A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF INSTRUCTORS' EXPERIENCES WITH

RECEIVING AND UTILIZING STUDENT FEEDBACK IN ONLINE COURSES

by

Stanley Triplett

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how community college online course instructors at a large community college in the Deep South experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. The central question of the study regarded how community college online instructors experience receiving and engaging with student evaluations. The theory guiding this study was Knowles's theory of andragogy as it provides a framework for understanding adult learning, including those of adult learners in community college contexts as well as those instructors receiving and responding to student evaluations of teaching. A total of 11 instructors who teach online courses through a community college were recruited, and data resulting from in-depth, unstructured interviews, reflective journal entries, and document collection were analyzing using the phenomenological approach defined by Moustakas (1994). Results indicated that instructors valued and acted upon honest feedback targeting specific problems, particularly related to exam preparation. Instructors noted disregarding feedback perceived to be untimely or vague and suggested preferring to rely on class-based informal evaluations for insights into students' learning needs and responses to instruction. Future research should further engage with the relative value of formal and informal student feedback, as well as to examine the experiences of instructors at institutions where no formal process for receiving student feedback of teaching exists. In all, the results reveal that evaluation can, if used and assessed correctly, provide significant value in terms of improving educational design, course content, test preparedness, and the ability to fulfill the needs of all students in a class. Hence, evaluation and feedback are of great importance and require significant executive decision making from teachers to navigate and utilize effectively.

Keywords: community college, student evaluations, online, instructors

Copyright Page

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First giving honor to God, who is the head of my life, I'd like to say I am truly blessed to have made it this far; "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Without God, I'd be a ship without a sail. I would like to acknowledge my wife Veronica and our two daughters Haleigh and Parker. Let this document serve as proof that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. I'd like to acknowledge my family, friends, and colleagues. You guys are simply amazing. Thank you for putting up with me even when you didn't feel like it.

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MOOC   Massive open online course

SET   Student evaluation of teaching

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. The introduction chapter includes a description of the study through a background discussion of the topic. Therefore, this chapter begins with the background of the study, followed by a problem statement and a purpose statement. Next, this chapter provides an overview of the significance of the study and a list of the developed research questions. Lastly, the introduction chapter includes definitions of the key terms that are relevant to the study.

Background

The key background of the proposed study is split into three distinct categories. First is the history of feedback in education. Feedback as a principle in education extends back as far as the Socratic method, but its nature has evolved considerably over time, and faces new challenges in the digital age. Second is the social background of students' feedback to teachers. Research has long focused on teachers' feedback to students, ignoring a key tool for teacher and course improvement. Third is the theoretical basis of feedback. This background rests most prominently on Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy.

Historical Background

Feedback is one of the most important elements of communication in a learning environment. Leibold and Schwarz (2015) defined *feedback*, in the field of education, as the exchange of information between students and teachers regarding a particular course; this information leads to better educational outcomes. The notion of feedback between teachers and

students goes back to times immemorial, though a noted early practitioner is the Greek philosopher Socrates, whose teaching took the form of dialogs between himself and his students (Taylor, 2019). While modern education is substantially different from Socrates' methods nearly 2400 years ago, the concept of feedback has remained of central importance. The most traditionally prominent sort of feedback, a type which is inherent in the very structure of modern education, is teachers' feedback to students (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). This type of feedback has evolved over time as well, from simple scoring of assignments to more in-depth forms of feedback (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010) and even personalized educational programs (Decelle, 2016).

In addition to these formal feedback structure, however, the use of feedback has maintained a separate, verbal track that is more similar to Socrates' dialogues with students (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010). In the context of the traditional, face-to-face classroom, students and teachers interact in real time. Teachers may solicit students' answers and then appraise them. In return, students may ask questions that provide a form of feedback to teachers (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010). While not an exhaustive way of measuring student feedback, this approach does have distinct advantages in terms of improving students' overall educational experiences (Ananga & Biney, 2017).

While there are many benefits of learning in the traditional, face-to-face classroom environment, the landscape of education has been evolving considerably for the past several decades, as more secondary and higher education institutions offer blended learning programs— those with both online and face-to-face components—and purely online courses with no traditional classroom time and instead meet only online (Szeto, 2014). Jaggars and Xu (2016) noted that, in postsecondary education, online coursework has become increasingly popular, with

around five to seven million students estimated to enroll in at least one online course per year. This shift toward the online context has disrupted the easy, bidirectional flow of real-time, verbal feedback in the face-to-face classroom (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016).

More formal feedback methods, such as course evaluations, represent one way to remedy this dearth of feedback. As a result, as education has shifted online, researchers have attempted to assess students' experiences in online courses and to determine their satisfaction levels with the quality of online coursework and their learning outcomes. For example, research from Nguyen (2017) on online learning outcomes of undergraduate students who participated in blended learning courses found that students who more effectively interact with the learning activities were able to provide suggestions for teachers in designing and implementing learning activities. Further, the findings from the study also suggest that greater student-to-student interaction also improved student learning outcomes (Nguyen, 2017). At present, however, the literature remains more strongly focused on addressing teachers' feedback to students as opposed to students' feedback to teachers, creating a research gap.

Social Background

For the purpose of this study, feedback denotes communication of information from students that facilitates educators' analysis and improvement of their teaching methods (Cesa-Bianchi, Gaillard, Gentile, & Gerchinovitz, 2017). Receiving feedback allows instructors to gauge the satisfaction and progress of their students, as well as consider alternative learning strategies. Some findings show that online courses designed to promote interaction between students and between students and teachers can help facilitate an environment where students feel more comfortable and confident while providing feedback. For example, Bourdeaux and Schoenack (2016) conducted a study on adult students' experiences and expectations in online

learning and found that students expected their instructors to provide clear and concise direction and intentional course design. Bourdeaux and Schoenack (2016) also found that the students expected respect from their instructors. Therefore, students in a university setting believe that they have better experiences and learning outcomes from online courses that facilitate effective communication strategies.

Learning environments will continue to evolve, and as such, educators must stay informed and up to date on the most recent and relevant strategies and tools to facilitate improved learning outcomes. Current researchers show teachers of high-quality online courses effectively engage students through interesting and challenging content that is relevant to their backgrounds and experiences (i.e., individualized learning) and through a higher degree of learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructor interaction throughout the online course (Hixon, Barczyk, Ralston-Berg, & Buckenmeyers, 2016; Jaggars & Xu, 2017; Kuo, Walker, Belland, & Schroder, 2014). In addition to individualized learning experiences and greater interaction, researchers have also shown that self-efficacy and self-regulation improve students' satisfaction with their online course experiences (Kuo et al., 2014; Markova, Glazkova, & Zaborova, 2016). For example, research from Kuo et al. (2014) found that students satisfied with their online courses believe they possess the capabilities needed to use the web-based and digital tools and systems for the online course. Satisfaction varies as a function of course quality, however, and little research regards online courses in community colleges, particularly about how instructors experience and respond to student evaluations of courses. However, *high quality* may be the key phrase in such results. More broadly, many students enrolled in online coursework suffer from inferior educational outcomes (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Leibold & Schwarz, 2015). One reason for this may be that it is more difficult to engage students without a face-to-face presence. As a

result, online courses often fail to serve students effectively (Gray et al., 2015), creating a

significant social problem given the vast numbers of students enrolled in online coursework.

Though this represents a societal issue, policymakers and practitioners cannot address it directly;

rather, they can do so only through mechanisms to improve teaching, such as feedback given to

instructors.

Theoretical Background

At the intersection of the social problem of online courses underperforming and the topic

of evaluation as a tool in education lies a highly relevant research gap. An examination of

existing research reveals, in particular, that certain key forms of evaluation by students can help

improve teaching practice (Buurman et al., 2018). Thus, given that many of the issues with

online education lie in failing to engage students and the need for online course offerings to be

improved to produce outcomes more commensurate with face-to-face learning (Dumford &

Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019), student evaluation is a natural tool

by which online education continually improves (Husain & Khan, 2016). Researchers have

produced some fruitful results in this direction (e.g., Boysen, 2016; Medina, Smith, Kolluru,

Sheaffer, & DiVall, 2019) regarding specific approaches and outcomes that create a significant

benefits. However, such research has been at the four-year school level, and this context

significantly differs from that of two-year community colleges in multiple regards (Juszkiewicz,

2017). Hence, there is a key research gap regarding the ability of student feedback to improve

instructional experiences at the community college level.

Within this particular niche and to address the research gap, it is important to adopt a

fully appropriate theoretical perspective. One of the key differences between two-year and four-

year schools is that two-year community colleges include more non-traditional students (Decelle,

2016). Accordingly, an appropriate theoretical perspective is Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy. The theory of andragogy is a theory of teaching adults, and it stands in contrast to pedagogy, or the teaching of children. The theory of andragogy rests upon six assumptions and on seven principles. The six assumptions of adult learning are those of understanding the reasons, experiential foundations, the importance of self-concept, relevance, problem-orientation, and internal motivation. The seven principles are that that adults must want to learn, adults learn only what they consider relevant, adults learn by doing, adult learning focuses on problem solving, the learning environment is key, and adults want guidance and consideration (Knowles, 1984).

Situation to Self

I am motivated to conduct the study because of my own experiences working for the community college where the proposed study will take place. The number of online course offerings at the college have increased dramatically in the last five years, and my own experiences with online courses have revealed that they can be more difficult for instructors than are traditional courses, especially when instructors have received no formal training for adapting their teaching methods to an online medium, meaning that feedback on ways to improve might be particularly relevant. The college has procedures in place for the collection of student evaluations, and given the challenges associated with online instruction, I feel that these evaluations can provide potentially powerful feedback for instructors to use in improving their teaching methods and the design of their courses. However, I have not seen much discussion of student evaluation results or any significant investment on the part of instructors to use those results to improve their teaching or their courses.

In conducting the research, I am especially interested in how instructors make sense of and construct meaning from student feedback. There have been recent studies that indicate improvement from student feedback only for instructors who initially rated themselves more highly than students did (Boysen, 2016; Buurman, Delfgaauw, Dur, & Zoutenbier, 2018), which suggests to me that how instructors see their teaching matters more than any objective measure of that teaching. For this reason, I would like to better understand instructor perceptions about student feedback and how they respond to it, as well as in what ways they act upon the feedback or use it to reevaluate their courses.

The first step in conducting a research study entails establishing a philosophical worldview to follow. In exploring the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and make decisions about improving instruction and course design from them, I will adopt a constructivist worldview. The key philosophical assumptions in a constructivist worldview are that much of human interaction involves socially constructed meaning. Hence, in adopting a constructivist worldview, one must assume that each individual plays a direct and active role in building interpretations of situations and events, and in building reality from those interpretations (Creswell, 2018). The corresponding set of ontological and epistemological assumptions are that, while a meaningful objective reality exists, people can only interact with this reality and each other only through a set of socially constructed interpretations. That is to say, objective reality holds little or no inherent meaning for individuals, and only through social context do individuals assign meaning to aspects of that reality. Inherent in my adoption of a qualitative research method and constructivist worldview are certain axiological assumptions, namely that the values of the participants likely play an important part in the research and must be understood. A phenomenological approach to research

also requires the assumption that my values as the researcher hold no relevance and must be filtered out as much as possible through bracketing. A qualitative research method also requires the rhetorical assumption that the results will not reflect objective realty, but rather subjective reality as experienced by the participants.

Problem Statement

The problem is that, in comparison to traditional in-person instruction, some online courses can result in poorer educational outcomes and may generally be of inferior quality (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Leibold & Schwarz, 2015), necessitating the use of mechanisms such as student feedback to improve the individual instructor educational experience and promote student engagement. Difficulty in obtaining student feedback may compound this problem. The potentially poorer educational outcomes in online classes may include lower levels of engagement and correspondingly reduced levels of achievement, though results are mixed regarding this question (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019). Students in online courses are also more likely to drop out or withdraw from those classes than in traditional courses (Brown, 2017). Compounding these problems is the increasing popularity of online courses: As many as seven million students enroll in at least one online course per year (Jaggars & Xu, 2016), and institutions of higher education plan to continue the current expansion in online course offerings (Goodman, Melkers, & Pallais, 2019).

Decades of research in higher education have indicated that student evaluations of teaching (SET) can be effective in helping teachers to improve their practice (Buurman et al., 2018; Centra, 1973; Cohen, 1980; McKone, 1999). Per the results in the existing literature, improvements are modest but meaningful, and instructors may achieve such results when they use formal qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques to interpret results of evaluations and

when they respond to evaluations in consultation with a peer or teaching expert (Boysen, 2016; Medina et al., 2019). However, these best practices emerge from the results of university-level studies and little if any research regards the community college level, creating a need for research such as the proposed study. Additionally, such recommendations do not pertain to instructors' subjective responses to student evaluations, which may predict how instructors change their teaching and course design to address feedback (Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017). Thus, researchers should explore the ways that instructors of online courses, especially those at community colleges, experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. College online course instructor experience and response include subjective feelings about the concept of student evaluations, attitudes toward specific evaluations they have received (Medina et al., 2019), self-perceptions of teaching quality, and self-reported actions taken in response to student evaluations (Buurman et al., 2018). Using a phenomenological design and a theoretical lens provided by Knowles's (1984) andragogy theory, I hope to potentially contribute additional understanding about the ways that community college online course instructors approach learning from student evaluations, conceptualizing the need for improvement, and acting on feedback.

Significance of the Study

The proposed study has significance from three perspectives. It is significant from an empirical perspective, from a theoretical perspective, and from a practical perspective. Though these significances overlap, each is unique as well.

Empirical Significance

The empirical significance of the proposed study lies in the importance of its results. There is an overall agreement in the literature regarding the relevance of learners' feedback. For instance, according to Sun and Chen (2016), frequent assessment allows faculty to analyze their own instructional competence by providing relevant, positive, and considerate insight from students. Leibold and Schwarz (2015) established that responses from apprentices allow instructors to determine the level of interest in online course activities. Instructors who reevaluate their practice promote understanding and stimulate interaction with students. As a consequence, feedback eliminates isolation and allows teachers to assess that students are performing adequately and meeting course and faculty expectations by keeping up with schedules in an online classroom (Crews, Bordonada, & Wilkinson, 2017). The purpose of this study is to help promote the understanding of the role of feedback in shaping the improvement of online education at the community college level. Such improvement is essential because online courses may lead to significantly worse outcomes in several regards (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Leibold & Schwarz, 2015) compared to face-to-face classrooms. Hence, the proposed study will help to address these shortcomings. Its findings will augment extant research, enhance decision-making, and improve theoretical understanding of the topic of student feedback. In online learning, Murray (2019) concluded that incorporating feedback in design and development provides instructors with new skills. For this reason, I will investigate how students' feedback

leads to a reevaluation of online course activity, resulting in the provision of engaging online education.

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of the proposed study is twofold. It stems from a combination of addressing a research gap and extending the theoretical framework. Existing research has shown that SET can be an important tool for improving the quality of instruction that instructors offer their students (Buurman et al., 2018; Centra, 1973; Cohen, 1980; McKone, 1999). At the university level, for example, research indicates that formal qualitative and quantitative analysis can lead to modest but significant improvements in instruction for online classrooms (Boysen, 2016; Medina et al., 2019). However, researchers have undertaken these studies, at present, only at the university or four-year college level, resulting in a research gap regarding how community college instructors can use SET to improve instructional outcomes. Filling this gap in the literature will help create a more comprehensive understanding of the role of SET in improving instructional offerings and may offer a way to help close the achievement gap between online and face-to-face learning. The proposed study will also extend the theoretical framework of Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy through the application of that framework to the specific context of SET in online courses at the community college level.

Practical Significance

The practical significance of the proposed study at the study site stems from the overall empirical significance. The specific study site does not have markedly worse outcomes, nor does it have markedly better outcomes. Thus, educators can apply insights from this study into how students shape instructors' instructional improvement through SET in several ways. If particular aspects of evaluation prove highly valuable, then instructors may emphasize those aspects in the

future. Further, the proposed study may result in better understanding of aspects of evaluation that instructors would like feedback on but do not receive such feedback on under the current system of evaluation. All of these outcomes could lead to practical improvements.

Research Questions

Based on the problem statement and the purpose statement, the following central research question is:

Central Question

CQ: How do community college online course instructors experience receiving and engaging with student evaluations?

The overarching CQ addresses the central issues of online courses (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Leibold & Schwarz, 201) and student evaluations. Researchers (Boysen, 2016; Medina et al., 2019) at the university level have begun to illustrate how responding to student feedback can enhance the teaching of online courses; these researchers have not, however, examined such issues at the community college level.

Sub-Questions

To support inquiry answering the central question, the following sub-questions will guide the study:

SQ1: How do community college online course instructors perceive the quality of student evaluations to instruction?

Central to the idea of using feedback is teachers' perceptions of such feedback as useful and relevant (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016). Hence, understanding instructors' views on these aspects of student evaluations is a key starting point.

SQ2: How do community college online course instructors perceive student evaluation as affecting the quality of their teaching?

Moving from understanding the relevance of evaluations, understanding the extent to which instructors use evaluations to assess and improve the quality of their teaching is central to understanding how evaluation and feedback inform instruction (Husain & Khan, 2016).

SQ3: How do community college online course instructors respond to student evaluations in improving instruction?

Finally, through this sub-question, I can directly explore how instructors use feedback and evaluations to inform their efforts toward improving instruction (Husain & Khan, 2016).

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Definitions

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The following list includes definitions of the key terms that are relevant to this study:

1. *Blended learning* – Blended learning is the mechanism instructors and course designers use to combine traditional and new learning modalities, methods, and strategies through educational policy initiatives and pedagogies (Mokal, Dziuban, & Hartman, 2013).

2. *Computer-mediated communication* – Human communication that occurs between two or more people facilitated through electronic devices (Jaggars & Xu, 2016).

3. *Digital learning* – Digital learning refers to the strategies instructors use to facilitate and strengthen learning with digital technologies (Harasim, 2012).

4. *Distance education* – The definition of distance education has changed over time as technologies evolve; however, the general definition refers to the institutional, formal education in which the learning group (learners, teachers, and resources) is not in the

same physical space, instead connected using interactive telecommunications systems (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010).

5. *Distributed learning environments* – Distributed learning environment is a general term to describe a learning environment with multi-media and multimodal methods of instruction delivery (e.g., blended learning/mix of web-based and traditional face-to-face classroom; Margaryan et al., 2015).

6. *Education outcomes* – Education outcomes, or *student outcomes*, generally include the positive and negative outcomes of learning, graduating, attending further education; the instructional outcomes of knowledge, skills, and habits that students learn in an educational setting; and societal and life outcomes students achieve due to educational results (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016; Nguyen, 2017).

7. *Feedback* – In the field of education, feedback is the exchange of information between students and instructors regarding a particular course to improve educational outcomes (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015).

8. *Instructor to instructor interaction* – Learner to instructor interaction includes the interactions that students/learners have with the instructors of the courses they are taking (Kuo et al., 2014).

9. *Learner autonomy* – Learner autonomy refers to the student's capacity to "take charge" of their own learning (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Ting, 2015).

10. *Learner to content interaction* – Learner to content interaction is the process in which individual learners reflect on the topic, content, or subject matter (Kuo et al., 2014). Learner to content interaction involves only the person who is directly involved in the interaction (Kuo et al., 2014).

11. *Learner to learner interaction* – Learner to learner interaction is the interaction that learners have with their peers. In a multi-modal learning environment, these interactions include talking, listening, viewing, emailing, online messaging and chatting, and posting in discussion boards online (Kuo et al., 2014). Learner interaction can occur with or without the teacher or instructor present (Kuo et al., 2014).

12. *Online course content assessment* – Online course content assessment refers to the strategies and tools that instructors use to assess students' progress and outcomes in the course content areas (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016).

13. *Online course content delivery* – Online course content delivery refers to the methods, strategies, and resources that instructors use to deliver course-related lessons, activities, projects, and other material to their students (Fedynich, Bradley, & Bradley, 2015; Nguyen, 2017).

14. *Perceived learning outcomes* – From the perspective of the learners, perceived learning outcomes refer to the beliefs about the course, the content, and the delivery and assessment methods and tools of the course content (Fedynich et al., 2015).

15. *Self-efficacy* – Self-efficacy refers to the beliefs that an individual has in their own ability to complete the tasks needed to perform or achieve something (Kuo et al., 2014). In a learning environment, a learner's self-efficacy develops based on their confidence to exert control over their behaviors related to learning outcomes and academic performance (e.g., a student's confidence in their ability to perform well on a test or to use a new online assessment tool; Kuo et al., 2014).

16. *Self-regulation* – Self-regulation refers to the motivational tools and learning strategies that students utilize in order to participate in and organize their own learning goals (Kuo et al., 2014).

17. *Student engagement* – Student engagement refers to the attention and interest that a learner has in the content that they are studying (Trowler, 2010). Student engagement also includes the time, effort, and resources that students invest in their learning and performance outcomes (Trowler, 2010).

18. *Student evaluation (of teaching; SET)* – SET is the responses that students give regarding their perceptions of teaching, including teaching quality and the outcomes they experience as a result of teaching (Burke, 2009).

19. *Student satisfaction* – Student satisfaction is an attitude students express in evaluations of their educational experiences, including teaching, resources, services, and facilities (Weerasinghe, Lalitha, & Fernando, 2017).

20. *Telelearning* – Telelearning is a term to describe distance learning. The prefix *e-* emphasizes the use of electronic devices (Sun & Chen, 2016).

Summary

Online education has increased significantly in popularity in the past two decades, though problems persist for online courses, including low levels of student engagement and performance and high levels of attrition. These problems are present in universities and community colleges, as well as within vocational education. Instructors have used student evaluations in traditional, in-person university courses effectively to improve teaching performance in traditional, in-person courses through proper analysis and expert consultation. There is a need, however, to explore how instructors of online courses, especially those at community colleges, experience

student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. Through the proposed qualitative phenomenological study, I will address this gap and may provide clarity for instructors and policymakers to guide appropriate and productive use of student evaluations of online community college courses.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. Chapter One included an overview of the study. Now, Chapter Two includes a review of the academic literature. This in this chapter, I explore research that leads to the need for the proposed study, examining both theory and relevant themes from the literature to describe current understandings related to student evaluations and instructors' experiences of this feedback, as well as to discuss the contribution this study will make in extending and refining these understandings.

To this end, this chapter first includes a discussion of the theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framing precedes an examination of the current literature, organized by theme. Topics include the meaning of feedback in an education context, the relationship between feedback and learner motivation, current challenges in using student feedback, methods of evaluating feedback, the impact of students' feedback on instructional improvement, students' feedback in online courses, and instructor responses to students' evaluations of teaching.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is paramount since it enables an understanding of the topic under study (Creswell, 2018). In this perspective, the theory constitutes the foundation for understanding students' feedback through different factors that could influence teachers' decision-making process. The primary aim is to compare how feedback influences the idea of evaluating the quality of online courses. The theoretical framework I have adopted to fill that role in the proposed study is Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy. Andragogy is, as the name

implies, a theory of adult education, much in the same way that pedagogies are theories of child education (Barrett & CMP, 2016). Although many instructional principles cross over between pedagogy and andragogy, not all aspects of teaching children and adults are the same. The perspective of andragogy, as opposed to pedagogy, applies to all collegiate settings (Decelle, 2016) but may be particularly relevant within the setting of the community college because community colleges serve a higher number of non-traditional students than do four-year colleges or universities. Pedagogy, by contrast, informs the teaching of children, and while it may extend to traditional college students, its applicability to non-traditional college students is less apparent.

Knowles (1984) first developed the theory of andragogy in the aftermath of the second World War. As an educator, Knowles was interested in the key principles of teaching adults, although he did not apply the term andragogy to his work until around 1969, when he compared his original, American-centric ideas of education with European post-secondary educational efforts, which introduced the term he would give to the broader theory he developed (Barrett & CMP, 2016). Hence, the theory of andragogy combines parallel trains of educational thought on both sides of the Atlantic, efforts that have taken on differing forms. In the European context, andragogy refers to the broader field of adult education, similar to how the term pedagogy finds common usage for referring to children's education in the United States. In the US context, however—and in this study—the theory of andragogy refers instead to the particular theory of adult learning first developed by Knowles and later taken up by a myriad of other scholars (Knowles, 1984).

The theory of andragogy, as laid out by Knowles (1984) rests upon six assumptions and on seven principles. The six assumptions of adult learning are those of understanding the reasons, experiential foundations, the importance of self-concept, relevance, problem-orientation,

and internal motivation. The understanding assumption is that adult learners need to know why something is important to learn (Decelle, 2016). Compared to children, adult learners are less likely to accept the need to learn particular content simply because of the expectations of their instructors. Hence, in andragogy, it is important to explain the importance of the subject matter and put it into context. The second assumption is that adult learning is experiential, or that experience and error provide the strongest foundation for adult learning activities. Experiential learning, especially where it allows students to see the effects of errors firsthand, helps to demonstrate the value and importance of the knowledge. Adults may be more prone to learning through experience than are children or adolescents because experiential learning is more a part of the adult life experience (Friedman & Goldbaum, 2016). Self-concept is the third assumption and relates to the idea that adult learners need to be engaged in the educational decision-making process in a way that supports their self-concept as adults who are the primary decision makers in their own lives (Knowles, 1984).

The fourth assumption is that of relevance. This assumption relates to the idea that adult readiness to learn material depends on its practical relevance to their lives; they are unlikely to be interested in learning content without such relevance (Knowles, 1984). When adults perceive content as irrelevant, they are significantly less likely to engage with it. For example, demonstrating the relevance of what they must teach their students has long been a challenge in professional development efforts aimed at math teachers because of the false but widespread belief that math is not a practical skill (Pinto & Cooper, 2017). The fifth assumption, problem-orientation, is related to the fourth assumption. It refers to the idea that adults learn best using a problem-oriented approach to learning, as opposed to a content-centered approach to learning that focuses on the instructional content itself (Knowles, 1984). Many adults will most willingly

embrace learning new content if they require it to overcome a specific problem (Murphy, 2017).

Finally, the sixth assumption of andragogy is that of internal motivation. This assumption is

related to theories of motivation and refers to the idea that internal motivation, rather than

external motivation, is more effective for adult learning. This assumption contains the others in

the sense that many of the other assumptions underline the ways in which adults may be better

motivated to learn because they leverage types of internal motivation such as relevance, creation

of relevant experiences, and self-concept (Knowles, 1984).

   Building upon these assumptions, then, the theory of andragogy includes seven key

principles of practice for guiding adult learning. The first principle relates most strongly to the

last assumption: that adults must want to learn (Barrett & CMP, 2016). Without the key

motivator of wanting to learn, adult students may discard instructional efforts they perceive as

uninteresting or irrelevant more readily than do adolescents. Hence, engagement with content is

especially important for adult learners. Related to this, and also to the first and fourth

assumptions of the theory, is the second principle of adult learning, that adults learn only what

they consider relevant (Decelle, 2016). Being more able to self-actualize, adults are likely to

significantly prioritize what they consider relevant learning (Knowles, 1984). In this sense, it is

key for educators and other instructors teaching adults to demonstrate the practical relevance of

skills and knowledge. This principle also ties into the idea of experiential learning that allowing

adult learners to make errors can help to demonstrate to them the relevance of their learning. The

relevance of learning, then, connects into the third principle of adult learning, which is that adults

learn by doing (Decelle, 2016). This third principle closely relates to the second assumption. As

a result, it is key for instructors teaching adult learners to offer their students experiential

opportunities to engage with the content.

The fourth principle of andragogy is that adult learning focuses on problem solving. This principle derives from a combination of the previous principle and the fifth assumption of the theory. Problem-oriented learning addresses material not as an abstract skill, but rather as a practically valuable technique with which learners may tackle a problem. This problem-focused approach to learning also connects to the need for instructors to demonstrate the practical relevance of knowledge (Decelle, 2016). By demonstrating how learning relates to specific problems, instructors help to demonstrate its relevance to learners. The fifth assumption, then, is that prior experiences shape adults' learning (Knowles, 1984). Learning from experience differs from experiential learning; this principle, rather, refers to the experiences that adult learners already possess, resulting in either advantage or disadvantage. In some cases, experiences are existing scaffolding upon which instructors can build educational content. In others, existing experiences can conflict with learning, such as when educational content is a new way of doing something the student already has experience doing. In these cases, instructors must find a way to engage with the students' prior experiences in a way that allows them to overcome the resistance created by those experiences.

The sixth principle of andragogy is the learning environment. The theory of andragogy posits that adults learn best in an informal and collaborative environment (Decelle, 2016). Such an environment differs from a traditional classroom, which is formal and structured. Hence, instructors seeking to teach adult learners may need to depart considerably from the traditional classroom model to create a more informal, collaborative environment where students take on responsibility for their learning. This principle relates, in that regard, to both the self-concept assumption and the assumption that internal motivation supersedes external motivation for adult learners. The final principle of andragogy is that adults want guidance and consideration

(Knowles, 1984). In other words, per the self-concept assumption, most adult learners have a strong sense of self and desire to have an active role in shaping their own learning experience. Hence, they do not benefit from approaches that do not engage with their desire for agency. Consideration of what learning approaches may fit their individual educational needs may also be more important because those needs are more fully developed for adult learners than they are for adolescents.

The full applicability of andragogy to the collegiate context is somewhat debatable. The traditional college student, age 18-23, falls in young adulthood or emerging adulthood, a gray area between adolescence and adulthood (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). As a result, both pedagogical and andragogical concerns may apply to this population to different extents. However, andragogy is appropriate for the proposed study because community colleges differ from four-year schools. Although non-traditional college students, who are typically older, are on the rise across all levels of collegiate education (Brändle, 2017), they are an especially prominent part of community college student bodies (Juszkiewicz, 2017). To recall, the research gap motivating the proposed study relates to the fact that researchers have not taken on studies of instructional feedback at the community college level. One reason the specific context of the community college holds such significance is that, because of the prevalence of non-traditional students (Juszkiewicz, 2017), andragogical instruction may be more appropriate than pedagogical instruction. However, because of a lack of research into online course feedback in the community college context, it is difficult to determine if that assertion is true; hence, this study may help to determine the answer.

A second reason why the application of andragogy as a framework is relevant in the proposed study is that online education presents certain unique boons and burdens related to the

principles of andragogy. For example, although results are conflicting, some studies (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019) have indicated that instructors of online courses have more difficulty engaging students. Others note higher dropout rates (Breslow et al., 2013). Within the context of andragogy, these two problems may relate in the sense that the principles of andragogy illustrate how a lack of engagement likely reflects a failure to present the material as important or practically relevant to adult learners and, in turn, a lack of perceived relevance makes adult learners turn away from material entirely, likely causing them to engage in their greater degree of agency and withdraw from a class. Another aspect of andragogy challenging to align with in an online learning context is experiential learning. Whether experiential learning is even fully possible in the context of an online course depends on the subject matter. For example, a face-to-face anatomy course can involve hands-on work with three dimensional models, and a biology course can include dissections. Neither is possible in an online course. On the other hand, online and face-to-face programming do not differ in the extent to which they can engage with experiential learning.

Conversely, instructors can more easily achieve other aspects of andragogy in the online education context. For example, most online education courses begin with a self-introduction posting (Kuo et al., 2014). Instructors can use such posts for a reference about students' backgrounds and prior experiences in a way that instructors of traditional face-to-face courses may find more difficult. Hence, online instructors may be able to engage with their students' prior experiences more easily than may traditional instructors in many cases. An informal learning environment embedded in the principles of andragogy may also be more prevalent in the online learning context, which is naturally relational and informal through the use of discussion postings as the most common form of student interaction (Conrad & Dabbagh, 2018). The

asynchronous nature of online classroom interaction also allows students to work at their own pace in completing assignments, allowing them greater agency in alignment with the principles of andragogy that speak to adult learners' need for a degree of autonomy and control over their own educational experiences.

Taken together, the total of the interaction between andragogy and the online educational context is difficult to understand, and even more so in the understudied community college context. In alignment with this, therefore, an andragogical approach allows for guidance regarding best practices in teaching adult learners and an opportunity to understand how these theoretically understood needs of adult learners relate to the lessons that instructors take from actual student feedback in the online classroom. In this regard, I will not only draw upon andragogy as a perspective but advance andragogy as a theory through determining if the assumptions and principles of andragogy align with the perceived needs of community college online learners or with the educational lessons that community online college instructors take away from SET.

Related Literature

Having established the theoretical underpinnings of the proposed study in the principles of Knowles' (1984)'s theory of andragogy, I provide a review of the relevant background literature. The body of the literature review contains a more comprehensive look at the background literature. To inform this literature review, I undertook a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature, drawing upon the academic databases available through Liberty University libraries and also the supplemental research resource afforded by Google Scholar. I carried out the literature search using keywords that included *college, university, community college, teacher, instructor, professor, community college, two-year college, four-year college,*

non-traditional students, pedagogy, andragogy, evaluation, student evaluation, feedback,
assessment, end-of-course, educational design, instructional strategies, lesson plans, and
appropriate combinations thereof. The result of the literature review is a set of key themes that
emerged from the literature. Each key theme reflects a central idea in the study or a highly
relevant related issue. The full list of themes includes theoretical perspectives on feedback,
feedback in education, learner motivation and feedback, current challenges in the use of student
feedback, methods of evaluating feedback, the impact of students' feedback on learning
improvement, student feedback in online courses, the failings of online courses, and the
community college context.

Theoretical Perspectives on Feedback

Scholars have discussed various models to describe the process of using feedback in the
learning process. For example, Picciano (2017) argued that cognitivism, behaviorism, and
structural constructivism help in studying topics related to online education. According to the
behavioristic theory, learners tend to acquire information through interaction with different
stimuli (Picciano, 2017). One can observe individual changes based on repeated actions. In this
respect, students respond to learning challenges if they acquaint themselves with the surrounding
stimuli in the classroom. When learners engage in an activity and the results are positive, they
are motivated to perform the task and increase the probability of internalizing such behavior. The
behaviorist perspective has roots in Skinner's (1938) concept of operant conditioning (Blackman,
2017). Operant conditioning is the process of learning that involves the use of rewards and
punishments to encourage or discourage specific behaviors (Skinner, 1938). From this
perspective, human behavior is extremely complex, and the best way to better understand why
humans behave the way they do is to look more closely at an action and then determine the

causes and consequences of that action (Blackman, 2017). The principles of operant conditioning derive from Skinner's (1938) three types of responses (operants) to the environment: neutral operants, reinforcers, and punishers. Neutral operants neither increase nor decrease the likelihood of repeating certain behaviors, while reinforcers (positive or negative) increase the likelihood of repeating behaviors and punishers decrease the likelihood of repeated behaviors (Skinner, 1938).

Operant conditioning. Teachers in traditional classroom settings often use operant conditioning, as learners are given grades on assignments and tests based on their performance, which in turn can reinforce behaviors related to studying, test-taking, and dprocrastination, among other behaviors (Kaplan, 2018; Krasner, 2017). For example, in early childhood, teachers use rewards such as stickers on assignments for good work. Operant conditioning is not as relevant in online courses and distant learning. However, online courses still involve extensive operant conditioning in the use of feedback on learner performance (Strickland & Strickland, 2015; Thompson & Martin, 2015). For example, one form of feedback is to encourage learners to use chat and messaging functions to engage with their peers and instructors, and if learners receive positive feedback or are able to encourage engagement and discussion, then they are more likely to continue using these functions to provide valuable feedback to the instructor. Similarly, Kay and Kibble (2015) emphasized that feedback is the first process through which people acquire knowledge. From a behaviorist perspective, learners understand a concept well when they identify a specified behavior from the physical environment. Notably, students present their feedback about online learning classes if they discover that their views bring positive effects. However, when instructors do not use those responses to improve the curriculum, students tend to stop and lose interest in providing feedback. In practice, this behavior has

negative implications since teachers require learners' views to make constant improvements in the teaching processes.

Cognitive theory. Strauch and Al Omar (2014) presented cognitive theory, which unlike behaviorism, addresses the role of mental capacity in learning. This learning concept revolves around individuals' understanding and the delivery of information to students (Strauch & Al Omar, 2014). According to Picciano (2017), students' responses emanate from environmental stimuli that elicit motivation and imagination. Through human information processing, learners' level of interpretation and understanding of various tasks is elevated when they give adequate feedback. In cognitive learning theory, there are three forms of feedback: the possibility of reproduction, ease of recall, and ease of relearning (Ebbinghaus, 1913). As such, successful learning first manifests in unaided reproduction of the learning content, while the second indicator of deeper learning is the ease by which a learner can reproduce content unaided (Ebbinghaus, 1913). Lastly, the third feedback indicator is the reduced amount of time that the learner requires to reproduce the content compared to the first time they reproduced the content unaided (Ebbinghaus, 1913). Unlike the operant, reward, and punishment behaviorist perspective, cognitive theorists and researchers explore how internal motivation enables learning to reach a goal. The implication is that students' views relate to their level of cognitive capacity. If learners process the information correctly, they are likely to show informed feedback through their interactive sessions. In discussing cognitive theory, Kay and Kibble (2015) mentioned short- and long-term memory. When students learn new concepts, they tend to store them in short-term memory (Kay & Kibble, 2015). Therefore, they can provide reliable feedback during that time. Secondly, learners internalize complex ideas in the long-term memory, where they

develop confidence through a deep understanding of these concepts. As a result, the feedback based on long-term memory is the most useful in informing decisions.

      Constructivism. Olusegun (2015) argued that co-constructing knowledge creates a mutual understanding between teachers and learners regarding a given task. The author stated that the learning process involves the combination of the existing information with new knowledge (Olusegun, 2015). From this perspective, instructors try to explain ideas to students for them to understand based on what they already know. For instance, when learners study zebras, teachers make comparisons with horses to promote practical understanding. Indeed, in the process of constructivist learning, people actively make their knowledge and continue to build new knowledge on top of previous knowledge. The constructivist approach applies to teaching practice as a means to gradually introduce new learning material that builds onto previous material that the learner has already mastered (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Another core principle of the constructivist approach to learning is that all knowledge is socially constructed, meaning that interactions with others lead to learning opportunities (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Social learning theorist Lev Vygotsky (1978) referred to this as co-constructing knowledge.

      Suhendi and Purwarno (2018) stated that the constructivist principle cuts across every discipline that involves learning. People have profound knowledge about their environment, which they tend to compare with the new information being taught in schools. Constructivism also implies that each learner has a distinct point of view based on their experiences and has formed existing knowledge and beliefs (Olusegun, 2015). Therefore, each student will have different prior knowledge and capabilities when completing the same assignment or exercise because they have different subjective interpretations related to their experiences. Teachers should realize students' capabilities and provide an environment that encourages learning based

on differing perspectives and experiences. The feedback obtained based on constructivist ideas

originates from previous personal knowledge. The process involves studying from the known to

undiscovered facts. Constructivist feedback is important in determining students' level of

understanding. Hence, researchers employing this theory can develop the learning process and

encourage learners' positive contributions.

       Humanistic theory. Humanistic theorists can also determine the learning process and the

way students provide feedback to their teachers. Zovko and Dillon (2016) postulated that

humanism is the most natural process of learning, which involves acquiring knowledge through

observation. The humanistic approach to learning occurs when others learn by observing the

behaviors of others and by witnessing the consequences of such behaviors (Kazanjian & Choi,

2016). From this point of view, the humanistic approach of learning is akin to modeling, as

learners observe the role model and attempt to replicate appropriate behaviors while learning not

to replicate inappropriate behaviors. Self-evaluation and monitoring are common methods of

feedback that apply to the humanistic approach, as these forms of evaluation allow students to

observe and self-reflect on their behaviors and make changes when/if needed (Sargeant et al.,

2015).

       Notably, the traditional method of gaining skills involved practical observation of

specific issues, after which learners identified the main points and used them to perform various

tasks. Untari (2016) asserted that people are at the center of all requirements of the learning

process; individuals tend to learn from their counterparts through various means. Primarily,

learning is a process that can occur simply through the observation of events as they happen

while making valid judgments. Collaboration is a common component of humanistic teaching

methods, as one of the primary purposes of group collaboration is to facilitate an environment in

which learners can closely observe their peers and make self-judgments and evaluations on their progress in comparison. In this realization, the cognitive process is not employed in education since learners acquire the knowledge they need through different avenues. Feedback, from the humanistic perspective, is difficult to interpret since people view things differently. Therefore, knowledge acquisition occurs only when students start copying the actions of their teachers.

Picciano (2017) introduced social constructivism theory, in which learning is an interactive process between teachers and students. The author indicated that teachers and learners engage in social relationships where they share ideas and learn from each other (Picciano, 2017). The theory, therefore, differs from the cognitive and humanistic theories that are based on the creation of a teacher-centric atmosphere. The assessment based on the social constructivism principle is two-ended, where instructors seek to receive feedback from students and respond to their queries accordingly. This theory differs from the metacognition concept, which "refers to the ability of a person to comprehend and understand their cognitive processes and to actively control and manage those processes" (Strauch & Al Omar, 2014, pp. 63-64). In the classroom setting, it implies students' urgency to learn. Regarding metacognition, learners are ever motivated to internalize new information and improve their understanding in different ways (Strauch & Al Omar, 2014). The two concepts, however, link to generate a common understanding. In essence, the need for learners to acquire knowledge about a particular concept elevates the urge to engage in dialogue with teachers. As a consequence, instructors tend to apply the social constructivism theory by embracing interactions and allowing students to provide more feedback on emerging teaching issues. One such social constructivist approach that can be implemented in online courses to facilitate a culture of feedback is reciprocal teaching (Doolittle, 2014). Reciprocal teaching occurs when instructors and students form collaborative groups,

typically two to four students and the instructor, and take turns leading conversations and guiding dialogues on a given topic. In these types of collaborative groups, teachers and students are able to give continual feedback on their understanding and progress, which can help improve learning outcomes.

Feedback in Education

Feedback in the context of education and student learning outcomes is a process in which students provide information so that they can bridge the gaps between their current performance and their learning goals and expectations (McCarthy, 2017; Mulliner & Tucker, 2015; Pereira, Flores, Simao, & Barros, 2016). While this is the most common view of feedback in an education context, feedback consists of the information needed to ensure that educators meet the needs and expectations of their learners (Carless & Boud, 2018; Wright, 2015). In this sense, feedback is learner-guided, as the learners are the ones providing information to education professionals to use to improve course content and other important aspects of education delivery to improve learning outcomes (Blair & Valdez, 2014; Carless & Boud, 2018). Carless and Boud (2018) also pointed out that the primary purpose of feedback is to help learners adjust to new ways of thinking and behaving so that they are able to improve learning outcomes. By this definition, this type of feedback differs from other types, such as praise, summative evaluations, and tests and assessments meant to evaluate outcomes (Reinholz, 2016; Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015). In this regard, feedback is a type of formative assessment in which the goal of the agent is to determine a learners' current knowledge or skill in a particular subject area at any given time in order to adjust learning material and assignments and to monitor progress toward goals and meeting expectations set by the learner, the teacher, institution, and state and national standards (Eppich, Hunt, Duval-Arnould, Siddall, & Cheng, 2015).

Feedback is also critical when developing an effective instructional cycle, as feedback is a response to learner performance and an outcome of teaching quality (Park, Takahashi, & White, 2014). Feedback most commonly comes from an external agent (usually a teacher or a peer in the same class); however, feedback can also be in the form of self-assessment, which is a self-regulated and self-generated response to individual learning. Feedback provides powerful information to prompt the attention of educators to the quality of education delivery to improve the short- and long-term learning outcomes of their students (Winstone, Nash, Parker, & Rowntree, 2017). Feedback, therefore, is useful for all areas of teaching practice. Feedback encourages teacher-learner dialogues, creates opportunities for practicing feedback methods, links feedback to the teacher and learner goals, is useful for daily teaching practice, and is an important part of empowering educators and learners (Jensen & Bennett, 2016; Winstone et al., 2017).

Further, incorporating feedback in daily teaching practice also helps create and sustain a culture of feedback (Kraut, Yarris, & Sargeant, 2015). According to Kraut et al. (2015), a culture of feedback is necessary for schools undergoing any type of transformation or change, such as implementing new technologies or moving from an instructor-centric paradigm to a learner-centric model. For example, Gonzalez (2018) found that teachers who integrate frequent feedback-rich assignments are more likely to have a better grasp on their students' needs because they have established greater trust with their students. Further, feedback-rich assignments create better balance in the classroom by encouraging honest and critical feedback (Sarangapani, Kharuffa, Leat, & Wright, 2018). From this perspective, instructors using feedback-rich assignments make meaningful contributions to the class by helping them and students overcome barriers and challenges overlooked with traditional feedback methods like teacher evaluations

and peer evaluations (Gonzalez, 2018). Continuously using feedback in the classroom also increases the likelihood that the feedback is sincere, as students become more comfortable with giving their honest opinions and discussing their experiences more openly (Gonzalez, 2018; Sarangapani et al., 2018).

An important element of using feedback effectively is ensuring that the culture of the education institution aligns with a culture of feedback. A culture of feedback simply means that a school develops and implements a curriculum, evaluation methods, mentorships, regular meetings, and teams that focus on continual dialogues and engagement among teachers, students, administration, and other relevant staff and stakeholders (Hattie, 2007; 2015). The notion of a culture of feedback is not unique to education; in business, ideas of feedback and evaluation from both above and below are also common (Karkoulian, Assaker, & Hallak, 2016). A feedback-rich environment promotes a culture of trust and support, personal and collective accountability, and a positive environment where students feel comfortable interacting with instructors and giving their sincere feedback (Hattie, 2007; 2015). A culture of feedback, according to Hattie (2015), can dramatically increase student achievement, as researchers have found that feedback is a necessary tool used to evaluate whether goals are being met and identifying improvement needed to achieve those goals. Although other researchers have contested the extent to which Hattie (2015) argued that feedback could function to shape the classroom context and the quality of education, the broad idea that a culture prioritizing the careful offering and consideration of feedback improves achievement finds support in more empirical results. For example, both Boysen (2016) and Medina et al. (2019) found that careful evaluation of thoughtful feedback can lead to statistically significant, albeit modest, improvement in functional learning.

In face-to-face classrooms, feedback is often more immediate, which increases the likelihood that the feedback is relevant and useful for both students and instructors (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010). A major advantage of face-to-face learning in the traditional sense is that instructors are immediately able to give individualized and personal feedback to students (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010; Tichavsky, Hunt, Driscoll, & Jicha, 2015). In schools that have embraced a culture of feedback, students feel motivated to engage in dialogues with peers and instructors as a means to provide feedback, as well (Tichavsky et al., 2015). In a recent study on student perceptions of face-to-face teaching, Tichavsky et al. (2015) found that, despite the continued growth and increased enrollment of online classes for undergraduates, students still have difficulties in learning outcomes due to lack of teacher presence and trouble with self-regulated learning. However, these perceptions were present regardless of student performance in online courses, which suggests that beliefs about online courses may be rooted in perceptions instead of actual experiences (Tichavsky et al., 2015). Similarly, Kemp and Grieve (2014) researched undergraduate perceptions of performance in face-to-face classroom tests compared to online learning and found that students preferred to complete class activities face-to-face rather than online despite there being no difference in their test performances using both modalities. As such, students base their attitudes toward online testing and learning on preferences instead of performance, and educators can use these findings to support the argument that online learning needs to be more interactional and engaging for students to fully accept as an alternative to face-to-face traditional classroom learning.

To bring together the key ideas, then, feedback in the educational context is a cycle. On one side, students perform coursework and are evaluated by their teachers, for example, through assignment grading and feedback (McCarthy, 2017; Pereira et al., 2016). On the other, students

provide feedback regarding their educational experiences in a course, allowing the instructor to learn what did or did not work for students. Careful consideration of student feedback can help instructors to improve their teaching and improve the overall educational experience that their courses provide to students (Boysen, 2016; Medina et al., 2019). A culture of feedback in a school results from embracing and engaging with both sides of this feedback cycle (Hattie, 2015). By improving both students' ability to understand their mistakes, instructors can understand what did and did not work for their students and create a culture of feedback that improves the educational experience across the board. However, a culture of feedback is easier to embed in a traditional, face-to-face course than an online course (Tichavsky et al., 2015).

All of this relates to the proposed study in the most general sense, laying the groundwork for an understanding of feedback in the context of education. The notion of feedback is quite complex and has quite an extensive underlying body of literature, but also one that remains incomplete. Understanding how online education may improve to more fully support feedback, however, may require some additional understanding of the intricacies of factors involved in educational feedback.

Learner Motivation and Feedback

A core component of improving the quality of education delivery and learning outcomes is increasing student motivation and ensuring that students are satisfied. According to an integrative review of prior literature conducted by Renninger et al. (2014), motivation to learn and engage in learning content tends to increase when students are more interested in what they are learning, which depends on instructional methods. In today's education environment, technology plays a key role in student motivation and their sustained interest in engaging with learning content (Croxton, 2014). Price and Kadi-Hanifi (2011) conducted a study on motivation

factors for adult learners in higher education settings and found that learners stay motivated by

using imaginative methods to study, including using social network platforms and texting to stay

in contact with peers and motivating themselves and others to continue studying. In this context,

the authors described this type of engagement as e-motivation, in which students used various

popular communicative technologies to transform their attitudes and, in turn, their habits, to

continue studying and to stay in courses and programs (Price & Kadi-Hanifi, 2011). Buckley and

Doyle's (2016) research on student motivation found that gamified learning interventions (using

video game design and elements of video games in learning contexts) in higher education

undergraduate settings have considerable potential to increase student engagement and improve

learning outcomes. The findings suggest that gamification offers both intrinsic and extrinsic

motivations for students; however, students who were more intrinsically motivated were more

likely to have better learning outcomes due to higher levels of engagement in the content

(Buckley & Doyle, 2016). Understanding these issues of motivation ties into understanding

evaluation because motivation relates to feedback in important ways. Understanding the role of

motivation in feedback may be key to understanding how instructors then experience and engage

with learner feedback.

Researchers have cited feedback as a significant factor of motivation for learning and

learner satisfaction (Kiemer, Groschner, Pehmer, & Seidel, 2015). Research from Kiemer et al.

(2015) on the effects of classroom discourse on students' motivation to learn mathematics and

science found that the lack of teacher-student interaction is a central reason why student interest

and motivation in STEM subjects has dropped in secondary education. Specifically, the

researchers investigated the impact that a video-based teacher professional development

intervention had on the productive discourse between students and teachers in the classroom,

improving the students' motivation and interest over the course of the school year (Kiemer et al., 2015). By introducing this discourse-centered intervention, teachers showed an increase in constructive feedback and a decrease in simple feedback given to students, while students indicated perceived increases in autonomy, competence, and intrinsic motivation to learn (Kiemer et al., 2015). Studies on the differences in student motivation and interest overwhelmingly show that classroom engagement and feedback-rich environments and assignments increase the likelihood that both teachers and students will participate in more meaningful dialogue (Buckley & Doyle, 2016; Kadi-Hanifi, 2011; Kiemer et al., 2015).

The importance of motivation in feedback ties back into the framework of andragogy. Per that framework, creating motivation for adult learners may require different techniques than creating motivation for adolescents (Knowles, 1984). The importance of more relational feedback in creating motivation, per Kiemer et al. (2015), aligns with the principle of andragogy that adult learners prefer an informal and relational environment. Price and Kadi-Hanifi's (2011) work also suggests that such an informal and networked approach to feedback works well in the online course context, further aligning with the principles of andragogy. However, motivation is not the only key issue bound up in issues of feedback in online courses.

Teacher Feedback to Students

The use of feedback and feedback evaluation methods have evolved over time to meet the changing needs of students and the changing educational environment. As noted above, teachers' feedback to students and students' feedback to teachers represent a cycle of feedback. In that regard, looking at teachers' feedback to students can illustrate one of the issues that student feedback to teachers may need to address to improve instructional practices. Nicol, Thomson, and Breslin (2014) pointed out that feedback is often a troublesome issue in education, especially

in higher education. Indeed, student feedback is a fundamental part of learning, but students are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the breadth and use of feedback collected in the higher education setting (Nicol et al., 2014). Specifically, higher education students from the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States have reported that they are less satisfied with feedback than with any other aspect of their courses and programs (Nicol et al., 2014). In response to these reports, educators have attempted to enhance the quality of feedback formation and feedback evaluation methods that educators provide, in particular, enhancing the clarity, level of detail, relevance, promptness, and structure of these methods (Nicol et al., 2014). Another challenge in the area of using student feedback in the higher education setting is that interventions have not resulted in any meaningful or significant improvements in learning outcomes (Nicol et al., 2014). Instead, most interventions implemented in these types of settings have only proven to add to the growing amount of data and information collected, while educators are still implementing and evaluating the best methods of using such vast amounts of data to improve learning outcomes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016).

Nevertheless, instructors continue to use feedback in many different ways to improve education delivery and learning outcomes. However, it is often unclear how exactly to use certain types of student feedback, and there is a current debate among researchers, educators, and policymakers on the most effective means of receiving, giving, and evaluating feedback (William, 2016). For example, educators have long understood that telling students what they think of their performance and how they can make changes to improve it can lead to improvements in learning outcomes (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019; Molloy & Boud, 2012). Despite this commonly held assumption, there is no real clear indication that this method of feedback results in improved learning outcomes (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). Buckingham

and Goodall (2019) discussed the research on feedback and learning and pointed out three myths of effective feedback: that people are more aware and can more easily identify weaknesses in others, that people are "empty vessels that can be filled up" as a result of an expert telling them what to work on to improve, and that "great performance can be described, defined, and packaged so that another person can simply 'open the package,' learn, and apply it" (pp. 92-94).

These problems relate back to the principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1984), which contradict the idea that instructors should treat adult learners as inferior or as lacking agency. While instruction is no doubt useful and important in a learning environment, the issue is that many educators are too reliant on telling their students the steps to follow and the factual knowledge that they are lacking to improve their performance in specific knowledge areas (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). Arguably, this behavior also teaches students to become too reliant on this method of feedback, which prevents them from truly thriving and excelling as learners. The theory of andragogy suggests, for example, the use of experiential learning as a potential way of presenting the value of learning the information correctly (Knowles, 1984). With an experiential approach, students may become aware of the errors in their technique and become more engaged with addressing them. Engaging with students' prior experiences may also be key (Decelle, 2016). Instructors can address problems by engaging more fully with students (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019); prior experiences either to scaffold new learning or to understand what their adult students may need to unlearn before they can effectively learn new material.

Methods of Evaluating Feedback

Various strategies can help instructors collect and evaluate feedback from students. To be effective, methods of using feedback to improve learning outcomes should find the gaps in

teaching and learning. In this regard, instructors must structure feedback to specifically target learners in terms of expectations and actual learning outcomes. Gay (2014) pointed out that one of the biggest concerns that educators have is meeting the needs of all learners in the classroom, which requires educators to consider the diverse experiences and backgrounds of each learner. As such, using student feedback to improve learning outcomes is one of the most direct ways that educators can learn about their students' experiences in the classroom (Lee & Hannafin, 2016). There are a variety of methods for evaluating feedback, and each method can provide relevant and appropriate tools for improving learning outcomes. Evaluating feedback is more than simply evaluating the quality of teaching, as feedback can help to evaluate the whole experience of student learning. For example, using feedback can help educators learn about their students' backgrounds, prior knowledge, likes, dislikes, interests, and motivations for learning.

There are different methods for evaluating feedback; therefore, education professionals use information from student feedback in many ways. Some of the most common methods of evaluating feedback include self-assessments, multi-rater assessments, peer evaluations, teacher evaluations, classroom technique research, and course evaluations (Gjerde, Padgett, & Skinner, 2017; Schütze, Rakoczy, Hattie, & Besser, 2014). Research from Schütze et al. (2014) on the perceived usefulness of using student written feedback shows that self-assessments and self-evaluations are effective for process-oriented feedback. Process-oriented feedback, compared to outcome-oriented feedback (grades/summative assessments), refers to focusing on the thought processes students go through when completing an assignment instead of feedback focused on corrections and final answers (Gjerde et al., 2017). Instructors, however, do not often implement process-oriented feedback in online courses because of the need to have effective discussions with learners about how they came to their decisions and answers on assignments (Gjerde et al.,

2017). Gjerde et al. (2017) found that one way that educators can provide process-oriented feedback is to give students their own process-oriented thinking that they used when assessing the students' assignments. Essentially, this is a critical-thinking process in which students engage in-depth with their thinking in order to help them better understand the learning material.

Steyn, Davies, and Sambo (2018) proposed the gathering of learners' views through performance appraisals. The authors present qualitative and quantitative methods to establish teachers' productivity. Quantitative feedback involves the statistical computation of data from surveys. Qualitative data are non-numerical, and instructors generate these data when they observe results and make judgments. Instructors diagnose qualitative feedback through the observation of diverse aspects of the learning process. In contrast, Yu (2016) proposed that the evaluation of teachers' performance needs to be done by students themselves. Learners should engage in the performance assessment process to determine the best and non-productive instructors, based on teacher-student interactions. As opposed to the method proposed by Steyn et al. (2018), whereby instructors evaluate themselves based on the performance of learners and the feedback received, Yu's (2016) approach gives students the freedom to choose the best teaching practice that can foster understanding. Nonetheless, the two articles share a common agreement that students' views create the best avenues for improving course curricula and teaching practices.

Impact of Students' Feedback on Learning Improvement

In most instances, productivity appraisals center on teachers and the teaching practices adopted. In this regard, Husain and Khan (2016) investigated the impact of students' feedback on the evaluation of instructors with the aim of improving the teaching quality. The researchers conducted the study in a selected school where educators implemented learners'

recommendations within three months. The findings of the research showed that two-thirds of the teachers agreed that the utilization of students' feedback had a positive impact on the school's overall academic performance. The majority of instructors noted that the inclusion of this feedback streamlined their actions towards learners' needs. In brief, the research revealed that students' views are effective in realizing advanced teaching practices. The teacher should adopt effective communication models, encourage peer dialogues, and motivate students to establish a team-oriented approach in bridging their academic gaps to attain the desired performance. The idea is to offer positive support guided by learners' feedback to empower them to communicate their educational challenges at the right time. As a consequence, both parties are able to set similar academic objectives since there is a mutual understanding regarding curriculum development. Learners also undertake self-assessment based on their capabilities and the set learning goals to make informed feedback. In this regard, "giving feedback is an important skill for lecturers in higher education and has a major influence on the quality of the students' learning process" (Mamoon-Al-Bashir et al., 2016, p. 20). Educators should also understand the position of students and make the necessary adjustments to the teaching program. The resulting teaching culture should align with learners' concerns raised through their feedback. Students' feedback should, therefore, form the basis for the development of educational programs.

Students' feedback is essential in fostering social relationships between instructors and learners. Singh and Malik (2015) emphasized the importance of learners' feedback in creating positive social interactions. The authors conducted research on the impact of students' feedback on teaching and management practices, finding that learners' feedback has a significant positive relationship with the performance of teachers. When students give feedback and educators

respond immediately, a sense of social interaction results. The actions, in turn, improve the

method of learning (Singh & Malik, 2015). Eladl, Abdalla, and Ranade (2018) supported this

position. Similarly, according to Mamoon-Al-Bashir et al. (2016), the process of giving and

evaluating feedback should occur in two directions, whereby instructors and learners need to

provide the information needed for improvement. The authors argued that education

professionals realize the success of a feedback exchange process when instructors play their part

in giving informed learning responses on time, and learners act on the instructions given

exhaustively. The authors propose two-way feedback involving interactive relationships between

educators and learners to promote communication. One issue with this in practice is that formal

student feedback is typically anonymous, although more casual feedback may come about during

normal interaction, such as a student telling a teacher that he or she did not understand the

presented material.

The importance of including social interactions is that they enable creation of a positive

learning atmosphere (Eladl et al., 2018). Notably, Steyn et al. (2018) proposed teachers solicit

qualitative feedback to enable positive social interactions, while they use computation of

quantitative feedback to make the right inferences. Altinay (2017), on the other hand, articulated

the significant changes in schools fostered by the digitalization of learning processes and the role

of social interactions in this context. The provision of feedback, especially on the introduced

technology, becomes a relevant factor towards the success of any program, which necessitates

the streamlining of online courses to integrate feedback-related learning improvements.

Similarly, Lee and Mohaisen (2016) emphasized the significance of learners' feedback by

highlighting the challenges of the one-way teaching system used in North Korea. In this case

example, lecturers constantly give learning materials to students without allowing them to

express feedback, which has adversely affected academic performance. As a consequence, interactive feedback between teachers and students may be a better method of enhancing learning.

There is also the importance of student satisfaction with learning outcomes in regard to using new and more accessible methods of education delivery, such as online courses. Recent research shows that the majority of students today expect some level of online coursework and e-learning in their higher education curriculum (Al-Gahtani, 2016). Further, given the ubiquity of smartphones and mobile learning apps, most students have already integrated various technological tools into their approach to learning (Al-Gahtani, 2016). In this regard, students are likely to be more satisfied with using learning tools that incorporate the same types of technological tools they are already using in everyday life (Van Volkom, Stapley, & Amaturo, 2014). Nguyen (2017) found that students prefer a more balanced approach to using e-learning and traditional learning tools because they can experience ease of access to information and learning content while at the same time experiencing the face-to-face engagement that helps improve learning outcomes. Blended learning provides excellent opportunities for students to give feedback on online courses because they are actively involved in taking an online course and are then face-to-face with instructors and other students (Nguyen, 2017). Online courses require students to accept higher levels of responsibility for their work, as they must manage the fact that there is often a real lack of structure to an online course (e.g., no formal class meeting times; Britt, Goon, & Timmerman, 2015). Online courses provide unprecedented access to learning opportunities, so it is up to educators to design and implement online courses that facilitate social interactions so that students feel less isolated and more involved in the learning process.

While scholars such as Steyn et al. (2018) may debate the appropriate form that SET should take, other researcher have supported the idea that both qualitative and quantitative analysis of feedback are valuable, provided that the analysis is careful and systematic. Boysen (2016) and Medina et al. (2019) supported this position, finding that careful analysis of student feedback using formal qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques could result in modest but significant improvements to educational outcomes. However, although these researchers engaged with both qualitative and quantitative methods of analyzing student feedback, they failed to engage with instructors' own qualitative responses to student feedback (Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017). This failure to understand the subjective experience of analyzing student feedback and extracting useful data from it makes the process of that extraction something of a black box in terms of instructors' actual experiences. This lack of subjective understanding of how to engage with and implement useful feedback from students through SET is one of the primary aspects with regard to which there currently exists a research gap. In the proposed study, I explore teachers' subjective experiences in receiving and implementing student feedback, allowing me to bridge that gap in the literature.

Student Feedback in Online Courses

The presentation of students' feedback in online courses differs from that in other disciplines, but it has the same effect in all situations. Martin and Valdivia (2017) studied the implications of feedback and anxiety among online students who studied foreign languages. Their findings indicated that most learners experienced challenges during oral classes. However, some of the students might have understood the concepts but failed to express themselves through the right feedback channels (Martin & Valdivia, 2017). The implication is that the learners continued to experience challenges, which affected their performance significantly. As a

countermeasure, Ion, Barrera-Corominas, and Tomàs-Folch's (2016) argued that peers may exploit responses to initiate teaching practice modifications. Their study results revealed that peer feedback mostly related to the structural components of the paper and the writing skills developed during the lesson. This position is also similar to the findings of Wiltbank et al. (2019), who conducted various interviews to measure determinants of effective learning among college students. The research outcomes showed that the level of social inclusion between students and teachers created an avenue for improving a course. In principle, an important factor of curriculum development is the systematic interaction between instructors and students and the level of peers' engagement. Learners' feedback also enables instructors to adjust their teaching practices to meet learners' demands regarding the acquisition of quality education. Overall, the two studies show that students' feedback positively influences their performance and teaching practices for educators.

When initiating changes in teaching practices, teachers should evaluate students' feedback to understand their needs. Huisman, Saab, van den Broek, and van Driel (2019) synthesized 24 quantitative studies regarding the influence of learners' feedback on their understanding of various concepts, investigating various teacher-centered techniques and possible ways to modify them to improve the teaching process. The research showed that students' feedback contributed to an average of 0.46 of the learning outcome (Huisman et al., 2019). The finding suggests a positive contribution to the teaching process. Equally, Esfijani (2018) conducted a comparative, interdisciplinary meta-assessment to show the correlation between best teaching practices and students' satisfaction. The idea was to adopt a standardized model to measure online academic outputs. The process entailed examining learning indicators against varied teaching criteria. Overall, the study's outcome revealed that the course content,

scheme, and instructors should standardize structure to realize quality online education by involving all stakeholders and applying the right resources in a utilization plan. Inevitably, instructors who use students' feedback are more successful than those who engage in teacher-centric practices.

Using student feedback not only creates a more student-centric class environment and greater trust between teachers and learners; it also encourages creativity in the pursuit and discussion of ideas that would normally not be part of the classroom. Buckingham and Goodall (2019) called this creating "normalcy," which means that feedback creates space for learners and teachers to experiment with new and interesting ways of communicating. Creating normalcy is especially important for introducing technologies to the classroom where previously, traditional methods of education delivery were the norm (Buckingham & Goodall, 2019). While online courses are not new methods, there are still some challenges in ensuring that online courses improve learner outcomes when compared to traditional face-to-face classroom settings (Ananga & Biney, 2017). Eventually, integrating behaviors into the course will result in turning them into the routine. Currently, there is a disconnect between methods of collecting and using feedback in online courses when compared to traditional face-to-face courses because there is a clear lack of physical presence (Jaggars, 2014; Richardson, Besser, Koehler, Lim, & Straight, 2016; Tichavsky et al., 2015). While there are many significant advantages to online courses, a lack of physical presence greatly diminishes meaningful social interactions between educators and students (Ananga & Biney, 2017). Students generally react favorably to learning with technology, especially using text-based communication and distance learning; however, there is still concern about student isolation and procrastination, of which both link to the lack of

opportunities for feedback (Dunn, 2014). As such, the lack of opportunities for feedback can lead to poor performance and even failure of the course.

Educators need to promote a feedback-rich culture not only in the physical, face-to-face classroom environment but also through methods of engagement in online courses. There are a many ways that educators can improve feedback in online courses, such as requiring students to engage with their peers through one-on-one and group discussions about assignments. These discussions can be in the form of formal writing assignments in which students respond to other students' writing assignments about course content (Hew, 2016). Further, according to research from Henderikx, Kreijns, and Kalz (2017), before beginning coursework, educators can have students complete pre-course questionnaires that evaluate students' prior knowledge and their interest in the course content. Based on the responses, educators can have a better indication of how to structure the course and can offer support materials and further reading for interested students (Henderikx et al., 2017). One common method of using feedback is to implement peer-assessment, especially in massive open online courses (MOOCs; Suen, 2014). MOOCs have exploded in relevance over the past several years because of their ease of access and content quality (Suen, 2014). Suen (2014) pointed out that the traditional approach to formative assessment (the teach-learn-assess cycle) is broken in MOOCs because they often amount to an "information dump" in which users engage audio, visual, and textual instructional modules regardless of their affiliation with educational institutions. There are typically no formal feedback collection or evaluation processes because of the enormous enrollment size of many of these courses (Suen, 2014).

However, comparing MOOCs to formal online courses that are a part of an educational institution is not an effective means of determining learning outcomes because of the differences

in enrollment size, learner motivation, and learner diversity. Indeed, MOOCs can have thousands—even tens of thousands—of learners enrolled in a single course because they are free and available to nearly anyone around the world with internet access, and this makes it extremely difficult to incorporate formative assessment tools and evaluation methods into the course (Henderikx et al., 2017; Suen, 2014). In online courses, providing additional feedback beyond a simple letter grade supports enhanced academic growth and improves learner outcomes (Harks et al., 2014). Instructors providing this feedback foster reflection and correction while at the same time increasing student motivation because students are more likely to feels as if their teacher is interested and invested in their success in the course and program (Harks et al., 2014).

Typical feedback formats in an online course are written, verbal, or via video, which is similar to feedback given in face-to-face courses (Crews & Butterfield, 2014; McCarthy, 2015). The major difference, however, is that instructors do not typically provide feedback in real-time discussion while learning course content or completing/working on assignments (Simonson & Schlosser, 2010). The lack of engagement between instructor and student (and student-student) when it comes to providing feedback can make it more challenging for students to incorporate the feedback into their work. In this regard, students often underestimate the impact that a lack of face-to-face instruction and feedback has on their performance because it creates more of a monologue instead of a dialogue in the learning environment. This monologue effect is in contrast to the desired relational nature of the course structure as per the principles of andragogy. Perhaps more importantly, however, these weaknesses in the feedback and SET mechanisms embedded within online coursework offer one potential explanation as to which online courses tend to have objectively inferior outcomes in key aspects of learning including engagement (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019) and retention

(Breslow, 2013). Understanding the weaknesses of online courses in empirical terms represents a key step in understanding how instructors use SET to strengthen the execution of formal online coursework potentially.

Weaknesses of Online Courses

Some of the existing weaknesses of online courses, and the conflicting results that address those weaknesses, appear in prior sections; but given their central role as the undergirding of the social problem, a more specific discussion of these issues is warranted. To recall, as of 2016, as many as seven million students enroll in at least one online course per year (Jaggars & Xu, 2016). Hence, online courses no longer represent merely a niche educational market, but instead constitute a source of mainstream education. Many colleges and universities offer at least some courses online in order to allow students greater flexibility in scheduling and travel (Orr, Weller, & Farrow, 2019). Other schools function entirely in the online realm, having no physical campuses to ground them at all and hence offering no traditional, face-to-face courses. Each type of online school has its own set of problems.

One problem with wholly online schools may be a lack of legitimacy. Accreditation rates remain lower for online schools (Bramble & Lu, 2016). This lack of accreditation means that students may unknowingly seek a degree that does not confer the full, desired benefits. At the same time, unaccredited schools need not adhere to the same standards of performance as accredited programs, and the practical quality of the educational content may be lower (Bramble & Lu, 2016). However, even when online programs are accredited, research suggests the degrees from online schools—and especially from large, for-profit online universities—have considerably less value in terms of financial returns to students for obtaining the degree (Cellini & Turner, 2019). This lack of return on investment may relate to the issues of perception as set

forth by Tichavsky et al. (2015), in which even students who do well in online courses tend to perceive those courses as poorer in quality. A school being entirely online compounds these perceptions of illegitimacy, and it is perhaps easy to see why online schools may seem to lack legitimacy overall.

However, there are also reasons to believe that students enrolled in online coursework may struggle more than their peers in a face-to-face setting. Research demonstrates that, under the right circumstances, high quality online education can create a high level of student engagement (Hixon et al., 2016; Jaggars & Xu, 2017; Kuo, Walker, Belland, & Schroder, 2014). In these cases, high quality online courses create engagement through fostering instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction. In alignment with the theory of andragogy (Knowles, 1984), such an informal and relational environment helps to promote adult learning. However, the success of this approach is contingent upon instructors' ability to facilitate high-quality interaction, both between themselves and students and among students. These efforts essentially overcome the fact that, by default, online courses have a lower minimum level of engagement and interaction between course stakeholders. The monologue-esque nature of much feedback in online courses as described by Simonson and Schlosser (2010) is a symptom of this lower minimal level of engagement; whereas a face-to-force course requires some degree of direct engagement and real-time, two-way interaction, online courses may proceed without such interaction at all.

Hence, it should be unsurprising that researchers have found that online courses are likely to result in a lack of engagement (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019). Academic engagement has long been a predictor of student achievement (Rotgans et al., 2018), and this foundational relationship does not change in the online course

setting. Indeed, researchers most often study the importance of engagement at the high school level (Konold, Cornell, Jia, & Malone, 2018). However, the principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1984) suggest that engagement is likely more important at the college level because collegiate learners are closer to being adults, if not already fully adults. As a result, if online college courses fail to engage students, those courses are likely to, in turn, result in worse academic outcomes.

This idea is borne out in the literature, wherein researchers (e.g., Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Leibold & Schwarz, 2015) have demonstrated that overall academic outcomes for online courses tend to be worse than in face-to-face courses, although this is not a rule. A further reason why a failure to engage students in the online course context may be a fatal shortcoming is that online courses require a greater degree of self-motivation than do face-to-face courses (Alkış & Temizel, 2018). In a face-to-face course, students may have homework, but much of the course content appears in a structured, easy-to-engage-with format where students need merely show up to get a significant part of the learning experience. By contrast, online courses require initiative and self-discipline, as there is no imposed structure beyond that of the assignment deadlines (Alkış & Temizel, 2018). As a result, unengaged or unmotivated students more easily fall behind. This problem links back to the key role of feedback in student motivation (Croxton, 2014). Some of the same problems that make meaningful feedback more difficult online may interfere with especially necessary student motivation.

Perhaps the result of these various ways in which it can be easier for students in online courses to fail to be engaged (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019), fall behind, lose motivation (Croxton, 2014), and ultimately cease to participate fully is high attrition rates. Broadly, online courses suffer from a higher rate of attrition than face-to-face

courses (Breslow et al., 2013), a result that may also have structural antecedents. Unlike a face-to-face class, an online course may give the appearance of being a less significant commitment to withdraw from, making it easier for students who are disengaged, struggling, unmotivated, or discontent with feedback to simply drop out of the course. High attrition rates waste both student and instructional resources and hence are a significant problem. Overall, online courses have their strengths but also bring with them a set of weaknesses that must be offset by high-quality instruction. Accordingly, it is key to undertake research such as the proposed study to better understand the iterative SET/feedback processes bound up in online courses and how these processes either succeed in improving or fail to improve educational outcomes for students and overall instructional design practices.

The Community College Context

The community or two-year college is a central and yet often overlooked component of the American education system. Community colleges are public schools, which are typically a set of campuses rolled together into a system within a localized geographic area (Dougherty, 2020). Community colleges rose as in prevalence and prominence in response to the increasing demand for educational attainment following World War II and the GI bills, which assured veterans a post-secondary education. The role of a community college falls between high school and a four-year college (Outcalt, 2019). Community colleges are generally commuting colleges—that is to say, students commute to campus rather than living on campus, in part because, as the name suggests, community colleges are located within the communities they serve. In accordance with this, community colleges serve two central purposes.

One purpose of community college is as a gateway between high school and a four-year bachelor's degree (Umbach, Tuchmayer, Clayton, & Smith, 2018). Most community colleges

offer two-year associate's degree programs where credits transfer to larger four-year colleges naturally. This allows students to obtain a basic, general education as the foundation for a more specialized degree at a lower cost and without moving away to attend a larger school. The second purpose of a community college is for remedial and technical education (Dougherty, 2020). These services allow students to prepare for specific outcomes less geared toward higher education. Remedial programs, for example, allow students who never achieved a high school diploma to study the material necessary to achieve a GED or other high school diploma equivalent (Dougherty, 2020). On the other hand, community college technical education programs allow students to pursue a technically oriented associate's degree or certificate which entails the key skills required to enter a profession (Stevens, Kurlaender, & Grosz, 2019). For example, two-year degrees might include those in accounting, basic nursing education, or electrical engineering.

One key difference between community colleges and four-year schools is that community colleges enroll a higher proportion of non-traditional students (Juszkiewicz, 2017). Non-traditional students represent a broad category of students who are outside the traditional collegiate age range of 18-24 (Juszkiewicz, 2017). This category can include those who took a few years off to work after high school and now seek to obtain a college degree or older students well above traditional college age who now seek a degree because of a renewed interest, professional necessity, or for some other purpose. Community colleges appeal to non-traditional students for several reasons (Peterson, 2016). First, many of the programs, such as remedial or technical education, resonate more strongly with the needs of non-traditional students. Second, even for non-traditional students seeking to complete a four-year degree ultimately, the ease of accessing a community-based, commuting community college is attractive compared to the more

involved nature of an away school. Third, community colleges represent a lower investment for non-traditional students juggling extensive financial responsibilities (Chen & Hossler, 2017), with cheaper tuition and less demanding educational schedules.

The popularity of community colleges with non-traditional students is one reason that community colleges tend to offer a high degree of flexibility in scheduling (Peterson, 2016). This flexibility includes the provision of evening, weekend, and summer classes, but perhaps most importantly, it has resulted in the rise of online courses at community colleges. Flexibility is one of the chief benefits afforded by online learning (Shea & Bidjerano, 2018), and hence online courses are a good fit for the demanding schedules that many non-traditional students must work around. As a result, many community colleges have begun to offer online coursework to a significant degree in recent decades.

It is, therefore, in the community college setting that the novel combination of andragogic learning (Dougherty, 2020) and online learning is perhaps most likely to play out. Non-traditional students at community colleges bring with them many of the background characteristics, such as a rich history of prior experiences, which separate andragogy from pedagogy (Knowles, 1984). At the same time, however, many community colleges hire instructors for their subject matter expertise rather than their instructional backgrounds (Outcalt, 2019). This preference in hiring means the instructors may have no meaningful background in andragogic methods.

These key differences in the community college context give rise to a research gap within the literature. Boysen (2016), Medina et al. (2019), and other researchers obtained their results regarding the function of SET almost exclusively at four-year colleges. Thus, while hardly irrelevant, whether these results would transfer to the context of community college online

instruction is far from clear. Community college online course offerings often cater to a significantly different subset of students, one dominated by non-traditional students and requiring more andragogic instruction. The role of SET in this specific and particularly important online learning context remains unclear. However, there is no reason to believe that the failings of online learning, which align with andragogic theory, do not apply in the online community college course context. Hence, that context is likely just as much in need of effective strategies to improve educational design as are other online education contexts. SET and how instructors engage with it may provide a key channel for such improvement, but only through research such as the proposed study.

Summary

In summary, I have reviewed the background literature informing the proposed study. The chapter began with an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework underpinning the study, that of Knowles' (1984) theory of andragogy. Andragogy is a key theory of adult learning that may be especially relevant, given the higher number of non-traditional students enrolled in community colleges (Peterson, 2016). A number of researchers have conducted studies on the impact of SET on the learning process (e.g., Boysen, 2016; Medina et al., 2019). The theoretical perspectives section shows that various models can be used to understand the significance of online learners' responses to improve the quality of learning processes, including behaviorist and motivational theories, constructivist and cognitive approaches, and social constructivist and humanistic theories. These theories provide the needed backdrop to underpin the important concepts that inform new developments in teaching practice, including the use of feedback to improve learning outcomes in online courses. Specifically, most of the previous research findings show that there is a positive relationship between students' feedback and teachers'

productivity. Further, the findings indicate that while technology and online learning are present in secondary and higher education, there is a considerable need for improvements in how students and teachers engage with each other in online courses. As such, increased engagement improves dialogue and gives students greater opportunities to give feedback so that teachers can orient their instruction about the needs and interests and their students. Instructors who utilize learners' feedback perform better in their work since they develop student-centered educational systems. Various propositions include students' feedback in the improvement of learning techniques. Despite this development, there is a challenge in the creation of a platform for online students to communicate their views to their instructors. Hence, a research gap exists regarding how instructors engage with online course SET and how that engagement may improve the educational design and instruction of online community college courses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Despite the growing popularity of online courses and growing interest in the use of student evaluations to drive instructional improvement, little research regards the subjective experiences of instructors with student feedback, both in online courses overall and within community college online courses, in particular. In the proposed qualitative phenomenological study, I will explore how instructors of online community college courses experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design.

The methodology chapter will describe the phenomenological research design for the study, as well as the population and sample for the study. The chapter will provide a full discussion of the interview protocol used to collect data, as well as the procedures used to recruit participants, collect data, and conduct analysis. The chapter will conclude with descriptions of the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations during the conduct of the study.

Design

The first aspect of the study design is the methodology. For the proposed study, a qualitative methodology is appropriate. As a research paradigm, qualitative inquiry is descriptive in nature. Researchers who employ it seek to explore the subjective experiences of a participant or group of participants with a given phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative studies engage with open-ended questions of what, why, or how, and seek to address a broader phenomenon rather than specific variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research is ideal for examining subjective issues that are bound up in the opinions and perceptions of a study's participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research is also a contextual approach to research; qualitative researchers examine a phenomenon *in situ* rather than

attempting to isolate it from its context to study it in the abstract (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). All of these key characteristics make a qualitative approach appropriate to the proposed study. First, the proposed study is exploratory in nature, a purpose that aligns with the exploratory aspect of qualitative research. Second, the proposed study emerges from a set of open-ended research questions, aligning with the open-ended nature of qualitative inquiry. Third, I address the broad issues of students' evaluation of courses and instructors' responses thereto, not with the relationships between specific variables. Finally, the proposed study is contextual in the sense that it concerns the phenomenon as it manifests specifically in the community college context, aligning with the contextual nature of qualitative inquiry.

By contrast, quantitative studies help to understand relationships among variables measured numerically; they proceed deductively (Creswell, 2018). Quantitative research is close-ended in nature and requires that the variables be well-established in advance and that the study be guided by a strong established theory which provides *a priori* insight into potential relationships (Creswell, 2018). A quantitative approach is a poor fit for the proposed study for several reasons. The proposed study concerns the subjective experiences that are difficult to quantify. Additionally, I have not identified relationships *a priori*; instead, I propose to proceed inductively, starting with the data and utilizing analysis to understand the subjective experiences that emerge for them. Hence, the relational focus of quantitative research would not suit the study, especially as there are no clearly quantified variables involved. Overall, a quantitative approach to research would be a poor fit for the propose study. This, in turn, means that a mixed methods approach, which utilizes both qualitative and quantitative components (Creswell, 2018), would also be a poor fit because a quantitative component could contribute little.

Within a qualitative research approach, there are many possible research designs. Among these are phenomenology, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry. Based on the studies of Patton (2002) and Cilesiz (2011), phenomenology is an appropriate design for my study, which is an investigation of the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. The fundamentals of this research topic are the perceptions and experiences of instructors receiving student evaluations. For such studies regarding online education, phenomenology is highly suitable, as it can describe the lived experiences of instructors responsible for educating through this medium. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology is the best design when trying to understand common experiences of several individuals. For the proposed study, this inquiry will help me to establish the meaning and the essence of instructors' experiences. Moustakas (1994) highlighted that phenomenology involves investigating the experiences of a person or a group of people so as to establish a comprehensive description of the phenomenon that illustrates the essences of the experience. Hence, a phenomenological approach is overall well-aligned with the purpose of the proposed study, which involves studying the lived experiences of the participants regarding student feedback.

In addition, other qualitative designs would be a weaker fit. An ethnographic approach to research (Brewer, 2000) involves studying intact ethnic or cultural groups. The proposed study focuses on community college instructors, who do not constitute an intact ethnic or cultural group. A case study would be the second-best design choice. Case study researchers focus on the contextual aspects of a problem, examining one or more specific cases (Yin, 2017). However, although context *is* important in the proposed study, it is of less importance than the participants' lived experiences, making a phenomenological approach more preferable. Grounded theory

research seeks to create new theory from raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Such an approach is not necessary for the proposed study as existing theory offers a strong framing of the study. Finally, narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013) addresses the experiences of participants, but it focuses on the narrative sequence and inherent story in those experiences, not the essence of the experience. Thus, researchers employing a narrative approach would not seek to elicit the essence of the participants' experiences in a way that would be easily applied in other situations.

Within phenomenology, there are two prominent paradigms: transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) and empirical phenomenology (Giorgi, 2009). The key difference between the two paradigms is the question of the extent to which the researcher can put on the *epoche*. Epoche, or bracketing, requires an investigator to view the phenomenon being investigated without any bias or preconceived notions (Moustakas, 1994). The major components of transcendental phenomenology include *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essence (Moustakas, 1994). By contrast, empirical phenomenology posits a lesser degree of bracketing as being possible and accepts more necessary grounding of the research within the research (Giorgi, 2009). As I intend to minimize my role in the research through careful bracketing, I will adopt a transcendental phenomenological approach.

Research Questions

Research questions will guide the proposed study. The research questions first appeared in Chapter 1 and reappear here in alignment with the research design. Based on the problem statement and the purpose statement, I developed the following central research question:

CQ: How do community college online course instructors experience receiving and engaging with student evaluations?

Sub-Questions

To support inquiry answering the central question, the following sub-questions will guide the study:

SQ1: How do community college online course instructors perceive the quality and relevance of student evaluations to instruction?

SQ2: How do community college online course instructors perceive student evaluation as affecting the quality of their teaching?

SQ3: How do community college online course instructors respond to student evaluations in improving instruction?

Setting

The research study will take place at a large community college located in the Deep South. The institution is over 40 years old and offers a variety of two-year credit and non-credit programs. It serves over 8,500 students, 35% of whom are full-time. It has a student-teacher ratio of 35:1, markedly higher than the state community college average of 28:1. The college has a minority enrollment of 29% of the student body, with most of the minority students being African American. However, the enrollment is lower than the state average of 39%. The college's diversity score is 0.45, which is also less than the state average of 0.56. However, the diversity score is enough for the researcher to pick all classes of participants from across the student population. The population consists primarily of young adults who are technologically savvy and engaged in their learning. The administrative structure of the setting is a dean of instruction, a campus dean, a division chairperson, and instructors that teach online.

Moreover, the student population is predominantly English-speaking, thereby reinforcing the institution's suitability for this research study. The site is suitable for the proposed study for

several other reasons. First, its location affords me convenient access as the researcher; this is a non-trivial consideration given that phenomenological research requires long-form, in-depth interviews with participants, potentially lasting multiple sessions. I also have access to the site through professional connections on LinkedIn, easing data collection. Furthermore, this site is a community college setting which offers a significant number of online courses, enabling the central phenomenon to be examined. In the context of the study, I will assign the study site a pseudonym so as to prevent violating the participants' confidentiality through review of the site staff.

Participants

The target population for the research study includes instructors who teach online courses through the community college serving as the site for this study. To be eligible to participate, participants must have at least two years of experience teaching at the school site and must have at least two years of experience teaching at least one online course at the community college. These requirements will ensure that participants have experienced the phenomenon in this study. The pool of potential participants at the study site consists of approximately 10 instructors. I will seek approval from Dean of Instruction at ███████ Community College to communicate with prospective participants and for access to their email addresses. Upon receipt of approval from the dean and, if necessary, community college IRB, I will send e-mails to the instructors, sharing information about the purpose and nature of the study, as well as inclusion criteria and means of contacting me if interested in participating.

I will employ purposive sampling to recruit participants. Researchers using purposive sampling focus on participant characteristics which make members of the population appropriate for inclusion in the study sample (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). To engage in purposive

sampling, I will seek to contact the instructors who teach the greatest volume of online courses

or who have the longest history teaching such classes first, but also endeavor to include

participants with relatively little experience so as to gain insight into a full range of instructors'

experiences. Since I intend to collect data from a diverse population, I deemed the maximum

variation sampling strategy was deemed the best fit. The approach allows researchers to gather a

broad range of viewpoints with regard to the topic of study (Palinkas et al., 2015). I expect that

the sample for the proposed study will consist of 10-12 instructors, though I will employ

saturation to determine the final sample size. Saturation is the point at which new data no longer

yield new ideas, meaning that the results have elicited all of the perspectives within the target

population (Saunders et al., 2018).

Procedures

The data collection for the proposed study will proceed as follows. First, I will obtain

preliminary site authorization from the dean of the college; in light of the ongoing pandemic of

CoVID-19, I may seek virtual site authorization in place of physical site access. If the initial

target school declined participation, I will seek another comparable community college. With

preliminary site authorization, I will seek IRB approval from the Liberty University Institutional

Research Board (IRB). This will entail the submission of the entire research proposal to the IRB

for approval. With IRB approval (see Appendix A for approval letter), I will request full site

authorization through a formal permission letter (see Appendix B). With formal site

authorization, I will begin data collection for the study.

To select participants, I will request from the study site a list of the instructors who meet

the inclusion criteria and the contact information for those instructors. I will prepare a

recruitment e-mail to describe the study, its purpose, and what participation will entail, and I will

use this to contact prospective participants, instructing those interested in participating to reply to

the e-mail (see Appendix C). I will schedule an interview time convenient to the participants,

likely through teleconferencing software such as Zoom or Skype. Interviews will last 30-60

minutes with each participant on average. Interviews are likely to include one session, but I may

extend them if circumstances dictate such. I will audio record interviews and will later transcribe

them. During the interview, I will also take research notes regarding non-verbal cues and will ask

participants to provide relevant documentation such as copies of anonymous student feedback or

lesson plans.

Prior to conducting each interview, I will review informed consent documentation with

each participant, interviewing only those participants who read and agree to provide informed

consent (see Appendix D). As interviews progress, I will use an informal rough analysis to

record the set of ideas that have emerged from each interview. This will allow me to judge

whether saturation has been achieved or whether new participants must be sought following each

interview. Once all interviews are completed, I will transcribe and enter the data into NVivo

qualitative data analysis software for data analysis.

The Researcher's Role

My role in the research will be that of the primary data collection instrument and also that

of an outside observer. However, as an educational researcher, I do not have perfect impartiality,

entering with my own biases, knowledge, and expectations. To obtain a researcher positionality

that is closer to impartiality, I will apply phenomenological bracketing and putting on the

epoche. The bracketing process constitutes a careful reflection on the researcher's own

experiences, biases, and preconceptions. These factors, which comprise the furniture of the

researcher's universe, can be set aside once acknowledged, allowing me to look at the data with

fresh eyes and ground my analysis of them entirely in the participants' responses. The need for this specific approach derives specifically from the phenomenological research design of the proposed study and the associated phenomenological data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994).

Regarding my previous experiences, I have had conversations with instructors about student feedback, receiving a mix of responses about the usefulness of student evaluations in measuring instructional quality and guiding improvement. Though some conversations have shown instructors to be receptive, even eager, for student evaluation data, many more conversations were with instructors who did not feel students were appropriately positioned to provide accurate or insightful feedback. Given these experiences, I expect some instructors to claim that student evaluations are unhelpful or colored by a desire to "blame the teacher" for any lack of success in the course. I expect teachers may describe what they see as students' responsibility to be prepared for class, submit assignments on time, and seek out tutoring when they struggle. In acknowledging these expectations, I am able to bracket them and enable participants to share authentically of their experiences and perceptions. I will maintain this stance through the collection and analysis processes, so my expectations and biases do not influence the conduct of the study or its findings.

Data Collection

Qualitative data for the descriptive phenomenology study will come from in-depth, unstructured interviews with community college online course instructors at a large community college in the Deep South to gain an understanding of the ways they experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. Data collection for this study will begin after IRB approval by Liberty University and the community college serving as the study site. With approval, I will recruit participants and conduct in-depth,

unstructured interviews with individuals agreeing to participate. I will collect secondary data from research notes and document collection.

Interviews

The appropriate type of data collection for the phenomenology design is unstructured in-depth phenomenological interview method. In a unstructured interview, participants answer non-predetermined questions to describe their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), unstructured interviews aid in understanding people's behavior without imposing any *a priori* categorization that might limit the field of inquiry. All the questions in an interview regard participants' experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. Indeed, this is what Moustakas (1994) called bracketing, when an inquiry proceeds from the perspective of the participant. On the basis of the phenomenological research design, the research must focus on what happens within the instructors to allow them to freely describe their lived experiences of student evaluation and their responses to it.

According to Creswell (2013), informal interview is mode of inquiry in which the researcher seeks to find more information about the background of the interviewee. In this case, the interviewer and interviewee engage in a conversation. Kvale (2006) highlighted that that an interview involves the interchange of views between two individuals discussing a theme of mutual interest. On this ground, the researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon under investigation from each participant's point of view to understand how they construct meaning from their lived experiences.

The interview questions for the proposed study appear below (also see Appendix E):

1. Please introduce yourself and give a recollection of your understanding of the research study.

This item is reflective of a general background to ensure that the participant has read and understood recruitment materials and informed consent documentation.

2. How would you describe your experience at this community college?

This question serves to create a generalized background of the participant's positionality and overall experiences. Understanding the broader context of education is key in understanding feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018; Wright, 2015).

3. Please describe your experiences in receiving student evaluations in the courses you have taught.

Recently, researchers have focused much more heavily on instructors' feedback to students (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; Nicol et al., 2018). Therefore, the research gap is on students' feedback to instructors (Boysen, 2016; Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017; Medina et al., 2019).

4. Please describe how you would say that student evaluations can help instructors to improve their instruction and course design (or why you do not feel that they can).

This question is grounded in prior studies that indicate that evaluations can be important for improving instructional design (Buurman et al., 2018). The question will elicit the teachers' own views on the matter and the rationale for those views.

5. How would you recommend that other instructors view and respond to student evaluations?

This question expands on the prior questions. Since the key research gap is on the utility of student feedback (Boysen, 2016; Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017; Medina et al., 2019), it

is important to examine how teachers feel their colleagues should use that feedback, a part of their overall understanding of feedback.

    6. Please describe some specific cases where student evaluations have caused you to change the way you teach.

    Research indicates that sometimes feedback can improve teaching (Carless & Boud, 2018; Wright, 2015). This question addresses the issue directly.

    7. Please describe any common unmet teaching needs or desires you often encounter in student feedback.

    This question addresses the specific needs of students. Research indicates that students place importance on having their desires and perspectives respected (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016).

    8. Please describe the process you follow in choosing to act on or not act on the content of student evaluations.

    As above, research (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016) indicates that students want to be respected. Understanding how teachers construe the value of specific feedback helps to understand whether they feel respected in the feedback process.

    9. What are some specific things you would like to better understand from student evaluation, and why these?

    10. Please describe any cases you recall where student evaluations raised important points but you felt unable to respond to them.

    Questions 9 and 10 address the limitations of feedback. Hence, though deriving from the overall research gap (Boysen, 2016; Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017; Medina et al., 2019)

regarding feedback, these two questions are exploratory and broadly outside the existing literature, given the overall limited research on the topic of student feedback to instructors.

The interview questions will serve as a guide, rather than as a fixed protocol, for each interview. In interviews for the proposed study, I will ask follow-up questions to clarify or expand upon participants' responses in keeping with the research design used in this study. Such a process will ensure that each phenomenological interview remains focused on the respondent's experiences with the phenomenon under investigation and also free enough time to allow them to express all elements that are relevant to their experiences (Ranney et al., 2015). Interviews will last approximately 45-90 minutes. During this time, I will endeavor to elicit consistent responses from participants, which at times may necessitate restating or rephrasing a question and giving further clarification regarding the question's meaning. I will sequence the questions in a way that generates self-disclosure and is reliant on conversational interviewing; I acknowledge that the sequencing of questions impacts the generation of data (see Appendix F for an interview excerpt).

Reflective Journaling

The second source of data will be reflective journaling. Participants in the study will be asked to complete a reflective journal entry following the interview and e-mail it to the researcher. This reflective journal entry will be framed as follows:

"Please carefully consider the following question and draft a journal entry (at least 1-3 pages, though it may be as long as you like) indicating the advice regarding the effective use of student feedback that you would provide to a new colleague if you were asked to do so by the college's administration, including what kind of feedback to pay attention to, what kind to ignore, and how to effectively incorporate valuable feedback into teaching practices."

The resulting reflective journal entries will be collected via e-mail attachment in the form of Microsoft word documents or other text formats. These journals will then be used as a further source of insight into the teachers' experiences of feedback and perceptions with regard to effectively utilizing it. The chosen form for the reflective journal entries reflects that such a presentation to a newly hired colleague is a natural and succinct way of expressing one's overarching views on the topic (see Appendix F for a sample reflective journal entry).

Document Collection

The third source of data for the proposed study will be document collection. As part of the recruitment process, I will request that participants provide supporting documents to demonstrate the value of student feedback in their educational planning. These documents may take several forms, but the most relevant example would be actual student feedback. Since the objective of the study is to determine how teachers interact with feedback and use it to improve their instruction, I may ask instructors to provide specific instances of student feedback they have found valuable and student feedback that they have found to be not useful. In the case of useful feedback, I may also ask instructors to provide a brief summary of how they incorporated the specific feedback into their future instructional design. I will also ask for a brief description of why non-useful feedback was not valuable. If relevant, the instructor may provide course syllabi from before the feedback and after the feedback to demonstrate any specific changes to the content of their courses made based on the student feedback. Since the purpose of the study is to understand how instructors engage with feedback, collecting systematic feedback information would provide little insight without knowing how it was that the instructors used that feedback or why they did not make use of it. Participants may provide documents as physical photocopies or virtual files e-mailed to me before or after the interviews.

Data Analysis

The objective of phenomenological data analysis is to reduce the data to the essence of the shared experience (Moustakas, 1994). Typically, such an analysis would take the form of eidetic reduction. Because the study is phenomenological, the first step in the analysis will be bracketing or putting on the epoche (Moustakas, 1994). In this stage, I will carefully reflect on and become aware of my biases, expectations, and preconceptions. Many of these appear in the role of the researcher section. After becoming aware of these perspectives, I will carefully set them aside in order to conduct the analysis with new eyes, approaching the data analysis from the perspective that it must reflect only what the participants have said, not my own views. A key characteristic of the epoche is that, in this state, every position has equal value (Moustakas, 1994).

Once the epoche has been put on, the central step in the analysis will be eidetic or phenomenological reduction. In this step, the "task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Per Moustakas (1994), the primary act of this reduction is to look iteratively over the data and describe them, not only once but repeatedly. Furthermore, in each iteration of seeing and describing the data, it is key to remain aware of the contextual qualities of the data. That is to say, within the words are more contextual clues to the underlying experience, such as the roughness or smoothness of the text, the size of individual descriptions, and their intensity. Addressing this contextual component of the data is twofold, in that the researcher must both look carefully at the data to obtain information about the quality of the experience through details, but also deduce characteristics of the experience from the ways in which those details are laid out,

Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) indicates that the researcher should begin with this full description of the experience and then work to reduce it to the essence. This essence should transcend the details of the description and also characterize the relationship of the experience to the phenomenon. The resulting essence should be "horizontal and thematic" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 101). In this context, horizontal refers to a full horizon of the experience, or piecing together the full horizon in which the phenomenon is experienced through a combination of perspectives, each of which represents a unique angle or perspective. The final resulting essence should be, at the same time, indicative of all these angles and yet transcend any specific angle. Once the essence is established, it should be reflected in a complete, textual description of what has been uncovered.

This textual reflection of the essence is then understood through the lens of imaginative variation. Imaginative variation refers to the process of establishing possible meanings for the data (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation is so called because it involves using the imagination to look at the data and infer possible meanings from a variety of standpoints or reference frames. "The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; […] the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107). A key portion of this stage of analysis is to move away from the physical universe and toward the realm of essences or ideas. Within this, identifying themes and universal structures is key.

The final stage of the analysis is synthesis. In this steps, the results of the more reality-oriented textual descriptions and those of the meaning-oriented imaginative variation step are combined and synthesized into a meaningful whole that reflects both textual and structural characteristics of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) noted that the essence of the experience

can never be fully exhausted, and so it is important to integrate the boundaries imposed by the textual descriptions in order to instead isolate the essence of experiencing the phenomenon within a more limited time, place, and vantage point. With these limitations, the issues can be addressed more fully and the analysis produce a more authoritative result.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a research study refers to how it precisely reflects the opinions, beliefs, experiences, and realities of its participants. There are four essential criteria to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility helps to ensure that the research study captures an accurate description of the subjective experiences of the participants who share a common phenomenon. One potential threat to credibility in this study is the possibility of participants offering preferred social responses in a bid to be socially desirable (Leung, 2015). Ostensibly, sharing negative experiences might make some people feel like incompetent learners. I will assure the confidentiality of the information that respondents share through an informed consent form to encourage open sharing from the participants. I also will use probes and iterative questioning when conducting interviews to help the participants avoid the urge to offer preferred social responses.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability can be a threat in qualitative research studies, chiefly owing to the changing nature of the phenomenon under investigation. However, the study does not constitute a single definitive result, but a credible one. I will use verbatim extracts to ensure that the data

are dependable, as I also explore various perspectives to achieve a detailed and multifaceted account of the phenomenon. While researcher bias is inevitable, I will focus on the study's confirmability to ensure that I remain objective. Therefore, I will clarify my predispositions from the outset, such as a pragmatist paradigm, qualitative phenomenology, and the detailed methodological description. The ongoing reflective analysis will help to corroborate the results while member checking helps to determine whether data are typical or atypical.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research deals with whether the findings of a research study can be applied from a small group setting to a larger setting. As advised by Leung (2015), I will address the limitation of a small sample of 30 participants in the study from a population of about 8,500 students. While the common themes will regard only this research population, I will ensure that they are transferable by detailing the demographic data of participants and producing thick descriptions of their lived experiences. I will also provide the verbatim extracts of the interviews to them afterward to help judge the interpretation accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

I will submit the research proposal to the IRB and commence the study only after approval. I will provide each of the participants with informed consent forms to sign and give their permission to be included in the study. I will also suppply an executive summary of the research process alongside the consent form for them to read before signing. This form will detail the respondent's freedom to volunteer in the study and their freedom to withdraw from it at any time during the study period. I will inform participants of the risks involved in participating in the study, the management of their data, and privacy and confidentiality issues. Protecting the respondents' data in the research enhanced the confidentiality of their contributions to the study.

During the data analysis phase, codenames will be assigned to participants to protect their real identities. The results will be presented to the participants first before submission for them to ensure that they are contented with how I maintained their confidentiality.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. In Chapter Three, I have discussed the methodological aspects of the proposed study. These include the choice of a qualitative research methodology, the use of a phenomenological research design, and the specific relevance of transcendental phenomenology. The research will take place at a specific community college in the Deep South, and I will recruit participants from the relevant staff through purposive sampling until saturation is achieved. I will collect data using face-to-face, unstructured interviews, research notes, and document collection, analyzing them through qualitative thematic analyses. I will adhere to ethical and trustworthy research practices at all stages of the research. This chapter concludes the proposal. Once the study is completed, the next chapter, Chapter Four, will include the results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. Chapter Four contains the presentation of the study findings yielded from the data collection and analysis methods described in Chapter Three. The data collection involved unstructured individual interviews with seven participants, one focus group discussion with four participants, and reflective journals collected from one interview participant and three focus group participants. The data analysis involved eidetic reduction (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter includes a narrative of the participants and an account of the theme development process that generated the themes. The themes that answered the research questions were: (a) honest feedback, (b) feedback targeting specific problems, (c) untimely and vague feedback, (d) reliance on informal evaluation, (e) feedback on course content and design, (f) addressing different learning needs, (g) unused feedback, and (h) feedback for exam preparation.

Participants

The participants of this study were 11 instructors who teach online courses through ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Community College. The participants were selected purposively. The inclusion criteria were: at least two years of experience teaching at the school site and at least two years of experience teaching at least one online course at the community college. Initially, 12 participants were recruited for the study; however, Interviewee 6 withdrew his participation. All data

collected from Interviewee 6 was permanently deleted and will not be used in this study.

Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 is an associate dean and an English instructor who has been working at the community college for 19 years. Interviewee 1 worked part-time during his first ten years as an instructor, and worked full-time in the last nine years. The participant has also been fulfilling an administrative role for the past six years. Interviewee 1 perceived, "It is from these positions that I base my overall experience with the college and my assessment of the atmosphere and the faculty, student, and administration roles within the college to give the following encouragement to new instructors." Interviewee 1 valued the relationships formed with students and colleagues, and the "autonomy" when designing courses in the community college.

Interviewee 2

Interviewee 2 is a nursing instructor and chairperson of the nursing department. The participant believed that the community college was a "vital part" of the community due to providing opportunities for the people in the rural area. Interviewee 2 cited that the students in the college were "open and motivated to learn" and that "most students are from rural backgrounds in which they are the first immediate family to have sought formal education beyond the high school level." Several families in the area were "from blue collar backgrounds." Thus, the participant also perceived that community outreach was a "very, very important service." Interviewee 2 stated:

> We make an attempt to promote inclusion and support for our students, where most are
> from extremely remote and rural communities. We try to paint a picture of what it looks
> like "outside" of the community in that many of our students, over their lifetime, have not
> ventured far beyond their community.

Additionally, the participant mentioned, "We have graduated approximately 200 nurses to professional practice thus far and typically have a 100% job placement rate prior to the time they graduate." Furthermore, Interviewee 2 perceived that the faculty consisted of diverse individuals who "share ideas with a sense of openness." Administrators on the campus were said to "advocate for the students."

Interviewee 3

Interviewee 3 is a biology instructor who has been teaching at the study site for two years. The participant "launched" his teaching career as a part-time instructor in the community college. The participant perceived that the study site had a "family atmosphere," and teaching in the community college has resulted in "getting to broaden [his] teaching practices." This result was due to the "diverse population of students" who were generally "non-traditional" students consisting of part-time students, individuals with their own families, or returning to college. Interviewee 3 believed that utilizing different teaching styles could "really promote learning and all of those diverse student lifestyles." Interviewee 3 argued that a vital component of teaching the students was the faculty. The participant reported, "I really had a positive experience. I think we have a great student population [and] an even better faculty. I have been very well accepted into the faculty…that is very collaborative, very diverse, very encouraging."

Interviewee 4

Interviewee 4 works as a history instructor at two campuses of the community college. Prior to that, Interviewee 4 also worked in two other campuses of the community college. The participant believed that "I'm one of the rare folks who have taught at all four our campuses, which I think gives me a unique perspective." In the two current campuses where Interviewee 4 taught, the student and faculty population was comparably smaller than those of the other two

campuses. As such, the participant experienced "more opportunity to collaborate with other faculty" and "work closely with students." Furthermore, Interviewee 4 enjoyed the autonomy which "allow[s] [faculty] to be sort of dynamic in our teaching; we can change things as we want."

Interviewee 5

Interviewee 5 has been employed at the community college "for a while." The study site was the only college where the participant worked for. Interviewee 5 described the experience of working in the study site as a "relatively positive experience." Interviewee 5 emphasized:

I've always felt welcome here. I've always felt like I was creating change in the instruction that I do. I feel like I'm pretty well supported in my efforts, especially at this campus very well supported. So you know I think overall is a great place to work.

Interviewee 7

Interviewee 7 has been teaching in the community college for six years. For the first two years, the participant worked part-time, and then for the next two and a half years, "moved into a little bit more than part-time position, but not quite full time, which is a little weird and hard to explain." During the last year and a half, Interviewee 7 worked as a full-time mathematics instructor. The participant shared:

I would say that for the most part, I've had a very positive experience at my community college. I have very close friendships with all of my co-workers. My administrators have always been helpful and very supportive…My students, for the most part, have been wonderful.

Interviewee 7 taught at multiple campuses, "So the student population is very different." Similarly, students in online classes were also different, "depending on the term and where they are geographically."

Interviewee 8

Interviewee 8 has been teaching for the past 17 years. She teaches mathematics. Interviewee 8 stated: [mathematics is] a "course [that] is always something that's difficult for students to understand." Interviewee 8 perceived that "the quality of the students have somewhat declined over the years since I've been teaching" in that high school graduates seem to be less "prepared mathematically." The participant shared that due to CoVID-19 restrictions, instructors were forced to teach "virtually." Nonetheless, Interviewee 8 regarded the online platform positively in that student feedback could be obtained "after each test." The participant generally asked about, "Test format, how they prepare for the test, what I could do differently." As a result, Interviewee 8 shared that, "I've adjusted some of the ways that I offer resources to the students to help them better understand [the course]."

Interviewee 9

Interviewee 9 has 14 years of teaching experience and has been teaching in the community college for four years. She has a doctoral degree in education, "which helped tremendously instructional leadership." The participant admitted that her experience of fully online-based instruction was a result of the CoVID-19 pandemic. Interviewee 9 shared, "So I've been teaching online since March." Nonetheless, the participant also stated that she was able to adapt to different teaching styles, including the "synchronous and asynchronous education" brought about by online instruction.

Interviewee 10

Interviewee 10 is a psychology instructor in the community college. The participant used to be a department chairperson. Interviewee 10 perceived that communication with administrators, department chairs, and colleagues has been "excellent" and "easy." Leaders were open to suggestions. Interviewee 10 also perceived that communication with the students was "excellent in traditional and online classes." Several students were able to "talk about how the course is not only just informational to them but rather how it's affecting and changing their lives and their relationships and even challenges they may be having."

Interviewee 11

Interviewee 11 has 20 years of teaching experience. She is currently a part-time psychology instructor and a counselor at the community college. The participant shared her experience as a first generation college student who grew up in a single-parent household. She explained that his mother "did not know how this education was going to happen" for her. She was a working student and later earned her degree in nursing in a community college. She then worked as a professional nurse for 25 years. Simultaneously, she worked on earning her master's degree in counseling and psychology. Interviewee 11 regarded education as "very important in my life."

Interviewee 12

Interviewee 12 has been with the community college for 15 years. Upon hiring, the participant shared that he was tasked to join the pioneer team "for online instruction and dual enrollment instruction." The participant experienced working on different campuses with different student populations.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. This study's sample consisted of 11 purposively selected instructors who teach online courses through the community college serving as the site for this study. The sampling criteria were: at least two years of experience teaching at the school site and at least two years of experience teaching at least one online course at the community college. Initially, 12 participants qualified and volunteered to join the study; however, one participant, Interviewee 6, chose to withdraw his participation. As explained verbally and as written in the informed consent form signed by the participants prior to data collection, participation in this study was completely voluntary. The participant who chose to withdraw will not suffer any consequences. All the data collected from the participant was permanently destroyed and will not be used in any part of this study. Data collection was conducted through the video conferencing software Zoom. Interviewees 5 and 7 to 12 were interviewed individually. Due to conflicting schedules, Interviewees 1 to 4 were not able to do individual interviews. Instead, the four participants joined a focus group discussion. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 11 also submitted reflective journals. Eidetic reduction applied to the analysis of the data revealed eight themes. The theme development, as well as descriptions and excerpts from the data, will be presented in the next section.

Theme Development

The aim of this study was to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. In order to address this goal, eidetic reduction was applied to the data collected from 11 instructors who teach online

courses through ███████████ Community College, who have at least two years of experience teaching at the school site, and at least two years of experience teaching at least one online course at the community college. The sources of data were unstructured interviews, a focus group, and reflective journals. To perform eidetic reduction, I followed Moustakas' (1994) four phenomenological analysis steps: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis through constructing composite textural-structural description.

Epoche involved my bracketing of personal beliefs and attitudes about instructors and student evaluations before I began data collection. To minimize bias, I listed and reflected on my personal experiences and assumptions about the phenomenon and the participants. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher's experience of the phenomenon being explored is significant to the analysis to connect with the participants' experiences. However, the process of epoche is vital in the textual-structural descriptions from different perspectives. My experiences and attitudes were presented in the role of the researcher in the previous chapter.

I began coding the text-based data, which were the Microsoft Word files for the interview transcripts, focus group transcript, and reflective journal. I imported the Word files into NVivo 12 Pro, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The coding process involved phenomenological reduction, in which I identified small units of meaning relevant to the phenomenon of how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. Moustakas (1994) referred to these codes or units of meaning as invariant horizons. In this phase, I read and re-read the texts line-by-line, treating each statement as equally valuable. I identified as many horizons as possible within the data. A small chunk of the horizons as they appear in NVivo is presented in Figure 1 as an example.
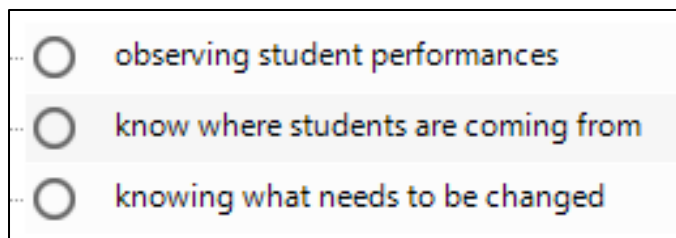
Figure 1. Sample codes from NVivo. The figure shows a visual representation of codes or horizons in NVivo.

I reviewed the codes to ensure that the statements were not overlapping or redundant. I then began to cluster and thematize the codes. Based on the coded texts, codes with similar meanings were grouped together. For instance, the codes in Figure 1 generally referred to experiences of using informal evaluation. Thus, the initial theme of Reliance on informal evaluation emerged from the data. For initial themes to emerge as final themes, I reviewed how the themes were represented in the data. Initial themes with sufficient evidence emerged as final themes that represent the participants' structures of experience. The final themes and the numbers of sources and total references are presented in Table 1. The column for number of sources refers to the number of data sources in which the theme can be found, while number of total references refers to the number of times, in total, the theme appears across the data sources.

Table 1.

Final Themes

Theme	Number of Sources	Number of Total References
Honest feedback	8	12
Feedback targeting specific problems	2	7
Untimely and vague feedback	3	9
Reliance on informal evaluation	4	8
Feedback on course content and design	2	5
Addressing different learning needs	11	28
Unused feedback	8	22
Feedback for exam preparation	2	12

At this point, the final themes represent the "what" of the participants' experiences. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), I applied the imaginative variation process to explore the "how" of the participants' experiences. This process involved reviewing the themes and reflecting on their relationships with each other. Textual descriptions and structural descriptions were used in this process, in which quotes from the data were used to determine the what and the how of the participants' experiences. Sample quotes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Sample Quotes Per Theme

Theme	Sample Quotes
Honest feedback	" Sometimes you're going to get some disgruntled students [who take out their frustrations]"
	" I don't necessarily feel like students even know what they're supposed to be writing"
Feedback targeting specific problems	"I think that if we could specifically identify areas to improve on that that would just make course instruction much better."
	"Not just validation, but a good you know piece of information and know you're doing something correctly."
Untimely and vague feedback	"It needs to be timely in order for it to mean something"
	"The main issue [was] that I would not receive timely feedback."
Reliance on informal evaluation	"I just don't do it in a in a quite a formalized manner."
	"I literally make adjustments according to what I observed with the students if they are not being successful."
Feedback on course content and design	"A lot of times, [comment] on things like the material that I use and less about teaching is a good thing"
	"[Comments on] course design…did help the way I teach…making sure

	that things in the course are lining up"
Addressing different learning needs	"I have learned to be adaptive in my teaching methods to accommodate vast learning styles."
	"I've tried to teach to all learning styles… We had to quickly change to online instruction and we just go right in with it."
Unused feedback	"They complain…about the cost of the textbook and the software… when we decide on those types of things, it's a departmental thing and not necessarily individual thing."
	"I think the biggest [complaint] is the amount of work the students are expected to do…I have no control over how much work you got to do in this class because it's set by somebody else.
Feedback for exam preparation.	"I've used the evaluations to really focus in the tools I am using to prepare them for the exam."
	"I have students [assess] the test format, how they prepare for the test, what I could do differently… And because of those feedback, I've adjusted some of the ways that I offer resources to the students to help them better understand."

Lastly, in this phenomenological process, I developed a synthesis through a composite textural-structural description. This description was composed of narratives of the participants' experiences consisting of the final themes and excerpts from the data. The phenomenon of how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction is seen through various perspectives. This narrative contained the essence of the participants' experiences. The composite textual-structural descriptions are shown after the presentation of the themes.

Honest feedback. This theme emerged from the participants' general experiences of honest and possibly misleading or shady comments. The participants generally concluded that honest student feedback was helpful in terms of evaluation affecting the quality of their teaching. According to Interviewee 8, some students might not give honest feedback about the course design and/or teaching style due to their own frustrations. Interviewee 8 shared:

Sometimes you're going to get some disgruntled students that… Because they didn't get the grade they wanted to give and they feel that they put the effort in, [they take out their frustrations]… I tell them it is important for them to…answer honestly, to give me constructive criticism so that I can… make the class better.

Interviewee 5 also believed similarly in that, "I think student evaluations kind of give us some insight into the perceptions that the students have about the class…if the students are truly honest." Additionally, Interviewee 5 also commented, "Most of our students aren't honest with themselves and they're not honest with us …If they don't have an A in the class,…they would give me a bad evaluation."

On the contrary, Interviewee 11 considered the feedback from "disgruntled students" as a sign to "give them a break." Interviewee 11 stated, "If I could tell that it was a particular student that was burying the hatchet… I probably will be willing to even talk with the person… to give them a break." Nonetheless, if the student was one who was known to "show up late and does not do the work," Interviewee 11 did not consider the evaluation as honest and objective, but "a personal unfounded suggestion."

Interviewees 2 and 7 perceived that some students might not be intentionally giving dishonest feedback. Instead, both participants cited that the evaluation questions may be

"vague." Interviewee 2 shared, "Initially found that the questions that were given the students to be very vague at times and not specific."

Feedback targeting specific problems. This theme emerged from the data highlighting the usefulness of student evaluations when feedback was directed to specific problems in the online course. Interviewees 1, 3, 4, and 12 contributed to this theme. According to Interviewee 4, the current evaluation system was conducted "college-wide" and that comments from students were often generalized. Interviewee 12 revealed that to identify a target problem, the participant often tried to find consistent comments. Interviewee 12 shared:

So every now and then I'll find something… sort of a consistent theme throughout responses and it lets me know that what I'm doing seems to be working. I think if instructors get [this] kind of…consistent response in their courses, that's…not just validation, but a good piece of information to know you're doing something correctly. Interviewee 1 perceived, "I think that if we could specifically identify areas to improve on, that would just make course instruction much better…I know what I'm looking for…feedback on specific assignments or specific design of the class." The participant explained that specific feedback could help in redesigning the course for the next semester, and then Interviewee 1 would repeat the cycle again.

In the experience of Interviewee 3, specific negative feedback on lecture and laboratory courses helped in designing both courses. Interviewee 3 explained that the schedule between the lecture and lab subjects may sometimes not be synchronized within the week in that the lab activity occurs "weeks away from lecture." When that happens, some students might find the activity difficult; thus, Interviewee 3 redesigned the courses such that the courses were coordinated better.

Untimely and vague feedback. This theme emerged from the participants' overall experience of receiving late and ambiguous feedback. Interviewee 1 shared that the timeliness of receiving feedback has improved since the college "started doing electronic feedback." The participant also shared that in the last semester, when classes moved to the online platform due to the CoVID-19 restrictions, "This past semester probably was the quickest I have ever gotten evaluations. I got it, like right after the semester. So that was really nice." Interviewee 2 reiterated that timely feedback was necessary for the comments to be useful to instructors. The participant stressed, "You're basing their evaluation on older on old information when you do not get it back in a timely manner." Interviewee 5 commented that the timing of the evaluation was also untimely. Interviewee 5 stated, "We do evaluations very late in the semester…it's hard to change when there's only four weeks left in the semester."

For Interviewee 3, the unhelpful feedback were often ones that were unclear. Interviewee 5 similarly perceived unhelpful ambiguous comments in that, "I'm getting feedback from the students has been very variable." Nonetheless, Interviewee 7 mentioned the types of questions in the evaluation could impact the types of answers from students. Interviewee 7 argued, "If you ask a generalized question you're going to get a very general answer."

Reliance on informal evaluation. The essence of the participants' experiences regarding the influence of the quality of student evaluations to instruction included placing value on informal evaluation rather than the formal, college-wide evaluation. Interviewees 1, 4, 5, 10, and 11 shared student-centered approaches to evaluation in that the participants generally focused on student performance, and "knowing where the students were coming from." Interviewees 1, 4, and 11 shared their experiences of observing the students' performances in class and in assignments to know what needed to be changed. Interviewee 1 articulated:

Especially if you do one assignment and your second you know your second unit has that same kind of assignment in it, and the students responded really poorly to that first one, then you can make adjustments within the semester.

Interviewee 11 had the same experience. In addition, Interviewee 11 also observed how students performed in class. For instance, the participant cited, the first week or so I found out that students sometimes those couple of the first couple weeks don't have books. So I literally make adjustments according to what I observed with the students if they are not being successful." Interviewee 4 also made observations about students' behavior in class. Particularly in online class, Interviewee 4 reported, "I have incorporated more kinesthetic activities and this did not come from any sort of evaluation. This came from me just observing the class and feeling like they need to get up and move around, or do something."

Interviewees 2 and 3 perceived that using student performance as a basis for informal evaluation of the quality of instruction could also help instructors to look at the feedback more objectively. Interviewee 2 elucidated:

Whether we get a positive or negative evaluation as an instructor. Much of it is dependent on how well the student is performing in the class… it seems like the students who are performing maybe towards the bottom…that is where we're getting the majority of the negative feedback as teachers... I'm just saying that we need to look at each comment that we get positive or negative, and you know it. Look at it very objective.

Interviewee 10 perceived that negative comments could help instructors "know where students are coming from." Interviewee 10 noted, "[I] match what my students are talking about and I see how I can take that information and make changes in my course. So I'm always looking for the learner perspective to improve."

Feedback on course content and design. Another essence of the participants'
experiences regarding the influence of the quality of student evaluations to instruction was
feedback on course content and design. The participants generally believed that comments
directed to course content and design were valuable in instruction, particularly in selecting
materials to improve student engagement and performance. Interviewee 8 reported:

What I mean by that right now because of the situation with the world and CoVid-19, we
are having to teach virtually, so after each test, I have students to [assess the] test format,
how they prepare for the test what I could do differently. And because of those that
feedback, I've adjusted some of the ways that I offer resources to the students to help
them better understand.

Interviewee 10 admitted receiving feedback about going off-topic when lecturing. The
participant shared, "I can change to make it better. Maybe, you know, stay focused on the topic."
Interviewee 3 stated, "I really use student evaluations in order to improve the course design that
way." Interviewee 4, who is a history instructor, narrated:

So if they if their complaints are petty sort of things, then I feel like I've probably done
my job. But if there were complaints or like this isn't history, then I didn't prove my
original thesis for the class…That's what I keep my eye out for. And that's really what I'm
using those evaluations for. …Have I…brought my course in terms of design into that
thesis?

Addressing different learning needs. This theme emerged from the data as a response
to student evaluations in improving instruction. Addressing different learning needs pertained to
the participants' general experiences of developing student-centered pedagogy as a result of
utilizing students' feedback. The participants generally perceived that the community college has

a diverse student and faculty population in terms of background and age. Interviewee 8 stated,
"If you have a student that is that is the oldest in…a family of six kids, they have it difficult…I
would like to… work more individually with that student. A lot of times they talked to me about
it." Interviewee 10 reiterated the significance of utilizing different styles of teaching to
accommodate the needs of different students. Interviewee 10 shared:

> Different approaches to teaching, learning methods…It can improve instructions because
> I want to have a diversity of students with different ages different backgrounds, different
> experiences and not everybody learns the same. And so I can take this information from
> the students that, hey, I can do a little bit more.

> Interviewee 11 emphasized that the diversity was particularly noticeable in online classes,
stating, "Older students sometimes have a lot of problems with technology." Interviewee 11 also
shared:

> An online diversity class that I taught and one of the assignments…millennial students
> they…[are] also last minute people, they just generally [turn in] assignments in at the last
> minute and then have the nerve to want you to give them feedback right now…so we can
> learn…each generation's needs are different

> In the reflective journal, Interviewee 11 wrote about the value of student feedback. The
participant perceived that feedback was "ongoing during the general process of learning" and a
"cry for more information on [a particular] student's learning style." Interviewee 11 wrote:

> When a student says, "I am trying to do this assignment but it is intimidating. A good
> approach is for the faculty member to do the assignment themselves to offer students
> direction. Or when a student says, "Can you write something on the board," this should
> be viewed as cry for more information in that student's learning style.

According to Interviewee 5, addressing students' learning needs may not necessarily be a result of feedback from evaluation, but from the instructor's observation. Interviewee 5 noted:

The first thing I do is since I don't know who said it. I have to look at the cohort as a whole and cohorts vary year to year…How did they do? How interactive? …Did they complain from day one?

For Interviewees 4 and 9, they responded to student feedback on online classes through making the classes more "interactive." Interviewee 4 "kept thinking" of various activities to keep students engaged, while Interviewee 9 used different media to catch students' attention. Interviewee 9 narrated:

Make it a little more interactive, but also include some videos, [may it be] teaching the content or pulling in some other resources that explain the content that are videos based into my lectures and I encourage them to come to our meeting with questions in hand to talk about the concepts that they learned…it's really trying to make it the way it should be when we have a live classroom.

Unused feedback. Another response to student evaluations in improving instruction that emerged from the data was that of unused feedback. Five participants revealed in the interviews that they often respond to consistent feedback. Interviewee 5 explained:

I also look at how many people complained about the same problem. So I look at the percentage of whatever problems I had and if it was a large percentage that had that same problem, then I've got to do something.

Interviewee 10 also expressed similarly, "We have a total of 200 to 300 students and if I have a certain number of students who have the same comment complaint or suggestion…I'll make changes." Interviewee 12 perceived that students often used evaluations for "venting," and

added that, "I get a lot of 'I didn't see the syllabus' or 'Oh, I love her. She's so funny.'…I don't

get enough consistent constructive responses to be able to use the feedback for the most part."

However, some consistent comments could not be responded to by the instructors, as the

comments may entail something outside of their capacity. For instance, Interviewee 8 shared:

> One of the biggest things that students say is they complain… about the cost of the
>
> textbook and the software. Um, it's really astronomical what they're paying for textbooks.
>
> Um, and so when we decide on those types of things. It's a departmental thing and not
>
> necessarily individual thing.

 Apart from responding to consistent feedback, some participant perceived that the

students' "tone" or "language" used in the evaluation impacted their response. Interviewee 1

elucidated:

> First thing I do is look at the tone and the professionalism of the comment you know that
>
> if a student does have a serious concern, obviously it will come across in a more
>
> developed manner…f you've got specific references that are of qualitative matter that's
>
> what I'll look at first.

In responding to student evaluations to improve instruction, Interviewee 11 reiterated, "I

think student evaluations are very important [but we have to see if] It looks like something

feasible." Overall, the instructors often respond to consistent and/or qualitative comments if they

have the capacity to do so.

Feedback for exam preparation. The theme pertaining to the use of evaluation to

prepare students for exams emerged from the data as a response to student evaluations in

improving instruction. Generally, the participants revealed that they often received feedback

about the difficulty of exams, the exam coverage, and the lack of preparation for exams. Thus,

five participants stated in the interviewees that they usually take the time to review the students prior to an exam as a response to the students' comments. Interviewee 10 stated, "I tried to give more exam reviews. They talked about needing more of that." Similarly, Interviewee 8 shared:

I have students [assess] the test format, how they prepare for the test, what I could do differently… And because of those feedback, I've adjusted some of the ways that I offer resources to the students to help them better understand.

Interviewee 3 shared that students who failed the first exam often "like to blame that the materials were too hard" although some students might have "poor studying habits." Nonetheless, the participant responded to such comments through doing reviews before exams. Interviewee 3 stated, "I always leave a day, or at least half a day when we can do a full review." Interviewee 4 shared that giving a study guide prior to an exam resulted in "fewer complaints" from the students.

Individual, Composite, Textural, and Structural Descriptions

After theme development, the final stage of a phenomenological study is to create a composite textural-structural description and identify the essence of the participants' lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions were derived from what the participants experienced in relation to students' feedback when reevaluating course quality and instruction, while structural descriptions were developed to describe how the participants experienced the phenomenon of student feedback on reevaluating course quality and instruction. The composite textural-structural synthesis was developed to describe the "essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 190), and derived from the transcendental-phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation processes. The sub-sections below show the individual composite, textural, structural, and essence descriptions.

individual textural description.

Interviewee 1. Interviewee 1 contributed to the focus group and reflective journal. In the focus group with Interviewees 2, 3, and 4, Interviewee 1 reiterated experiences of responding to student evaluations to improve instruction. The participant also reported the same experiences in the reflective journal. Interviewee 1 perceived that responding to evaluations needed consideration, and that not all feedback needed a counteraction. The participant perceived that the questions involved in the evaluation form were not useful in improving the quality of teaching and instruction. Interviewee 1 expressed a preference for relying on informal evaluation, particularly when observing student performance. In the journal, the participant also wrote that the quality of teaching and instruction can be improved through addressing students' different learning needs.

Interviewee 2. Interviewee 2 joined the focus group and submitted a reflective journal. The participant believed that the community college fostered a collaborative and engaging environment. With that, the interviewee experienced handling a diverse group of students every semester. Interviewee 2 reiterated that using student evaluations was helpful in identifying students' learning needs, which was useful in improving the quality of teaching and instruction through being able to address those needs.

Interviewee 3. Interviewee 3 was part of the focus group. In the discussion, the participant shared the value of comments about course design or the delivery of the lesson on improving one's quality of teaching. Among the participants of the focus group and the individual interviews, Interviewee 3 was the only one to state that they consulted with colleagues to see which comments from students were useful in order to improve instruction.

Interviewee 4. Interviewee 4 shared lived experiences through the focus group and reflective journal. The participant believed that honest student feedback affected the quality of teaching. Comments on the course design was perceived to be the most useful type of feedback. The participant also used student evaluations as a means to improve the quality of teaching through identifying and addressing the different learning needs of students.

Interviewee 5. Data were collected from Interviewee 5 through an individual interview. The participant experienced that the current student evaluation practices were not useful, as the feedback was often received at the end of the semester. Moreover, student feedback was perceived to be unhelpful for the course, as the comments were often about students taking out their frustration over their grades. Nonetheless, the participant emphasized that honest feedback was helpful. With the lack of honest feedback, however, the participant relied on informal evaluations. In observing the students, for instance, the participant was able to improve instruction, specifically in learning and addressing the students' needs to be engaged during online classes. Additionally, Interviewee 5 believed that not all of the students' needs in online classes can be addressed by an instructor.

Interviewee 7. In the individual interview, Interviewee 7 shared that the quality of student evaluation depended on timing and content. The participant preferred for feedback to be received earlier in the semester, and for the comments to focus on the course design to be able to be useful in improving instruction. However, not all feedback was honest, and some comments were vague. Students needed to provide honest, timely, and relevant feedback for Interviewee 7 to address their learning needs and to improve the instructor's quality of teaching.

Interviewee 8. Interviewee 8 shared in the individual interviews that the quality of student feedback could impact the perception of how the feedback would be used in improving

the quality of teaching. The participant believed that the current evaluation form did not elicit sufficient data for instructors and that only honest student responses could be useful. Interviewee 8 experienced reading comments in which students only took out their frustrations about their grades in the course. Therefore, the participant reviewed the language used by the students to judge the usefulness of the feedback on improving instruction. Nonetheless, the participant also believed that not all comments can be addressed by an instructor, as some needs were outside the scope of their jobs as instructors.

Interviewee 9. Interviewee 9 joined the individual interviews. The participant perceived that the current student evaluation process could be improved with additional questions that would elicit honest responses from students. The current evaluation process was also perceived to be a method for students to vent their frustrations over their grades. Interviewee 9 used student feedback to improve instruction through searching for teaching methods addressing the students' needs while classes were held online, specifically in enhancing student interaction in online classes. The participant also contended that student evaluation can be used to improve instruction through addressing students' needs for exam preparation.

Interviewee 10. In the individual interview, Interviewee 10 perceived that when teaching, the preference of instructor was applied to the course over students' feedback. However, the participant also believed that student evaluation was a means for instructors to understand what the students were experiencing and where their comments were coming from. Nonetheless, Interviewee 10 reported the need to improve the data collection involved in the current evaluation process, and that the participant believed the use of informal evaluation was helpful in improving the quality of teaching. Additionally, the participant shared that, regardless of the form of evaluation, student feedback was useful in addressing different learning needs, as well as

in preparing students for exams. Interviewee 10 suggested that consistent feedback needed to be taken into consideration to improve instruction.

Interviewee 11. During the individual interview with Interviewee 11, the participant revealed that students generally used the evaluation as a chance to comment on the delivery of lessons. However, some students used the evaluation to express their frustrations regarding their grades in the course. Hence, the participant reiterated that only honest feedback was useful in improving the quality of teaching. Interviewee 11 received that students' feedback may be mostly used to address individual learning needs of students, but instructors also needed to review if the means to help the students was feasible. Currently, the feedback was useful in improving instruction through increasing student engagement in online classes. The participant reiterated the same perceptions and experiences in the reflective journal.

Interviewee 12. Interviewee 12 shared in the individual interview that consistent, honest and targeted feedback were useful in improving the quality of teaching and instruction. While the participant reported using their preferred way of teaching, students' feedback was also often used to improve instruction. Specifically, the participant attempted to use different teaching methods to address the students' learning needs, particularly as the students and instructors adjusted to online learning.

Composite textural description. The description of the collective experiences of the participants were generated from the synthesis of individual textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The composite textural description captured the community college online course instructors' experience of student feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. Collectively, the participants' experiences specific to the quality of student feedback involved honest responses (theme 1: honest feedback) particular to specific target areas within the course

(theme 2: feedback targeting specific problems). Moreover, the participants collectively

experienced receiving and engaging with untimely and vague feedback (theme 3: untimely and

vague feedback). The instructors generally relied on informal feedback (theme 4: reliance on

informal evaluation) and feedback on course content and design (theme 5: feedback on course

content and design) to improve their quality of teaching. In improving instruction, the instructors

practiced addressing different learning needs (theme 6: addressing different learning needs),

reviewing the usefulness of the feedback (theme 7: unused feedback), and using the feedback to

prepare students for examinations (theme 8: feedback for exam preparation). The participants

mostly perceived that student feedback need not be formal to have an impact on teaching and

instruction. Collectively, community college online course instructors preferred and perceived

honest, relevant, and timely feedback as useful in improving the quality of teaching and

instructions.

Individual structural description.

Interviewee 1. Interviewee 1 placed emphasis on the response to student evaluation in

improving instruction. The participant argued that not all feedback should be responded to and

that only student evaluation "of qualitative matter" needed to be taken seriously. The participant

shared:

> The process I do here is the first thing I do is look at the tone and the professionalism of
>
> the comment you know that if a student does have a serious concern, obviously it will
>
> come across in a more developed manner.

The participant also reiterated the importance of informal evaluation of the quality of

teaching and instruction in that the instructor could observe how students performed in

assignments and exams. Interviewee 1 stated, "[When] students responded really poorly to that

first [assignment], then you can make adjustments within the semester." Interviewee 1 perceived

that the current way of how questions were asked in the formal student evaluations were not

useful in eliciting honest student feedback. The participant proposed the use of questions such as

asking about the GPA and how much input the students placed to check whether the students

read the contents of the evaluation form.

   Interviewee 2. Interviewee 2 reported that the classes every semester consisted of

different cohorts. To improve the quality of instruction, the participant believed that the use of

student feedback to address different learning needs could help. The participant shared, "I think

that we can utilize these evaluations to identify [what] the majority of the [learners are]. They are

they are getting into these individual cohorts and just make improvements based on that."

   Interviewee 3. Interviewee 3 perceived that students tend to give many positive and

negative comments during the evaluation. The participant asked other instructors for their input

on which comments can be used to improve instruction. However, in the actual evaluations, the

participant preferred "someone who talks a bit more about course design or about actual kind of

teaching practices."

   Interviewee 4. Interviewee 4 used honest student feedback to improve instruction and the

quality of teaching. Honest student feedback was perceived to impact the quality of teaching

when the comments were directed to the course design. The participant reiterated that the course

design differed between community colleges and four-year institutions in that instructors were

directly involved in the course design in community colleges. The participant also used the

feedback to address students' learning needs. Interviewee 4 shared, "I am constantly sort of

rethinking and trying to find better ways."

Interviewee 5. Interviewee 5 experienced handling diverse groups of students with different needs every semester. As a result, the participant used student feedback to address different learning needs. Interviewee 5 used different teaching styles to see what worked for certain groups of students. The participant shared: "[I changed] the format of the PowerPoint and started using a different program that allows more bells and whistles." While the participant also experienced receiving rants rather than comments about the course content and design, Interviewee 5 argued that instructors needed to understand students' perspectives, stating, "But I know a lot of instructors don't want to hear their faults, especially from a student…You can't be that way. You have to understand that the student has a different perspective." Therefore, Interviewee 5 perceived that honest feedback and informal evaluations were helpful for instructors.

Interviewee 7. Interviewee 7 perceived that timing of the evaluation contributed to its impact on the quality of teaching and instruction. According to the participant, "around midterms" was the most suitable time to gather student feedback, as students tend to be honest about the course content and design while not being stressed about finals and their grades. Regardless, Interviewee 7 also commented that not all student feedback was feasible and able to be addressed. The participant shared, "If a student tells you the classes are too hard, come on now. Am I supposed to make my class easier?" Nonetheless, Interviewee 7 attempted to address different learning needs using different teaching methods:

> As much as possible, I repeat important information. And I deliver it multiple ways. If I'm in person or online I record my lectures for online, they have the PowerPoint in front of them. I say it multiple times. I also provide YouTube links to re-emphasize what I've already said so that helps.

Interviewee 8. Interviewee 8 perceived that the current evaluation process lacked efficiency in collecting feedback. The participant shared, "I know that all instructors do that. They just hand them out. And then, most students don't get it done…less than five minutes and [they are] out of there. There's no comments, no nothing." Interviewee 8 added that, sometimes, students used the evaluation to rant about their grades, stating, "Sometimes you're going to get some disgruntled students that they may say because they didn't get the grade that they wanted…and they feel that they put the effort in, [they would vent their frustrations]."

Interviewee 8 also emphasized the diverse student population in the community college and how it intensified the differences in the learning needs of the students. As a result, the participant also reiterated reviewing student evaluations along with the background of each student to understand whether their comments were relevant in helping instructors to address their needs. Interviewee 8 focused on the language the students used, stating, "I look at the content of what the students say." Interviewee 8 also shared, "I need to know the reason why… I will you know that you can't really pick up on an evaluation."

Interviewee 9. For Interviewee 9, the current evaluation process was not efficient enough to obtain useful student feedback. The participant shared, "You have to really have some good data to back up what you're saying." Moreover, some students might be using the evaluation to "take out their frustrations." Interviewee 9 noted:

> Sometimes people are using that as an outlet to take out their frustrations. And those are not things that we really have to take the heart, but we're going to look for anything we can in that to improve our instruction for the whole group.

Interviewee 9 experienced handling a diverse group of students in the community college. With that, students also tend to have different learning needs. As an instructor, Interviewee 9

perceived that the students' feedback can be used to address their learning needs. During online classes, the participant used methods to increase students' engagement to help them address their learning needs. For instance, the participant shared, "I encourage them to come to our meeting with questions in hand to talk about the concepts that they learned."

Interviewee 10. Interviewee 10 utilized informal evaluation to improve teaching and instruction. The participant relied on verbally asking for comments from students after class to address their learning needs. In online learning, the participant shared:

I'm not technology bright. I will find these YouTube videos of someone lecturing on a topic in the field. And so I had a number of students that enjoyed those, but they said they would rather have me. So one of the things I've done here is to learn a bit more about technology.

The participant perceived that the questions in the evaluation form can be improved, as "sometimes evaluations don't tell the whole story." Additionally, since the student population was large, Interviewee 10 stated that not all comments can be addressed by one instructor. Interviewee 10 then emphasized that consistent feedback may be used as suggestions to try using different methods of teaching to address different student needs.

Interviewee 11. Interviewee 11 shared using students' comments about assignments to adjust teaching and instruction to meet the needs of the student group. The participant stated:

I had a student say to me one day, can you write something on the board. And I thought, well I got PowerPoints that I got handouts. I am a very much a visual learner and so it just, it wasn't enough for that student. And so I added, you know, doing some explanations on the board.

However, the participant reiterated that changes resulting from feedback also needed to be "feasible." Interviewee 11 added the use of informal evaluations in helping instructors review student evaluations objectively in that they could use student performance as a measure of how relevant the students' comments were and to avoid being personally affected by comments where students simply vented their frustrations.

Interviewee 12. Interviewee 12 often took student evaluation as suggestions but maintained an effective teaching style for the most part. Interviewee 12 perceived that student evaluation needed to be consistent to be useful. The participant narrated:

I don't get enough consistent constructive responses to be able to use the feedback for the most part, so I would actually like to see the process change and students have a little bit more information on why [not seeing things on the syllabus is] important.

The participant experienced receiving comments that were "extremes," in which Interviewee 12 looked for the "middle" to address the students' needs. Moreover, the participant used student feedback to address students' needs.

Composite structural description. This synthesis emphasized that community college online course instructors experienced receiving and engaging with student evaluations through reviewing the quality of the feedback, using the feedback to impact the quality of teaching, and responding to the feedback through improving their instruction. The participants of this study described and narrated their experiences of receiving and engaging with student evaluations that contributed to their teaching and instructional methods. Participants of this study generally experienced receiving and engaging with disgruntled students who wrote rants and complaints about the grades they got from the instructor after the course rather than provide honest evaluation of the instructor's teaching and instruction (theme 1: honest feedback). Moreover, the

participants often received generalized feedback rather than responses pointing to specific target problems that could help instructors improve their teaching (theme 2: feedback targeting specific problems). Lastly, while evaluations were scheduled to be conducted immediately after the course at the end of the semester, instructors often receive the feedback too late (theme 3: untimely and vague feedback).

The participants then revealed their experiences in informal feedback, which could be received at any point during the semester or can be done through observation (theme 4: reliance on informal evaluation). The participants generally experienced that feedback and observation during the first few weeks of the semester helped the instructors adjust to the needs of the students. Furthermore, frequent and constant evaluation helped instructors continuously improve and adapt to the needs of the students. Additionally, improving quality of teaching entailed addressing relevant feedback on the course (theme 5: feedback on course content and design). As feedback on content and design were received, the instructors were able to search and utilize more relevant materials and methods to engage the students. As a result, instructors tend to address students' learning needs better, focusing on a student-centered pedagogy (theme 6: addressing different learning needs).

Instructors generally addressed feedback that appeared repetitively, was written professionally, and focused relevantly on the course rather than on complaining (theme 7: unused feedback). However, as students tend to focus on their grades, instructors also attempted to improve their instruction through addressing students' feedback regarding the exams. Specifically, instructors provided better exam preparation, such as providing time to review before an exam (theme 8: feedback for exam preparation).

Research Question Responses: Essence Description

This section contains a description of how the themes applied to the research questions of this phenomenological study. The study aimed to address how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. The essence of the participants' experiences were drawn from the principles of a transcendental phenomenological design. The design of this study was based on a modified Husserlian approach, in which the essence is drawn from the context of the participants' experiences (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, in the context of a specific community college in the Deep South, the essence of being an online course instructor was to receive and engage with student evaluations through feedback to improve the quality of their teaching and instruction. Online course instructors can use honest, specific, and timely feedback to address their students' needs. Moreover, online course instructors can use informal and frequent feedback to enhance their course content and design. Ultimately, improving the quality of teaching and instruction was attributed to using feedback to address learning needs and to help students prepare for exams. Online course instructors also filter the feedback they receive in order to focus on students' needs. The sub-sections below further expands on the essence of those experiences.

Central research question. The central research question in this study was, "How do community college online course instructors experience receiving and engaging with student evaluations?" This question was asked to reveal central issues of online courses and student evaluations. The essence of the experience captured the specific involvement of each community college online course instructor in student feedback and their individual actions to use the feedback to improve their quality of teaching and instruction. Data in this study generally revealed issues related to honest, generalized, untimely, and vague feedback, as generated from

the following themes: (a) honest feedback, (b) feedback targeting specific problems, and (c) untimely and vague feedback.

In addition, the participants generally preferred frequent, informal, class-based feedback rather than the periodic, formal, college-wide evaluation, as revealed in the theme Reliance on informal evaluation. Moreover, the participants generally perceived that feedback apart from course content and design were not as helpful and relevant to instruction, as developed in the theme Feedback on course content and design.

The central issues may be resolved when instructors used student-centered methods such as Addressing Different Learning Needs, and feedback for exam preparation. However, the participants also generally revealed the issue that not all student feedback could be or will be addressed. Factors such as consistency, language, and feasibility could impact the instructors' response to the feedback.

Sub-Question 1. The first sub-question in this study asked, "How do community college online course instructors perceive the quality of student evaluations to instruction?" Three themes emerged to answer this sub-question. The themes were: (a) honest feedback, (b) feedback targeting specific problems, and (c) untimely and vague feedback. The participants generally experienced that student feedback was useful and relevant when honest feedback were provided. Some participants perceived that the students may use the evaluation to "vent" or "take out their frustrations" especially when they were not performing well in that class. Such comments were perceived to be generally not useful. On the other hand, some participants perceived that the students might not be intentionally giving dishonest or misleading remarks. Rather, the questions within the evaluation itself may be irrelevant, too broad, or vague. Hence, part from ambiguous and untruthful comments, students' feedback may also be generalized or vague. The participants

generally believed that comments that specifically targeted problems in class would be useful in online classes. Lastly, for evaluation to be useful and relevant, the participants generally believed that feedback had to be timely and clear.

Sub-Question 2. The second sub-question was, "How do community college online course instructors perceive student evaluation as affecting the quality of their teaching?" This sub-question was developed to investigate the extent to which instructors use evaluations to assess and improve the quality of their instruction. Two themes emerged from the analysis. The themes were: (d) reliance on informal evaluation and (e) feedback on course content and design. The participants generally believed that some comments in formal evaluations were useful; nonetheless, several participants also relied on informal evaluation. Informal evaluation included observation of student behavior and performance. Informal evaluations were perceived to be a way for instructors to "understand where students were coming from." Thus, the participants generally made changes to their instruction based on these observations. However, in formal observations, the participants generally used feedback on course content and design to improve their instruction.

Sub-Question 3. The third sub-question was, "How do community college online course instructors respond to student evaluations in improving instruction?" This sub-question was developed to examine how instructors use feedback and evaluations to improve instruction efforts. The following themes emerged from the data: (f) addressing different learning needs, (g) unused feedback, and (h) feedback for exam preparation. Generally, the participants reported that their response to student feedback entailed student-centered methods. Particularly, the majority of the participants shared that they often tried to address students' different learning needs. The community college consisted of students with diverse backgrounds and demographics, which

may result in varying learning styles and needs among students. The participants shared that instructors often considered such factors when teaching and utilized different teaching styles to engage different students. Essentially, the participants also believed that students valued exam results and would complain if they got low scores. In response to that feedback, the participants shared that they incorporated test preparation as part of their instruction. However, the participants also believed that not all comments will be or can be addressed by instructors. Instructors often responded to comments raised by several students on several occasions. Furthermore, instructors also typically responded to comments that appear "professional" in terms of the language used and comments that pointed out specific problems in class. However, some problems may not be addressed, as the participants believed that the solutions were not within their capacity as instructors.

Summary

The goal of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. The participants of this study were 11 instructors who teach online courses through ████████ Community College. The participants were selected purposively using the eligibility criteria: at least two years of experience teaching at the school site and at least two years of experience teaching at least one online course at the community college.

Four participants were part of the focus group discussion, while seven participants were interviewed individually. The focus group and all interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Additionally, four participants electronically submitted a 300-500-word reflective journal on advice or words of encouragement that they would give to a brand-new instructor.

Eight themes emerged from eidetic reduction of all the data. The themes were: (a) honest feedback, (b) feedback targeting specific problems, (c) untimely and vague feedback, (d) reliance on informal evaluation, (e) feedback on course content and design, (f) addressing different learning needs, (g) unused feedback, and (h) feedback for exam preparation.

The themes answered the central and sub-questions that guided this study. The discussion and interpretation of the study findings will be presented in the next chapter. Chapter 5 also contains the implications, recommendations, limitations and conclusions of this transcendental phenomenological study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The problem motivating this study was that, in comparison to traditional in-person instruction, some online courses can result in poorer educational outcomes and may generally be of inferior quality (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Leibold & Schwarz, 2015), necessitating the use of mechanisms such as student feedback to improve the individual instructor educational experience and promote student engagement. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. The study was guided by a single, overarching research question: How do community college online course instructors experience receiving and engaging with student evaluations?

In Chapter Four, the results of the study were presented. These results contain both a profile of the study participants and the results of the phenomenological reduction analysis of the data, resulting in key themes. These themes are strongly supported by individual and composite textual and structural description, which was used to elicit the essence of the participants' experiences. Now, in Chapter Five, the importance and implication of these results will be discussed. The chapter begins with a brief, concise reiteration of the results presented in Chapter Four, shown in such a way as to answer the research questions. This summary is followed by a discussion of the results within the context of the literature and theory. Following the discussion, the results' key implications are developed from both a theoretical and empirical perspective. These implications are contextualized by the following discussion of how the results were limited and delimited. Based on a combination of the implications and limitations, the final

section of the chapter addresses how this study might be built upon by future researchers to further the line of inquiry.

Summary of Findings

The participants of this study were instructors who teach online courses through ███████ ███ Community College. The study included 11 participants —initially 12, but one participant withdrew before the conclusion of the study. Hence, the study participants are given codenames Interviewee 1-5 and Interviewee 7-12, with Interviewee 6 excluded from the naming scheme. Each participant completed a single interview session, which was audio-recorded, then transcribed. Some of these participants also participated in the reflective journaling, though analysis indicated that the journals seldom offered notably different ideas or experiences than did the interviews. The interviews and journal entries both were analyzed using phenomenological reduction and with the careful use of epoche and bracketing to minimize bias and researcher influence during the data analysis process. The analysis process yielded a total of eight key themes, which were supported through the textual and structural description components. The key ideas that encapsulated the essence of the participants' experiences with feedback were: (a) Honest feedback, (b) Feedback targeting specific problems, (c) Untimely and vague feedback, (d) Reliance on informal evaluation, (e) Feedback on course content and design, (f) Addressing different learning needs, (g) Unused feedback, and (h) Feedback for exam preparation.

Sub-Question 1

The first sub-research question in this study was: How do community college online course instructors perceive the quality of student evaluations to instruction?

In answering this question, the key ideas that emerged were: (a) honest feedback, (b) feedback targeting specific problems, and (c) untimely and vague feedback. Of the eight themes,

these three were most specific to quality and ultimately reflected the highly contingent nature of the teachers' assessment of student evaluation quality. The teachers were inherently suspect that feedback might be invalid because students who criticized them might be disgruntled and therefore provide dishonest answers. Similarly, they found that some feedback was too vague to be of use. However, if they could be relatively certain, the feedback was honest, and also that it was specific and timely, then it was perceived to be valuable. In this regard, feedback regarding specific problems was inherently more useful because it was less likely to be vague.

Sub-Question 2

The second sub-research question in this study was: How do community college online course instructors perceive student evaluation as affecting the quality of their teaching?

In answering this research question, two key ideas from the participants' experiences were relevant: (a) reliance on informal evaluation and (b) feedback on course content and design. These themes revealed two key aspects of the answer to the research question: the specific areas in which feedback was valuable and the type of feedback they valued more. Course and content design were the principal areas where students' feedback through evaluations was perceived as useful. Furthermore, while the teachers did not consider the formal evaluations run through the school to be without value, they tended to rely more heavily on informal evaluations as a means of enhancing content. This may also relate to the theme of timeliness. The teachers noted that, especially in the past, their receipt of the formal evaluations was often quite delayed, making it harder to make changes relative to the feedback therein.

Sub-Question 3

The third sub-research question guiding this study was: How do community college online course instructors respond to student evaluations in improving instruction?

In addressing this research question, participants' responses resulted in three key ideas that captured the essence of their experience: (a) addressing different learning needs, (b) unused feedback, and (c) feedback for exam preparation. One of the most important implications in answering this research question pertains to the use of evaluations to identify how they may be better able to meet the diverse learning needs that their students possess. Relatedly, the need to better prepare students for exams was a sentiment that mostly emerged in response to students' frustrations with poor exam scores. However, it is also important to note that the teachers perceived that not all student feedback could or should be acted upon. Given that evaluations could easily contain dishonest perspectives or conflicting perspectives from different students, this result is important.

Central Research Question

The central research question that guided this study was: How do community college online course instructors experience receiving and engaging with student evaluations?

Bringing together the eight key ideas that encapsulate the essence of the participants' experiences from the three sub-questions makes it possible to construct a cohesive and coherent answer to the central question. Most prominently, the community college online course instructors, experienced student evaluations and feedback in a contingent manner. This contingency is reflected both in the themes for the first sub-question and in the theme of "unused feedback" from the third sub-question. Thus, the teachers perceived that they could—and should—not take every suggestion to heart, leaving them with the need to determine which suggestions were authentic and useful. Hence, the teachers in this study perceived and experienced evaluations as essentially a sorting process through which they needed to determine which ideas were valid and useful and which were false, value, or impractical. However, the

results also evinced that the teachers ultimately felt they could make good use of certain kinds of feedback—often that provided informally—to improve their teaching. This manifested in efforts to meet the diverse learning needs of different students and through efforts to better prepare students for exams. Overall, feedback and evaluations were perceived as most relevant to course design and could also be a valuable tool for identifying specific problems, such as one participants' tendency to digress and get off-topic.

Discussion

The relevance of the themes uncovered in answering the study's central question and sub-questions must be understood within the context of the existing literature. The literature to which these results relate is divided into the theoretical literature—that relating to the theoretical framework—and the more empirical literature. These topics are discussed in their respective sections.

Theoretical Discussion

The theoretical foundations for the present study were built upon Knowles's (1984) theory of andragogy. As discussed in Chapter Two, the theory of andragogy is a theory of adult learning, one that addresses the specific ways adults learn as opposed to how children learn (pedagogy). Andragogy rests upon six assumptions and seven principles. The six assumptions of Knowles' (1984) theory are understanding the reasons, experiential foundations, the importance of self-concept, relevance, problem-orientation, and internal motivation. The themes that emerged from the present study ultimately did not directly reflect the assumptions of andragogy in how they were expected to. The most relevant theme was that evaluations could help identify, understand, and address certain specific problems with teaching. This theme relates to the andragogic assumptions of relevance and problem-orientation. For example, Interviewee 10

noted that "I can change to make it better. Maybe, you know, stay focused on the topic."

Similarly, Interviewee 3 noted that evaluation reflecting a failure to align with the kind of

knowledge the students sought was something that they watched out for carefully; "But if there

were complaints or like this isn't history, then I didn't prove my original thesis for the class…

That's what I keep my eye out for."

Moving beyond the assumptions, andragogy also has seven principles. The first principle

is that adults must want to learn (Barrett & CMP, 2016). This principle did not appear to be

meaningful within the study's results. The second principle of adult learning is that adults learn

only what they consider relevant (Decelle, 2016). This principle did arise, primarily in the theme

of feedback on course content and design in the same was described above in the section on the

assumptions. The third principle of adult learning is that adults learn by doing (Decelle, 2016).

This principle did not meaningfully arise within any of the themes. The fourth principle of

andragogy is that adult learning focuses on problem-solving (Decelle, 2016). This principle did

arise within the study, primarily in the theme of feedback for exam preparation.

One of the most effective uses of student feedback that the study participants indicated

was identifying and addressing the occasions on which the preparations they had given students

for exams were insufficient, often reflecting a learning by doing approach. The fifth principle is

that prior experiences shape adults' learning (Knowles, 1984). This principle did not

meaningfully emerge within the results of the present study. The sixth principle of andragogy is

the learning environment (Decelle, 2016). This principle of andragogy was invoked implicitly by

the study's focus on the online learning environment, but it did not emerge more specifically than

that. The final principle of andragogy is that adults want guidance and consideration (Knowles,

1984). This principle did emerge, primarily with respect to the theme of feedback for exam preparation.

Overall, the theory of andragogy proved less well-aligned with the study than expected. The study results did not necessarily indicate a large number of issues that one might expect only to emerge in an andragogical context, but rather more general pedagogical or teaching issues. Without knowing the distribution of the interviewees' classes, it is difficult to say if this was because they taught traditional college-aged students to whom andragogy is less fully applicable or simply because the issues upon which feedback actually emerged did not relate to andragogical issues. As discussed above, there was some relevance, but a number of the study themes had no direct alignment with a particular aspect of the andragogical framework.

Empirical Discussion

To recall, the societal problem motivating the study was grounded within the empirical literature to begin with. In particular, the study was motivated by the fact that students may experience worsened educational outcomes in terms of their engagement and their achievement (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019). This is not always the case, but such outcomes were prevalent enough in the literature to represent one of the key motivators of this study. With respect to that particular foundation, the results of the present study offer mixed conclusions. On the one hand, the instructors in this study believed that students' feedback could sometimes be shaped by their displeasure with doing poorly in a class, offering a potential obstacle to the usage of feedback as a means of correcting students' poor achievement or engagement. On the other hand, the participants also offered insight into how feedback shaped their teaching practice, including that they could use it to help shape course design, improve exam preparation, and help meet students' diverse needs. Therefore, with regard

to this overall empirical motivation, the study did show some promise of informing the real-world improvement of teaching practice.

Another key empirical outcome in the literature was that scholars including Gay (2014) and Lee and Hannafin (2016) utilize feedback to improve educational outcomes, especially the educational outcomes of students with diverse and nonstandard educational needs. This thread in the research was strongly affirmed within the present study. It emerged that the instructors felt they had effectively used feedback to improve course and content design, improve their ability to meet all their students' educational needs, and improve test preparation. Thus, in that regard, the present study affirmed prior researchers' conclusions regarding the most important purpose of SET-styled feedback.

Another thread in the literature was the different forms of feedback (Gjerde et al., 2017; Schütze et al., 2014). In this study, that aspect of the literature was supported by the distinction between formal and informal feedback. However, the results of this study contradicted the research of scholars such as Steyn et al. (2018), whose focus was on increasingly formalizing feedback. Instead, in this study, the instructors generally valued informal feedback from students more than they valued formal feedback received through the school system's formalized feedback system. That perspective aligns more with Singh and Malik's (2015) research, wherein feedback was discussed in terms of fostering positive social interactions between teachers and students. Researchers such as Eladl et al. (2018) and Steyn et al. (2018) did suggest informal, qualitative feedback, but only for its ability to help cultivate positive social relationships with students. In this study, the participants instead found informal feedback more valuable for improvement. They also felt that, in anonymous formal feedback, students were perhaps more likely to be disingenuous and deceitful, offering negative feedback on the course because of their

own failure to do well instead of actual weak points in the teaching. Such deceit is less possible when using informal, non-anonymous feedback channels.

This concern about deceitful feedback is particularly interesting because no significant consideration of students' potential dishonesty in providing feedback was uncovered in the literature that was reviewed for this study. Instead, researchers have tended to assume that students will act in good faith to improve their classes. Scholars such as Esfijani (2018) have addressed the issue of feedback purely through the lens of student satisfaction, without allowing for the possibility that feedback could be dishonest, vague, inaccurate, or otherwise detrimental if utilized. By contrast, this study yielded multiple themes that were contingent on the perceived quality of the feedback. Issues that could shape contingent quality included *clarity, specificity, honesty,* and *timeliness.* While the timeliness of feedback was a factor shaped by the school, the other three factors that shaped the evaluation of feedback were instead at the level of the students who provided the feedback. Furthermore, the participants explicitly expressed a theme that feedback is not always possible or appropriate to enact.

The closest to this sentiment that emerged in the literature was the argument by Boysen (2016) and Medina et al. (2019) that there is a need for careful, comprehensive analysis when integrating different types of feedback. Though that argument is more directly aimed at preventing drawing incorrect inferences from perspectives that arise in only a vocal minority of students, it still illustrates a similar exercise of executive function. The participants in this study indicated that they believed it was necessary to assess and use feedback properly. The present study emphasized this executive function even more, not only because of the reasons why feedback needed to be evaluated but also for acknowledging that it could be deemed irrelevant or

inappropriate to follow. This need for executive decision making is perhaps unsurprising; even with student-centered teaching, the teacher still retains executive control over the classroom.

The importance of teachers' decision-making and ability to assess and categorize evaluation input is one of this study's key, novel contributions. This finding offers a new perspective through which feedback should be understood. It is not necessarily an unvarnished positive; a lack of clarity, honesty, specificity, or timeliness can render a piece of feedback of little value. To make use of feedback in improving their classes, teachers need not only know when and how to use feedback, they must also understand why sometimes it is more appropriate *not* to do so.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

Based on the discussions presented above, it is possible to draw key implications from the study results. These implications can be divided into theoretical implications, empirical implications, and practical implications. Each of these types of implications is derived from the discussions presented above, and together they represent the whole of the study's key outcomes in different areas.

Theoretical Implications

As per the discussion section, the theory of andragogy demonstrated only limited applicability to how students provide feedback to their online community college teachers. It was not that the theoretical framework was wholly unrelated, as there were parts of the results that aligned with specific assumptions and principles of Knowles's (1984) theory. These alignments, however, addressed only some of the themes, not all of them. This suggests that the theory of andragogy may not be the most ideal theoretical perspective from which to understand the types of feedback that online instructors at community colleges receive and make use of.

The broader question is whether this reflects a shortcoming of the theory of andragogy or a simple misalignment of the framework. Either could be implicated. Since community colleges typically teach adult students, andragogy should be directly relevant. At the same time, however, the present study focused more on the teacher side of the equation, while andragogy is focused more on the student side. Therefore, at minimum, the results of this study imply that andragogy should not be used as the sole theoretical perspective when seeking to understand the experiences of community college instructors with feedback from students.

Based on this finding, a more careful assessment of andragogical principles is merited. The extent to which teachers, even at the adult-centered community college level, perceive the value and relevance of andragogical principles is not clear. In order to advance andragogical theory, it is recommended that more attention be paid to evaluating these principles at the community college level. The results of this study cannot unambiguously support that relevance or the recommendation that andragogy be adopted at present.

Empirical Implications

With respect to the empirical literature, the present study's key implications are twofold: the results both align with the literature and expand it in new ways. Most importantly, this study's results align with the conclusions in the literature that evaluations and feedback can be used to bolster teaching practice and efficacy (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Stocker, 2018; Thompson & McDowell, 2019). Hence, together with the literature, these results support the usage of required evaluations such as those implemented at the school under study. The relative burden on students of requiring them to offer feedback is low, and the benefits are high.

The other implication of this study is the need for the literature to more carefully examine teachers' executive function in evaluating feedback. The potential construct if students' deceit in

providing feedback is not adequately addressed in the existing literature. While this may be considered by some too obvious to include, it does significantly challenge a common assumption in the literature that students are acting in good faith to improve teaching. This is a rich issue to explore, given that it may not always be clear where the line between genuine feedback intended to improve the class and frustrated reprisal should be drawn. Any student's failure to succeed represents a potential point of improvement, but in reality, failure can still rest upon the student rather than the teacher or class. Understanding how teachers can determine which cases are which when evaluating and responding to feedback is a topic that has not yet been adequately studied despite the considerable literature on feedback and evaluation.

Based on these empirical implications, it is recommended that additional efforts be made to ensure that students provide feedback to the teachers of their online courses. Moreover, it is recommended that every effort be made to get this feedback to teachers in a timely manner and to cultivate an organizational culture that supports and allows for the utilization of student feedback. At the same time, this support should not extend to mandating the use of feedback, as not all feedback is honest or useful.

Practical Implications

Finally, there are certain key practical implications to be taken from the results of this study; these take the form of recommendations for practice. In some cases, these are drawn from the combination of the literature and the research and in other cases drawn from the novel findings. The study's most substantial practical implication is that schools should ensure that online instructors can receive clear, specific, and timely feedback. A key issue in the results was that the formal feedback became much more useful when the school ensured that teachers

received it on time. Feedback not received on time could not be implemented even if it included good suggestions.

In keeping with this, it is strongly recommended that schools go to some effort to ensure that students actually complete evaluations. One concern regarding online course feedback is that students may not be motivated to do it. This can mean only students with particularly strong responses offer their input, potentially skewing the teachers' sense of students' perspectives. In this study, feedback was required, and there was consequently no concern among teachers that the responses they received from students were not indicative. Therefore, based on the findings, it is recommended that, at minimum, students receive some grade for not only opening an assessment, but submitting it with a complete set of answers. This recommendation would not hurt diligent students and could provide great benefit.

Thirdly, it is recommended that schools provide teachers with the expertise and tools to distinguish between valuable feedback and feedback that is deceitful, vague, or otherwise lacking utility. Pressuring teachers to address feedback without arming them with the ability to make such distinctions—or worse, expecting them *not* to make such distinctions—could undermine the value of evaluations and actively harm both teachers and the quality of the instruction they provide. Hence, when using feedback in practice, balance, and informed decision-making are key. It is strongly recommended that teachers be provided with feedback and also equipped with the practical and intellectual tools needed to make sense of and take value from it, as well as the freedom to accept or reject feedback within reasonable limits.

Delimitations and Limitations

There were several key delimitations inherent in the present study. The first of these was that it was delimited only to online course instructors at the community college level. This

delimitation was selected in alignment with the research gap and also with the researcher's research interests. The study was also delimited to participants from a single community college. This delimitation was selected because of the researcher's access to the study population at this college and because a single college offered a contextually bounded research setting, ensuring that all participants had a similar background. This does limit the generalizability of the results. In particular, the community college under study enacted a policy of required evaluations, meaning that the results might not apply as well to other colleges where the students are not required to fill out evaluations.

The present study also had limitations. The foremost limitation was that the researcher conducted the research in such a way that it only addressed instructors' perspectives on evaluation using self-reported data. Therefore, it is possible that the instructors had inaccurate perspectives on how their usage of evaluation had played out. It is also possible that they falsified information because of social desirability bias. However, this possibility is considered low, given that the participants often identified specific cases in which feedback had helped them correct problems. There were also significant themes regarding the contingency of using feedback when social desirability bias would likely drive participants to present themselves as always following feedback. Therefore, none of these limitations are judged to have significantly harmed the study results.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the study findings, the implications therefrom, and the study's limitations, key recommendations for further research are derived. The first and most important of these is that future studies should build upon this study's novelty and address further the potential role of student deceit and instructors' executive decision making in terms of evaluating feedback.

Though previous research has considered some aspects of decision making, the potential influence of dishonest responses and identifying and accounting for them has not been adequately studied. This should be addressed qualitatively, both through an investigation of why and how teachers consider potentially deceitful feedback and assess if and why disgruntled students might give inaccurate feedback.

Another direction for future research might be to repeat the present study at a college that did not require students to complete evaluations or give feedback. It would be interesting to see to what extent teachers' experiences at such schools are the same as those in this study and in what ways they differ. This would also address one of the principal limitations constraining the results of this study.

A third direction in which future research might be conducted would be to study the difference between formal and informal feedback. The use of informal feedback was perceived to be more genuine and useful by some participants in this study, in conflict with other research findings that have emphasized the importance of increasingly formalized and quantified feedback. In this regard, future researchers could examine both students' and teachers' perspectives on why informal feedback is or is not more valuable. Moreover, it could be fruitful to examine if there is any way to incorporate the appealing components of informal feedback into more structured feedback forms to improve their genuineness.

Summary

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how community college online course instructors experience students' feedback to reevaluate course quality and instruction. The study was guided by a single, overarching research question: How do community college online course instructors experience receiving and

engaging with student evaluations? The researcher answered the central research question through eight themes that emerged from the phenomenological analysis of 11 interviews with community college instructors. These themes were: (a) Honest feedback, (b) Feedback targeting specific problems, (c) Untimely and vague feedback, (d) Reliance on informal evaluation, (e) Feedback on course content and design, (f) Addressing different learning needs, (g) Unused feedback, and (h) Feedback for exam preparation. There are two key takeaways from the study based on these themes. The first is that the current literature does not give adequate consideration to deceit, vagueness, over-generality, or delayed receipt, which can undermine the value of student feedback. The second key takeaway is that evaluation can, if used and assessed correctly, provide significant value in terms of improving educational design, course content, test preparedness, and the ability to fulfill the needs of all students in a class. Hence, evaluation and feedback are of great importance and require significant executive decision making from teachers to navigate and utilize effectively.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER
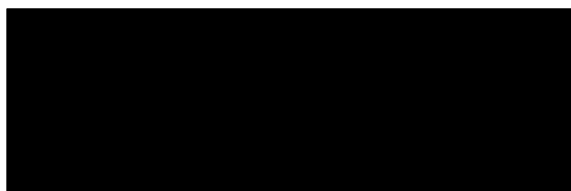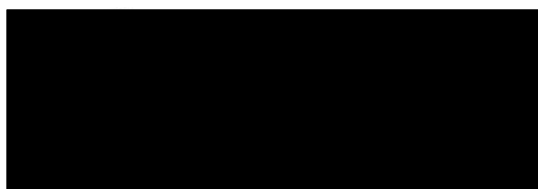
OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Institutional Review Board:

✓ The attached proposal is approved and can be executed according to the outline on the IRB proposal

_____ The IRB has declined to sign off on the attached proposal until the requested changes are resolved

_____ The IRB does not approve the project

- Dean of Institutional Effectiveness

- Instructional Officer

- President

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

July 29, 2020

███████████████████
███████████████████████
███████████████
███████████████

Dear █████████:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education in Higher Education degree. The title of my research project is A Phenomenological Study of Instructors' Experiences with Receiving and Utilizing Student Feedback in Online Courses. The purpose of my research is to explore the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design.

I am writing to request your permission to contact Instructors at █████████ Community College to invite them to participate in my research study. If you choose to grant permission, I will identify a group of 10 instructors who meet the following criteria.

- Participants teach full-time at █████████ Community College
- Participants have taught full-time for at least 2 years
- Participants have taught full-time for at least 2 years online

Participant makes the decisions on student feedback. Participants will be asked to participate in an in-person or zoom audio-recorded interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Stanley Triplett
Ph. D. Candidate

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Higher Education Administration in Educational Leadership degree. The title of my research project is A Phenomenological Study of Instructors' Experiences with Receiving and Utilizing Student Feedback in Online Courses. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants for this research study includes instructors who teach online courses through the community college serving as the site for this study. To be eligible to participate, participants must have at least two years of experience teaching at the school site and must have at least two years of experience teaching at least one online course at the community college. These requirements will ensure that participants have experienced the phenomenon in this study.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an in-person or zoom interview about your experiences with student feedback which should take approximately 30 -60 minutes to one hour to complete. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. In order to participate, please contact me at ███████ ████ or sttriplett@liberty.edu to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email for you to review prior to participation in the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If the interview will take place via Zoom, please sign the consent form, take a photo or scan the document, and email it back to me at sttriplett@liberty.edu

Sincerely,

Stanley Triplett
Ph.D. Candidate

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: is A Phenomenological Study of Instructors' Experiences with Receiving and Utilizing Student Feedback in Online Course

Principal Investigator: Stanley Triplett, Ph. D Candidate, Liberty University

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring the lack of internet marketing as a marketing strategy used by small business owners. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the following criteria:

1.) You are a full-time instructor at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Community College.
2.) You have taught full-time for at least 2 years.
3.) You are a full-time instructor that has taught online for at least 2 years.
4.) You receive student elevations.
5.) You make decisions on instruction and course design to your online.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this form and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to take part in this research project. I am a doctoral candidate in the school of education at Liberty University and I am completing this research as part of my doctoral degree.

Background Information: The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the ways that community college online course instructors experience student evaluations and respond to them to improve instruction and course design.

Procedures: If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview about your small business marketing activities which should take approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded through digital audio and your answers will be kept confidential and the findings will not disclose your identity. The researcher will also take written notes during the interview.

Benefits of being in the Study: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Your responses will provide valuable information as this study is designed to compare actual business practice to reviewed literature. Your responses may also help others gain a better understanding of how the lack of internet marketing affects rural small businesses.

Risks of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any report the researcher might publish, the researcher will not include any identifiable information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely, and the researcher, the researcher's faculty chair, and the researcher's committee members will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes. Each participant will receive an assigned code they will be referred to in the study findings. This will ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be kept on a personal password-protected document on the researcher's flash drive and on a password-locked personal laptop and may be used in future presentations. Written notes and the flash drive will be kept in a locked file drawer where only the researcher has a key to access the files. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and written notes will be shredded
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Stanley Triplett. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ███████████ or sttriplett@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Dina Samora at ████████████████.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Statement of Consent: By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☒ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____   _____
Printed Participant Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself and give a recollection of your understanding of the research study.

This item is reflective of a general background to ensure that the participant has read and understood recruitment materials and informed consent documentation.

2. How would you describe your experience at this community college?

This question serves to create a generalized background of the participant's positionality and overall experiences. Understanding the broader context of education is key in understanding feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018; Wright, 2015).

3. Please describe your experiences in receiving student evaluations in the courses you have taught.

Recently, researchers have focused much more heavily on instructors' feedback to students (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; Nicol et al., 2018). Therefore, the research gap is on students' feedback to instructors (Boysen, 2016; Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017; Medina et al., 2019).

4. Please describe how you would say that student evaluations can help instructors to improve their instruction and course design (or why you do not feel that they can).

This question is grounded in prior studies that indicate that evaluations can be important for improving instructional design (Buurman et al., 2018). The question will elicit the teachers' own views on the matter and the rationale for those views.

5. How would you recommend that other instructors view and respond to student evaluations?

This question expands on the prior questions. Since the key research gap is on the utility of student feedback (Boysen, 2016; Buurman et al., 2018; Flodén, 2017; Medina et al., 2019), it

is important to examine how teachers feel their colleagues should use that feedback, a part of their overall understanding of feedback.

6. Please describe some specific cases where student evaluations have caused you to change the way you teach.

Research indicates that sometimes feedback can improve teaching (Carless & Boud, 2018; Wright, 2015). This question addresses the issue directly.

7. Please describe any common unmet teaching needs or desires you often encounter in student feedback.

This question addresses the specific needs of students. Research indicates that students place importance on having their desires and perspectives respected (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016).

8. Please describe the process you follow in choosing to act on or not act on the content of student evaluations.

As above, research (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016) indicates that students want to be respected. Understanding how teachers construe the value of specific feedback helps to understand whether they feel respected in the feedback process.

9. What are some specific things you would like to better understand from student evaluation, and why these?

10. Please describe any cases you recall where student evaluations raised important points but you felt unable to respond to them.

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE INTERVIEWS AND REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRY

Sample Interview Data

<u>Interviewee 5</u>

Stanley Triplett: Thank you. Question number five. How would you recommend that other instructors view and respond to student evaluations.

Interviewee 5: I think it's very important that the instructor looks at every student evaluation that they get. Now like I said with me. I haven't, haven't seen any in a while, but I did notice on ones that I did have, I was pretty consistent. So I would like to, you know, tell instructors that it is good information that you get. You may not like it. They may tell you something about yourself that you have maybe blocked. Our, our don't see as a bad trade, but with this new millennial students that were teaching. They, they do like to pick out your files and now I'm I'll be the first one to say I want to know what my thoughts are so I can improve on them.

But I know a lot of instructors don't want to hear their faults, especially from a student. They think that the state should be in all the sage on the stage everything I say is good. You can't be that way. You have to understand that. The student has a different perspective. And this is what I tell my students. Everybody has their own perspective. Nobody's perspective is right. except the one you have of yourself. So in order to improve your perspective, you've got to say the good and the bad and I would tell the instructor after other instructors. Look at it, read it. Don't react to it. You know, I kind of have to look at it and then set it down for a few days and then go back to it and maybe I can be more objective.

After I've gotten over. What do you mean you don't like the way I teach
And so that I can go and kind of do some self reflection and go, well, you know, I can see that. So not taking it so much to heart. And also understanding that the students sometimes that's the only time they get to give their opinion about the class. So we have to look at it as a as a whole in that this was the only time they were able to give their opinion and maybe we should ask their opinion more. Maybe we should evaluate twice a semester once at the beginning and once at the end. And kind of see what the differences are, because that's what we do to our students with ourselves. We look at them at the beginning and we're looking at them at the end. And I think if maybe instructors had that same. Maybe you know thing we could do, then maybe the students would understand better, a little bit about what they're evaluating and then the instructors can understand better their progression throughout the semester. So I don't know, that's just about

Stanley Triplett: That's fine, thank you. Question number six. Please describe Some specific cases where student evaluations have caused you to change the way you teach.

Interviewee 5: Well, let's see. I know that some specific ones would be that. Okay, I'm a PowerPoint person. Okay. And I know that when I was going through school. They're like, Oh, no, you should get away from PowerPoints. And so I kind of pulled my students and said okay, you know,

You know, the higher education. People think that PowerPoints are not a higher level of learning. What do you think about that and, you know, and some of them were we really like having PowerPoints with your bullet points. Are some of them are like, now you're just reading from the PowerPoints that she usually is just give us the PowerPoint. So I decided to change specifically change.

Group Interview

Stanley Triplett: Question number two. How would you describe your experiences at ███████ ███ Community College.

Interviewee 1: Well, I've been here for 19 years so I must like it. I'm a slave to my, my love for students. I'm a slave to my love for education.

Interviewee 1: I do really the best thing about this college is the

Interviewee 1: The relationships that I've been afforded and many of them are located right here.

Interviewee 1: I do also love the autonomy that I'm given as an instructor to be able to structure my classes with, you know, some guidelines obviously from state and college directions or course objectives, but I really love the autonomy that I'm given to be able to create what I think is a good course.

Stanley Triplett: Interviewing number two.

Interviewee 2: My experience at the community college has been positive. I've been in a full time employee at ███████████ for approximately the last nine years.

Interviewee 2: And I think, I think that we do our community of very, very important service. And I think that what we do extends beyond the community. We're a vital part of the community and CLANTON and

Interviewee 2: I really really enjoy being able to see individuals from rural areas, be able to establish themselves and to get on their own two feet per se.

Interviewee 2: This is what keeps me coming back. It's a testament really of my upbringing. As a young man, where we did not have an active community college system. And we've had very, very limited opportunities afforded to us and

Interviewee 2: I think that we play a very, very important role within our community.

Interviewee 2: Their positive role.

Stanley Triplett: Thank you, interviewing number three.

Interviewee 3: My experience. I've been with the community college for about two and a half years, and it is certainly been a positive one. One thing I really

Interviewee 3: That are, I guess jumps out to me about is the really the diverse population of students that we serve. So many of my students

Interviewee 3: Or what I often use the term non-traditional which I think a lot of people do. And so those that maybe weren't full time.

Reflective Journal Entry

<u>Interviewee 4</u>

Let me begin by saying welcome! I personally have felt that way since the moment I stepped into my interview. ▬▬▬▬▬ Community College ▬▬▬ adopts a family atmosphere, and I personally have had that experience. I have been a faculty member at ▬▬▬ for over 2 years. I began as an adjunct instructor where I received a tremendous amount of support from the Biology faculty as I launched my teaching career. As I transitioned to a full-time faculty member and was placed at one campus, I found the faculty and staff to be friendly, helpful, and collaborative. I enjoy being able to share ideas and struggles with them as I seek guidance and support. Working at a place I feel comfortable is extremely important to me, and the environment at ▬▬▬, specifically the ▬▬▬▬ Campus, has offered that.

My experience with the student body across all campuses of ▬▬▬ overall has been positive. I have seen a drive to learn and succeed in most of our students. We have a diverse student population, so I have learned to be adaptive in my teaching methods to accommodate vast learning styles. With that I have been able to bring my background, such as my research career, into the classroom to enhance the learning experience. Each semester brings new opportunities and challenges to ensure I am preparing my students for their career endeavors. There are many opportunities outside of the classroom for students to be involved, from honors societies to drama club to sports. I see many students participating in extracurricular activities to enhance their experience at ▬▬▬. I was involved in many activities as an undergraduate and graduate student, so this is something I fully support and believe can greatly benefit the student. I have had the opportunity to be involved in our annual ▬▬▬▬▬, Fall Festival, Christmas parade, and more. I enjoy these activities because you experience the camaraderie among all at ▬▬▬.

I have not had a great deal of direct interaction with our administration at this point, but I have observed that they are very student directed. They focus on new and innovative ways to help our student body succeed not only at ▬▬▬ but also in their next steps, whether that be transferring to a 4-year institution, a certificate program at ▬▬▬, or entering the workforce. My experience at ▬▬▬ thus far has been very positive. I have felt supported by my leadership and colleagues, and most importantly, I love my time in the classroom. My students are vibrant and eager to learn. I love getting to be a part of their journey.