on her Apple 8 cell phone. The recordings were transcribed by hand and imported onto a HP Laptop. The data was then hand coded and imported into NVIVO for data analyses.

The data was collected from phone interviews through the use of each interview protocol, which were designed to answer the research questions through interviews. Data collection consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E and F. The interview protocol included open-ended interview questions to avoid restricting the

responses of the Veterans. The interviews were recorded for full context to be transcribed and sorted into pre-coded phrases. NVIVO 11 by QSR International was utilized on the researcher's HP Laptop for data analyses. Since this researcher has experience with NVIVO from other classes, this type of instrumentation is recommended.

Data Analysis Plan

Some research methodologists utilize qualitative-analysis software, often termed computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software (CAQDAS), is key in analyzing, storing and managing qualitative data (Hoover & Kobeur, 2011). NVIVO has been selected and recommended by other peers that would be useful in analyzing the data from this research. Discrepant data from interviews was considered and mentioned in results in a separate finding. Another approach was the selection of participants' language (military jargon) used as short phrases or words, which is a strategy Miles et al. (2014) referred to as in vivo coding. The researcher utilized an open-coding process to analyze the data of the research questions. The researcher read the interviews of each participant and created a list of similar topics discussed by the veterans in the study. These topics assisted the researcher in finding categories for the data and utilize them for a preliminary analysis. Each research question had theme that broke down into categories that enabled the researcher to find saturation in each question. See Appendix C and tables one and two above for interview protocols and how the interview questions related to each research question.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In order to ensure credibility, member checking was utilized for interviews. Member checking is one method to ensure validity and reliability of a qualitative case study (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Each of the six participants were scheduled for 30 minute interviews at two different times of the day in order to ensure each veteran was interviewed in two different times of the day. Member checks were utilized at the beginning of the 2nd interview with the participant. At the beginning of the second interview, a transcript of the first interview was presented to the participant for verification of accuracy in the interview data. Also, after the second interview, the transcript of that interview was emailed to the veterans for verification of accuracy. Additionally, interviewees received a copy of both of their own interviews and were asked to read and provide feedback on the accuracy of both documents. No results of the research were released until the dissertation was uploaded to ProQuest.

Transferability

The appropriate strategies to establish transferability was to ensure all interview protocols were exactly the same with little to none sidetracking off the exact interview question, as well as each interview protocol began and ended the same way. When a participant went into further detail or remarked in a long answer, the interview questions continued in the same order. The variation of the participant selection entailed different service members from the different branches of the US Military. Members were selected from the Air Force, Coast Guard, Navy and Army. The importance of finding participants

with different views of their time in the service was essential and with the different services represented was able to saturate the data.

Dependability

To be consistent with the process of the research study relates to what has been referred to as reliability, dependability, or auditability (Miles et al., 2014). Dependability was through research questions and interview questions that aligned with the qualitative interview study that included the conceptual framework, the collection of data, the process of collecting data and analyses, the role of the researcher and journaling. In order to increase validity, peer reviews of transcripts and themes were also completed by other doctoral students after each set of interviews were completed. For example, after the first set of interviews occur with every participant, the researcher sent the interview transcripts to a fellow doctoral student for review. Also, after themes and codes are developed, they were also sent along with transcripts to the doctoral students for review. Confirmation of these themes by other doctoral students led to increased validity in the study.

In order to ensure dependability within the study, the researcher utilized an audit trail to track progress throughout the interview process. The use of a researcher's journal during the study was also used to record different findings and thoughts during the study but were only be used for dependability not a data source. This researcher developed a reflexive and personal journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) where the researcher made notes while interviewing during the research process. The logistics of this research and personal reflection upon what is happening in terms of one's own perceptions and interests were entered in this journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

 While doing an interview with one participant, a thought may occur about a different participant, or a similarity between participants and this was noted in the journal. Also, the journal was used to record non-verbal cues and interactions that were not easily captured by a recording. Since there was two interviews completed by each participant, the intention was to schedule interviews for different times of the day. By changing the interview time, this researcher hoped to find how the student veterans views change depending on the time of the day and how their usual routine changes their perceptions. Since this researcher was using a journal, this ensured there was a solid record of not only the data but how the process of interviews, personal findings, and data analyses occurred.

Reflexivity

 The interviews with each of the participants occured twice in different times of the day through a period of approximately two weeks. While the scheduling of interviews is important, there was some flexibility to accommodate the student veteran's schedule. If a participant dropped out of the study, there were four alternative participants that were available. In addition, a personal journal was not utilized for the data collection, but as an interpretation of the interviews for the researcher's reflection of the collection and interpretation process.

Confirmability

 To ensure confirmability every participant was asked the same questions in the same order during the first interview (Appendix B). The second interview for each participant confirmed the results from the first interview and proceeded to the second set

of questions (Appendix C. Saturation occurred when similar codes and themes were being found for new participants.

Intra and Inter Coder Reliability

All the interviews were conducted by the researcher, a journal was also kept by the researcher and was on hand for all phone interviews that recorded any information that may have pertained to the research. The researcher was also the sole person that imported and transcribed the interviews and data, therefore inter coder reliability was not applicable. Peer review member checks as stated above were utilized.

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Ethical Procedures

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Before I completed my Chapters 1-3 in this dissertation, I successfully finished a web-based training course titled "Protecting Human Research Participants" by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and received a certificate of completion that was part of a core class through Walden University. I submitted an application to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Once I gained approval, I contacted the administrators of the Veteran Facebook pages a requested permission to send the survey link to veterans that have completed their degrees online.

Ethical procedures conducted during the selection, interview, coding and publishing process included release of liability forms from the researcher and to the participants to ensure the participants knew their information will be utilized only for research. While each participant shared their contact information, their service, and their disability, the information was only be used for this research only. Their names and identifying information were not published, and their names and personal data were

coded using a unique identifier in the database. The data is kept on a secure laptop that stays in my home and is password protected. The use of pseudo names for each participant were also used and referenced in the study. Once the study was completed, all interviews, information about participants and all data including the journal will be destroyed after 2-3 years.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the main points were the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology including participant pool collection, instrumentation utilized, data analyses plan, trustworthiness, and procedure for data collection. IRB. The consent form is found in Appendix C. The research questions, interview questions are provided in Appendices B and C. The following Chapter will discuss results found in the data collection after interviews and after data was analyzed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This general interview qualitative study focused on the lived experience from the student veterans that had attended an online university or their college through online courses. The following research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?

Subquestion 1a: Do disabled student veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the average nondisabled student veteran? If so, how?

Subquestion 1b: Do nondisabled veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the disabled veteran? If so, how?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How have the tools within LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?

Subquestion 2a. What type of online learning experiences have helped veterans to reach their educational goals?

Subquestion 2b. What specific tools that are part of learning management systems (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) have student veterans successfully used to obtain their college degree? How have they used these tools?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What specific obstacles in the online environment hinder student veterans from completing their degree online?

Subquestion 3a. What military experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

Subquestion 3b. What veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

Chapter 4 encompasses the following information: the setting, demographics, data collection, data analyses , evidence of trustworthiness, the results, and finally the summary. I will also go into detail regarding the findings that emerged from this research, and identify themes related to the research questions.

Setting

This study was an interview based qualitative study that took place with telephone and Skype interviews with six veterans in the United States. After I selected the participants, the veterans were allowed to schedule their two phone interviews at their convenience. While most interviews were conducted in the evening after work or dinner, a few of them happened during the day because two veterans were located on a different time zone than me. While I preferred to do a Skype interview and record each veteran, this was not feasible for each interview and one was hand transcribed. Every interviewee had different requirements, and while Skype was a preferred method, it was not ideal for each interview. Thus, I needed to have options for each interview, which included iPhone interview that was recorded on the iPhone and sent to a file on my laptop. Another method was a Skype interview, where the audio portion was recorded, and finally the last method which was a hand scribe method, where all the responses were recorded on paper. The first interview was hand scribed, as the interviewee was very nervous about speaking on Skype and could not be called using an iPhone device.

All the interviews were recorded and were conducted at different times at the convenience of participants' schedule. After the consent form was signed and sent back to each veteran, the first interview took place. The second interview was also completed at the veteran's schedule and the first interview answers were reviewed and transcribed before the second interview took place. Each participant was provided time to examine the letter of consent and after they had signed theirs and sent back. I did the same with each participant, so they had their own copy to maintain the requirements from IRB. Before each interview, I introduced myself, asked consent to record our conversation, and then began the interviews.

Demographics

The veterans in this study were selected from a pool of over 20 veterans that served in the military and went to school online who had completed an eligibility survey on Google Forms. The six veterans that were invited to complete the interviews from the poll of survey were all prior enlisted, completed their college degrees online, served within the last 15 years, and were from the US Army, Air Force, Navy and two from the Coast Guard. The six veterans were four female and two ale, and all responded to the survey and the invitation to complete two interviews at approximately 30 minutes each. No other demographic information was collected on these participants in order to ensure privacy, a practice recommended by Lancaster (2017) when doing qualitative interview studies.

Data Collection

Data collection began shortly after I received approval from IRB at Walden University (approval # 07-11-19-0360765). After testing my questions as I outlined above with a fellow veteran that I knew from my years in the service, I checked for errors in the questions and made sure they were ready. I then submitted my survey request to the administrations of five different veterans' sites on Facebook to post a survey link for my research study. The sites were Veterans to Veterans, Women Veterans, Maine Women Veterans, Veterans Now What, and US Military Vets. The surveys were live on the Facebook sites for five days, then after accumulating over 25 Veterans, I turned off the link on each Facebook Veteran's site. After selecting ten Veterans that fit my criteria of learning online, only enlisted personnel, different service groups, and a selection of both men and women, I sent out emails inviting them to complete my consent form. Out of the ten people I emailed, six came back and signed consent forms and sent them back signed. As soon as I received their consent form, I signed my copy and sent it back to them, and then scheduled their first interview.

The phone, Skype, and iPhone recorded interviews were conducted all within an 8 day period with some interviews being scheduled the same day, one in the morning and one after dinner, but with two different veterans. One veteran requested that his interview occur in the same day with a break between, so I accommodated each request and did member checking from the previous interview. The interview questions in this study were open ended. During the interviews, I not only recorded each reply but also wrote extensive notes in my journal outlining questions that were answered with notable

differences. If answers to interview questions were significantly similar to another veterans', I noted that in my notes. Many questions were answered in the same way with almost the exact same answers.

Every interview was at least 20 minutes long with a different set of questions for the first interview for non and disabled veterans. Each interview ended with an open question to add any additional information and the second interview began with a summary of the first questions, and also requesting to record the second interview. Each interview's notes and comments were reviewed before moving onto another interview for themes and notes that participants may have replies that were significantly different than another's.

Each recording (including the one that was hand transcribed) was kept on the researcher's laptop for transcribing and each transcription was put into a word document. Each interview totaled around 5-8 pages with overall totals over 45 pages of transcribed interviews. I then turned around the transcriptions to each veteran for member checking. None of the veterans responded with changes on their transcript.

While once each interview started, there were no problems in technology and recording. In the case of two interviews from the beginning I had to use my cell phone to record the session and not utilize Skype that had its own recording device installed. Initially I had installed a free recording device with free calling on my cell phone, but while initiating the first call I found that it called the wrong number and the gentleman that I spoke to was very irate. I then called the first interviewee from my landline that not have Skype or any other technology available and hand transcribed her entire interview.

Data Analysis

For this research, I decided to divide my research into multiple stages in order to find consistencies and themes within the data. The first step after transcribing all the interviews, was to review my notes from my own journal, this held important keys to find key components and codes that stood out. The coding process that was utilized was to find patterns through the interview questions to collaborate the findings and resolve my research questions. An example of this type of code established through a consistent pattern in the interview was the overall positive experience that each interviewee had with most of their online colleges. Overall, the codes that emerged were positive and negative experiences around their learning online and finishing their degree but with some differences in learning management systems, support from the VA, how disabilities impacted online learning, and how interacting with other students impacted their online learning.

After each completed interview, I reviewed my journal notes and ensured that the recording was saved in two places for safe keeping. With reviewing my journal notes, I noted themes became apparent after the data showed saturation of the same answer time again. One example of a theme was the usage of the learning management system and the background that each interviewee had acquired with computer skills and IT experience within their active duty in the service. While five out of the six interviewees had utilized Blackboard as their learning management system, one response that was discrepant was the interviewee named Walter that had started his learning experience earlier in time when it was still distance learning. Thus, Walter's experience was radically different than

the other interviewees, since he did not have much experience with learning online but had important things to contribute to the overall study.

With the second step, I analyzed the transcripts noting consistencies in the different interviews or noting examples of answers that were significantly different than the other veterans. In addition, I found several quotable items that were significant in the study. While reviewing the transcripts I found patterns in the responses and began to formulate a common theme in the data. Many veterans have positive and negative experiences during their time in college, and how they applied their education to their current positions. As noted earlier, distinguishing between disabled and non-disabled veterans were important to see how veterans with or without disabilities viewed their educational process. The common codes that emerged from the data were disability benefits, instructor professionalism, project collaboration with other students, treatment of other veterans in class, military experiences, their responsibilities while in college, computer skills, learning management system familiarity.

With the common codes, I then was able to move onto other identifiers that made the open coding process viable. Open codes emerged such as their injury in the service, what job they needed to move into if disabled, what veterans' services were available to them because of their injury, their need to use their GI Bill benefits, the software each veteran needed to master for their courses, and how other students were viewed that were not service connected. I then organized the codes in different ways to show how themes and consistencies were met and then applied this to my data collection. My method of

hand coding as an analysis tool provided great analyses of the data by utilizing the participants' common answers that often was repetitive of another interview in this study.

My narrative on the results shows how the perceptions of a veteran in college learning on line embodies their need to complete their degree in order to move onto the next step after their military career. My results also showed that military culture emphasizes physical toughness and self-sufficiency, that further explained why some student veterans are reluctant to ask for additional services (Osborne, 2016). In addition, this research showed how each student found their professors very professional but sometimes hard to reach during weekends and evenings. The veterans' administration experience in each veteran was different but overall positive since they all used their GI Bill or another support program.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness during my research, I applied the research methods of that of Miles et al. (2014) to integrate the specific steps that I utilized in my data collection. The following sections will address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure this study is trustworthy.

Credibility

During the initial planning on this study, credibility was enforced in the very beginning stages of development and especially when it came to selecting the veterans in the study. It was very important that my recipients in this study were not only enlisted personnel that had attended college, but also that had studied online after time in the service, in order to ensure my data would show a varied amount of experiences in

college. Each participant was given a copy of the transcript of their interview to offer a chance for their input.

Transferability

The interview process with open ended questions lends the ability to be able to transfer this study to other similar research with other veterans and their learning experiences online. The appropriate strategies to establish transferability was to ensure all interview protocols were exactly the same with little to none sidetracking off the exact interview question, as well as each interview protocol began and ended the same way. The variation of the participant selection entailed different service members from the different branches of the US Military, which included two interviewees from the US Coast Guard, two interviewees from the US Army, one interviewee from the US Navy, and one from the US Air Force. Finding different participants through the initial survey responses was the most important aspect of finding rich individuals that would help my research.

Dependability

The research plan that was established for this dissertation was determined after studying the Miles et al. (2014) text on how to provide the results of the study through a matrix that showed all the research questions. The interview protocol was selected in order to obtain the answers to the research questions while obtaining information on their experiences related to the veterans studying online. My use of journaling during the interview process and reviewing the transcripts of all the interviews ensured interpretations of the data is devoid of researcher bias.

While there was no pilot study for my research, I did conduct a trial interview with a friend of mine who not only served in the military, studied online, and is also disabled. This provided me with a guideline on how my interviews would flow and while I did not change any of the interview questions, I did reorder them so they would not repeat and be repetitive in nature. I found this to be quite helpful and provided me with a practice interview session and feedback from a veteran that I had been stationed with a few times in my career and also had earned his MBA online. Interestingly, I found myself trying to keep this mock interview on track and not last over three hours, since he went into long details about his experiences. This provided me input on how to start my interview processes with the six veterans I interviewed and to keep them on track and not run long or go off topic.

Confirmability

As defined in Chapter 3, the methodology and the approach in which to obtain the results of this study were discussed in detail. The most important aspect of this research was to ensure there was no bias as my own time as a graduate student who studied online for my masters and doctoral degrees. Utilizing an objective approach during the interviews and analyzing the data was integral to ensure confirmability of this research. To ensure confirmability, every participant was asked the same questions in the same order during the first interview (Appendix E). The second interview for each participant confirmed the results from the first interview and proceed to the second set of questions (Appendix F). Saturation occurred when codes and themes were consistent from interview to interview.

Results

The six veterans in the study were all very different in their experiences in the

military and offered rich experiences on why they attended college online. Each of them

had different levels of education at the end of their educational journey, ranging from a

Trade certificate, Associates Degree, to Bachelors, Masters, and one Doctorate degree.

All veterans noted different colleges they had attended, some ranging from common

online universities, to large colleges in the United States.

Table 1

Demographic Information for the Student Veterans in the Study.

Name (Pseudo)	Disabled/Non-Disabled	Service Branch	Degree Obtained
Ms. Jennifer	Disabled	Navy	Bachelor's Degree
Ms. Katherine	Disabled	Army	Bachelor's Degree
Ms. Samantha	Non-Disabled	Air Force	Bachelor's Degree
Mr. James	Disabled	Coast Guard	PhD
Mr. Walter	Non-Disabled	Coast Guard	Associates Degree
Ms. Ivy	Disabled	Army	Associates Degree

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: What are the perceptions of online student

veterans toward online learning? The student veterans in this study had been separated

from systems and people they relied upon in the military for years, and most do not feel

that they can relate to traditional civilian students due to differences in age, maturity, and

lack of understanding of the military experience (Adams, Lee & Holden, 2019). The

themes from this research question were physical abilities, outlook on online learning,

and communication with other students. This research question was addressed by both disabled and non-disabled veterans during the first interview.

A great deal of the answers created a theme of the student veteran's physical ability to attend a college course. My coding showed that all veterans had physical reasons for studying online. For example: Interviewee Ms. Ivy stated "Online learning was easier and didn't have all the pressure in the classroom. Since I have PTSD, I could not handle a lot of instructors that might would not understand my disability." Mr. Walter concluded that he found studying much more flexible than being in a conventional classroom since he had physical limitations. Mr. James, who was injured in the Coast Guard could not walk around campus due to knee injuries and had limited mobility, thus found online learning well suited to his needs.

Another example of physical limitations does not occur because of a disability, but that of a required need to alter patterns of learning. Ms. Jennifer who lived on a remote island, since her husband was stationed there, had no physical alternative to online learning. Ms. Katherine, who was a single mother found online learning to be the only solution to splitting her time learning and raising her daughters. The physical aspect of learning online for different reasons was important to all veterans in this study.

Each veteran had a previous positive outlook on online learning from a past experience or was referred to learn online. When each veteran was asked how they heard about online learning, the responses varied but stayed in the same theme. Ms. Jennifer reported that she heard studying online was much easier, and that she could work on her own time. Mr. Walter who began his online learning experience in the early 1990's

reported that he heard positive reports and found distance learning to be a viable answer to his limited schedule. Ms. Samantha, who completed her degree online heard online learning was 'convenient' and needed the flexibility to manage her busy life with her daughters.

The lack of communication or collaboration with other non-military students in an online course, was another theme that emerged from the data. Communication is key to transition to civilian life in addition to pursuing a college education (Adams et.al., 2019). While communication is key for every veteran, one thing that was clear, was the great divide between military and non-military students. One interviewee Mr. James stated, "I preferred taking courses with other military personnel, because they understood my method of speaking and short answers." Ms. Samantha stated, "most regular students in the classroom don't understand our blunt and direct military communication style."

Mr. James specifically noted when he took courses with other military personnel, they understood his abrupt nature in answering questions that would not necessarily go well in a conventional classroom. Ms. Jennifer also stated that nonmilitary students did not understand the drive military students have, they were lacking the drive to complete their programs and did not share in the work on collaborative assignments.

Subquestion 1a asked: Do disabled student veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the average non-disabled student veteran? If so, how? The perceptions of online learning before each disabled student veteran in the study were consistent with little variations. A number of veterans pursue an academic program while contending with a disability (Osborne, 2016) and thus to move to online learning as an

option. Ms. Jennifer stated early in her first interview that she had heard that taking courses online was the easiest way to get her classwork done on her schedule. Since she reported that she had migraines from the service, migraines would keep her from attending a conventional class with tight schedules, but online learning gave her more flexibility. Ms. Ivy also reported that "it was easier to take online courses and didn't have all the pressure of taking a class in the classroom." She also stated that since she suffered from PTSD, she did not think the instructors would understand her limitations and found online learning to be a better fit.

Mr. James, the one participant that had taken many courses online while in the service, reported that his experiences helped him make his decision to take courses online after he retired from the service. He began taking courses online to complete his master's degree from Capella University after the service and had heard good things about the college and their online learning program. Overall the perception of taking courses from all the veterans interviewed that classified as disabled were consistently positive. Ms. Katherine reported that she began taking courses in the Army before she began taking courses after she left the military. Ms. Jennifer reported that heard that it was a lot easier to take courses online tan in a classroom. Their reasons for taking courses were different, but that is addressed in RQ2.

Mr. Walter and Ms. Samantha were the two participants in the study that were not considered disabled from injuries incurred from the service and identified themselves as non-disabled veterans. Both had heard positive things about online learning and wanted to complete their associate degrees online while working. Since neither had physical

issues prohibiting them from going to classes at a brick and mortar college, their reasoning to take online courses was due to their work schedule after leaving the service. Ms. Samantha reported that "I heard about the convenience of taking online courses, and that being a military dependent, and anywhere my husband was, I could take them." Mr. Walter reported that he did not hear a thing about online learning from others but did his own research and decided it was the best program in graphic design that he could find. He also stated that he wanted to just learn something new, and this was the best way to take courses as he could not find anything local at a community college and did not want to travel to work on his degree.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked: How have LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree? Five of the six veterans Ms. Samantha, Mr. James, Ms. Jennifer, Ms. Ivy and Ms. Kathleen had utilized Learning Management Systems while working online on their college degree from the beginning of their journey with their colleges. Mr. Walter however began his educational journey through a distance learning course environment that had very little collaboration or technology since his courses were taken before LMS's were implemented in colleges. Mr. Walter did switch colleges however midway through his degree and learned how to work in Blackboard the LMS at his online university. He stated the learning curve was there, but he persisted and 'found the environment user friendly.'

Four out of the five remaining veterans Ms. Samantha, Mr. James, Ms. Jennifer, Ms. Ivy, and Ms. Katherine in this study utilized Blackboard through their college

degrees and found the environment user friendly overall. The students in this study found

their Blackboard environment easy to manage through after working through issues,

found their syllabus, saw their past courses, and future requirements. Ms. Jennifer

reported that "Blackboard took a while to get used too, I wasn't exactly tech friendly at

first, but grew into it." Ms. Jennifer reported that while she utilized the Blackboard

environment and found it useful, she still had problems communicating to her instructors

since she was located on an island in the Pacific and most instructors were in different

time zones. Ms. Katherine reported that she had also used blackboard at her community

college and found it very friendly to keep track of what courses she needed to complete

her degree.

        Subquestion 2a asked: What type of online learning experiences have helped

veterans to reach their educational goals? The interviewees all had different experiences

in the military and knowledge of how to use technology. All but one interviewee (Mr.

Walter) had experience with LMSs while learning online. The one interviewee that had

taken courses from a distance learning platform did not experience a learning

management system. Mr. Walter stated: "My courses were computer based but were only

told what to read and what to write on and take tests. I knew what was expected through

the syllabus, and each assignment in the syllabus."

        Subquestion 2b asked: What specific tools that are part of learning management

systems (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) have student veterans successfully used to

obtain their college degree? How have they used these tools? Each of the veterans had

some computer experience in the military, and one of them Mr. James took extensive

courses online to work on his bachelor and master's degrees. While all six of the veterans had different experiences, all reported during the interviews that they needed to be well versed in MS Word, Excel, Google Research, Adobe products, and Skype for connecting with their instructors during their time taking online courses. While none of the veterans in this study were provided a computer by the Veterans Administration, all reported they were prepared for their online course by providing their own laptop or desktop computer.

The tools that were part of the learning management Blackboard were collaboration environments, places to upload their work, but most of their tools were expected to be on their own personal computers for the duration of the course. All veterans in the study reported that the assignments needed to be uploaded either in MS Word, or PDF files into Blackboard. All students utilized Blackboard tools to download their syllabus and integrate it into their calendar. Mr. James reported that he used the calendar tool in Blackboard to download and program his entire schedule with homework and discussion posts, with reminders of when everything was due in each course. He found this to be valuable as Mr. James was taking multiple courses at once. Ms. Jennifer reported that she "liked that she could go in, leave responses to discussion posts, or log in a certain time, like sitting in a regular classroom. I could pay attention to my family, and then go finish. That helped a lot." Ms. Jennifer stated that while blackboard was a good tool, it took her some time to get used to it. Ms. Katherine reported that at the beginning of using blackboard she found it to not be user friendly. Once she obtained, she stated "just being available to access my classroom no matter where I was, was incredibly helpful."

Research Question 3

      Research question 3 asked: What specific obstacles in the online environment hinder student veterans from completing their degree online? The theme that emerged from obstacles in the online environment was the collaboration with other students. It was notable that all six veteran students in my research overcame this obstacle. This theme was consistent in all the interviews with the student veterans. Mr. James reported that he had issues while he was traveling with his family and trying to keep up with his coursework through his PhD program. One instance where he had a deadline, and found himself traveling, he missed his deadline to turn in an assignment while traveling. The professor did not allow for him to turn in the assignment late, so for the first time his grade was lowered. Mr. James mentioned, he never made that mistake again. Mr. Walter stated he very little communication with other students, while Ms. Jennifer had a whole different experience with other students, especially veterans in the classroom. She stated that other veterans in the class did not believe she was a mechanic in the military, as she was a 'girl'. This created for her a negative experience dealing with other veterans in the classroom but was patient and moved on from that negative experience. Ms. Katherine had a negative experience as well in the online classroom, finding other students to be procrastinators on group projects, and had to support the entire project on her own. She reported that while she communicated the issue with the instructor, everyone in the group was given the same grade due to her hard work.

      Subquestion 3a asked: What military experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals? While all participants had greatly

different experiences in the military from different services or even time in service, Ms. Jennifer reported extensively of an experience that not only hindered her from reaching her educational goals but hindered her from keeping a job. Ms. Ivy reported on her experience and dealing with anxiety from sexual assault in the military. She found that working was difficult, as she found most experience or dealing with people difficult and decided to slow down and take courses online. One instructor even recommended that she take valium in order to take tests in the classroom to help her manage. Ms. Ivy reported that she found testing environments too noisy, so moved all her classes online and had no further problems. If she struggled online, she did repeat a course or two in order to pass. While Ms. Ivy struggled even in her online learning environment, she was awarded her degree in business after six years.

Subquestion 3b asked: What veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals? While many veterans had positive experiences on reaching their educational goals, there were a few consistencies in collaborating with other students in the classroom. Discussion posts found on many LMSs with students that were not military or younger traditional students were difficult to communicate with. Ms. Katherine stated: "Many students would procrastinate so much on group projects that I had a hard time dealing with other students. This was a very negative experience, when everyone was getting the same grade." Ms. Ivy even reported she had a bad experience with another veteran student, who did not consider women veterans equal and yet another experience with a collaborative project with a 'rich kid' that did not care about the other students.

One theme that was consistent in this research was the negative outlook of taking an online course with students that were not military or expected to collaborate with nonmilitary or younger students. All but one interviewee stated that collaborative or group projects were loaded with problems, since younger students tended to have less engagement or procrastinated on projects. Ms. Samantha stated, "The students that were not veterans did not participate in group projects that much, they didn't hold their end of the bargain." Ms. Jennifer also reported that while she had other students on a collaborative project, they procrastinated so much that she had problems finishing the project. Ms. Jennifer stated "everyone once in a while, we would have to do teamwork type projects, and definitely we all logged in at once, it was like a chatroom. A lot of my fellow students were 'hippies' and had their thing in mind and we clashed quiet often. " When she took on the project on her own, she advised the instructor what had happened, but all received the same grade. While Mr. James reported he had collaborative projects with others, he found working with non-veterans and veterans alike to be inspirational and tended to lead them to success in each project. It is this researcher's opinion that Mr. James was a leader and inspirational guide for most students in his classes since he was working on his PhD.

A common theme for obstacles was the ability to get solid online access and a computer that each veteran would have to rely on. Mr. James replied to one question: "While I was out of the military I was still contracted through the military, so was on a 'watch rotation', it was hard to be consistent with logging on and getting homework done in time if I was working nonstop." Ms. Samantha reported that she did have problems

getting access at a certain time when a professor was working from Alaska. Internet problems were common from some of the places she was stationed, she had to go to the local library often. Ms. Katherine reported "IT reported that it was my own issue, so I had to go to the library to get a reliable connection."

None of the veterans received a computer from the Veterans Administration or support for high speed access, Mr. James and Ms. Samantha did receive support for their materials in class, such as textbooks. For those interviewees that had family responsibilities Mr. James and Ms. Samantha the VA did help them with paying for daycare and support. Ms. Katherine reported that at the time as a spouse she was not aware of how the VA would help her with her education but is very aware now of the assistance that was available to her.

The theme was consistent throughout all veterans and found online learning to be a lonely effort without the support of the conventional classroom social structure. Ms. Samantha reported "I did not feel connected in most classes, but overall I never felt connected for the online experience." Ms. Ivy reported that while she was in school "turning to the instructor was frustrating, sometimes an assistant would respond to your question, but normally you were on your own." In addition, Mr. James reported that since he was not only a single father with limited time, he was also working full time in the government sector which made his conversing with his instructors difficult as it was often late at night or early in the morning. Ms. Jennifer also reported that she felt very alone during her education, as her husband was deployed but was raising a young child

on her own. "I was taking one class a month, and that was the entire class, and that was really rough." Ms. Jennifer found that her paper schedule was hard to complete.

Summary

The qualitative interview process for all the veterans was lengthy but completed using three different recording technologies, and over 30 hours of transcribing time. The results were not surprisingly consistent if the veteran was active duty then took college classes online after incurring an injury while in the service. While all veterans took courses online, all but two of them took courses because not only they needed to complete courses with more flexibility for their disability but also for familial restraints.

All six veterans had fantastic learning experiences with their professors and instructors. The one consistent experience was the collective experience of all veterans working with students that were not veteran students. All participants viewed other college students as different, as they did not take their college courses as seriously as the veterans did. The results of my study after analyzing and replaying the interviews over again for many hours, showed many consistencies in course requirements, reasons for taking courses online, experiences with other students both military and nonmilitary students. Chapter 5 will cover the interpretation of the findings from the research study, limitations on the research study as well as further research and implications to positive social change, and conclusion thus capturing the essence of the research study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this general interview qualitative research was to explore the veteran students' experiences with collegiate online learning for veterans that are restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons. The key findings in this research were the themes derived from the codes related to the experiences that each interviewee had while attending college online. The six interviewees were from various places in the United States, had served in various parts of the US Military as enlisted personnel, and attended college online and obtained their degree. Conducting this general qualitative interview study was unique because while the veteran population is commonly studied, this study focused on the difference of a disabled and nondisabled student veteran and their experiences while attending college online. The results of this study could provide Veterans' Administrations with insights on how to guide veterans who might not be able to attend brick and mortar classrooms and what to expect with online learning.

Through the utilization of Facebook Veterans' groups, the veterans responded to a survey request to contribute their information to be selected for my research. While over 30 veterans responded, only 10 were viable to contribute to the research due to their time in service, or if they were an officer or enlisted. In addition, I selected veterans who only studied online versus partially in classroom and online. While I had selected 10 veterans to move forward, only six of them responded to the email with the confidentiality release and further communication. Thus, the six Veterans became the interviewees and were

sent the confidentiality agreement, and then the first interviews were scheduled. After all signed consent forms were received, all interviews were conducted between July 22, 2019 through July 29, 2019. All interviewees were scheduled two different interviews over 1 week, and after the first interview were sent transcripts of the first interview before the second interview commenced. All of the interviews took between 20-40 minutes, and the disabled veterans in the study were given a different set of questions for the first interview than the nondisabled veterans.

Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this general qualitative interview study was to explore the student veterans' success through collegiate online learning for veterans that were restricted from the conventional classroom for various reasons. This research was completed with regards to the limitations, struggles, and challenges that a student veteran may face in college. In addition, among most undergraduates in college, veteran students tended to be older students who are married, employed, and had family dependents, compared with students who did not serve in the military (Schonfeld et al., 2015). These differences can cause additional stressors and challenges. My research encompassed not only the struggles that a student veteran encountered in completing conventional classroom college courses, but also any potential issues that may have occurred while enrolled in the online learning platform offered by most colleges.

My findings showed one of the largest challenges is most veterans feel that they cannot relate to traditional civilian students due to differences in age, maturity, and lack of understanding of their military experiences (see Adams et al., 2017) and that this

perception kept them isolated from other students. When asked during interviews if the veterans in my research felt when other students found out they had served in the military, all replied that there were few responses. However, when working in a collaborative environment, the veteran student reported that most nonmilitary students did not take their college courses seriously, and the veteran students had to do most of the work.

Many colleges have implemented programs for student veterans, as it is well documented that student veterans have challenges in the transition from military life to campus life (Adams, Lee & Holden, 2017). While my literature review showed how college groups have supported veterans in this transition, like the Student Veteran Association of America (SVA), none of the veterans in this study utilized any support groups for veterans at their colleges. Future research to evaluate how online veteran students could utilize support for their courses would be ideal.

College administrations have also educated their faculty and administrators to prepare them for this type of nontraditional student (Adams et al., 2017), but none of this was found in the interviewee's responses. In addition, while some colleges offer programs that provide referrals to outside agencies and community partners such as the Veterans Administration and other providers (Caton, 2018), this was also not evident during my interviews.

Colleges all around the country have implemented more and more online courses for the non-traditional student that needs to stay home or study remotely (Cass & Hammond, 2015). The unique needs of veteran students as they prepare to transition from

combat to college, and the importance of online technologies and online courses were essential for any veteran to integrate into college life (Cass & Hammond, 2015). As my literature review has shown the challenges that service members are enduring while acclimating themselves to their new environment of learning, can be extremely daunting (Sportsman & Thomas, 2018). Each disabled veteran in my study was content their ability to complete their degree online since they were having difficulties in the conventional classroom. Ms. Jennifer reported that while she tried to attend classes in a conventional classroom she stated "I would have numerous flare ups that would make me absent a lot, or I would have to leave" the classroom. In addition, Mr. James also stated that in the service he fell down a hatchway on a ship, injured his back and knees, thus making it hard for him to walk distances. When asked specifically why he didn't attend classes on campus he stated; "just walking on campus was hard enough for me to endure, I would be in so much pain I wouldn't be able to function" in the classroom. While four of the veterans in my study had medical problems incurred from the service that made learning in the classroom difficult, the other two veterans chose online learning due to familial obligations.

Gonzales and Elliott (2016) investigated college instructors' willingness to help student veterans in the classroom and found prior experience with student veterans or current military students determined how they evaluated and interacted with them in the classroom. My research confirmed these findings, as interviewees reported that if the instructor had taught veterans in the past, they understood their challenges more and were more forgiving. Mr. James reported in his second interview: "One time I was driving

across country with my family and was working a contract with the military. During my travels I lost the ability to turn in an assignment on time, since I could not access the internet in the middle of country at our hotel. I tried to explain this to my instructor, but at that point it was already late. It hurt my GPA, but I never missed an assignment again."

Romero, Riggs, and Ruggero (2015) examined the need for a social support system for student veterans that have symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Their research investigated how student veterans' family support networks impact their ability to cope in college and deal with any psychological symptoms that may cause problems during their educational journey. In my research, Mr. James spoke of his educational trials as he was a single father during his master's program, and then remarried during his doctoral degree. Mr. James spoke of how he was required to move across country during one semester near the end of his doctoral degree and found that not only was his changing family supportive, but also his superiors at his job. He found that this made his journey easier, and while he had to give up a lot of personal time, his family especially understood his need to finish his education.

Past research suggested that combined social connections with other students in the classroom and support from instructors might be effective in helping student veterans integrate into collegiate life (Blaauw-Hara, 2016). All the veterans in this study reported they had some experience with online learning before entering college and had some experience with the educational tools required to complete the course. Blaaw-Hara (2016) reported that it is important that military personnel have received the tools to work and study hard while in the military in order to become successful in college afterwards.

Transitions from the military to be a college student were also reported in my research as many of the veterans found going right into college challenging. Osborn (2016) reported that students who are veterans have unique life challenges that may often serve as barriers on college campuses, which can include family, job, health issues and mental challenges. Additionally, a moderate number of veterans pursue an academic program while contending with a disability and are subsequently unaware of college resources available and may be too ashamed to ask (Osborne, 2016).

Two educational models contributed to my conceptual framework and guided my research: the student integration model (Tinto, 2007) and Malcolm Knowles' andragogy (Knowles, 1970; Henry, 2011). My research questions encompassed the integration model by Tinto, as well as the adult learning andragogy by Knowles. The student integration model by Vincent Tinto detailed how each student begins their typical four year university with different attributes, family models, and experiences. This was important to relate to my research questions as all my interviewees were adults entering four year online universities to complete their degree. The Tinto model can be divided up into two categories; academic integration and student integration. Academic integration refers to how a student perceives their performance in a course, and how their personal development is self-valued as they move through their collegiate learning (Tinto, 1975) and whether or not they have academic self-esteem and if they are enjoying their subjects.

The academic integration aspect of the Tinto model was well presented in my research. In response to one question in my research regarding what skills did they have

now that they did not have while in the service, the answers were consistent. All veterans in my study reported they now had patience, confidence and were proud of their accomplishments of their online learning. The academic integration model is consistent in my findings as all six of the veterans in the study concluded their educational journeys and moved onto new careers with their degrees. All of the veterans in the study considered their college journeys to improve their self-worth and image.

Tinto (1975) also reported that how student veterans would identify as being a college student is very important to make sure they fully integrate into college life. While identification is important when they are taking online courses, it was apparent during the interviews that all of the interviewees identified themselves as veterans first, and students second. Self-identifying veterans identified themselves as military first, and then as a student with family responsibilities as a close third. Veterans have difficulty fully integrating into college life and experience a "lack of community" compared with their military experience, and academic difficulties such as inadequate readjustment time, problems with study habits (Schonfeld et al., 2015).

Tinto's research and theories about the concept of integration of support are essential in college academic support programs for retaining and supporting the student. This research study found that all six of the veterans in the study had very little contact with administrators, other than to register for courses and most of that was done through the learning management system. The findings relative to support were well built LMSs that detailed the course and study plan for each student to complete their degree. Support included administrator contact, instructor support, syllabus expectations, IT support,

extensions, homework deadlines and course expectations. All of the veterans in the study were consistent with having very little contact with administrators if any at all. Ms. Ivy reported "I was involved with the VOCAB program at the VA, so had more support from them than the college I was attending. They understood my disability and if I failed a course or exam were forgiving on letting me repeat a course." Therefore, my research results conflicted with Tinto's concept of providing college academic support programs to assist the veteran.

Tinto (1975) also established that personal contact with academics (instructors or professors) is utmost of importance when dealing with student engagement. When interviewees in this study were asked about how they were treated by administrators and instructors they stated they were treated fairly, but overall had minimal contact with instructors. Most veterans in this study had reported that they had no conversations with administrators, as they registered online for courses. On the other hand, all communications with instructors were limited, unless there was a need to turn in an assignment late. Mr. James reported that while he was driving his family across country, he was having difficulties finding a reliable internet connection. His assignment for his PhD course was two hours late, he communicated with his professor, but was not given forgiveness and his GPA dropped a small amount. Mr. James never repeated that mistake of missing a deadline for the rest of his degree. This lack of contact with faculty, and subsequent lack of engagement in learning, by the veterans in my study confirm Tinto's theory.

The integration of military students into the online college environment was found to be challenging for my interviewees. Ms. Katherine reports: "While I wasn't the only Veteran in my class, I tended to be the only female Veteran which caused problems as they didn't consider me as a military person. It was also difficult to work with other students that were not military, as their focus was different, and they tended to procrastinate and wait till an assignment was due."

Knowles andragogy involves contract learning and self-directed lifelong learning which a key component was to create my research questions. Knowles had the conviction that person's meaning in reaching their educational goals that people set for themselves and this applied to all of my veterans in my research. Similarly, the veterans in my study had their own goals and completion of those courses/goals and how they might overcome obstacles to reach those goals .

A significant theme that was apparent in all six veterans' experiences while attending college online was their consistent goal and ambition to complete their degrees without disrupting their normal routine. All of them stated that the reason they needed to complete their degree was to move on to better roles and feel better about who they were after the military. Ms. Katherine commented, "the ability to learn online allowed me to work when I was able to, through work, family and my disability." Three of the four veterans in the study that classified themselves as disabled tried the in classroom approach before moving onto online learning because of the inability to attend classes successfully due to the nature of their disabilities. Ms. Katherine reported that she had regular migraine headaches that were very hard for her to manage if she tried to attend

class. Her and other veterans in the study chose to move their education entirely online

after unsuccessful attempts in the brick and mortar classroom. Colleges strive to cater to

returning veterans but have not developed ways to accommodate them within classrooms

and on campuses with appropriate support services, effective instructional strategies, and

goals for the veteran in the classroom (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015). Until this happens,

most veterans will move toward a different solution in order to complete their college

education.

The Romero, Riggs, and Ruggero (2015) research examined the contribution of

family support is critical in a students' success in college. Their research even went

further to state that anxiety and depression can be related to lack of social support, and

this was also consistent with three of the veterans in the study. Ms. Katherine and Ms.

Samantha reported they were single parents and had some support from family which

confirms Romero, Riggs, and Ruggero (2015) research. Ms. Jennifer reported that her

husband was deployed, and she also had children to take care of. Mr. James, at the

beginning of his educational journey, was a single parent, married again and then had

more support to finish his Doctoral Degree. Mr. Walter and Ms. Ivy had no obligations

with family at the time but were holding down jobs that encouraged them to continue

their studies. My research study results supported the Romero, Riggs, and Ruggero

(2015) research findings that family support is integral when veterans are completing

their college education.

As described in Chapter 2, the ADA legislation amendment of 2008 outlined that

all college students have equal opportunity to succeed during their educational journeys.

The opportunity for all students to succeed whether they have no limitations, or many disabilities was another theme in the results of this research study, called accommodations. While each disabled veteran in the study had a service connected disability that kept them from a conventional classroom, the veterans that were not self-declared as disabled learned online due to learning problems not associated with any injury. Accommodations included for these disabled veterans were computer support, instructor support, learning assistance, extra time, technology assistance and computer support. For example, Ms. Ivy reported in her first interview, that she struggled with taking Algebra, and finally after the third time, found a teacher that would help her take her test in her office and passed.

Knowles (1950) stated that adults in self-directed lifelong learning acquire the skills they need to achieve the potential of their personalities; understand the essential values in the heritage of the tradition and knowledge that bind people together; and understand society and become mindful in directing social change (Knowles, 1950). In relation to acquiring the skills needed for lifelong learning, Mr. James reported: "While I was still in the military, I took every course I could find, and actually obtained five degrees through DANTES, and then took two years of college through Capella University. I obtained my master's degree in Informational Technology and finally finished my PhD last January."

The second aspect of the Knowles theory in regards to the essential values in the heritage of the tradition and knowledge that bind people together was well represented when interviewing Mr. James. Mr. James stated during his second interview regarding

experiences with other students that "every time I was working and people asked me about my college work, I would try to talk them into taking couses and inspired many other veterans to take classes online." and the other veterans in the study as they were all lifelong learners. It is important to note, that Mr. James continuously works in his field in the military as a contractor with his PhD and makes a great impact on others in his field to become lifelong learners. Ms. Jennifer also reported that while she wanted to give up her educational goals, she pushed through and completed her degree. Mr. Walter also noted that while he found restrictions on obtaining a local college degree, he pursued an online degree instead and obtained his goal of not only reaching an associate degree but completed a bachelors in his field. Knowles andragogy relates to understanding the essential values in the heritage of the tradition and knowledge that bind people together; *intersectionality*: to be self-determined is to act in a social-cultural-historical environment influenced by numerous internal and external factors. To be self-determined is not to be an island, however this is how most veterans feel while obtaining their college education (Squires, et, al, 2018).

Another aspect of the Knowles andragogy theory that specifically focuses on self-directed lifelong learning, is a major theme throughout my interview findings. While there was not any data collected on the age of each participant, the LMS edition they used clearly indicates the specific time frame of during which their online learning was completed. Mr. James was a great example of learning for many years through his life in order to move his career forward, as well as work on his ultimate goal of completing his doctorate degree. Not only did Mr. James receive job certifications in his Information

Technology field, but also completed two bachelor's degrees, one master and one

doctoral degree, mostly online.

Finally the Knowles theory that understanding society and becoming mindful and

directing social change was very apparent when interviewing Mr. James, Ms. Katherine

and Ms. Jennifer. All three of these student veterans were studying online courses that

would help others. Whether it was a PhD in IT so Mr. James could teach others, or

working on administration courses so Ms. Katherine could help her employer more

effectively, and finally Ms. Jennifer who sought out other students in the course to help

through study groups, all were mindful of positive social change. With all the veterans in

this study it was clear they demonstrated to others whether a single mom or dad being a

positive example to his/her children, or a veteran in a leadership role, all demonstrated

the power to move forward to initiate social change in their field of learning.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study involved the andragogical assumption that all adult

learners have the same experiences regardless of their cultural background or history

(Bashir & Fournier-Bonilla, 2016). The findings in this study showed that not all adults

have the same experiences but have the same outcome when they complete their degrees.

While many veterans are alike in their past experiences, differentiating the learning

experience between the officer and the enlisted person was not be part of this research.

This research only addressed veterans that have attended college online, not through a

mix of online and face to face methods, nor through solely conventional brick and mortar

classes that utilize LMSs. While three of the veterans in this study tried to complete

courses at a brick and mortar college, they found their learning disabilities or physical disabilities too difficult to manage in a conventional classroom. Another limitation of this study was the population of the study (six student veterans that learned online after leaving the service). This is a small sample of veterans that may not have represented the whole student veteran population. Every veteran selected for this research was interviewed two times. The use of two interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to go over information from the previous interview.

The limitations of this research were the different learning experiences of officers versus enlisted persons that were not included in this research. Since most officers already have a bachelor's degree before they enter service, this was not a consideration for this research. There also is a lack of research on the student veterans' perspective, thus another limitation (Cass & Hammond, 2015). While this study addressed the difference in difficulty of the disabled and non-disabled veteran, it did not compare different disabilities, but referenced whether or not their disability hindered their ability to study in a conventional classroom. Ms. Katherine reported: "I have migraines from an accident from 2008, and they worsened with time. There was no way I could attend a conventional classroom with migraines."

This general qualitative interview study did not have the insight that might have been provided with a qualitative case study or a phenomenological approach as interviews were conducted on the phone and did not address a single phenomenon. This limitation was resolved by completing the interview questions, and thus addressing the research questions through the compilation of the questions under each research question.

The interviews provided rich, thick descriptions of the interviewee's experiences of their experiences of learning online.

Another limitation of this study was self-reported data from the interviewees that can be limited by their responses and could not independently verified. Bias was avoided by ensuring that interviews were kept in a professional context and not revealing personal information about the interviewer. Strict adherence during the interviews to the interview script assisted in ensuring bias did not enter the results.

In order to address these limitations, the researcher found saturation of themes after conducting two interviews with each veteran student in a one week period. Interview protocols were conducted in exactly the same manner for each interview that began and finished the same way. When a participant went into detail on an answer, all was recorded in my journal and was greatly helpful in analyzing the data and confirming themes. Although my findings are not transferable to the specific contexts and other research for veterans that need to study online, the rich, thick results may provide insight to other researchers.

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Recommendations

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The findings of this research supported the need for other studies on how veterans complete their college education with disabilities or the inability to learn in a brick and mortar classroom. The unique challenges of veteran students that transition from military service to a college are often not what college instructors are prepared for (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015). Not only are there challenges in the brick and mortar classroom, but

online learning can be challenging for the veteran working to finish their college education.

Collaborative environments can be challenging for all students, whether in classroom or online. One finding in this study was that student veterans could not work well with conventional students that were not military when in a collaborative environment. Recommendations for future studies would be to evaluate the way student veterans collaborate and their perceptions of how to work in a collaborative environment with those not military. A second recommendation for future research would be to conduct a qualitative inquiry on how veterans perceive other students in the classroom, and how they can collaborate effectively with other students that do not have a military background.

Another recommendation for a future study would be a quantitative study that evaluates online programs, degrees that veterans are obtaining online, rates of attrition, ages of veterans and rates of graduation. This type of data would provide valuable insight on programs offered online that veterans can take to obtain their college degrees. This type of data would be important for VOCAB and other veterans support administrators looking to build effective programs for veterans in education.

There needs to be further research that would assist the student veteran in the conventional classroom, and additional instructor training to support veterans in college. While my research showed that each interviewee had a different experience learning online, they all had significant reasons not to study in a conventional college classroom. Interestingly, the different types of students in my research alone showed that each

student in my study learned differently through their challenges. This type of research

will not only help vocational counselors at the VA, but also college counselors

understand the veteran populous is incredibly diversified.

Implications

With this research study, implications for social change were evident from the

beginning of the study. The veteran population is in distress and too many are

floundering and not finding direction in their life after military service. They are in great

need of a forward movement of goals and an obtainable future. This research may

provide a way to help veterans that are struggling to learn in the conventional classroom

and may need to find a different way to complete their college degree. The findings in

this research confirmed that veterans with disabilities struggle in the conventional

classroom, as well as with collaborating with other students. Even the veteran that is not

disabled may not be able to collaborate well with other students that do not have a

military background or understand how they may speak or operate. The veteran that turns

to a veteran's representative asking about their college goals or dreams should be well

versed in what worked in the past for other veterans and what research is showing that

can help all types of veterans.

To illustrate this problem, colleges around the country have created Veteran's

clubs and support systems, but the average veteran has had such a diversified experience

that they struggle to work with other veterans even from their same service. The results

of this study positively showed how some veteran students completed their college

degree online, but did so alone, with very little collaboration from others, even other

veterans. One veteran, Ms. Katherine, did however state that the Parents for Scholars organization made it possible for her to complete her study online through the provision of childcare. This was an outlier, as the other five veterans in the study completed their studies alone or with support from family members.

Positive Social Change

The positive social change in this study could influence veterans that may decide to study online, versus studying in a brick and mortar classroom. This study also provides students with expectations of what they will need in order to reach their educational goals. Veterans Administrators, not only in the VA but at colleges, can use information from this study provided by the six veterans to guide students with disabilities that are on the fence on how to complete their education, and how they can reach their educational goals with their disabilities or learning requirements. Also, many veterans that may feel alone in their education, may view this research as a solution to learning and not having to deal with social problems in the college classroom. Student veterans who are single parents, after reviewing this research, should have a positive outlook on how they can manage their studies and create their schedules around their children, but still complete their goals. While two of the veterans in the study were single parents, they found the learning environment most forgiving for having small children around and very little support. The disabled veteran, that may have physical disabilities that prohibit him or her from succeeding in a classroom, may look at these research findings and decide that online learning may work for them. Many veterans with or without disabilities should have a positive venue to complete their education online, and be prepared to do it alone,

without the social constructs of the conventional classroom, but for the average veteran, this is fine and even better for them.

In order to utilize this research for better practice the VA would need to continue to understand one size does not fit all for educating their disabled veterans. While the VA encourages their veterans to obtain their degree by utilizing their GI Bill and other benefits, reacting when a student starts having issues early in their educational journey is essential. The VA is severely under staffed, however simple alerts to engage with the veteran in trouble to see if they can change their educational route and possibly study online could work for many veterans in crisis.

The veterans in this study all reported they had little communication with their college instructors for most of their online courses. Many stated they did not reveal that they were veterans, unless it came up in a discussion post or homework assignment. When a veteran did have trouble in their course and needed to contact their instructor, three of out the six veterans reported it took days for the instructor to get back to them or was not flexible in needing additional time. My recommendation for college instructors would be to identify those students that are veterans early in the course, and ensure they have a communication plan set up that is comfortable for both instructor and student in the course. The average veteran however does not normally ask for help or want to be identified as needing an accommodation until needed, so I am unsure of how this could be done.

Conclusion

Veterans want to move on after the service, they want to use their educational

benefits, and become contributors to society and be happy outside of the military. This

however is a huge undertaking, Veterans enter colleges with a chip on their shoulder,

with a wide array of experiences, some positive, some horrible. They try to bring these

into the classroom without showing their battle scars to other students. Many veterans

realize that they have developed a different set of values than they had before entering the

military - which is vastly different than the views of their families and friends (Sportsman

& Thomas, 2015). Many veterans enter the classroom alone and feel alone during their

educational journey, as college instructors do not succeed in engaging them, and other

students move away from them. In addition, veterans that are looking to take on a

college experience, can be extremely overwhelming, confusing, and/or frustrating for

former military personnel (Sportsman & Thomas 2015).

While many veterans do well in the conventional classroom, many with

disabilities cannot handle the classroom environment or dealing with the average

classroom student. Other veterans with family obligations may also require an alternative

to learning in the classroom and may need a more lenient schedule that allows them to

attend to family requirements and then attend to their educational requirements. Between

disabilities and requirements from the adult learner with other responsibilities, online

learning has provided the veteran student with an alternative to completing their

educational goals online. While online learning is still a relatively young learning

method, veterans have found it to be a meaningful way to complete their education and move onto their chosen field with their degrees.

This general qualitative interview study aligned with Iverson, Seher, DiRamio, Jarvis, and Anderson, (2016), and found that veterans come into a college environment with their own set of skills and limitations from being prior military, but overall find a way to persevere and complete their goals. The military has prepared their personnel to persevere after setbacks, but find a way to move forward and complete their goals through learning experiences. The findings from all six interviewees showed that all had overcome some adversity and challenges while learning online, but due to their military experiences did not give up and completed their educational goals. This alone proved the strength of the average veteran and their need to finish their program in order to move onto something better. All six of the interviewees have moved onto new jobs and careers utilizing their degrees they earned online and not only are a positive force in their own lives, but the others that have come into contact with them during and after their online educational goals have been accomplished.

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Appendix A: Prospective Research Applicant Questions for Google Forms Survey

Thank you for responding to my advertisement on social media looking for Veterans that have been enrolled in college after service. In order to see if your input would match the criteria I am looking for, please answer the following questions below. All information will remain completely confidential, and no obligation to complete the study if you are selected. Thank you in advance.

1.   Were you in the United States military? Y/N

2.   What service were you in? Navy, Marines, Army, Coast Guard, Air Force, National Guard

3.   Were you and Officer or Enlisted? Officer or Enlisted or BOTH

4.   How long were you in the military? _____ (Years, Months)

6.   Did you take classes online, on campus, or both? JUST Online, On Campus, Both (On campus and online).

7.   Your name _____

8.   Email and Phone number

_____

Appendix B: First Interview Questions

First Interview

Research Question   Interview questions for disabled student veterans

RQ1: What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?

1. What did you hear about online learning before you enrolled in your first online course?

2. What were the online or distance learning courses you took while on active duty?

3. What type of program were you looking for? Ex: Education/Criminal Justice etc.

4. Was the course required for advancement, job certification, or another reason?

5. During enrolling in the course what were you told about the expectations? For example; how long it would take, what computer hardware and skills you would need, a deadline in which this course had to be taken.

6. For what reason(s) did you chose to study online? Accessibility etc? Disability?

1.a. Do disabled student veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the average non-disabled student veteran? If so, how?

7. If injured in the service, what changes did you have to make in your job or career after you recovered?

8. Describe your main disability from the service.

9. If you were told you needed to change jobs because of your injury in the service, what type of training did you have to go through?

10. If disabled, how do you think your disability is viewed by other students in the classroom?

11. What type of other military students were in the classroom? Other services, ROTC, Reservists etc.

12. What other disabilities do you recognize or see with other student veterans?

13. What type of experiences did you have working with other student veterans?

14. What type of experiences did you have working with other students that were NOT veterans?

15. What instructions to access and complete the course did you receive from the instructor prior to taking the online class?

16. What challenges would you foresee in the conventional brick and mortar classroom in terms of your disability? Accessibility, etc.

17. What did you find accommodating in the online classroom to help with your disability?

18. While you were in the course, what type of computer platform did you work on? Ex: Macbook, PC etc.

19. What sort of family responsibilities did you have while taking courses online?

20. What was your daily schedule for logging into your courses and working on homework?

21. When you registered for your course, what were some of the things the administrator or instructor told you to expect in the course?

RQ2: How have the tools within the LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?

22. What type of introduction to the online course materials did the professor provide? Ex: A tutorial, examples of completed projects etc.

23. While learning online, did you feel connected to the other students through chats, forums, etc?

24. When/if you needed assistance with your course or tools where did you turn?

25. What tools did you utilize during your online course? Ex: MS Word, Excel, Visio etc.

26. What type of support or training did you need to master the tools in the online course?

27. What programs did you experience for the first time during your online courses?

28. Do you have anything to add about the previous questions?

End of first set of interview questions for disabled veterans in the study.

(Question 29 does not exist for this set of questions)

Research Questions   Interview questions for Non-disabled veterans

RQ1: What are the perceptions of online student veterans toward online learning?

1. What did you hear about online learning before you enrolled in your first course?

2. What were the online or distance learning courses you took while on active duty?

3. What type of program were you looking for? Ex: Education/Criminal Justice etc.

4. Was the course required for advancement, job certification, or another reason?

5. During enrolling in the course what were you told about the expectations? For example; how long it would take, what computer skills you would need, a deadline in which this course had to be taken.

6. For what reason(s) did you chose to study online? Flexibility, etc.?

1.a. Do non-disabled veteran perceptions about online learning differ from those of the disabled veteran? If so, how?

7. What was the main reason why you chose to study from home?

8. What type of experiences did you have working with other student veterans?

9. What type of experiences did you have working with other students that were NOT veterans?

10. What type of other military students were in the classroom? Other services, ROTC, Reservists etc.

11. What was your daily schedule for logging into your courses and working on homework?

12. What sort of family responsibilities did you have while taking courses online?

RQ2: How have the tools within the LMSs assisted student veterans to obtain their college degree?

13. What type of introduction to the online course materials did the professor provide? Ex: A tutorial, examples of completed projects etc.

14. What type of computer platform did you work on? Ex: MacBook, PC etc.

15. What if any problems did you have with accessing your online course?

16. While learning online, did you feel connected to the other students through chats, forums, etc?

17. When/if you needed assistance with the course or technological issues where did you turn?

18. What tools did you utilize during your online course? Ex: MS Word, Excel, Visio etc.

19. What type of support or training did you need to master the tools in the online course?

20. What programs did you experience for the first time during your online courses?

21. Do you have anything further to add to the previous questions?

End of first interview for Non-Disabled veterans in the study.

(Questions 22-29 do not exist in this set of interview questions)

Appendix C: Second Interview Questions

Second interview for both sets of veterans

2.a What type of online learning experiences have helped veterans to reach their educational goals?

30. Which college did you take the majority of online classes from?

31. What type of learning management system did the college(s) use (e.g. Blackboard, Angel, Canvas, etc.)?

32. How friendly did you find the LMS to be when first logging in?

33. What sort of support did you have during your use of this LMS?

34. How do you think this LMS helped you reach your goals?

35. What things might you have changed in the LMS environment?

2.b. What specific tools that are part of learning management systems (wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.) have student veterans successfully used to obtain their college degree? How have they used these tools?

36. Think about your online class, what tools did you find useful that helped you with your course? (If interviewee does not suggest specific tools, then ask specific questions about their use of wikis, discussion forums, blogs, etc.)

37. What sort of computer problems did you have when trying to work on your classwork?

38. Where were you able to access high speed connections?

39. When you had computer problems who did you turn too?

40. If you ever needed an extension to complete your course what challenges did you discover?

41. What sort of software did you need to complete your courses?

42. Were you provided a laptop or funding for equipment through the VA or another program?

43. What sort of software did your college provide to you either free of charge or at a discount?

44. What sort of guidance on new software from your instructors or recommend help when needed?

45. What experiences did you have with the IT department at your college?

46. When you first began each online course, what were your biggest concerns?

47. What was your biggest challenge of finishing your coursework on time?

48. What type of collaboration did you have with other students in the course?

49. What sorts of problems did you have with other classmates during a collaboration on a project?

50. How do you feel the instructor responded to you if you had questions in the course?

51. How do you feel about finishing your college education?

52. What skills do you have now that you did not have while in the service?

RQ3: What specific obstacles in the online environment hinder student veterans from completing their degree online?

53. While in the military, were you interested in taking online courses and why?

54. Was there a difference in college educated enlisted personnel versus non educated at your unit? Explain.

55. How long after you left the military did you enroll in school?

56. What specific obstacles in the online environment hindered you from completing your degree online?

3a. What military experiences during their times in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

57. While taking online classes did you write about an experience in the military? What was it?

58. What past experiences while in the service created learning problems for you while taking courses?

59. When you spoke about being a veteran in class how did the other students respond?

60. What military experiences during your time in the service hindered you from reaching your educational goals?

3b. What veteran experiences after their time in the service hindered them from reaching their educational goals?

61. How did you feel you were treated while registering for your classes?

62. Were you asked by a counselor or administrator about where/when you served in the military? Were you proud or reserved?

63. Do you have a resource at the VA to help you with your student loans and benefits? Do you feel they take care of you well?

64. While visiting your college where you introduced to the Veterans affairs administrator or group?

65. Do you have any information to share about anything that happened after leaving the military that did NOT help you in college?

66. What veteran experiences after your time in the service kept you from reaching your educational goals?

67. Do you have anything to add to the interview questions?

End of Interviews