THE EFFECTS OF COACHING ON THE MOTIVATION OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

A Scholarly Research Project

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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May 2022

Abstract

The number of nontraditional students in colleges in the United States has been and is continuing to rise, but these students face difficulties that affect their motivation to persist towards graduation. Some of these difficulties include balancing multiple roles, including work, school and family demands, lack of support, financial constraints, and lack of confidence. Higher education institutions often address these difficulties with the same or similar support traditional students receive. However, because nontraditional students face unique issues, an approach tailored to their needs may be more effective. Coaching is a supportive approach that can help nontraditional students thrive and overcome difficulties. This qualitative observational case study utilized a participatory action research approach to explore the effects of coaching on the motivation of five nontraditional students in a large, urban university in the US northeast. Three research questions guided the study: (1) How motivated were participants to attend college classes? (2) How did difficulties affect the motivation of the participants? and (3) How did coaching affect the motivation of the participants? The study's findings showed: (1) Participants displayed moderate to high motivation to attend classes. Both internal and external factors influenced their motivation, with internal factors slightly more evident. (2) Difficulties experienced by participants negatively affected their motivation by causing burnout, stress, and frustration. (3) Coaching interventions positively affected the participant's motivation by providing support and helpful tools. The findings of this study apply to higher education institutions, especially large urban colleges. Colleges can incorporate coaching into the support services for nontraditional students to create long-lasting change and a positive impact on retention.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Clyde Roberts and Marjorie Gibbs-Roberts, my uncles, Dr. John Gibbs, Michael Gibbs, my aunt, Joyce Gibbs, and my cousin, Richard Edwards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, Dr. Jana Hunzicker, Dr. Jenny Tripses, and Dr. Patricia Nugent, for your teaching, advice, and support with my scholarly research project.

I extend gratitude also to my brother Keith Roberts, my uncle and aunts, Harold Gibbs, Barbara Gibbs, Pearl Edwards-Gabriel, my nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, and co-workers for your support.

I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Elizabeth Cardoso, Dr. Jennifer Tuten, Dr. Allan Frei, and Dr. Hualin Zhong. When I shared my goal of returning to school for a doctorate with you, you offered encouragement and support, helping me see that it was possible to achieve.

Thank you to Yiciana Rodriguez and Cassandra Skeete, who have spent hours listening to my ideas and struggles throughout this journey. Your labor of love is not in vain.

Also, thank you to the dean, the coordinators, and the students of the program that participated in my study. I hope that the results of this study will be useful in helping nontraditional students stay motivated and achieve success in college.

Finally, I give all glory to God, my source of strength, comfort, and wisdom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The number of nontraditional students in colleges in the United States has been and is continuing to rise, but these students face various difficulties that affect their motivation to persist towards graduation (Macdonald, 2018; Markle, 2015; Remenick, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Literature suggests that nontraditional students are subject to greater risk of dropping out because of the unique challenges they face (Chen et al., 2020; Remenick, 2019). According to Remenick (2019), "Nontraditional students in colleges and universities are increasing in number but have greater barriers to persist and thrive" (p. 115). This is significant as obtaining a college degree is a way to increase earnings. A recent study reported, "An associate degree yields a causal earnings premium of about 30% over a high school degree" (Dawson et al., 2021, para. 3). Based on the impact that a college degree can have on upward economic mobility, it is important to expand research on ways to help nontraditional students navigate difficulties and stay motivated to attend college classes (Chen et al., 2020; Macdonald, 2018).

A student is considered nontraditional if they identify with at least one of the following: is at least 25 years old, is a first-generation student, delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, is attending classes part-time, is working full-time, has dependents, is a single parent, has a GED or high school equivalent certificate, is enrolled in a non-degree program, or reentered a college program (Chen et al., 2020; Macdonald, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The traditional student, on the other hand, is normally between n. to 24 years old, lives on campus, takes a full load of classes, and is financially dependent (Pelletier, 2010; Remenick, 2019; Wax & Wertheim, 2015).

This research study explored the effects of coaching interventions on the motivation of nontraditional students attending college-level classes. Chapter 1 introduces the study's research problem, including background information about the need for the study and an introductory discussion of the context, challenges, and possible solutions related to the research problem. The chapter goes on to articulate the purpose of the study, the study's research questions, and the definitions and assumptions that will guide the study. The chapter closes with a discussion of the study's significance and a brief description of how the five-chapter research report is organized.

Statement of the Research Problem

Research Problem

Because nontraditional students are older and more commonly balancing work with family life and school, they face different issues than their traditional counterparts (Bidwell, 2014). Common academic and social concerns of traditional college students may include career indecision, academic struggles, time management, social anxiety, personal issues, and relationship conflicts (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). However, nontraditional students have additional unique concerns including inter-role conflict such as family-school demands, work-school demands, and other situational factors such as confidence, lack of support, and limited financial resources that can be barriers to their success (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Markle, 2015; Wax & Wertheim, 2015).

Research has shown that colleges, for the most part, have approached the concerns of nontraditional students in a similar manner to those of traditional students (Chen et al., 2020; Markle, 2015; Remenick, 2019; Zart, 2019). Services commonly used for the general college population such as learning communities, academic support, and advising support can be effective strategies for improving college retention and may be increasingly necessary as

traditional college counseling programs are overextended in many institutions (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Todorova, 2019; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). However, instead of this one-size-fits-all approach, nontraditional students need institutional support tailored to fit their unique needs (Macdonald, 2018; Markle, 2015; Osam et al., 2017; Rabourn et al., 2018; Remenick, 2019; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Solutions

Coaching is a supportive approach explored in research that can provide an opportunity for nontraditional students to thrive and overcome barriers (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Devine et al., 2013; Helens-Hart, 2018; Jarosz, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). The International Coach Federation, the leading global organization dedicated to advancing the coaching profession, defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (International Coach Federation, n.d., para. 5). Coaching, which focuses on identifying and building on an individual's strengths, has a foundation of positive psychology (Ackerman, 2022; Devine et al., 2013; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and is distinct from other helping fields such as therapy and advising. Coaching involves a non-clinical approach to working through steps to achieving goals whereas "therapy focuses on pathology, clinical populations and presenting problems and diagnoses" (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018, p. 70). Advising helps students with choosing a major, class registration, academic and graduation audits, and staying on task with what needs to be done for academic progress, whereas in coaching, students are more self-reliant with the coach serving as a guide (Wax & Wertheim, 2015).

Research shows that adult learners or nontraditional students can benefit from the support of a coach who can help them navigate difficulties they face:

> The obvious challenges adult learners face related to time management and organizational skills can be compounded by anxiety about being in school, negative experiences in prior learning settings, lack of a support system at home and/or work, limited financial resources, or failure to link education goals with employer needs. The learner may face one or more of these obstacles. Apprehension about being back in school after a long absence is perhaps the most common concern for adults. Although they may feel they are out of the routine of studying, writing papers, and working on projects, those tasks may actually be close to what they do in the workplace. A coach can help them see the similarities and can also suggest time-management tips to help ensure success (Wax & Wertheim, 2015, p. 40).

In addition, coaching has positive effects on lowering procrastination and increasing student productivity (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Sims, 2014; Torbrand & Ellam-Dyson, 2015). "The coach can help adult students stay on track by encouraging them to realize the advantages and challenges of their situations and how to capitalize on the advantages while diminishing the effects of the challenges" (Wax & Wertheim, 2015, p. 44).

Summary of the Research Problem

Nontraditional students are significant in number in higher education institutions in the United States. More than 70% of undergraduate students have one or more nontraditional characteristics (Chen et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). However, nontraditional students face difficulties that affect their motivation to persist towards graduation. Institutions often provide them with support like that of their traditional counterparts; however, because of

the unique difficulties they face, an approach tailored to their needs may be more effective in positively affecting their motivation. Exploring the effects of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students can shed light on whether this approach is suitable.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of four coaching workshops on the motivation of five nontraditional students who were part of an academic, career, and personal support program for low-income students in a large, urban university in the U.S. northeast. The guiding research question was what are the effects of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students? The specific research questions were: (1) How motivated were the participants to attend college classes? (2) How did difficulties affect the motivation of the participants? and (3) How did coaching affect the motivation of the participants?

Definitions and Assumptions

Four definitions and three assumptions guided this study. *Large university* was defined as a university with more than 15,000 students. *Low-income* referred to an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount, and *retention* referred to the continuation of students from one semester to the next. *Urban university* was defined as a campus located in a major urban area with a substantial number of commuter students.

In conducting the study, the following assumptions were made: (1) Semi-structured interviews would be the best way to elicit reliable responses from participants. (2) Participants would fully understand the questions asked, and (3) Participants would answer the questions honestly.

Significance of the Study

Exploring the effects of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students is significant in expanding the research on retention among this group. Approximately 25% of U.S. college students do not return to school after their freshman year, and a significant proportion of these students are underrepresented, many identifying as first-generation students, racial or ethnic minorities, and/or individuals from low-income households (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Olbrecht et al., 2016). High attrition rates can have a negative impact on students, educational institutions, and by extension, their communities. Thus, it is important that there is continued research on how coaching can be a possible solution to this problem. According to Bettinger and Baker (2014), "In an era when college retention is receiving increased attention in public policy and the media, our article provides strong evidence that college coaching is one strategy that can improve retention and graduation rates" (p. 15).

Although coaching has increased in popularity, the presence of coaching within higher educational contexts is still minimal (Griffiths, 2005; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). However, empirical research with specific populations of college students has shown its effectiveness. For instance, research on coaching college students with learning disabilities, students on the autism spectrum, and those with ADHD and other disabilities has shown that coaching increased student success by influencing their sense of independence, fostering determination, aiding goal attainment, and increasing confidence, persistence, and specific life skills such as time management and organizational skills (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). This action research study extends the discussion of the effectiveness of coaching to the nontraditional student population, particularly those in an urban context.

The benefits of this study are significant for the higher education community as it lets college leaders have a greater understanding of the concerns of nontraditional students while exploring additional approaches to serve that population more appropriately (Markle, 2015; Osam et al., 2017; Remenick, 2019; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). This study is also beneficial to the professional coaching community as it explores the benefits of incorporating professional coaches into higher education institutions thus expanding the already successful coaching industry into a relatively new area (Griffiths, 2005). This is a unique opportunity for both the higher education community and the coaching community to work together in exploring methods to increase the motivation and persistence of nontraditional students, supporting them as they navigate through difficulties on their journey to graduation.

Organization of the Research Report

This chapter introduced the study's research problem, including background information about the need for the study and an introductory discussion of the context, challenges, and possible solutions related to the research problem. The chapter also articulated the purpose of the study, the study's research questions, and the definitions and assumptions that guided the study. Chapter 2 will present a literature review of previous research on the topic, chapter 3 will describe the study's methodology and methods, chapter 4 will report and discuss the study's findings and chapter 5 will provide a final report of the study discussing implications for practice, recommendations for future research and the study's limitations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite being a significant population in U.S. colleges, research has shown that nontraditional students face various difficulties that affect their motivation to persist towards graduation. (Macdonald, 2018; Markle, 2015; Remenick, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). These difficulties include balancing multiple roles, financial issues, transitioning back into college after a break, and lack of confidence (Moore et al., 2020; Rabourn et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010; Zart, 2019). Not adequately addressing these issues leads to nearly 70% of nontraditional students dropping out of college, some within a short time frame of four months (Macdonald, 2018). This chapter presents a literature review of studies that describe (1) the motivation of nontraditional students to attend college classes, (2) how difficulties affect the motivation of nontraditional students, and (3) the effectiveness of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students.

Nontraditional Student Motivation

Studies show that nontraditional students are motivated to attend classes by both external factors, such as higher-paying jobs and good grades and internal factors like personal fulfillment, with the influence of internal factors slightly higher (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013).

Landrum et al. (2000) surveyed 327 students at Boise State University about their motivation and attitudes towards school. The results indicated that students aged 25 years and older were more intrinsically motivated than students up to age 24 who were more motivated by external factors. While students aged 24 and younger were motivated by the approval of their friends, parents, and professors, indicative of external motivation, nontraditional students

reported: “higher importance ratings in trying their best, understanding the subject, learning something new, and learning practical skills they can use, all indications of intrinsic motivation” (Landrum et al., 2000, p. 91). Previous studies, such as McGregor et al. (1991), concluded that nontraditional students did not warrant special programs based on their unique differences. However, subsequent research has shown motivational orientation differences between nontraditional and traditional students and provided insight into strategies that can help colleges create programs that meet the unique needs of nontraditional students (Landrum et al., 2000). Landrum et al. (2000) suggests, “Instructors with a higher proportion of nontraditional students may wish to use learning strategies that focus on intrinsically motivating factors, such as the use of autonomy” (p. 91). For example, allowing students to choose the form of content for learning and encouraging their self-expression can foster understanding and interest in their academic activities and goals (Goudas et al., 1995).

Bye et al. (2007) further explored the topic of motivation differences in their study that compared the “affective and motivational components of academic life for traditional and nontraditional university graduates” (p. 141). The study tested the hypothesized differences between two age groups – 18 to 21 years and older than 27 years on their motivation to learn, and relationships between age, trait interest, intrinsic motivation, and positive effect (Bye et al., 2007, p. 142). The study hypothesized that nontraditional students would report higher levels of intrinsic motivation than traditional students and that traditional students would report higher levels of extrinsic motivation (Bye et al., 2007). A total of 300 undergraduate students completed a questionnaire battery, which consisted of three self-report questionnaires, including the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ; Pintrich et al., 1991), the Differential Emotions Scale IV-A (DES; Izard et al., 1993), and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

(PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). The study's results were that nontraditional students reported slightly more motivation overall than traditional students, notably higher levels of intrinsic motivation. However, both groups of students reported equal amounts of extrinsic motivation to learn (Bye et al., 2007). This study also noted how age and intrinsic motivation to learn interact to produce positive affect (Bye et al., 2007). As a result, the researchers suggested further research to examine the relationship between age and intrinsic motivation (Bye et al., 2007).

Subsequent research has focused on the role of intrinsic factors in the motivation of nontraditional students. Shillingford and Karlin (2013) expanded research on this topic by "exploring the role of intrinsic motivation in the academic pursuits of nontraditional students" (p. 100). In this study, the Academic Motivational Scale (AMS) was administered to 35 undergraduate students, ages 25 to 49 years, which measured students' motivational orientations to attend college. The results of this study were that "the sample endorsed more items of intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation or amotivation" (Shillingford & Karlin, 2013, p. 100) These results support past research by Bye et al. (2007) which found that nontraditional students reported significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation than traditional students.

Johnson et al. (2016) added to this body of knowledge by "investigating the differences among traditional and nontraditional students' self-determination, attributions, and expectancy-values and identifying the motivational variables that best predict students' academic achievement by status" (p. 10). Data were collected by surveying 88 traditional and 51 nontraditional students on various motivational measures using the theoretical perspectives of Attribution Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory. The study's results also support literature that indicates differences between traditional and nontraditional students (Bye et al., 2007; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). However, this study also expanded

research on this topic by "analyzing separate regression models for each student group using multiple motivational variables" (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 10). Because of using this strategy, these researchers found that traditional and nontraditional students' motivation differs on some variables, including self-efficacy, peer learning, peer personal support, teacher academic support, and intrinsic motivation (Johnson et al., 2016).

Connection to the Current Study

The results of these past studies are of importance to this study. They expand knowledge on the differences in the motivation of traditional and nontraditional students (Bye et al., 2007; Landrum et al., 2000; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). Based on the NCES (2002) and NCES (2005) reports, extrinsic factors, such as gaining new skills for improved job performance or making a career change, were the primary motivators for nontraditional students. However, further research has shown that intrinsic factors are significant, in some cases slightly outweighing external factors (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). This study built upon the findings of these previous studies by expanding knowledge on the motivation of nontraditional students from an academic, career, and personal support program for low-income students at a large university in an urban environment during the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their unique experiences added contextual factors not highlighted in previous studies referenced in this review, such as transitioning and adapting to emergency remote learning and the college's response to their needs.

How Difficulties Affect the Motivation of Nontraditional Students

Research shows that nontraditional students face unique difficulties that affect their motivation and persistence, including inter-role conflict, finances, transitioning back to school after a break, and anxiety (Markle, 2015; Moore et al., 2020; Zart, 2019).

Markle (2015) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the factors influencing nontraditional students' persistence. The study was conducted with 494 nontraditional male and female students in a large public university in the U.S. southeast over three years. The quantitative part of the study examined the effects of demographic, academic, and situational variables on persistence. The qualitative component of the study examined participants' motives for considering withdrawing or remaining enrolled in classes and their suggestions on how the institution can be supportive (Markle, 2015). Some of the barriers to persistence identified in the study were worrying about incurring debt, especially among men, inter-role conflict and time constraints, and feeling "out of place" or "different" particularly among women (Markle, 2015, p. 277). The study showed that these factors differed between genders and age groups (Markle, 2015). The study's findings show that inter-role conflict and perception of difference led nontraditional women in the study to consider withdrawing, but most did not (Markle, 2015). Markle (2015) stated, "Instead, they exhibited a will to persist that enabled them to overcome obstacles and ultimately graduate" (p. 281). Some of the reasons for their "will to persist" cited by Markle (2015) were that (1) the women returned to school to fulfill a dream they deferred to take care of others and that they are finally taking "their turn" to pursue their goals, (2) completing the degree as a mature woman student had meaning beyond the credential – it signified an investment in themselves, (3) the degree represented a "hard-won" achievement that was difficult because of their multiple roles, and (4) achieving their degree made them a role-model for their children (p. 281).

These findings are significant as, although the women faced difficulties, intrinsic factors played a role in their persistence towards finishing their degrees (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). This draws a connection between the

literature review on nontraditional student motivation and the literature on the difficulties they experience.

Moore et al. (2020) conducted a study "assessing the differences in presenting concerns, academic functioning, and mental health history between nontraditional students (age 25 or older) and traditional students (ages 18 – 24)" (p. 223). They also conducted additional analyses to examine possible differences between graduate and undergraduate students and the potential effects of financial stress. These researchers hypothesized that nontraditional students would present higher rates of previous mental health issues, more significant academic dysfunction, more financial stress, and unique concerns (Moore et al., 2020). The participants for the study were students from one of 13 public, state university institutions who received mental health services from their school's counseling center over one academic year. Out of 4,778 participants, 630 were nontraditional students. The data were collected from client information forms (CIF) completed by students before or at the time of intake of their first visit to the counseling centers. The documents provided information on student background, presenting concerns, and academic functioning. This study showed that nontraditional students raised different concerns and challenges than traditional students. These concerns and challenges were attention/concentration, thoughts of leaving school, and marital or family problems.

The study also noted a connection between financial stress experienced by nontraditional students and poorer academic functioning (Moore et al., 2020). Moore et al. (2020) outlined some considerations for university counseling centers, including offering an avenue to help nontraditional students achieve a balance between their multiple roles, extending services provided to students, including modified office hours, and staff equipped to deal with the unique needs of nontraditional students. The researchers also suggested expanding resources to address

financial stress among the student population, such as financial counseling services and informational sessions on budgeting and credit card debt. Lastly, Moore et al. (2020) also suggested peer mentorship to help students create a network for nontraditional students. “The mentorship would provide nontraditional students an opportunity to learn from their peers, time management, organizational, study, and other related skills that address their unique needs, which might not be addressed through more traditional student services” (Moore et al., 2020, p. 231).

Moore et al. (2020) provided essential data that connects well with this study. They supported the findings that difficulties can affect the motivation of nontraditional students to persist (Markle, 2015) and provided insight into possible solutions that universities can adopt to help mitigate those effects.

Zart (2019) conducted a phenomenological study that explored the success of five undergraduate adult women at a predominantly tradition-aged, mid-size public masters’ comprehensive Midwest institution. The students participated in two individual interviews that focused on how their experiences facilitated or hindered their overall college success (Zart, 2019). The following question guided the study by Zart (2019): “What do women undergraduate adult learners perceive as factors that facilitate or hinder their success on a predominantly traditional-aged campus?” (p. 246). The study’s overarching themes were “motivation for attending higher education, factors that hinder participant success in higher education, and factors that support the participants’ success in higher education” (Zart, 2019, p. 251). The study’s findings include that several women showed waning self-confidence because of their age and feeling burdened by others’ doubts of their academic abilities. All participants expressed difficulties juggling multiple priorities and conflicting roles (Zart, 2019). Zart (2019) found that

the participants discussed the motivation to be an example for their children and provide a better life financially. This confirms Markle's (2015) finding that degree completion sets a positive example for their children. Additionally, the lack of confidence expressed by the participants is a significant barrier that can affect their self-efficacy and the ability to succeed (Bandura, 1977). These findings by Zart (2019) are essential for this study as the participants' overarching themes, sample size, and difficulties are similar to those in this study.

Connection to the Current Study

These bodies of literature provide significant contributions to this study. They reveal the unique difficulties that nontraditional students experience, such as financial distress and debt, which can affect academic performance (Markle, 2015; Moore et al., 2020), inter-role conflict, juggling multiple priorities, and waning self-confidence (Zart, 2019). However, they also reveal insight into the impact of intrinsic motivation on students' persistence (Markle, 2015; Zart, 2019). This study built upon the findings of these previous studies by exploring the motivation of low-income students in an urban environment.

The Impact of Life, Academic and Peer Coaching

Research shows that life, academic and peer coaching positively impact college students by increasing self-efficacy, self-confidence, and persistence (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Helens-Hart, 2018; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010).

Short et al. (2010) conducted a two-factor mixed-design study to examine the "effectiveness of a peer coaching intervention on aspects of well-being in students" (p. 29). Two groups of third-year undergraduate psychology students participated in this study. The coaching group comprised 32 students (24 female and eight male) with a mean age of 25. All students were studying coaching psychology. This group was introduced to a coaching model and

practiced skills during classes for the study. They then conducted and received five peer coaching sessions before an examination period. The control group consisted of third-year students who were not studying coaching psychology or engaged in peer coaching. This group comprised 33 members (30 female and three male). Measures in the study were taken at Time 1 (pre-coaching intervention) and Time 2 (post-coaching intervention). Demographic data were obtained, and the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) and the Inventory of Personal Problems (Barkham et al., 1996) were used. The study's results showed that the increase in psychological distress was significantly lower in the peer-coaching group, with 67% of the sample finding coaching intervention to be at least moderately effective. Short et al. (2010) found that peer coaching had the potential value of helping students manage their well-being during a potentially stressful period. The findings of these studies are significant as they provide insight into how different forms of coaching can be an effective method for increasing retention among students, increasing motivation, managing stress, and giving success strategies.

Bettinger and Baker (2014) used data from a randomized experiment that tested the effectiveness of individualized student coaching with 17 cohorts of randomly selected students, the majority of which were nontraditional students enrolled in degree programs. During this experiment conducted over two school years, InsideTrack, a for-profit student coaching service, provided coaching to students attending public, private, and proprietary universities. The students were coached on several issues, including goals, time management, self-advocacy, and study skills. Bettinger and Baker (2014) found that the coaching increased students' persistence after one year and that the effect of coaching on persistence did not disappear after the treatment. "Coached students were 3 to 4 percentage points more likely to persist after 18 months and 24 months" (Bettinger & Baker, 2014, p. 14). They also found that coached students had four

percentage points higher graduation rates for the three campuses where they obtained degree completion data than uncoached students after four years (Bettinger & Baker, 2014).

Helens-Hart (2018) conducted a multi-class activity that used appreciative coaching to "help students utilize a positive mindset and achieve academic and professional goals" (p. 220). Helens-Hart (2018) adapted the appreciative coaching (AC) model (Orem et al., 2007) by incorporating appreciative inquiry (AI), which is an intervention tool for organizational development that focuses on the strengths and successes of a firm and member talents rather than dwelling on problems and failures when planning (Mohr & Watkins, 2002). Rather than focusing on organizational improvement, the goal was to concentrate on individual talent development for classroom use. This included students practicing positive reframing, identifying their strengths and skills, selecting goals, creating action plans to reach these goals, and taking responsibility for their academic and professional goals. Helens-Hart (2018) found that students who went through appreciative coaching in her classes experienced diminished career preparation anxiety, increased self-confidence, and improved relationships with professors and peers. The students also developed the skill of breaking goals into smaller steps. The results of this activity present valuable data for this study. They reveal the direct effects of coaching on improving confidence and other skills necessary for academic success.

Lefdahl-Davis et al. (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study that explored the benefits and outcomes of providing life coaching to undergraduate students. The study focused on "awareness of values and alignment with decision making, confidence in goal setting and attainment, confidence in choice of major and satisfaction with that major, compatibility of choices with faith, values, and strengths, confidence in life purpose, and self-confidence" (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018, p. 73-74). The study examined data compiled by the Life Calling and

Integrative Learning (LCIL) department at a small, liberal arts university in the U.S. Midwest. The sample was 94 students who voluntarily self-selected to engage in a minimum of three coaching sessions between 2013 and 2016. Data were collected from pre- and post-coaching online surveys. These surveys used a 10-item assessment that measured student-perceived change, growth, and development (Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018). The study's results were that all students who received life coaching reported a positive impact. Lefdahl-Davis et al. (2018) found that life coaching effectively increased self-confidence, increased awareness of strengths and values, and provided practical goal setting and attainment. This mixed-methods study found that coaching is effective as an intervention for undergraduate students and aligns with the findings of Helens-Hart (2018).

Connection to the Current Study

This body of literature is helpful for this study as these studies provide insight into coaching in the higher education context. However, there is a gap in research on coaching nontraditional students in an urban context. This study intended to fill that gap by exploring the impact of coaching on the motivation of five adult learners in a large, urban college.

Summarization of Literature Review

The research articles discussed in this literature review show that nontraditional students are motivated to attend college classes (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013), but their retention rates are not as high as their traditional counterparts (Chen et al., 2020; Markle, 2015; Remenick, 2019). Possible causes of this are difficulties that affect their motivation to persist, such as balancing multiple roles, inter-role conflict, financial problems, and decreased confidence (Moore et al., 2020; Rabourn et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010; Zart, 2019). The studies on coaching in higher education presented in this

review show that coaching positively impacts students' well-being, confidence, performance, and retention (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Helens-Hart, 2018; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010). However, there is a gap in the literature on coaching nontraditional students in an urban context. This study filled this gap by exploring the impact of coaching on the motivation of five adult learners in a large, urban college.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a literature review of studies that described (1) the motivation of nontraditional students to attend college classes, (2) how difficulties affect the motivation of nontraditional students, and (3) the effectiveness of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students. Chapter 3 will describe the study's research methodology, research context, data collection, data analysis, and the researcher's positionality.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Literature suggests that nontraditional students are subject to a greater risk of withdrawing from college because of difficulties that affect their motivation to continue attending classes (Chen et al., 2020; Markle, 2015; Moore et al., 2020; Remenick, 2019; Zart, 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore what effect coaching had on the motivation of nontraditional students. This study answered three fundamental questions: (1) How motivated were the participants to attend college classes? (2) How did difficulties affect the motivation of the participants? (3) How did coaching affect the motivation of the participants? Chapter 3 describes the study's research methodology, research context, data collection, data analysis, and the researcher's positionality.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, participatory action research methodology using an observational case study research design.

Qualitative Research Methods

When describing the qualitative research approach, Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, "In this situation, the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants. This means identifying a culture-sharing group and studying how it develops shared patterns of behavior over time" (p. 17). In other words, in qualitative research, the researcher states questions not objectives. "In a qualitative case study, the questions may address a description of the case and the themes that emerge from studying it" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 134). In this study, the phenomena being investigated were student motivation and engagement. A qualitative research approach was suitable for this study as I was able to

understand the meanings of certain phenomena from the views of the study's research participants. The qualitative research approach also helped me to discover and understand themes and patterns among the participants.

Action Research

Action research is defined in Herr and Anderson (2016) as "inquiry done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them" (p. 3). The authors go on further to state:

> Action research is oriented to some action or cycle of actions that organizational, or community members have taken, are taking, or wish to take to address a particular problematic situation. The idea is that changes occur within the setting or within the participants and researchers themselves (Herr & Anderson, 2016, p. 3).

Mertler (2020) states, "Action research offers a process by which current practice can be changed toward better practice" (p.14). Action research was appropriate for this study because both the research participants and I worked together to achieve the research study's purpose, which related directly to my current work responsibilities and to the research participants' current degree completion goals.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research is "a philosophical approach to research that recognizes the need for persons being studied to participate in the design and conduct of all phases (e.g., design, execution, and dissemination) of any research that affects them" (Vollman et al., 2004, p. 129). The purpose of participatory action research (PAR) is to foster capacity, community development, empowerment, access, social justice, and participation among the researcher(s) and the research participants (Vollman et al., 2004). Participatory action research tends to focus on a

broader societal analysis and is concerned with equity, self-reliance, and oppression problems (Herr & Anderson, 2016, p. 16). The practical, collaborative, and reflexive nature of participatory action research made it a suitable approach for this study because the research participants were an active part of the research process. They gave honest feedback about the college's support for nontraditional students and offered suggestions for improvement. I believe that using a participatory action research approach helped participants to view their input as part of the solution to a problem within their institution. I also believe that participating in the research study was an empowering process for the participants. Empowerment is another key characteristic of participatory action research (Vollman et al., 2004).

Observational Case Study

This qualitative study utilized an observational case study research design. Case studies are a "design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). The focus of an observational case study can be a particular group of people or activity within an organization (Mertler, 2020, p. 95). Because of the limited amount of research on coaching nontraditional students in an urban environment, a qualitative observational case study method was an appropriate approach for this study. This approach allowed me to explore contextual factors of the particular case under study: nontraditional students currently completing a college degree at one particular institution. To explore these factors, I used semi-structured interviews, semi-structured observations, and a personal reflective journal.

Research Context

Research Setting

"The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 185). The participants in this study were students in a large, urban university in the U.S. northeast. They were all part of an academic, career, and personal support program for low-income students that offered a wide range of services, benefits, and support to students receiving public financial assistance. This program was chosen because the population enrolled consisted of nontraditional students, who were the focus of the study. The program offered services to help medium and high-need students to be successful. Examples of services offered were specially designed seminars, specific outreach campaigns, and strategies to foster student success. This study aimed to enhance these activities by exploring the effects of coaching workshops designed to help students achieve success in college and their careers. The study was in essence an extension of the services already offered and therefore not a disruption to the program.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The study followed the typical sample size for qualitative case studies of "four to five cases" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186). To recruit participants, I used a nonprobability or convenience sampling strategy, "in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience and availability" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 150). To participate in the study, students had to meet one or more of the following criteria: 1) A student who is at least 25 years old, 2) a first-generation student (FGS), 3) delaying enrollment into postsecondary education, 4) attending college part-time, 5) being independent from parents, 6) having dependents, 7) working full-time

while enrolled in college, 8) being a single parent, 9) having a GED or high school equivalent certificate, 10) enrolled in a non-degree program, or 11) have reentered a college program (Chen et al., 2020; Macdonald, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

I collaborated with the coordinator of the program to conduct the recruitment process. The coordinator sent an email to all students who fit the study's selection criteria, inviting them to participate in the study. Following this, the program coordinator scheduled meetings with the students who expressed interest in the study where she introduced me to the students, explained the purpose of the study, and what participating entailed. Following this step, the program coordinator gave me the email addresses of the students who continued to express interest in participating. I then emailed each prospective participant the study's informed consent form, which described the nature of the study, the participants' involvement, and the duration of the study to the interested students. Appendix A outlines the details of the consent form sent to participants. Upon receipt of the signed consent forms, I scheduled the initial interviews with the participants. A total of 267 students were invited to participate in the study. Ten students attended the information meetings; seven expressed interest in participating in the study and signed the consent form. Of that number, five followed up and participated in the study.

Participants

All five participants of the study met one or more of the characteristics of nontraditional students listed earlier. Participant 1 was a 36-year-old Hispanic woman. She was a single mother in the senior year of her undergraduate studies. She was also working part-time in the college and volunteering at a rape victim center. Participant 2 was a 31-year-old Hispanic woman. She was a single mother, working full-time and in the senior year of her undergraduate studies. Participant 3 was a 31-year-old Hispanic woman. She was married with children and a full-time student in

her senior year. She was not working. Participant 4 was a 26-year-old Hispanic woman in the first year of graduate school. She was single with no children and was working full-time while attending classes. Participant 5 was a 38-year-old Black woman in the junior year of her undergraduate studies. She was single with no children and was working part-time. Table 1 outlines the characteristics of the participants in the study.

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics

Participant	**Age**	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**	**Student Status**	**Employment status**	**Family Status**
Participant 1	36	F	H	Senior	Working part-time, Volunteering	Single with children
Participant 2	31	F	H	Senior	Working full-time	Single with children
Participant 3	31	F	H	Senior	Not working	Married with children
Participant 4	26	F	H	1st year in graduate school	Working full-time	Single, no children
Participant 5	38	F	B	Junior	Working part-time	Single, no children

Note: F – Female; H – Hispanic; B – Black

Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning the study, I informed all prospective research participants about the purpose for collecting the data, how the data would be collected, where the data would be stored, and who would have access to the data. I treated all participants following the ethical guidelines of the Bradley University's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHSR), the institutional review board of the college where I conducted the study and the International Coach Federation (ICF).

Although there were no identifiable risks for participating in this study, I noted a few considerations. Firstly, I treated the information shared in the semi-structured interviews with strict confidentiality. For instance, I kept the names of the participants confidential and did not indicate them on any of the documents used in the study. I also obtained the express permission of all participants to record the interviews and then destroyed the recordings on April 1, 2022, after I had transcribed them verbatim. In addition, because the interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, participants were allowed to keep their cameras off while the session was being recorded, if they chose to do so. I reminded participants about confidentiality and the research study's purpose at the beginning of each interview.

Secondly, I made clear to participants the distinction between coaching and other forms of helping, such as therapy, before beginning the study. Although I am a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, for this study, I provided coaching and not counseling. During the study, there was no participant that I determined to need counseling services; however, if a case had arisen, I was prepared to provide a list of counseling resources.

Research Methods

Data Collection

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "Typically, in good qualitative research, the researchers draw on multiple sources of qualitative data to make interpretations about a research problem" (p. 187). For this study, I collected data using three sources: semi-structured interviews, semi-structured observations, and a personal reflective journal. The data were collected from September 2021 to December 2021. Due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was conducted virtually via Zoom videoconferencing technology instead of in person.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are a useful method for collecting data when the researcher cannot directly observe participants. One advantage of using interviews to collect data is they allow the researcher to probe further and ask for clarification to participants' responses. They are also helpful for collecting data from participants who prefer to verbally share their thoughts or feelings rather than in writing (Mertler, 2020). However, this data collection approach can be limited as the researcher's presence may bias participants' responses and not all interviewees are as articulate and perceptive as others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Mertler (2020) states:

> Other limitations of interviews include the fact that respondents are not able to remain anonymous. Many people are simply uncomfortable with a recording device lying on the table between them and the interviewer. Finally, respondents often fear that something they have said may be used against them at some point in the future (p. 138).

For this study, I used a semi-structured interview process. According to Newcomer et al. (2015), "Conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, the semi-structured interview employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions often accompanied by follow up why or how questions" (p. 492). Newcomer et al. (2015) also describe the semi-structured interview process as "relaxed and engaging" (p. 492). Like all interviews, semi-structured interviews are time-consuming, labor-intensive, and require the interviewer to be skilled and "knowledgeable about the relevant substantive issues" (p. 493); however, semi-structured interviews are a useful method for asking probing and follow-up questions to elicit detailed responses from research participants (Newcomer et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviews were an appropriate method of data collection for this study as I was able to use a variety of questions

to get a detailed description of participants' motivation levels before and after attending the coaching workshops.

Each research participant attended two semi-structured interviews virtually via Zoom and was given a $30.00 Amazon gift card as a thank you for their time. The purpose of the interviews was to understand and measure the participants' level of motivation at the beginning and end of the study. I conducted the interviews in September 2021 and December 2021 using the following layout. First, I provided basic information about the interview. At the beginning of each interview, I gave participants a brief overview of the purpose of the study, the general structure of the interview, and an invitation to ask questions. Second, I asked opening questions. The first set of questions gave participants the opportunity to talk about themselves, including their demographics, their major, and their career goals. For the second interview, I omitted this part and went straight to the next section. Third, I asked content questions. During this phase of each interview, participants were asked about their motivation to attend college classes using the sub-questions of the research study framed in a way that was interesting and relevant to their experiences. Fourth, I brought closure to the interview. During this part of each interview, I thanked the participants for participating in the interviews. I also restated the confidentiality of the interview and of the study and invited the participants to ask any further questions. Appendix B and Appendix C outline the initial questions used in the two semi-structured interviews.

Semi-Structured Observations

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), observing participants allows researchers to engage in firsthand experiences with the research participants and record information, events, and impressions as they occur. Mertler (2020) states that observations, such as noticing the nonverbal reactions of participants during a coaching workshop, are useful when other forms of

data collection are not possible or appropriate. Using a semi-structured observation method, I intended to observe participants' interest-level and engagement during the workshops. I particularly noted their enthusiasm to learn and discuss success strategies, which added rich detail to the data collected through the semi-structured interviews.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that a disadvantage of collecting observational data is that the researcher may be seen as intrusive. I informed participants prior to beginning the study that I would be conducting the coaching workshops as part of the data collection. This helped participants understand my role as a practitioner-researcher and reduced any intrusiveness. I also made notes as unobtrusively as possible during the coaching workshops.

Personal Reflective Journal

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and the semi-structured observations during the coaching workshops, I maintained a written reflective journal to describe my feelings and experiences throughout the research study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, "Sufficient reflexivity occurs when researchers record notes during the process of research, reflect on their own personal experiences and consider how their personal experiences may shape their interpretation of results" (p. 184). Keeping a personal reflective journal throughout the data collection phase of the study allowed me to reflect on the observations and interviews during the study and my feelings and interpretations associated with those observations (Mertler, 2020).

Together, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the semi-structured observations, and my reflective journal allowed me to formulate detailed descriptions of the feelings and experiences of each of the five participants during the data analysis phase of the study.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), in a qualitative research report, it is essential to "specify the steps in analyzing the various forms of qualitative data", which "involves segmenting and taking apart the data (like peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together" (p. 190).

Preparing for Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in rich detail" (p. 6). Thematic analysis involves searching across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used thematic analysis to analyze the data collected for this study. Thematic analysis allowed me to notice similar themes and patterns across the data collected from the five research participants.

Visual Data Displays. To prepare for the thematic analysis, I created visual displays of the data collected. One of the visual display methods used was the contact summary form (see Appendix D). "A contact summary form is a one-page document with some focusing or summarizing questions about a particular field contact" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 124). This form was helpful in answering questions such as, "what were the main concepts, themes, issues, and questions that I saw and heard during this contact?" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 124). The contact summary form was also helpful in reflecting on each participant in detail.

A data accounting log was also used for displaying data such as attendance for the interviews and workshops (see Appendix E). According to Miles et al. (2014), "The data accounting log is a record-keeping tool for the types and quantity of data collected" (p. 122).

This method was effective for this study. It allowed the data to be organized simply for analysis to reflect on patterns and themes across all five research participants.

Following this, I reviewed the transcriptions of the interviews. I used Zoom transcription software for transcribing each interview and manually edited the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. I also used Google Docs to record my observations and write notes in my reflective journal after each interview and after each coaching workshop. All these documents were stored in a password-protected Dropbox folder on my computer laptop.

Qualitative Coding

According to Miles et al. (2014), codes are used to retrieve and categorize similar data so that the researcher can "quickly find, pull out, and cluster segments" of the data related to a particular research question or theme (p. 72). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that qualitative coding "involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often based in the actual language of the participant (called an in vivo term)" (p. 193). During the data analysis phase of this study, qualitative coding was used to label chunks of data to make it easier for me to understand the sorted data later in the analysis process.

First Stage of Thematic Analysis

I began the thematic analysis process by familiarizing myself with all data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is essential to immerse in the data to be familiar with the depth and breadth of the context. "Immersion usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data and reading the data in an active way – searching for meanings, patterns and so on" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16). As I read through the interview transcripts, visual data displays, and other

documents, I made notations and marked main ideas. This gave me a general sense of emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Following this step, I sorted the data using Microsoft Excel, using the process of inductive coding to create codes. Inductive codes are codes that "emerge progressively during data collection" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 81). I used this approach rather than creating deductive codes, which are a "start list" of codes created before collecting data (Miles et al., 2014, p. 81). I chose inductive coding as I wanted to remain open to what the participants had to say rather than trying to "force-fit the data into preexisting codes" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 81).

As I coded the data inductively, I created descriptive codes and in vivo codes to sort the data. "A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). For example, words and phrases such as family (FAM), career goals (CAR), and passion (PASS) were descriptive codes that emerged as I coded the participants' responses to interviews. "In vivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). For example, words and phrases such as mental break (MEN), burnout (BURN), and support (SUPP) were common phrases mentioned in the responses of participants. Once the descriptive and in vivo codes were created, I used colored highlights in Excel to sort the codes into categories. The first two columns of Table 2 show the different categories that emerged after the first stage of analysis.

Table 2

Coding & Thematic Analysis Progression

Codes		Sub Themes	Themes
CAR	Career goals		Participants were motivated by both **internal and external motivators**; however intrinsic motivators slightly outweighed external ones.
FIN	Finances		
PASS	Passion		
GRD	Grades		
GRAD	Graduation		
FAM	Family		
SUPP	Support	**Lack of Support**	**Difficulties** negatively affected the motivation of participants.
COV	COVID-19		
REM	Remote Learning		
WFH	Working from home		
ADV	Advisors		
FAM	Family	**Multiple Roles**	
MARR	Married		
MOTH	Mother		
SING	Single Mother		
CHILD	Children		
FTW	Full-time work		
PTW	Part-time work		
FTS	Full-time student		
PTS	Part-time student		
VOL	Volunteering		
BURN	Burnout	**Burnout, Stress & Frustration**	
STR	Stress		
FRU	Frustration		
COV	COVID-19		
FAMI	Family Issues		
MEN	Mental Break		
BREAK	Take a break		
TIME	Time Management	**Attendance, Motivation, Difficulties**	**Coaching Workshops** positively impacted participants' motivation.
COMM	Commitment		
HELP	Helpful Resources		
GIV	Give up		
SELF	Self-Care		
INT	Interaction		
INFO	Informative		
GROW	Growth Mindset		
SKILL	Skills		
TIP	Tips		
STRG	Strategies		

Second Stage of Thematic Analysis

During the second stage of thematic analysis, I sorted the codes by their color categories to look for patterns and themes. Several sub-themes emerged during this phase, including Internal and External Motivators, Lack of Support, Multiple Roles, Burnout, Stress and Frustration and Attendance, Motivation, and Difficulties. Following this, I again reviewed the collected data to ensure that I did not miss any patterns or emerging themes and that the themes accurately reflect the meanings in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The third column of Table 2 displays the sub-themes that emerged.

Third Stage of Thematic Analysis

During the third stage of thematic analysis, I conducted a detailed analysis of the study's emerging themes to identify the story that each theme told (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final themes that emerged from the detailed, three stage thematic analysis process were: 1) Participants were motivated by both internal and external motivators; however intrinsic motivators slightly outweighed external ones, 2) Difficulties negatively affected the motivation of participants, and 3) Coaching Workshops positively impacted participants' motivation. The last column of Table 2 lists the three main themes that emerged from the study.

Displaying the Summary of Findings

The sample size for the study was small and many of the responses to the research questions were clear and for the most part similar. As a result, a conceptually clustered matrix was a suitable method for displaying the study's findings (see Table 3). According to Miles et al. (2014) "Conceptually clustered matrices are most helpful when some clear concepts or themes have emerged from the initial analysis. They also can be used with less complex cases, such as individuals or small groups" (p. 174). This method was helpful in bringing together key data

from the participants into a single matrix and allowed the researcher to summarize themes of interest and their relationships in a simple format (Miles et al., 2014).

Table 3

Summary of Findings

Research Questions	How motivated are the participants about college?	How did difficulties affect their motivation?	How has coaching affected the motivation of the participants?
Participant 1	Motivated to find a better job and by her desire to help her community.	Caused burnout.	Workshops were motivating. Participant was ready to take a break but chose to continue to the next semester.
Participant 2	Participant's motivation on a scale of 1 to 10 was above 7; motivated by grades.	Caused frustration.	Workshops were motivating and helped the participant learn new techniques to better manage her semester.
Participant 3	On a scale of 1 to 10, participant was at a 10. High intrinsic motivation.	Caused emotional sadness.	Workshops were helpful. However, they did not affect the decision to register for the next semester.
Participant 4	Participant chose between 4 and 5. Moderately low motivation.	Felt overwhelmed to the point of dropping all their classes.	Motivation rose to 10. Workshops had major impact on the decision to return to classes in the next semester.
Participant 5	Participant chose 7; self-motivated.	Took the semester off.	Workshop was helpful and insightful.
Subthemes		**Lack of Support; Balancing Multiple Roles; Burnout, Stress, and Frustration**	**Attendance; Motivation; Difficulties**
Major Themes	**Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**	**Difficulties**	**Coaching Workshops**

Researcher Positionality

Herr and Anderson (2016) state, "Researcher positionality is important in all research. Essentially, your positionality as a researcher means asking the question, who am I in relation to my participants and my setting" (p. 37). Therefore, it is important to close this chapter with a

statement of my positionality as this study's researcher. I have worked with the participants' program for the past three years as a volunteer coach and workshop facilitator, assisting students with personal and professional development. From this previous work with students in the program, the idea for this research study was born. While working with students over the past few years, the program coordinator and I have seen areas for improvement, particularly in creating interventions to increase student motivation. Conducting this action research study helped me understand the effects of coaching on motivation and improvements that could be made to the workshops (Herr & Anderson, 2016; Mertler, 2020).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students to attend college classes. This chapter described the study's research methodology, research context, data collection, data analysis, and the researcher's positionality. Chapter 4 will report and discuss the research study's findings, the themes and subthemes that emerged during the data analysis phase, and a synthesis of the findings based on the study's research questions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative observational case study explored the impact of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students in a large urban college in the northeast region of the United States. Four undergraduate students and one graduate student who were part of an academic, career, and personal support program for low-income students participated in the study. The program's mission is to help students complete their college degrees. The study's research questions were: (a) How motivated were the participants to attend college classes? (b) How did difficulties affect the motivation of the participants? (c) How did coaching affect the motivation of the participants? Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, observations, and the researcher's reflective journals from September 2021 to December 2021. This chapter reports the research study's findings, then identifies and discusses the themes and subthemes that emerged during the data analysis phase of the study. The chapter closes with a synthesis of the findings based on the study's research questions.

Research Findings and Themes

As explained in chapter 3, the participants were all over 25 years old, female, and from minority backgrounds. The participants were interviewed before attending four coaching workshops, and again after attending the workshops. The interview questions elicited detailed responses on participants' motivation to attend college classes before and after the coaching workshops. Participants' responses reflect both similar and different circumstances and experiences, which resulted in three themes and five subthemes. The themes were Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, Difficulties, and Coaching Workshops. The subthemes were Lack of

Support, Balancing Multiple Roles; Burnout, Stress, and Frustration; Attendance; Motivation; and Difficulties.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

In the first interview, on a scale of 1 to 10, the participants' level of motivation ranged from 4.5 to 10. Four participants reported levels from 7 to 10, and one participant stated that her motivation level was between 4 and 5. All five participants presented both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; however, they displayed more intrinsic motivation in their answers to the interview questions and their engagement in the workshops.

Participant 1 stated that she was motivated to get a college degree because she wanted to earn more than a minimum wage. She shared, "I do not want just a minimum wage job at this point." She continued to elaborate by sharing that she intended to get a master's degree and become a licensed social worker. Participant 1 also showed intrinsic motivation while discussing her passion and interest in earning a college degree. She elaborated further:

> I think the community, just seeing how the community is so broken, and the majority of humans, they kind of just care about themselves, or they see things as taboo. Many people, they are very judgmental in many situations. I really am willing to help others, and I feel like I need to be licensed to be involved.

Participant 2, who expressed that her motivation level was above 7, displayed more extrinsic motivation in her responses. She stated that her motivation was to stay in the social work program, which involves earning good grades; hence, she takes the necessary steps to stay on top of her grades, such as modifying her social life to spend more time studying while working and having a family. In my reflective journal, I shared, "Participant 2 exuded confidence and is motivated to graduate. She is already considering her master's degree."

Participant 3 expressed a very high level of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, choosing a 10 on the 1 to 10 scale. This participant demonstrated extrinsic motivation when she stated that being close to graduation motivated her. She said, “I’m so close, I’m ready to be finished. I’m almost done. I feel like I’m right there, and I’m ready.” However, this participant also showed some intrinsic motivation as she shared that she also wanted to complete her degree because of the memory of her parents, whom she recently lost. She stated that their memory was driving her to finish. She shared, “They gave me more motivation to finish. If they were here, they would want this for me.” She further stated that wanting a better life for her children also motivated her to continue college classes. She wanted to do better for her children and lead by example. “I just want to show them it’s never too late to see your goals and everything,” she explained.

Participants 4 and 5 both expressed lower levels of motivation. However, there was still some sense of intrinsic motivation in their interview responses. They were both working while pursuing their college degrees. Participant 4 stated that her motivation level was 4 to 5 out of 10. Her motivation was low because she was overwhelmed with working full-time, transitioning back to in-person work while attending classes remotely. At the time of the study, she took a break from classes. She stated:

> Part of the reason why I took the break was, I was getting burned out and then I also was transitioning back into full-time at the office, so even though during COVID I was doing it at home, I kind of want to give myself the time and space to readjust back into the routine of work.

Although Participant 4’s motivation level was the lowest of all five participants in the study, she showed intrinsic motivation. She was very eager to attend all the coaching workshops and put

what she learned into practice. I noted in my reflection journal that she was “energized and highly engaged” in the workshops.

Participant 5 chose a 7 on the motivation level scale. Her reason for choosing 7 and not a higher score stemmed from nervousness about balancing classes with a new full-time job. In previous semesters, she did not work while attending classes. She shared:

> I’m a little bit nervous about starting a new chapter - going back to work, and then in the back of my mind is how to balance schoolwork and working because I’ve never done this before. I was unemployed for the last four years and so I was always a full-time student and had nothing else going on besides this program.

Participant 5 further elaborated on academic challenges that were affecting her motivation:

> The last two semesters with the pandemic and all that stuff, really made me lose my motivation and my confidence. I was a 3.5 GPA student and now I’m a 2.5 and I have three classes that I must appeal before they turn into F’s.

When we met for the first interview, Participant 5 had begun appealing her grades. She was not receiving much help with the appeal process as she had a long wait to meet with the general advisor. However, she started working on the process herself. “What I’m doing is writing down my reason for the appeal, but the other part I don’t know how to fill it out,” she explained. She seemed to be motivating herself by beginning the appeal without fully understanding the process.

The themes of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that emerged throughout this study matched research by Shillingford and Karlin (2013), which explored the role of intrinsic motivation in the academic pursuits of nontraditional students. The findings of their research were that “intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in nontraditional students’ academic pursuits”

(Shillingford & Karlin, 2013, p. 101). Shillingford and Karlin (2013) also cited research by Harju and Eppler's (1997) examination of college students' academic motivation, which found that:

> The majority of nontraditional students (74%) endorsed the learning orientation, which was related to a higher level of classroom and study flow. Flow in these learning contexts can be characterized as intense concentration and involvement, strong intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment (p. 154 as cited in Shillingford & Karlin, 2013).

Additional researchers also compared the motivations of traditional and nontraditional students. They concluded that nontraditional students reported higher importance in trying their best, having practical skills they can use, and other forms of intrinsic motivation for learning (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Rabourn et al., 2018). Although external factors such as good grades and the hope of better employment were motivators for the participants, they also displayed a high level of interest in personal growth. Their intrinsic desire for self-improvement seemed to have a positive effect on their persistence to attend classes despite the difficulties they faced (Landrum et al., 2000).

Difficulties

Participants in the study reported two primary difficulties: lack of support from the college and balancing multiple roles, including work, school, and family. These difficulties resulted in varying levels and types of burnout, stress, and frustration for the five participants.

Lack of Support

Four out of five participants stated they did not feel support from the college. Participant 1 shared that the pace of college life was a bit hectic and that support from the college in the form of self-care resources would be helpful for her as a single mother and full-time student. She

stated that in her previous college, which was a community college, she received that type of support:

> For me, as a student, working out and doing yoga kind of relieves the stress off me, and that just makes you motivated. In this college, it's just class to class and work and you know, the city life is very hectic. When I came into this college, that is what I was looking for. I was looking for those yoga classes, but I didn't find anything.

Participant 2 stated that she did not receive support after the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency. She stated, "I don't feel a lot of support from the college after we started attending classes remotely." She further elaborated:

> I emailed my advisor to register for this semester, and she just sent me a rough email back saying, you're not a new student, you already know what your courses are, just follow your curriculum. So, it looks like she was not able to at any time help me see what courses I really needed to take in this semester.

Participant 3 was satisfied with the help she received from the program's coordinators. She stated:

> I mean, the program, they're doing pretty good with helping, especially with the summer grants. Financially, it's been hard. As far as workshops, I think the school is pretty good so far with the workshops as far as like time management and resume writing.

From her response, it seems that finances and job preparedness were important areas for her, and both the program and college offered sufficient support in that area.

Participant 4 shared that she needed support with online classes. She shared that she did not have regular meetings with her advisor and wished she had the support of someone checking

on her, especially when classes were remote. She mentioned that her mother was her biggest supporter but did not expect her to understand everything she was going through.

Participant 5 expressed a lack of support from the college. However, she did share that being part of the program was helpful to her. She stated that the program coordinators were always "looking out" for her and "checking in" with her. She mentioned that she needed to consider what they are doing for her.

The number of participants that stated that they needed more support from the college was an unexpected trend in the findings. I believe the difference between Participant 3's response and the four participants who felt unsupported was the type of support that they sought. Participant 3 did not seem to need as much academic support, self-care resources, or advising support as the other participants did. As the study's institution was a large college with over 20,000 students, I did expect to find some discontent with the services offered; however, four out of five participants feeling a lack of support was surprising. Some of the support services available at the college during the time of the study included writing workshops, tutoring, assistance for students with disabilities, counseling services, and career services. Students were able to access these services by contacting the departments. However, studies show that nontraditional students are typically less likely to reach out for help even though they know help is available (Macdonald, 2018; Remenick, 2019).

Studies show that support from the institution plays a vital role in the success of nontraditional students, as they will persist if they feel supported. Therefore, it is essential for colleges to offer support to help them succeed (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Brown, 2002; Kachur & Barcinas, 2021; Osam et al., 2017; Remenick, 2019; Todorova, 2019; Zart, 2019). However, some colleges experience issues such as budgetary constraints, and this may affect the support

they provide for nontraditional students. Remenick (2019) states, “Today, many universities are unable to budget for the specific resources nontraditional students need and instead find that a one-size-fits-all approach to student services is most economical” (p. 123). One reason most participants in this study felt a lack of support may have been that the services provided by the college were a one-size-fits-all approach and not tailored to fit the unique needs of nontraditional students.

Balancing Multiple Roles

All five participants shared difficulties balancing multiple roles, including work, family, and school. Participant 1, a single mother and a full-time student, identified some of her challenges as financial constraints, busyness, time management, and stress. Participant 2, a single mother, and Participant 3, who was married, both managed family responsibilities and school. Participant 4, who was in a relationship but had no children, worked full-time while taking college classes and shared that balancing the return to in-person gatherings, full-time work, and online classes was overwhelming. Participant 5, who was single with no children, stated that she recently started a new job and was nervous about having enough time for both work and school.

Research shows that balancing multiple roles is a common concern of nontraditional students. Only 18% of adult learners do not work while in school (Ross-Gordon, 2011). “For the most part, these adult learners attend school part-time while juggling the responsibilities of multiple roles such as full-time employee, spouse or partner, caregiver for children or parents, volunteer, friend, and coworker” (Wax & Wertheim, 2015, p. 40). As evidenced by all five participants in this study, nontraditional students often struggle with balancing their multiple roles and staying successful in school (Bidwell, 2014; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Wax and Wertheim (2015) asserted, “Adults need help figuring out how to balance these demands” (p. 40).

Burnout, Stress, and Frustration

All five participants shared that the difficulties they experienced caused burnout, stress, and frustration, which affected their motivation and caused some of them to consider taking a break or withdrawing from classes. Participant 1 stated:

> As an upper senior, balancing workload and completing assignments diligently can be challenging. I do believe that not having a full-time income can be stressful and spending 6 to 10 hours studying a week plus a part-time job and my internship was a lot to take on in this semester. Handling my children's emotions as well as teen conflicts put me in a state of burnout.

Participant 1 further shared that she considered taking a break because of the burnout she was experiencing. Participant 1 also noted that she wanted more support in the form of self-care; however, I noted that although busy, she was very excited to volunteer at a hospital as a rape victim advocate. This act of service may have been self-care for her. Studies find volunteering can be a form of self-care and have the potential to boost mental health (Yeung et al., 2017).

Participant 2 shared an account of one situation where her college advisor was unable to help her with registration for the new semester. Frustrated by the situation, the participant took the initiative and reached out to another classmate who helped her through the process. This action showed self-efficacy, as Participant 2 was resourceful in solving the problem by choosing to find another form of support (Ackerman, 2022a; Bandura, 1977). Taking this action may have also built her resilience and increased her coping skills, factors that can contribute to enhanced performance in school (Devine et al., 2013; Pajares, 2010).

Participant 3 experienced stress caused by a combination of personal and family issues. At the time of the study, both her parents had recently passed. She shared, "Personally, I was

going through a bit of a moment of sadness. Maybe if I had the time to participate in the self-care workshop, it would have benefitted me." However, being close to graduation was still a motivator for her. "I have several more credits to complete to graduate. I think being so close to finishing has motivated me to register for the next semester."

At the time of the study, Participant 4 dropped her classes because she was feeling burned out and stressed. She was having a difficult time handling both remote work and remote learning together. She said to me in the interview, "I'm stressed out."

Participant 5 expressed similar feelings of stress, mainly due to fear of successfully balancing multiple commitments. At the time of the study, Participant 5 withdrew from classes to take a "mental break." She commented:

> I want to go back to school but I'm just so nervous and fear that I'm not going to be able to balance work and school. That's why it's kind of hard for me to do two things at one time. I don't want to quit my job because I need the money but at the same time I definitely want to go back to school. It's all about pushing myself, sucking it up and you know, go for it.

Despite the stress, nervousness, and fear, Participant 5 expressed some hope to return to classes. "I still want to go back to school, so summer looks like it will be a go-to for me, so we'll just have to see."

The responses of the five participants showed that difficulties did affect their motivation to continue attending classes. However, some were able to persist and others were not. Understanding the effects of these difficulties on nontraditional students is essential. Left unaddressed, these difficulties can lead to decreasing levels of confidence, low self-esteem,

poorer academic functioning, and lower motivation to continue attending classes (Moore et al., 2020; Rabourn et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010; Zart, 2019).

Coaching Workshops

Although the five participants showed different responses to the difficulties they faced, they all seemed to want to persevere towards completing their degree. Because I believed that having an additional layer of support would be beneficial in helping them persist, coaching was included in this study as a form of support to help participants effectively manage the difficulties they were experiencing (Dalton & Crosby, 2014; Pajares, 2010; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). During the months of September 2021 to December 2021, I facilitated four coaching workshops using skills developed as a certified personal and executive coach. A total of four virtual workshops were offered via Zoom video conferencing platform. Each workshop focused on one topic. The topics covered in the coaching workshops were time-management, dealing with procrastination, self-care, and developing a growth mindset. The theoretical frameworks of the workshops were based on principles of positive psychology and self-efficacy. Positive psychology reinforces the importance of recognizing and building strengths, which is helpful for academic motivation and persistence (Ackerman, 2022; Devine et al., 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Self-efficacy helps with students' belief in their ability to perform well (Bandura, 1977; Ben-Yehuda, 2015).

In the coaching workshops, participants responded to my prompts, completed homework exercises, and engaged with one another. They shared tips, tools, and resources by unmuting or by typing in the chatroom during the workshops. The hour-long sessions used the following pattern. For the first 30 minutes, participants considered the focus topic and discussed tools and strategies they have used to achieve college success, and learned additional tools and strategies

that they could incorporate into their lives. Then participants took part in a 10-minute collaborative review of a case study using the tools and strategies they had discussed. During the last 15 minutes, we reviewed the main points of the session and engaged in either a question-and-answer discussion or a brief coaching session. Following each workshop, participants put what they learned into action by setting a goal for the week and using one or more of the strategies shared in the workshops. Lastly, students gave an account of putting the action plan into practice in the following workshop.

As a more detailed example, the topic for the first workshop was time management (see Appendix A). We began the workshop by discussing how the participants scheduled their time throughout the semester. Students shared their experiences and areas where they needed help with time management. We then discussed one way of making the semester more manageable, which involved creating a plan for the entire semester and highlighting important dates such as assignment due dates, holidays, and schedule changes. From there, I guided students in breaking their general semester plans into smaller monthly, weekly, and daily goals. Following this, we reviewed a case study of a fictional student, Noel, who needed help making his schedule more manageable. Noel was a single father with a part-time job. His schedule was very hectic, unbalanced, and included a lot of time wasters. Participants were able to create a schedule for Noel using the tools we had discussed earlier in the workshop. Following the case study, I reviewed the strategies we had practiced and answered participants' questions. After the workshop, participants' homework activity was to create their own semester plan and break it into smaller monthly, weekly, and daily goals. In the following workshop session, some of the participants reported their experiences with creating their schedules. They also shared how making their own schedules positively affected their outlook for the semester. The additional

coaching workshops on procrastination (see Appendix B), self-care (see Appendix C), and growth mindset (see Appendix D) followed a similar pattern.

Attendance

Attendance in the coaching workshops varied among the five participants in the study. Participants 1 and 4 attended all four workshops, Participant 2 attended two of the four workshops, and Participants 3 and 5 attended one of the four workshops. Reasons for participants not attending the workshops were mainly scheduling issues, such as working or family responsibilities that clashed with the times of the coaching workshops. I tried to be flexible with the times of the coaching workshops, and all workshops were offered virtually, but I was unable to meet everyone's availability. Research shows that because nontraditional students have a host of other responsibilities, committing the time to participate in services offered by the college can be difficult (Remenick, 2019; Ross-Gordon, 2011)

Motivation

Overall, participants reported that the coaching workshops had a positive effect on their motivation. Participant 1 shared that she was at the point of taking a break, but the workshops, especially the last one on growth mindset, helped her realize that she was "one step closer to reaching success." Participant 2 stated that although she did not make it to two of the workshops, she liked the group format. She stated that meeting with other students made her feel more motivated. She said social interaction was huge: "When you're coping with stress and classes, you need the interaction with people, and you learn from people.". Participant 3 said that although the workshop she attended was motivational, it did not motivate her to register for the following semester as she was already motivated by how close she was to graduation. However, she stated that if the coaching workshops continue, she would participate in them. Participant 3

had a motivation level of 10 out of 10 at the beginning of the study. Because her motivation level was already very high, one workshop may not have made a distinct difference in her motivation to register for the following semester.

Participant 4 attended all four workshops and stated that they were very motivating. She stated that her motivation rose from between 4 to 5 in the first interview to 10. She stated that the growth mindset workshop helped her learn how to tackle tasks and assignments. She also said that the coaching workshops were a motivation for her to register for the following semesters. Participant 5 indicated that her motivation level rose from 7 to 8 after the workshop she attended. She shared that it was helpful and gave some "good ideas." I also reflected on the impact of the workshops on the motivation of the participants in my journals. Table 4 summarizes my written reflections following each of the four workshops.

Table 4

Researcher's Reflection on Coaching Workshops

Workshop	*Topic*	*Researcher's Reflections*
1	Time management	"The first workshop was a great session. The participants were engaged and seemed enthusiastic about time management and achieving success as students."
2	Procrastination	"After the first two workshops, my impressions were positive. It seems that participants were energized to attend these workshops and use the tools for improving their organization and management of the semester."
3	Self-care	"I was motivated to continue with these workshops as I saw the results they were having on students. They were engaged and reported that they were putting what they learned into practice."
4	Growth mindset	"This session was extremely beneficial to participants. One participant shared that she was having personal challenges with her family. However, she mustered the motivation to attend the last session. She stated that she needed to focus on her goals and that I was so understanding and motivating. Her impressions of me stood out as our relationship possibly served as a support for her. This participant attended all the four workshops."

Attending the coaching workshops seemed to help motivate the participants because it allowed them to maintain focus and motivation (Wax & Wertheim, 2015). Engaging in the workshops also helped participants notice their own capabilities, strengths, and achievements. By collaborating with one another, they were able to exchange ideas and build upon their own knowledge. Participants also recognized that some of the skills needed for success in school were skills they were already using for work or at home. This helped them build self-efficacy (Tate et al., 2015; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). Attending the workshops also helped them strengthen their courage, reduce fear and anxiety, and increase self-confidence, showing them that they do have some control over what happens to them academically and professionally (Ben-Yehuda, 2015; Helens-Hart, 2018; Jarosz, 2017).

Difficulties

The coaching workshops also appeared to have provided some of the support participants felt they were lacking. Participant 1 stated that the workshops provided her with helpful resources to guide her to finish her degree. Participant 2 gave an example of how the time management workshop helped her. She stated that because of the workshop, she bought a daily planner, created a daily plan, and was managing her time much better. Participant 2 also shared that if the workshops continued, she would participate.

Participant 3 stated that the topics of the workshops were beneficial for students. Even though she did not express lack of support as a pressing issue for herself, she commented, “The workshops touched on a student’s everyday life, such as self-care and time management. Having a better understanding of time management can definitely help any student be successful in school or even at everyday tasks.”

Participant 4’s response to the workshops showed self-reflection. She stated:

> My major takeaway from these coaching workshops is that it all begins with me. I have to be willing to look at things from a growth mindset, consider my own self-care and practice time management. Time management is definitely a skill I am working to master.

Participant 5 was only able to attend one workshop, which was on the topic of procrastination. However, the concepts she learned in the workshop left an impact on her. She commented, "It was really helpful and insightful on some strategies of what I could do." I further asked her to elaborate on these strategies, and she shared, "It's definitely not to be afraid and second guess myself. I have a habit of doing that." Despite self-doubt, anxiety, fear, and academic setbacks, she was grateful for the support offered by the program.

These findings reflect literature on coaching nontraditional students (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Spencer, 2021; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). The participants in the study were motivated to attend classes which usually is the case with nontraditional students (Bye et al., 2007; Rabourn et al., 2018; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013; Zart, 2019); however, they experienced difficulties that affected their motivation levels (Kundu, 2017; Markle, 2015; Remenick, 2019; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Zart, 2019). As the number of nontraditional students continues to grow, colleges ought to incorporate strategies to help them handle difficulties that affect their motivation to attend classes. I agree with the assertion of Wax and Wertheim (2015) that "Coaching enables postsecondary institutions to be responsive to the adult learner" (p. 43).

Overall, the coaching workshops seemed to have had a positive impact on the motivation of the participants. Coaching provided support and tools that participants needed. In addition, coaching increased participants' self-awareness, which can lead to further personal growth (Dalton & Crosby, 2014; Devine et al., 2013; Helens-Hart, 2018; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018;

Short et al., 2010; Spencer, 2021; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). Although scheduling presented a challenge for some of the participants, they were engaged in the sessions they attended, reported the impactful results of putting what they learned into practice, and expressed interest in participating in future workshops.

Research Questions

The themes, subthemes, and discussion reported in this chapter helped to answer the study's three research questions. The study's first research question was, how motivated were the participants to attend college classes? The findings of the study show that the five participants were moderate to highly motivated to attend classes. For most participants, intrinsic motivation was slightly more evident than extrinsic motivation.

The study's second research question was, how did difficulties affect the motivation of the participants? The findings of the study show that difficulties experienced by participants negatively affected their motivation by causing burnout, stress, and frustration.

The third research question was, how did coaching affect the motivation of the participants? The findings of the study show that the four coaching workshops had a positive effect on the motivation of the participants by providing support and helpful tools. Specifically, participants' motivation rose from the beginning of the study and all five participants reported that they would participate in coaching if offered again.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reported the research study's findings, then identified and discussed the themes and subthemes that emerged during the data analysis phase of the study. The chapter closed with a synthesis of the findings based on the study's research questions. Chapter 5 will offer a summary of the findings of the research study, implications for practice, and

recommendations for future research related to the study's findings, before discussing the study's limitations and drawing final conclusions.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative, observational case study and participatory action research study explored the effects of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students. The study answered three research questions: (a) How motivated were the participants to attend college classes? (b) How did difficulties affect the motivation of the participants? (c) How did coaching affect the motivation of the participants? This chapter will offer a summary of the research study's findings and discuss implications for practice and recommendations for future research. Then it will discuss the study's limitations and draw final conclusions.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study revealed the following: (a) Participants displayed moderate to high motivation to attend classes. Both internal and external factors influenced their motivation with internal factors slightly more evident. (b) Difficulties experienced by participants negatively affected their motivation by causing burnout, stress, and frustration. (c) Coaching interventions had a positive effect on the motivation of the participants by providing support and helpful tools.

Motivation of Participants

All five participants in the study were motivated to attend classes by both internal and external factors. However, internal motivation such as a passion for their career choice and a desire for self-improvement were most common. These findings matched literature on the motivation of nontraditional students, which shows that intrinsic motivators play a vital role in nontraditional students' academic pursuits (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Rabourn et al., 2018; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013).

Effects of Difficulties on Participants' Motivation

Participants in the study experienced difficulties commonly seen among nontraditional students. These difficulties included lack of support from the college, balancing classes with other roles such as family and work, and dealing with burnout, stress, and frustration (Bidwell, 2014; Markle, 2015; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). These difficulties had a negative impact on the motivation of participants. Some participants were able to persist even though they were facing difficulties whereas others were not able to persist. However, all participants expressed the desire to complete their degree.

Impact of Coaching on Participants' Motivation

Participants attended four coaching workshops covering the topics of time management, dealing with procrastination, creating a daily self-care routine, and developing a growth mindset. The study's findings show that coaching had a positive impact on their motivation. The coaching workshops helped participants become more self-aware, build self-efficacy and confidence, manage stress, and deal with overwhelm. The coaching workshops also provided participants with useful resources to be successful students such as scheduling tips and self-care practices. Several studies affirm the usefulness of such resources (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Devine et al., 2013; Helens-Hart, 2018; Jarosz, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010; Wax & Wertheim, 2015).

Researcher Reflection

As I reflected on the responses of the participants, I remembered my experiences as an international student working part-time during my undergraduate studies. Some of my experiences were similar to those of the participants. I found it difficult balancing schedules as well as adjusting to a new culture, making new friends, and learning how to adjust to student life

after taking a six-year break from school. My experiences helped me understand the power of internal motivation as well as the importance of personal growth. I later learned that these principles are a fundamental part of coaching and positive psychology (Ackerman, 2022; Devine et al., 2013; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The findings of this study have confirmed what I experienced as a student and have motivated me to continue coaching other students using these principles helping them persist while facing difficulties.

Implications for Practice

I believe that the findings of this study are applicable to higher education institutions, especially large urban colleges. Two ways colleges can incorporate coaching for students are by hiring external coaching vendors and creating in-house coaching programs (Keen, 2014).

External Coaching

Many colleges have well developed academic and student services programs to meet the needs of their students; however, some students do not connect to these services, which often leads to lack of preparedness, lack of motivation, and for many an "untimely exit" (Keen, 2014, p. 69). One solution to this issue would be private student coaching services offered by an external vendor. Keen (2014) states:

> In this situation, an outside vendor has a significant chance to make a difference by providing coaching relationships that support individual undergraduate clients in doing what they need to do when they need to do it and equally importantly, in demystifying the welter of expectations that colleges place on their incoming students, especially when they can deliver "just in time" advice and reminders that fit into the schedule of the client (p. 69).

Bettinger and Baker (2014) studied the effects of student coaching offered by an

external student coaching service, InsideTrack, to mostly nontraditional students attending public, private, and proprietary universities. The results of this study showed an increase in retention after coaching compared to similar students who were not provided with coaching services. They also noted that the effect of coaching on persistence did not disappear after treatment (Bettinger & Baker, 2014).

External coaching can be beneficial for the educational institution as outside contractors would relieve institutions of additional duties by taking care of necessary tasks such as recruiting, screening, training, supervising, supporting, and evaluating their coaches (Keen, 2014). In addition, a proactive third-party coach who is persistent in contacting students and showing interest in them can be a powerful motivator (Dalton & Crosby, 2014). However, this option may be costly for some colleges.

In-House Coaching

Another way colleges can incorporate coaching into services offered to nontraditional students is by training their own in-house coaches. Colleges can do this by building a network of part-time coaches by training staff, students, alumni, faculty, or others who are interested (Keen, 2014).

Studies show that peer coaching, for example, has the potential to help students with personal development and manage stress (Devine et al., 2013; Short et al., 2010). According to Keen (2014), "Because the goal of coaching relates directly to student retention and successful matriculation to graduation, it seems pertinent to remind ourselves that students generally have the greatest influence on the decision making of other students" (p. 72). One example of peer coaching in practice is the Arizona State University Student Success Center. Through this center, the university offers a variety of peer coaching services including freshmen and sophomore

coaching and a student success series. In describing their freshman coaching program, their website states:

> Through the Student Success Center VIP² Coaching, highly qualified upper-division and graduate students team up with freshmen to offer free academic support, information, skill development and advocacy. These coaches have experienced the challenges and obstacles first-year students are facing and work closely with them to help form good study habits, solve problems, adjust to the demands of college life and more.
>
> Your VIP² coach acts as a connector, a cheerleader, and a catalyst (Arizona State University, n.d.).

A peer-coaching program like this can be beneficial for students during a stressful period in their lives (Short et al., 2010). By training upper-division and graduate students in the basic components of coaching, they can support their peers through difficulties (Keen, 2014). Peer coaching can also be an asset for the student-coaches as well as they will learn strategies and tools that can be valuable additions to their life skills (Keen, 2014). Both external and in-house coaches can provide essential support to colleges that can create long-lasting change in students and a positive impact on retention (Keen, 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of coaching on the motivation of nontraditional students, particularly those in large universities in an urban environment. One of the areas for further research listed by Bettinger and Baker (2014) was exploring the specific type of coaching services and the specific actions of coaches that are most effective in motivating students. I believe that this study expanded research in that area by using coaching workshops with a positive psychology foundation.

However, new questions have emerged based on the findings of this study. As noted in the responses of this study's participants, students in large urban universities are normally busy commuter students and since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been attending some or all classes virtually. These students sometimes find it difficult to engage with the college community and often do not utilize some of the services offered by the college (Macdonald, 2018; Remenick, 2019). It would be interesting to see replication of this study including follow-up individual coaching sessions with students in between the workshops. This would allow researchers to explore the effects of a personalized, more proactive approach on students' motivation.

Another recommendation for future research would be exploring the incorporation of twenty-first century tools in coaching nontraditional students. For example, I would suggest studying the effects of incorporating coaching using technology that participants can access on their own time such as on-demand webinars or mobile apps. The use of on-demand technology can improve accessibility for students who have demanding schedules (Macdonald, 2018; Remenick, 2019).

Limitations

Limitations in a study "represent weaknesses in the research that the author acknowledges so that further studies will not suffer from the same problems" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 199). This study had three prominent limitations. Firstly, the sample size for this study was five participants. This small sample size makes it difficult to generalize the results of the study. However, this sample size was manageable for me and produced rich data. The descriptions of the characteristics and experiences of the sample of participants in this study are also sufficient to allow adequate comparison with other samples (Miles et al., 2014, p. 314).

Secondly, researcher bias was also a limitation. I am a practicing coach and this could have affected my view of the findings and conclusions of the study. To minimize this, I used triangulation by verifying results with various data sources (Miles et al., 2014, p. 299), including semi-structured interviews, observations during the coaching workshops, and keeping a research journal. I also reviewed the study's findings with peers to challenge and clarify my thinking during the analysis phase of the study (Miles et al., 2014, p. 298). Thirdly, a mixed-methods approach would have produced richer data. According to Mertler (2020), "The combination of quantitative and qualitative data tends to provide a better understanding of a research problem than either type of data could on its own" (p. 14). For example, including surveys or short answer forms in addition to semi-structured interviews would have given participants more time to ponder on their responses. In addition, incorporating assessments such as the VIA character strengths survey (VIA Institute on Character, 2022) and self-efficacy surveys could have added further detail to the findings.

Conclusion

Nontraditional students constitute a significant proportion of the college student body (Chen et al., 2020; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative that colleges embrace new models of education and support services that can accommodate them (McNair et al., 2016, p. 15). The responses of the five participants in this study show that nontraditional students are motivated to attend college classes (Bye et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2016; Landrum et al., 2000; Rabourn et al., 2018; Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). However, difficulties that they face can negatively affect their motivation (Bidwell, 2014; Markle, 2015; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Wax & Wertheim, 2015). The findings of this study show that coaching is a strategy that institutions can incorporate to increase the motivation of nontraditional students and provide them with the

support they need to persist towards graduation (Bettinger & Baker, 2014; Devine et al., 2013; Helens-Hart, 2018; Jarosz, 2017; Lefdahl-Davis et al., 2018; Short et al., 2010; Wax & Wertheim, 2015).

Since completing the data collection phase of the study, I have continued to facilitate the coaching workshops for the new semester with new knowledge and a renewed commitment to helping nontraditional students stay motivated. In our kickoff meeting for the new semester, one of the study's participants gave an account of her experience attending the workshops in the prior semester. She shared that the workshops were refreshing during a busy semester. She stated, "The workshops helped me when I was overwhelmed." This simple statement by the participant summed up this study's research purpose. It showed that the effect of coaching on the motivation of the participants was a positive one.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of professional coaching sessions on the motivation and perseverance of non-traditional students currently enrolled in a large, urban university. This study consists of attending four student success coaching workshops and answering questions in two audio/video recorded focus group sessions with the researcher. Your participation in this study will take place over the 15 weeks of the Fall 2021 semester, with the four coaching workshops lasting one hour each and the focus group sessions lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour each. Your participation in the study will be a total of 6 hours for the 12 weeks. The results of this study will be anonymous. Your identity will be protected in all reports. There will be no link between your name and the research record. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time without affecting your grades, classes, or participation in the program.

Questions about this study may be directed to the researcher in charge: Ms. Karlene Roberts at kroberts2@mail.bradley.edu.

If you have general questions about being a research participant, you may contact the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects office at (309) 677-3877.

You are voluntarily deciding to participate in this study. By clicking I Agree below, means that you have read and understood the information presented and have decided to participate. Your participation also means that all of your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. If you think of any additional questions, you should contact the researcher.

APPENDIX B

INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how motivated are you as a college student?
2. What are your reasons for choosing that score?
3. Since becoming a college student, what difficulties have you faced?
4. How have you dealt with these difficulties?
5. How have you been performing academically since starting college?
6. What has helped your academic progress?
7. What can help you improve your academic progress?
8. As part of this study, you will be participating in coaching workshops. What do you know about coaching?
9. Have you participated in coaching previously?
10. If yes, what was your experience like?
11. If not, what do you expect to experience?
12. What questions do you have for the researcher?

APPENDIX C

CLOSING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many coaching workshops did you attend?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how helpful were the coaching workshops?
3. What is your reasoning for your answer to question #2?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how motivated did you feel about school after the coaching workshops?
5. What is your reasoning for your answer to question #4?
6. What else could be done to increase your motivation?
7. How much did this study influence your decision to register for the following semester?
8. What were your major takeaways from the coaching workshops?
9. Would you take advantage of that opportunity if you were offered coaching again as part of this program?
10. Can you explore your answer to question #9?
11. What questions do you have for the researcher?

APPENDIX D

CONTACT SUMMARY FORM

Contact Name:

Contact date: Today's date:

1. What were the main issues or themes that stood out in this contact?
2. Summary of the information obtained on each of the target questions for this contact.
    - What was the motivation level of this contact before coaching?
    - What were the reasons for their score?
    - What are some difficulties they experience as a nontraditional student?
    - How do these difficulties affect their motivation?
    - How many workshops did they attend?
    - What was the motivation level of this contact after coaching?
    - What were the reasons for their score?
3. Anything else that stood out as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important in this contact?
4. What new or remaining questions am I considering for my next contact with this person.

APPENDIX E

DATA ACCOUNTING LOG

Attendance	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Summary of Researcher's Notes
Interview 1						
Workshop 1 *Time Management*						
Workshop 2 *Procrastination*						
Workshop 3 *Self-Care*						
Workshop 4 *Growth Mindset*						
Interview 2						

APPENDIX F

TIME MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

This table outlines the content of the first coaching workshop, which covered the topic of time management.

Time frame	*Activity*
30 minutes	Participants discussed their experiences with time management, including the tools and resources they are currently using. The coach guided participants through time-management resources and strategies they can incorporate.
10 minutes	Participants, with the coach's guidance, collaboratively reviewed a fictional case study of a student that needed help creating a management schedule.
15 minutes	The coach did a review of the workshops and answered questions.
5 minutes	The coach assigned the homework activity and asked participants to share their experiences at the following workshop then the program coordinator wrapped up the session.

APPENDIX G

PROCRASTINATION WORKSHOP

This table outlines the content of the second coaching workshop, which covered the topic of procrastination.

Time frame	Activity
10 minutes	The workshop began with an icebreaker activity and participants sharing their experiences with the homework assignment from the previous workshop on time management.
20 minutes	The coach shared reasons why people procrastinate and strategies to identify and deal with it. The coach also introduced participants to steps to create a personal plan to tackle procrastination.
15 minutes	Participants shared experiences with procrastination and collaboratively discussed a fictional case of a working student who struggled with procrastination.
10 minutes	The coach did a brief coaching session with Participant 5.
5 minutes	The coach did a brief review of the session, assigned the homework activity, asked participants to share their experiences at the following workshop then wrapped up the session.

APPENDIX H

SELF-CARE WORKSHOP

This table outlines the content of the third coaching workshop, which covered the topic of self-care.

Time frame	Activity
15 minutes	The workshop began with an icebreaker activity and a review of the past two workshops on time management and procrastination.
25 minutes	The coach reviewed six steps to incorporate self-care into the daily routine.
15 minutes	Participants shared their own self-care practices.
5 minutes	The workshop ended with a question and answer session and homework activity to create a personal self-care plan.

APPENDIX I

GROWTH MINDSET WORKSHOP

This table outlines the content of the third coaching workshop, which covered the topic of growth mindset.

Time frame	Activity
10 minutes	The workshop began with an icebreaker activity and a review of the past three workshops on time management, procrastination, and self-care.
30 minutes	The coach spoke on the differences between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset, reasons why a growth mindset is helpful for students and ways to development a growth mindset.
10 minutes	The coach briefly coached participants on ways they can improve their mindset patterns.
10 minutes	The workshop ended with a motivational video of a nontraditional student who faced obstacles while in college and a brief affirmation.