

EXPLORING TIME MANAGEMENT DECISIONS ON PERSISTENCE AMONG NON-  
TRADITIONAL LEARNERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN ONLINE LEARNING

by

James Dale Lawrence

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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### **Abstract**

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners over 30 at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. The central research question is: What are the shared time management experiences of persistent non-traditional online students over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States? Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. The sample comprised 12 participants. Saturation began to visualize after the ninth interview. Data collection continued until all 12 participants were interviewed and their journal prompts were completed. The study was conducted in a virtual setting, utilizing Knowles's theory of adult learning as its theoretical framework. Strategies for ensuring transferability and credibility include member checking and triangulation of data sources. Thematic analysis was employed for data interpretation. Findings revealed that key themes such as Personal Organization and Reflection, Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and Work–Life Balance significantly influenced the persistence of non-traditional learners in online education. These elements and strategies for navigating challenges and leveraging online learning flexibility underscored the importance of effective time management for online academic success and personal fulfillment among non-traditional learners enrolled in online learning programs.

*Keywords:* horizontalization, time management, non-traditional, phenomenological, online learning, adult learners

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## **Dedication**

To my wonderful wife, Janice Leigh Lawrence,

These past four years have been incredibly challenging. Your tireless support of my goal to complete my Ph.D. has not come without sacrifice. Your continued support has enabled me to drive forward in record time. Without your support and devotion, I would not have been able to achieve this milestone in my life. You are my bedrock and keep me focused on what is necessary to achieve my dreams and our dreams as a family.

Janice, this Ph.D. is not just an academic milestone but a testament to us, our partnership, and the incredible person you are. I dedicate this dissertation to you with heartfelt gratitude and endless love. Here is to the next 34 years.

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I would also like to acknowledge my father, Earnest Dale Lawrence. Though he is deceased, he instilled in me a drive to succeed, and I felt his presence with me each time I sat down to research, analyze the data gathered, and write. He was indeed a remarkable individual who supported me throughout his entire life. He guided me in life and still guides me to this day.

I want to acknowledge my son, Paul Andre Lawrence. You kept me focused on completing this; we have experienced ups and downs throughout the years; however, you are always there to listen and provide insight when I need it. Sometimes, I think you have taught me as much as I hope I have taught you.

I must acknowledge my mother, Janice Earline Lawrence, because none of my success would have been possible without you. You brought me into the world, cared for and loved me, and instilled in me the drive and desire to succeed in everything I do. Your love and support keep me grounded and focused.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication .....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables .....	15
List of Figures .....	16
List of Abbreviations .....	17
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	18
Overview .....	18
Background .....	18
Historical Context .....	19
Social Context.....	20
Theoretical Context.....	21
Problem Statement .....	22
Purpose Statement.....	24
Significance of the Study .....	24
Theoretical .....	25
Empirical.....	25
Practical.....	26
Research Questions .....	26
Central Research Question.....	27
Sub-Question One.....	27

Sub-Question Two .....	28
Definitions.....	28
Summary .....	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	32
Overview.....	32
Theoretical Framework.....	33
Need to Know .....	33
Self-Concept (Self-Directedness) .....	33
Learner’s Experience .....	34
Readiness to Learn.....	34
Orientation to Learn.....	34
Motivation.....	35
Related Literature.....	35
Online Adult Learning .....	36
Definition .....	38
Growth .....	39
Online Learners.....	40
Adult Learners .....	41
Lifelong Learners.....	42
Non-Traditional Learners.....	43
Characteristics of Successful Online Learners .....	44
Self-Directed.....	46
Motivated .....	50



Engaged.....	54
Time Management .....	58
Integrated .....	65
Summary.....	71
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	72
Overview.....	72
Research Design.....	72
Research Questions.....	74
Central Research Question.....	74
Sub-Question One.....	74
Sub-Question Two .....	75
Setting and Participants.....	75
Sites.....	75
Participants.....	77
Recruitment Plan.....	78
Researcher’s Positionality.....	79
Interpretive Framework .....	79
Philosophical Assumptions.....	80
Ontological Assumption .....	80
Epistemological Assumption .....	81
Axiological Assumption .....	82
Researcher’s Role .....	83
Procedures.....	84

	10
Data Collection Plan .....	85
Individual Interviews .....	86
Journal Prompts .....	89
Focus Groups .....	90
Data Analysis .....	93
Trustworthiness .....	95
Credibility .....	95
Transferability .....	96
Dependability .....	97
Confirmability .....	98
Ethical Considerations .....	99
Permissions .....	100
Summary .....	101
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	102
Overview .....	102
Participants .....	102
Alex .....	104
Avery .....	105
Bailey .....	106
Cameron .....	106
Jamie .....	107
Jordan .....	107
Morgan .....	108

	11
Parker .....	109
Quinn.....	109
Riley.....	110
Skyler .....	111
Taylor.....	112
Results.....	113
Personal Organization and Reflection .....	114
Adapting to Academic Challenges.....	115
Family and Personal Life .....	116
Prioritizing Tasks .....	117
Time Management Tools .....	118
Time Management Challenges and Scheduling.....	119
Academic Challenges and Planning.....	121
Personal Development and Schedule Management.....	122
Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation .....	123
Challenges in Education, Work, and Life.....	124
Work–Life Balance in Education.....	125
Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling .....	127
Balancing School and Work Priorities.....	128
Time Management and Personal Organization.....	129
Outlier Data and Findings.....	131
Research Question Responses.....	132
Central Research Question.....	132

Sub-Question One.....	133
Sub-Question Two .....	135
Summary .....	136
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	137
Overview.....	137
Discussion.....	137
Summary of Thematic Findings.....	138
Critical Discussion .....	140
Implications for Policy and Practice .....	144
Implications for Policy.....	144
Implications for Practice .....	146
Empirical and Theoretical Implications.....	149
Empirical Implications.....	149
Theoretical Implications .....	152
Limitations and Delimitations.....	154
Limitations .....	154
Delimitations.....	155
Recommendations for Future Research .....	156
Conclusion .....	158
References.....	160
Appendix A.....	185
Research Questions.....	185
Central Research Question.....	185

Sub-Question One.....	185
Sub-Question Two .....	185
Appendix B.....	186
Recruitment.....	186
HSU Recruitment.....	186
PSU Recruitment .....	186
Appendix C.....	187
IRB Approval.....	187
Appendix D.....	188
Site Permission Request.....	188
Horizon State University (HSU) Alumni LinkedIn Group.....	188
Appendix E .....	190
Site Permission Approval .....	190
Horizon State University (HSU) Alumni LinkedIn Group.....	190
Patriot State University (PSU) Online Facebook Group .....	191
Appendix F.....	192
Consent .....	192
Appendix G.....	196
Participant Transcript.....	196
Appendix H.....	197
Interview Questions .....	197
Appendix I .....	199
Journal Prompts .....	199

Appendix J .....	200
Focus Group Questions .....	200
Appendix K .....	202
Focus Group Transcript .....	202
Appendix L .....	203
Bracketing Journal Audit Log .....	203
Appendix M .....	215
Personal Organization and Reflection Horizontalization .....	215
Appendix N .....	230
Time Management Challenges and Scheduling Horizontalization .....	230
Appendix O .....	243
Work–Life Balance and Education Horizontalization .....	243

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Site Demographics.....	76
Table 2. Interview Questions .....	87
Table 3. Journal Prompts .....	90
Table 4. Focus Group Questions.....	91
Table 5. Participants .....	103
Table 6. Themes and Sub-Themes.....	113

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Participants by Race, Age, and Gender.....	104
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### **List of Abbreviations**

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

Personalized Learning (PL)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The landscape of the online classroom changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which influenced the education model and posed unique challenges for adult learners pursuing an online degree. As online education continues to grow, adult learners' challenges have become increasingly apparent (Hamilton, 2023; J. L. James, 2019). This chapter investigates the influence of time management experiences of non-traditional learners over 30 currently enrolled in online programs, employing Knowles' (1978) theory of andragogy as the lens for this study. This study is significant as it addresses an important research problem and seeks to improve the understanding of persistence among non-traditional learners in online programs. This chapter provides the background for the topic, problem, and purpose statements aligned with the research questions and concludes with a discussion of the study's significance and a chapter summary.

### **Background**

The pandemic changed online classrooms and created challenges for learners seeking to complete their online degree programs. The expansion of online learning offers unique challenges among adult learners (Hamilton, 2023; J. L. James, 2019). According to Regmi and Jones (2020) and Zhu et al. (2024), there is a strong connection between time management and motivation, and this connection is a success factor for online learners. During the pandemic, governments were forced to mandate remote learning, which highlighted shortcomings in the online curriculum (García-Morales et al., 2021; Li & Pei, 2023; World Bank Group, 2022). J. L. James (2019) found that adult learners enrolled in online programs face distinct challenges with retention. Additionally, studies of adult learners show a failure rate of 10% to 20% higher for these learners than their traditional face-to-face counterparts (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton,

2023). Chapter One investigated the influence of time management decisions of non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in online degree programs using Knowles's (1978) theory of andragogy as the lens.

### **Historical Context**

Moving from traditional learning to remote online learning is a way for institutions to offer learning opportunities to those unable to attend traditional courses (Lee, 2017). In the past, educators made a few efforts to provide education from a distance. One such initiative was The Society to Encourage Studies at Home, established by Ann Ticknor. This organization started providing individualized learning materials through mail delivery during the 1930s. With the emergence of the open-learning movement, distance education experienced a significant surge in popularity later in the 1960s and 1970s. Lee discussed this expansion in his research.

Subsequently, in the 1960s and 1970s, distance education began to see an expansion in growth with the introduction of the open-learning movement. The expansion of growth in education resulted in further research in the 1980s and 1990s that found the concepts of distance education were critical to the growth of education. (Harasim, 2000; Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006). With the introduction of the Internet, educational institutions began exploring online education, preparing to offer digital education (Divjak et al., 2022; Jiménez-Bucarey et al., 2021). This move to distance education via the Internet was viewed as providing educational experiences that went beyond the abilities of traditional learning (Stephens et al., 2022).

Moreover, in the past two decades, online education has experienced significant changes. Panigrahi et al. (2018) and Harasim (2000) found that online education is now an option to traditional education, and learners and educators now see online learning as a part of modern education. One reason is that online learning continues to attract non-traditional learners at a rate

of more than 8% each year, representing an astonishing 6.1 million learners (Muljana & Luo, 2019; Sagna & Vaccaro, 2023). However, despite the flexibility offered by online learning, Lee (2017) discovered that online learning requires high cognitive skills, even higher than traditional education. The demand for higher skills may be one reason online learning dropout rates are 10% to 20% higher than conventional learners (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2023). Today, people celebrate online education because it offers flexible access to higher education. However, this flexibility often comes at a cost for learners with physical constraints, as they may need additional support to persist in online programs (Lee, 2017; Lu et al., 2022).

### **Social Context**

Research has highlighted the alarming statistics that indicate adult learners in online settings are 10% to 20% less likely to complete their undergraduate/graduate degrees compared to their counterparts engaged in traditional instruction (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2023; Muljana & Luo, 2019). These statistics raise concerns about the impact of online learning on adult education, which identifies a need to examine why these learners have lower persistence rates. Hachem (2023) and Hargittai et al. (2019) found that the low persistence rates may influence these learners to succeed, especially when continuous learning and upskilling are essential for career advancement. Adult learners often engage in online education to acquire new skills or enhance existing ones, aligning their educational pursuits with professional goals and aspirations (Hachem, 2023). However, Nygren et al. (2019) discovered that balancing work, family responsibilities, and online coursework creates significant time constraints and motivational challenges for online learners.

The strain of managing social demands can result in reduced focus on studies, possibly causing students to abandon their educational pursuits prematurely due to work–life balance,

family strains, and the loss of free time to pursue interests other than higher education (Hamilton, 2023; Sallai et al., 2023). The abandonment of their degree program not only jeopardizes their chance of obtaining a degree but can also translate into lost tuition fees and missed opportunities for career advancements (Muljana & Luo, 2019; Sallai et al., 2023; Smathers et al., 2022). Moreover, the impact of attrition extends beyond individual learners, affecting institutions as well (Muljana & Luo, 2019). High attrition rates impact an institution's reputation, which can result in financial losses (Gontzis et al., 2022; Muljana & Luo, 2019). The cost of attracting new students to replace those who drop out and the negative impact on the school can be significant (Achenreiner et al., 2019; Gontzis et al., 2022).

Taking a broader view of retention among adult learners, the impact of low retention rates can hinder economic growth and limit innovation, therefore leading to a less skilled workforce and the loss of a competitive labor pool; this may even influence innovation and economic growth (Farcnik et al., 2022; Helsinger et al., 2023). Lower retention rates extend beyond individual learners and institutions and impact society.

### **Theoretical Context**

The constructivism theory in education emphasizes the creation of knowledge by learners through their interactions with the environment (Piaget, 1952); this, along with Knowles's theory of adult learning, supports this perspective and aligns with the beliefs that adults bring their experiences into the process of learning (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). Piaget's and Knowles's theories highlight the importance of linking information.

In addition to theories by Piaget and Knowles, one theory offered by Rogers (1969) and Maslow (1970) suggests that humanistic psychology also aligns with Knowles's principles of andragogy as it highlights the importance of learner autonomy and internal motivation.

Knowles's identification of self-perception, orientation toward learning, readiness, and motivation corresponds with fostering individual personal growth (Rogers, 1969).

Finally, Mezirow and Associates (2000) suggested that the theory of transformative learning provides insight into the potential of andragogy; he further highlights the value of introspection and the adult learners' thirst for knowledge. In 1926, Eduard Lindeman (1926) researched adult education that also aligns with the principles of andragogy. He explored the characteristics displayed by adult learners in a manner that anticipated Knowles's focus on recognizing adult learners' life experiences and self-concept. This connection demonstrates the importance of acknowledging and addressing adult learning needs when adopting andragogy.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that non-traditional learners in online settings are 10% to 20% less likely to complete their degree than their traditional students (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2023; Muljana & Luo, 2019). Muljana and Luo discovered through their research that the number of people enrolling in online learning has consistently grown at over 8% yearly. Even with increased registrations, schools offering online programs still experience higher dropout rates for online learners (J. L. James, 2019; Sagna & Vaccaro, 2023). With dropout rates higher for online learners than traditional learners, understanding what influences persistence is needed. Uzir et al. (2020) indicated a gap in the existing literature on time management decisions and how these decisions may help improve persistence in online courses. Sagna and Vaccaro provided evidence that time management, motivation, and persistence can be positively influenced by understanding challenges faced by online learners and the need to expand upon current research.

The research conducted by Baker et al. (2019), Cao et al. (2022), and Heo et al. (2021) suggest that the experiences of non-traditional learners play a significant role in their persistence

and time management decisions. It is often observed, through current research, that adult learners face various challenges due to a need for more time management skills. These learners commonly have responsibilities like education, work, and family, making it quite challenging to manage their time effectively (Heo et al., 2021). Zimmerman (2000) and Waldron (2020) have observed that individuals pursuing advanced degrees in higher education and taking online courses experience a decline in their ability to manage time effectively. When evaluating one's academic achievements and commitment to academic pursuits, it becomes crucial to recognize time management's significant role in these outcomes, as supported by Baker et al. and Waldron. Unfortunately, an inability to manage time can significantly influence one's ability to persist.

Additional research by Waldron (2020) indicates that time management skills align with students' use of different methods to manage time and persist, showing the importance of effective time management decisions on persistence. Conversely, the negative correlation between poor time management strategies and lower persistence highlights the need to develop customized approaches to time management (Waldron, 2020; Xavier & Meneses, 2022). This correlation may imply that practical time management skills are necessary to shape positive academic outcomes (Baker et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2022).

In addition, Waldron (2020) indicates that learners need time management skills to improve persistence. Xavier and Meneses (2022) highlight the intricate relationship between time management, procrastination, stress, and dropout rates. They emphasize that learners grapple with balancing competing demands on their time. Similarly, Heo et al. (2021) found that there is a need for good time management skills in online environments. Waldron indicated mixed results from time management skills training in higher education. Delnoij et al. (2020), Hamilton (2023), and Xavier and Meneses have found that addressing the completion rate

disparities between online and traditional learners requires practical time management skills, which are becoming more evident. Understanding the complex experiences and challenges of non-traditional learners regarding time management and its potential influence on their persistence is needed (Cao et al., 2022; Oyarzun et al., 2020; Sagna & Vaccaro, 2023).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. Time management decisions were defined as the act and process of planning and implementing conscious control over the amount of time used for specific activities (Syahri, 2021). Chung et al. (2014) and Schuetze and Slowey (2002) indicate that most of the research defines non-traditional as based on researcher-imposed demographic criteria (e.g., age, work/marital status); however, there has been a lack of agreement in terms of the type of students being described as non-traditional. Therefore, this study defined persistent non-traditional learners as adult learners over 30 currently enrolled in an online program at large institutions in the United States. The theory guiding this study is Knowles's (1978) theory of andragogy, as it provides an understanding of an adult's motivation for learning or learning-related decisions.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is a significant amount of research that explores the retention rates of adult learners when compared to their traditional face-to-face counterparts; however, most of the reviewed literature focuses on content quality, institution support, and educator interactions with learners as well as the development of employment skills (Owusu-Agyeman et al., 2018). The study sought to identify non-traditional online learners currently enrolled in online degree programs to



explore their experiences with time management decisions that helped them persist in an online learning modality. Outcomes from the study are significant since the experiences provided by participants can assist educational institutions, policymakers, and educators in understanding the time management decisions that may lead to higher retention rates among non-traditional learners (Delnoij et al., 2020).

### **Theoretical**

This study's theoretical significance explored Knowles's (1978) theory of andragogy and online learning, focusing on the lived experiences of non-traditional learners' time management decisions on persistence in online degree programs. In his empirical research, Knowles identified four critical assumptions about adult learners' approach to learning: the learner's self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning. In this research, Knowles shed light on how these assumptions appear in the learning environment. This study used Knowles's and Knowles et al. (2005, 2020) theory of adult learning and sought to understand how time management decisions made by non-traditional learners may influence their persistence. According to Hamilton (2023), understanding online learners' characteristics and how those characteristics may influence persistence is critical to improving modern online programs.

### **Empirical**

Current literature on adult learning focuses on course content, course quality, and motivational reasons why adults seek to use online learning to expand their knowledge or skills (Hachem, 2023). This research aimed to add to the existing body of knowledge by exploring how time management decisions influence persistence among non-traditional learners in an online modality. Delnoij et al. (2020) identified a need for further research on the influences of time management strategies on persistence among adult learners. Additional studies indicate that adult

learners' persistence rates are low, often by as much as 20% to 30%. This study continued this research by exploring the lived experiences of adult learners with time management decisions and how these choices helped them persist in their online program.

### **Practical**

The problem of low retention rates among adults studying online is a matter of great concern (Delnoij et al., 2020). Even though online education has become more accessible to individuals who wish to enhance their knowledge and workplace abilities, the number of students dropping out from online courses continues to rise (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2022; Muljana & Luo, 2019). Many educational institutions are now integrating virtual teaching approaches into a substantial part of their academic programs (World Bank Group, 2022). Figuring out what drives successful online learners and the methods they use to complete their courses can be beneficial for institutions and instructional designers and can assist them in creating a curriculum that engages online learners and enhances their ability to retain knowledge (Fletcher & Tyson, 2021; Hachem, 2023). The practical significance of this study is that it may help to identify aspects of time management decisions employed by non-traditional learners, which institutions can use to improve course content, improve learner engagement, develop policies, and provide improvements to online courses that ultimately lead to the improved persistence rates among this demographic.

### **Research Questions**

Adults' experiences when attending online courses vary, and for adults to be successful, the courses must provide challenging content and an engaging atmosphere. Without these aspects, studies suggest that adults fail to complete online courses (Hachem, 2023). The questions posed by this study seek to answer several questions relating to non-traditional

learners' lived experiences about time management decisions that may assist them in persisting in their online degree programs—this transcendental phenomenological study aimed to address the following research questions (see Appendix A).

### **Central Research Question**

What are the shared time management experiences of persistent non-traditional online students over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States?

Current research has demonstrated that adult learners are less likely to complete online degrees (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2023). Delnoij et al. identified in their research that there is a significant gap in current research relating to the influence of time management and motivation and the completion of online degree programs.

### **Sub-Question One**

What challenges do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States experience with time management decisions while persisting in online degree programs?

Current studies by Fletcher and Tyson (2021), Hachem (2023), and Hamilton (2023) determined that understanding the motivations and time management strategies used by learners may offer insight into improving retention rates among adult learners. The demands of online learning due to poor time management skills lead to many learners failing to cope with the needs of online learning. (Zhu et al., 2024). Understanding how adult learners perceive and manage time is critical to being able to help these learners in online modalities to complete their programs successfully.

## **Sub-Question Two**

What best practices do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States use to foster good time management decisions while enrolled in their online program?

Ucar and Kumtepe (2020) found that motivational influences drive learners to adopt effective learning strategies. Understanding the interplay between time management and motivational influences that result in higher retention rates for adult learners can help institutions understand these strategies, thus offering insight when creating course content that aims to improve retention rates among adult learners (Fletcher & Tyson, 2021; Hamilton, 2023).

### **Definitions**

The following terms are significant for understanding the context of this paper.

1. **Andragogy:** Andragogy is a theory of adult learning developed based on the idea that adults have unique characteristics and needs as learners compared to children, and therefore, they require a different approach to education (Knowles, 1978).
2. **Need to Know:** Adult learners require three dimensions: the need to know how training is conducted, what learning will occur, and why the learning is essential (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).
3. **Self-concept:** Self-concept is seen as self-teaching, whereby learners can take control of the mechanics and techniques of teaching themselves in a particular subject (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).
4. **Readiness to learn:** It emphasizes that adults' motivation to learn is heightened when they perceive an immediate need, relevance, or necessity for the knowledge or skills being taught (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).

5. Orientation to learning: Orientation to learn emphasizes the importance of creating learning experiences that respect adult learners' self-directed nature and integrate their existing knowledge, resulting in a more effective and meaningful learning experience (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).
6. Motivation to learn: Motivation to learn emphasizes the internal motivation of adults and the need to design a learning experience that aligns with their needs while empowering them to engage in the learning process (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).
7. Competency-based program: Competency-based programs measure skills and learning rather than the time spent in the classroom (Patriot State University, n.d.).
8. Engagement: Engagement refers to the extent to which individuals are actively and meaningfully involved in their learning experiences, demonstrating a genuine interest, commitment, and motivation to acquire new knowledge and skills (Fredricks et al., 2004).
9. Motivation: Motivation is the internal drive, desires, and reasons that propel adult learners to persist in online learning (Fajri et al., 2021; Hachem, 2023).
10. Non-traditional: Most research defines *non-traditional* as based on researcher-imposed demographic criteria (e.g., age, work/marital status); however, there has been a lack of agreement in terms of the type of students being described as non-traditional (Chung et al., 2014; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). The study defines non-tradition as an adult learner over 30 persisting in an online program at a large institution in the United States.
11. Online Learning: Online learning involves using various online platforms, websites, video conferencing tools, and virtual learning environments to deliver educational

content to facilitate interaction between learners and instructors (Arghode et al., 2017; Ferri et al., 2020).

12. **Time Management:** Time management is the act and process of planning and implementing conscious control over the amount of time used for certain activities to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity (Syahri, 2021).
13. **Microlearning:** Microlearning is an educational approach that delivers content in short, specific bursts designed for quick consumption and easy comprehension (Thillainadesan et al., 2022).
14. **Blended Learning:** Blended learning is a flexible educational approach combining in-person and online experiences. The term is broad by design, allowing for various teaching methods and styles. It is often used interchangeably with terms like “hybrid” and “mixed mode” learning. (Smith & Hill, 2019).
15. **Horizontalization:** Horizontalization refers to treating every statement participants make about their experiences as having equal value or importance (Moustakas, 1994).
16. **In-vivo coding:** The primary intent behind in-vivo coding is to retain the participant’s voice, ensuring that their terms, language, and meanings are preserved in the analysis (Saldaña, 2021).
17. **Imaginative Variation:** Imaginative variation determines the structural essences of an experience by varying its possible horizons or perspectives to derive its invariant structural themes (Moustakas, 1994).
18. **Personalized Learning:** Personalized learning is a student-centered learning approach where learning experiences are tailored to meet unique needs and ensure strong growth of each individual student on a real-time basis. Specific approaches of personalized learning

are varied. RI adopted eight themes to inform implementations: individualization, differentiation, standards-aligned, student owned, socially embedded, connected to student interests, in flexible environments, continuous formative assessment (Bernacki et al., 2021).

### **Summary**

Chapter One explored the experiences of non-traditional learners over 30 and their experience with time management while enrolled in online programs. Despite the significant growth in adult learners opting for online programs, dropout rates still need to be higher for online learners (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2023; Muljana & Luo, 2019). By gaining insights into the lived experiences of these learners, the study sought to shed light on the factors that impact adult learners' ability to persist and complete their online programs. Drawing upon the theoretical lens of Knowles' (1978) and Knowles et al. (2005, 2020) assumptions about motivation, self-concept, and the readiness to learn, and the interplay between these principles and time management, the chapter explored the experiences with time management decisions and persistence among non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. Furthermore, this transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand how the time management decisions employed by non-traditional learners can inform the design and implementation of effective online learning programs to address adult learners' challenges, particularly regarding time management and persistence.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive overview of the factors influencing time management decisions among non-traditional online learners in education. It is divided into distinct sections and sheds light on critical aspects of this topic. The chapter begins by establishing a robust theoretical framework that underpins the study, drawing insights from Knowles's (1978) and Knowles et al. (2005, 2020) theory of adult learning, offering a notional lens to explore the persistence of non-traditional learners. Following this foundation, the chapter delves into adult learning within online education, emphasizing the unique traits of adult learners and their significance for time management decisions and persistence. The chapter also discusses the dynamics of online learning, recognizing its pivotal role in modern education while exploring the challenges and opportunities associated with the digital age, including the digital divide (Azubuiké et al., 2021; Hill & Lawton, 2018) and its implications for time management and persistence. The chapter expands on the topic of self-directed and self-regulated learning, highlighting how these skills empower non-traditional learners to navigate the complexities of online education and their complex relationship with time management decisions (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). The chapter discusses economic considerations encompassing income inequality, financial burdens related to higher education, and the growing importance of accessibility and flexibility in the digital divide. Simultaneously, the review addresses familial responsibilities, emphasizing the varied roles that non-traditional learners often shoulder and the crucial support, both emotional and practical, that families provide to bolster persistence in education. The chapter concludes with a summary encapsulating the critical insights into the



factors shaping time management decisions among non-traditional online learners and persistence in online learning (Diep et al., 2019; Hill & Lawton, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework selected for this study is andragogy (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). This theory identifies six fundamental principles uniquely differentiating adult learners from their younger counterparts (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). These six principles serve as the foundation for understanding andragogy and help align time management decisions and persistence to the non-traditional learner.

#### **Need to Know**

The need-to-know trait was not part of the original four traits posed by Knowles (1978). Instead, Knowles et al. (2005, 2020) expanded the initial four traits to six, adding the need-to-know trait. This trait identified by Knowles et al. after the initial 1978 work forms the cornerstone of adult learning motivation. The trait encapsulates the theory that adults acquire knowledge when they perceive learning as essential to meet their immediate needs or solve real-world problems. This drive to learn arises from a practical necessity. Knowles et al. (2005) found that adult learners become highly motivated to seek information and learn when confronted with a pressing question or relevant challenge.

#### **Self-Concept (Self-Directedness)**

Coupled with the need-to-know is self-concept or self-directedness, which highlights a principle that sets adult learners apart from their younger counterparts (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). As self-directed learners, adults possess self-perception when moving through their learning experiences; however, unlike younger learners, who often require external guidance and structure, adult learners prefer to take ownership of their education and growth

(Knowles, 1978). During the learning process, educators should nurture and respect the self-concept trait, which empowers adult learners and gives them a sense of autonomy.

### **Learner's Experience**

Along with self-directedness, Knowles (1978) identified that the learner's experience is a defining trait of adult learners. Adults bring a rich tapestry of life experiences to their learning path. Positive and negative experiences significantly influence learners' learning approach to expand their understanding of real-world problems (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).

### **Readiness to Learn**

In Knowles's (1978) work, the readiness-to-learn trait is critical to the adult learner. Unlike their younger counterparts who learn for the sake of learning or at the behest of others, adults tend to be more inclined to engage in learning when they perceive relevant and applicable life situations. Readiness is a deep-seated desire to bridge the gap between existing knowledge and their need for growth and improvement (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).

### **Orientation to Learn**

Adult learners thrive when the educational experience is learner-centered (Knowles, 1978). Orientation-to-learn implies that effective online learning places the adult learner at the center, tailoring the learning experience to align with their interests, needs, and preferences. According to Knowles, adult learners are motivated and engaged when they perceive that the learning process respects their individuality and empowers them to shape their education actively. Thus, according to Knowles, the orientation to learn must shift from educator-driven to learner-driven, acknowledging adult learners' autonomy.

## **Motivation**

Knowles et al. (2005, 2020) expanded the initial four traits to include motivation, as the research indicated that motivation is a crucial trait that drives adult learners. Intrinsically motivated adult learners discern a direct connection between their learning and personal or professional goals. Unlike external motivators that drive their younger counterparts, adult learners' motivation arises from within and is driven by a sense of purpose.

Knowles' (1978) adult learning theory provides the theoretical framework that guides this exploration, offering insights into the challenges and benefits of online learning for non-traditional learners. Through the lens of adult learning theory, the study aims to understand the lived experiences of non-traditional online learners persisting in online education. These traits identified by Knowles et al. (2005, 2020) serve as the foundation for this exploration and guide for understanding adult learners' experiences with time management decisions and their drive to persist.

## **Related Literature**

The related literature section explores the experiences of adult learners over 30 regarding time management decisions and persistence when attending online courses. This section examines current literature, research, theories, and empirical studies to gain valuable insights, interventions, and support mechanisms concerning non-traditional learners' experiences with time management decisions and persistence in an online program. By delving into persistence and time management decisions, the review seeks to contribute to the existing body of research to help educators, policymakers, and researchers enhance online education persistence rates among online learners (Perkins, 2019; Rahayu & Friyatmi, 2022; Thathsarani et al., 2023).

## **Online Adult Learning**

Online Adult Learning has modernized education using dynamic and flexible platforms for adults to acquire knowledge and skills (Arghode et al., 2017; Ferri et al., 2020). Bastos et al. (2022) found that the online learning modality leverages the Internet and digital technologies, offering adaptable, personalized learning experiences and accessibility tailored to the unique needs of adult learners (Waldron, 2020; Xavier & Meneses, 2022). Flexibility is a trademark of online adult learning (Jiménez-Bucarey et al., 2021). Unlike its counterpart, traditional classrooms, it frees adults from fixed schedules and physical constraints (Lee, 2017; Lu et al., 2022; Panigrahi et al., 2018). Kara et al. (2019) posed that online learning now enables online learners to integrate their educational pursuits with work and family obligations, allowing them to continue their education without the limitations imposed by traditional modalities. Fabríz et al. (2021) and Khalil et al. (2020) found that since many online courses are asynchronous, they allow learners to progress at their own pace, accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences.

Moreover, the asynchronous nature of online adult learning employs technology to create personalized learning journeys (Fabríz et al., 2021; Khalil et al., 2020; Zhu & Doo, 2022). Flexible learning platforms thoughtfully integrated into the learning environment help educators and learners assess strengths and weaknesses (Cascio et al., 2020; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021; Smetackova & Stech, 2021). This individualized approach enhances the learning experience by focusing on areas where learners need the most support, thus significantly increasing success rates by offering immediate feedback through interactive assessments (Thathsarani et al., 2023; Van Thien, 2021). Ferri et al. (2020) noted that various online learning materials, including multimedia resources, interactive simulations, and collaborative forums, enrich online learning

experiences. Thoo et al. (2021) posed that an effective online adult learning environment depends on skilled designers and educators with expertise in online learning to guide learners through their courses, thus creating a sense of community among these learners. Meuser et al. (2022) and Van Thien noted that collaboration is vital to mitigating feelings of isolation that some online learners experience. Sagna and Vaccaro (2023) further elaborated that instructor engagement and feedback are necessary and promote learner retention and overall satisfaction among adult learners in their online programs.

Furthermore, self-motivation and time management skills are indispensable in navigating the online adult learning landscape (Zhu & Doo, 2022). Adult learners must exhibit self-discipline to stay focused while meeting course deadlines (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022). The lack of a physical classroom and face-to-face interactions demands a proactive approach when seeking assistance (Hoon et al., 2018). Consequently, online adult learning enables learners with self-regulation and time-management skills to transfer these skills to online learning contexts (Regmi & Jones, 2020). The accessibility of online adult learning is a significant win for adult learners. Hoon et al. posed that the flexibility of online learning enables adult learners to transcend geographical barriers. With access to high-quality education, learners with diverse backgrounds and locations can continue their education with minimal restrictions (Iyer & Chapman, 2020). The inclusivity of online adult learning underscores the power of online learning, providing unique opportunities for adult learners who face exclusion from traditional educational institutions due to work–life challenges (Azubuike et al., 2021).

Finally, the flexibility of online adult learning creates an educational environment that meets online learners' unique characteristics and needs (J. L. James, 2019; Muljana & Luo, 2019; Sagna & Vaccaro, 2023). Along with flexibility, modern advances offer an atmosphere where

online adult learning plays a distinct role in continuing education (Lin & Sun, 2022; Sadeghi, 2019). Online learning enables modern approaches to adult learning and represents an investment in personal and professional growth (Hachem, 2023; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). Understanding the importance of online adult learning provides a foundation for exploring the definition of online adult learning.

### ***Definition***

Singh and Thurman (2019) state that definitions of online learning constantly change. “Online learning is defined as learning experienced through the internet/online computers in a synchronous classroom where students interact with instructors and other students and are not dependent on their physical location for participating in this online learning experience” (p. 15). One fundamental principle of adult learning is its alignment with the concepts of andragogy, recognizing that adults have learning needs and preferences (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005). One aspect of adult learning is its adherence to the principles of andragogy, acknowledging that adults possess requirements when it comes to their educational journey. Adults often take charge of their learning process, seeking relevance in what they learn while striving to connect knowledge with their existing experiences (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020; Nygren et al., 2019). The content is usually created to be easily applicable and focuses on skills and knowledge (Hachem, 2023). Essentially, online learning for adults uses technology to offer a practical educational experience (Hachem, 2023; Jiménez Bucarey et al., 2021). Now that we have finished exploring definitions of learning, we can shift our focus to expanding and developing education.

## ***Growth***

The growth in adult online learning, accelerated by COVID-19, is remarkable (Ahmed et al., 2020; World Bank Group, 2022). For over a decade, online education has continued to accelerate, and online adult education continues to grow significantly at rates exceeding 6% annually (Harasim, 2000; Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006; Lee, 2017). A shifting focus on career changes highlights this significant growth (Hamilton, 2023; J. L. James, 2019), and this unprecedented global challenge is forcing a surge in the popularity of online learning, changing how adults learn and improving workforce skills (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). Increased growth, access, and the flexible nature of online education make this modality a preferred choice for adult learners (Iyer & Chapman, 2021; J. L. James et al., 2021).

Azionya and Nhedzi (2021) found that the advances in technology, the proliferation of mobile devices, and widespread access to the Internet have created an atmosphere where online learning is accessible globally. Adults can access various systems and resources from virtually any location, thus eliminating barriers and expanding learning opportunities (Harasim, 2000; Hoon & Wilkins, 2018; Lin & Sun, 2022). Hamilton (2023), J. L. James (2019), and Rangraz and Pareto (2021) indicated that work and career demands fuel the demand for continuous learning, and technological advances drive industry demand for highly skilled workers, adding to the global need for new skill sets.

Furthermore, the forced governmental lockdowns imposed during the global COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the growth of online adult learning (World Bank Group, 2022; Heo et al., 2021). The pandemic caused widespread adoption of remote work and social distancing measures, prompting educational institutions and organizations to shift to online learning modalities (Heo et al., 2021; Saavedra et al., 2021; World Bank Group, 2022). The result of this

shift forced adults to seek out the benefits, flexibility, and convenience of online learning (Muljana & Luo, 2019; Sagna & Vaccaro, 2023). Kim et al. (2021) and Zhu and Doo (2022) posed that diverse online learning platforms have contributed to the growth of online adult learning and the use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offered by universities provide specialized training that allows learners to access courses in a user-friendly environment. These platforms provide flexible scheduling, self-paced learning, and engaging content catering to learners' unique needs.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic and forced governmental lockdowns resulted in changes to the modern workforce and demanded changes to skill sets; this caused adult learners to make a transformative decision on how they expand their education (García-Morales et al., 2021; Li & Pei, 2023; Saavedra et al., 2021). As online learning continues to grow in popularity, it is necessary to understand this group of learners that gravitate to online learning.

### **Online Learners**

Online learners come from all walks of life, including working professionals, parents, and those of varying age groups, all drawn to online education's flexibility, and these learners often share a trait called self-concept, which guides their behaviors and decisions (Jiménez-Bucarey et al., 2021; Khalil et al., 2020). Al-Hawamleh et al. (2022) and Zhu et al. (2024) indicate that self-driven learners often enroll in online courses to set their study routines and navigate challenges independently. Growing up in the digital age, these learners are tech-savvy, which complements their online learning journey and boosts their chances of success. Bastos et al. (2022) found that determination and technological proficiency help these learners enhance their educational experiences.



Additionally, online learners value the flexibility that online education provides. These learners balance their learning, work, family, and personal commitments (Kara et al., 2019). The flexibility of online learning modalities enables these learners to adapt their learning experiences to their needs (Khalil et al., 2020; Rangraz & Pareto, 2021). Online learners seek community and engagement with peers and instructors (Liu et al., 2019). Michailidis et al. (2022) found that these learners require content that motivates them to engage in the online environment. They recognize the need for institutions to incorporate content features that promote engagement. Interaction and collaboration drive these learners to engage and persist; therefore, understanding online learners' unique characteristics and motivations is essential for successful online instruction (Lanford, 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020). The group of learners defined as online learners includes all types of learners; however, moving away from this general category of learners to a more specific group labeled as adult learners is necessary to understand what differentiates online learners from adult learners.

### ***Adult Learners***

Adults opting for online education hail from diverse walks of life and possess motivations distinct from their younger counterparts (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). Recognizing the different traits of adult learners is essential for crafting relevant online courses (Michailidis et al., 2022; Rajabalee & Santally, 2021). Societal, personal, and workplace aspirations drive most learners (Hachem, 2023; Knowles et al., 2005). Adult learners pursue online courses to enhance their knowledge, refine their skills, and propel their professional lives (Perales Jarillo et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2024). Kara et al. (2019) and Zhu and Doo (2022) noted that their rich life experiences enable them to link new knowledge with their past learning; given their busy

schedules, which often involve work and family, the adaptability of online education appeals to these learners.

Furthermore, adult learners have a defined perspective on their learning objectives and the significance of their education; adult learners gravitate toward courses that resonate with their passions and objectives (Aldowah et al., 2019; Kara et al., 2019); however, while many are well acquainted with technology, it is essential to remember that some might require additional technological guidance (Hamilton, 2023; J. L. James, 2019). Therefore, educational platforms must remain accessible and provide tech assistance (Diep et al., 2019; J. L. James, 2019). Ultimately, these mature learners prioritize actionable insights they can integrate into their everyday lives or professions (Hamilton, 2023; Thoo et al., 2021). As the research narrows, attention can shift to a distinct group of learners who adopt a unique approach to learning.

### *Lifelong Learners*

Lifelong learners are individuals committed to a continuous learning journey of intellectual growth (Szabo, 2019; Tang et al., 2023). This commitment is like crafting a story, with each chapter representing new knowledge and experiences. These learners often start with a profound realization: learning occurs beyond formal education (Drewery & Pretti, 2023). This realization creates an environment of lifelong learning and a quest for knowledge, which drives their intellectual curiosity (Mezirow, 2005; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Nygren et al., 2019). Lifelong learners are self-directed, with self-management and high intrinsic motivation defining their learning ability throughout their lives (Drewery & Pretti, 2023; Tang et al., 2023).

Szabo (2019) noted that critical thinking and decision-making are essential in becoming a lifelong learner, but only if the individual's thinking is flexible enough to consider all opportunities for learning. According to Tang et al. (2023), often with a distinguished approach

to learning and an inherent aptitude for uncovering significant revelations in everyday life, these learners continue their online education when instructors exhibit more effective and encouraging behavior. These learners use self-initiated education to enhance their learning beyond academic courses (Drewery & Pretti, 2023; Obhi et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2023). This inclusive approach augments their educational expedition and persuades them to view learning as a chance to grow, not just as a destination (Drewery & Pretti, 2023; Szabo, 2019). It is all about the experiences and ability to grow (Arghode et al., 2017; Rajabalee & Santally, 2021). Obhi et al. noted that lifelong learners attend online education to fulfill their diverse learning requirements. Ensuring online courses deliver high-quality content and engage these learners effectively facilitates their continuous educational journey (Arghode et al., 2017).

Finally, Obhi et al. (2021) found that experience and interaction contribute to the lifelong learner's ongoing story, and their comprehensive approach to learning characterizes lifelong learners as pillars of inspiration in pursuing knowledge. Though lifelong learners encompass all types of learners, from young to old (Knowles, 1978; Obhi et al., 2021), a more distinct group exists. This group of learners is the focus of this study and forms the basis for exploring time management and persistence among non-traditional learners.

### ***Non-Traditional Learners***

Non-traditional learners are a distinct and tenacious group (Knowles et al., 2020; Marine, 2020). Unlike high school graduates and first-year college students, these learners may delay entry into school by more than a year and juggle numerous roles from career to family (Marine et al., 2020; Remenick, 2019; Sutherland et al., 2023). Marine and Sutherland et al. stated that these learners are typically generalized into groups of learners over 22. Non-traditional learners opt for online education to advance academically and professionally (Remenick, 2019; Singh, 2019).

With rich life and work experiences, they bring a wealth of practical knowledge to their courses (Rajabalee & Santally, 2021). Their background provides context to their studies and gives them a clear purpose for pursuing further education (Singh, 2019). Managing their time is crucial, as they must synthesize academic demands with professional and personal responsibilities, and the flexibility of online programs is particularly beneficial for them, offering learning avenues to educational success without significant disruptions (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024).

Moreover, these learners are typically self-driven, deeply motivated, and eager to absorb new knowledge, and these learners prefer online or blended learning programs (Singh, 2019; Smith & Hill, 2019). Maintaining academic integrity is a prominent concern for non-traditional learners (Gamage et al., 2020). Non-traditional learners value connection with their faculty members and personal relationships between the instructors and other learners motivate persistence in their educational programs (Singh, 2019). Sutherland et al. (2023) noted that while many are tech-savvy, some might need additional assistance navigating digital tools, and online courses that are intuitive and backed by strong technical support resonate well with this group of learners. Having defined the types of learners that make up those who prefer online learning, it is essential to understand the characteristics that define these groups of learners (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).

### **Characteristics of Successful Online Learners**

Online education has experienced an unprecedented boom (Harasim, 2000; Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006; Lee, 2017). As this learning mode garners increasing popularity, certain characteristics separate successful online learners from the rest. Several characteristics emerge as pivotal. Foremost, successful online learners exhibit self-motivation (Heo et al., 2021; Schunk, 2019). In the same way educators adapt to emerging technologies in physical

classrooms, online learners must harness their intrinsic drive to explore and engage with digital platforms. Without the traditional classroom's structure and guidance, these learners must rely on their innate push to initiate, sustain, and excel in their academic endeavors (Holford et al., 2018; Li & Pei, 2023).

Paudel (2021) found that time management is another crucial facet, and just as educators struggle to integrate new teaching methods due to technological growth, online learners need help to balance autonomy and discipline. The freedom to choose learning schedules is empowering but necessitates rigorous planning and prioritization (Syahri, 2021). Successful online learners recognize this and carve out dedicated time segments, ensuring they navigate their coursework efficiently (Uzir et al., 2020). Iyer and Chapman (2020) and MacRitchie et al. (2022) found that effective communication, often understated, is paramount; thus, given the virtual nature of interactions, these learners have honed their ability to articulate queries, share insights, and foster collaborations using digital communication tools.

Moreover, adaptability is a distinguishing trait (T. James et al., 2021; Saavedra et al., 2021). The online learning arena, akin to the constantly evolving technological world educators grapple with, is in flux. The successful online learner is agile, ready to embrace these changes, and adept at assimilating new ways of learning (Aldowah et al., 2019; Iyer & Chapman, 2020). In essence, as the realm of online education expands, recognizing and nurturing these characteristics is critical. Self-directedness stands out as a challenge and a cornerstone to learner success (García-Morales et al., 2021; Jafar et al., 2023). Exploring self-directedness reveals how this self-governance shapes the online learning experience, transforming passive students into active participants in their education.

### *Self-Directed*

With the expansion and increasing diversity in the field of education, a distinct group of adult learners has emerged. These individuals possess strengths and face their own set of challenges. What sets adult learners apart from their counterparts is their ability to direct their learning (Courtney, 2018; Hachem, 2023). Self-directed learning refers to the ability of these learners to take control of the methods and techniques they use to teach themselves a subject (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). In today's dynamic learning environment, where blended learning and microlearning have gained popularity, adult learners often lead the way by using resources tailored to their needs (Boelens et al., 2018). Microlearning involves delivering content in bursts designed for consumption and easy understanding. On the other hand, blended learning combines classroom teaching with online instruction to create a flexible and integrated learning experience (Courtney, 2018; Smith & Hill, 2019; Thoo et al., 2021). Unlike students who rely heavily on environments for motivation, adult learners bring their internal motivation when starting their educational journey (Holford et al., 2018; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1969). These students are not merely receivers; they actively pursue knowledge due to their motivations, desires, and goals (Hachem, 2023; Rangraz & Pareto, 2021).

This ability to direct oneself is not solely a result of age or experience. The self-directed learner is deeply connected to the challenges and aspirations of the world (Hachem, 2023; Rangraz & Pareto, 2021). These learners possess the skills to identify their needs, locate the resources, and adjust their learning pace according to their lifestyle. Self-directed adult learners navigate various resources, with educational institutions and platforms playing a role in their success (Azubuike et al., 2021; Balouchi & Samad, 2021; Hill & Lawton, 2018). By recognizing

and supporting adult learners' autonomy through curated resources, these learners can enhance their learning journey (Khalil et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2024).

Self-directedness goes beyond being a characteristic. Self-directedness is an integral part of the identity of adult learners (Knowles, 1978). It encompasses how they approach learning, absorb knowledge, and put it into practice in real-life situations (Holford et al., 2018; Li & Pei, 2023). Recognizing and nurturing this quality is crucial for creating an environment where adult learners do not only acquire knowledge but also thrive (Regmi & Jones, 2020; Thoo et al., 2021). Achieving self-directedness requires learners to employ strategies that support their learning journey.

**Strategies.** People who actively take control of their learning distinguish themselves by using strategies to enhance their experiences. A crucial element of their approach is setting goals as a roadmap for their learning journey (Feraco et al., 2023; Jafar et al., 2023; Yu, 2023). Through goal setting, they create signposts that direct their inquiries and determine the desired outcomes. This clear definition of goal setting enhances the likelihood of achieving it (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022).

Moreover, active engagement plays a role in their learning approach (Regmi & Jones, 2020; Zhu et al., 2024). They do not merely consume information passively; adult learners actively interact with it. Whether it is through texts, participating in forums, or engaging in project-based learning activities, this active involvement deepens understanding and improves retention; nonetheless, active involvement helps to transform the learning process from a one-way street into an exchange of ideas and perspectives (Holford et al., 2018; Syahri, 2021).

Effective time management is crucial for these learners (Diep et al., 2019; Michailidis et al., 2022). They can be productive while maintaining flexibility by planning their schedules,

prioritizing tasks, and dedicating time to learning activities. Efficiently managing their time allows them to balance responsibilities and progress towards their objectives (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024).

Thathsarani et al. (2023) identified that feedback mechanisms also play a crucial role for adult learners. Self-directed learners often employ assessment tools and peer reviews or participate in online communities where feedback is freely given and received (Liu et al., 2019; Sridharan et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). Loureiro and Joao Gomes (2023) indicated that performance evaluation and feedback inform real-time adjustments in learning strategies, enabling improvement.

Adaptability is an aspect of the strategy toolkit for self-directed learners (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022; Feraco et al., 2023). The ability to adjust, change direction, or embrace approaches in an evolving learning environment becomes incredibly valuable. This flexibility guarantees that they are well-equipped for the present and ready to handle any challenges in their learning journey (Feraco et al., 2023). Every strategy has a purpose, and they all work together to create a detailed, engaging, and customized learning experience. When using these strategies effectively, learners who take charge of their learning are also aware of the obstacles that may come up and are ready to adjust and readjust their approach accordingly (MacRitchie et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023).

**Challenges.** Self-directed learners can shape their learning paths, but this autonomy also brings complexities (Hachem, 2023; Zhang & Hwang, 2023). One of the foremost challenges is the paradox of choice. Schlimbach et al. (2023) found that learners often felt overwhelmed in deciding on the most appropriate materials. This overabundance of options can lead to burnout and decreased learner engagement.



Isolation can also be a concern (Folayan et al., 2022). The self-directed learning approach, while flexible, often needs more community engagement found in traditional settings (MacRitchie et al., 2022). Folayan et al. also indicated that this absence can lead to feelings of solitude and may result in a narrow perspective devoid of the enriching discourse that comes from diverse viewpoints.

Holford et al. (2018) and Li and Pei (2023) indicated that sustaining motivation over long periods is another hurdle online learners face that challenge self-direction. Procrastination can easily seep in without the external pressure of deadlines; therefore, another challenge facing these learners is scheduling and appropriate management of time and resources to maintain progress (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022). The responsibility for maintaining enthusiasm and drive, especially when confronting challenging subjects, lies solely with the learner (Ucar & Kumtepe, 2020).

Lastly, Lang (2021) and Heidari et al. (2021) identified that digital literacy is another challenge facing online learners and often results in declining motivation due to limited skills with technology; in other words, digital illiteracy can result in lower levels of self-direction. Recognizing one's limitations can be daunting, and unlike traditional learning environments, where assessments are built into the system, self-directed learners must possess or develop keen self-assessment skills (Liu et al., 2019; Loureiro & Gomes, 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Confronting these challenges is a critical aspect of the self-directed learning process, requiring continual adjustments and refinements in strategy (Aldowah et al., 2019; Iyer & Chapman, 2020). As the conversation around self-directed learning evolves, it becomes clear that self-regulation and autonomy offer a nuanced layer to the broader concept of autonomous education (Kara et al., 2019; Perales Jarillo et al., 2019).

### ***Motivated***

Research often correlates successful learning with intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Balouchi & Samad, 2021; Van Thien, 2021). Motivation consistently emerges as a critical characteristic (Van Thien, 2021). Fiorini et al. (2022) and Mukhtar et al. (2020) indicated that observations indicate that, akin to educators adjusting to evolving pedagogical methodologies, successful learners display notable adaptability, driven significantly by their motivation. Beyond the straightforward task of content assimilation, today's educational framework demands critical thinking, contextual understanding, and an aptitude for synthesis (Balouchi & Samad, 2021; Bastos et al., 2022; Lin & Sun, 2022). Just as educators must be strategic in curriculum design to meet contemporary needs, motivated learners must employ strategies to maintain engagement and commitment (Zhang & Hwang, 2023).

Different learners manifest varied sources of motivation (Regmi & Jones, 2020). The importance of sustained learning and internal motivation is evident in the contemporary professional environment, which values ongoing skill acquisition and adaptability (Hachem, 2023; Hargittai et al., 2019). Simultaneously, Fiorini et al. (2022) determined that intrinsic factors, including personal growth and intellectual satisfaction, propel another faction of these learners. These individuals, like educators aiming for effective pedagogical outcomes, seek knowledge to deepen their understanding and personal competencies (Mukhtar et al., 2020). It is imperative to recognize that motivation is not a monolithic concept but is subject to change (Fiorini et al., 2022). Reflecting educators' need to adjust strategies based on student feedback and outcomes, successful learners also reevaluate and modify their sources of motivation (Balouchi & Samad, 2021). This dynamic nature ensures they remain focused and driven toward success (Holford et al., 2018; Li & Pei, 2023). The role of motivation in successful learners is

undeniable (Fiorini et al., 2022). As the educational landscape undergoes continuous transformation, the adaptability and resilience demonstrated by motivated learners underscore its significance to academic success (Fletcher & Tyson, 2021; Hachem, 2023; Hamilton, 2023).

**Types.** Understanding how successful online learners adapt their strategies to learning contexts and goals is crucial when exploring the concept of motivation (Lanford, 2020; Nygren et al., 2019). Intrinsic motivation, which stems from a person's drive to learn and develop, plays a role in this regard (Diep et al., 2019; Holford et al., 2018; Zhu & Doo, 2022). Motivated learners engage in the learning process because they genuinely enjoy acquiring knowledge, finding satisfaction, and having a natural curiosity (Balouchi & Samad, 2021). Their engagement is rooted in their interest in the matter and not solely reliant on external rewards (Havard et al., 2023; Loureiro & Gomes, 2023).

Another type of motivation is extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by factors of the individual (Kara et al., 2019; Nygren et al., 2019). Extrinsically motivated individuals are driven by outcomes such as grades, degrees, job prospects, or recognition from society (Nygren et al., 2019). Skills development plays a role in self-regulation and motivation for learning (Bandura, 1991; Michailidis et al., 2022).

Successful learners have high levels of motivation. It cannot solely be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic (Maqableh & Alia, 2021). These learners use both types of motivation depending on their goals and obstacles (Lange, 2021; Liu et al., 2019; Sridharan et al., 2019). Understanding the strategies employed by successful learners gives researchers a complete picture of the difficulties and challenges that might impede effective learning (Li & Pei, 2023).

**Threats.** Delving into the intricacies of motivation that characterize successful learners, it is vital to address the potential threats that can erode or destabilize this foundational attribute

(Maqableh & Alia, 2021; Sadeghi, 2019). Foremost among these threats is burnout (Schlimbach et al., 2023). Extended periods of intense academic pursuits without adequate breaks or self-care can lead to mental and emotional exhaustion. Maqableh and Alia emphasized that online adult learners often face an increased workload compared to their counterparts in traditional learning environments and can quickly become overwhelmed.

Balayar and Langlais (2021) asserted that the move to remote learning severs learners from their peers, in-person contacts, and face-to-face interactions with educators, which has a tangible effect on the overall learning experience and, subsequently, on motivation. Additionally, Rangraz and Pareto (2021) identified the potential for dispute regarding the quality of online courses, which can lead to doubts in learners' minds and affect their motivation. Lastly, Lang (2021) warned that learners' engagement in other responsibilities can impede their ability to harness their learning motivation. Various obstacles force non-traditional learners to face a tricky balancing act.

Feedback, or the inconsistency thereof, also poses a substantial challenge (MacRitchie et al., 2022). Sporadic or ambiguous feedback can generate confusion and doubt (Babu & Koduru, 2022; Kara et al., 2019). Moreover, the rapid pace of curriculum evolution and the constant influx of new knowledge can sometimes feel overwhelming (Schlimbach et al., 2023). The challenge of keeping up and staying relevant can induce stress, threatening the very motivation driving learners (Heo et al., 2021; World Bank Group, 2022). Li and Pei (2023) and Balouchi and Samad (2021) noted that awareness of these potential threats ensures learners can adopt strategies to safeguard their motivation, guaranteeing a consistent and enjoyable academic journey.

**Strategies for Increasing Motivation.** Understanding the intrinsic and extrinsic nature of motivation and its potential vulnerabilities leads to a pertinent exploration: Much like professionals who constantly update their skill sets, successful learners use specific strategies to augment their motivation in the face of academic demands (Michailidis et al., 2022). One pivotal strategy is setting clear, attainable goals (Diep et al., 2019). Just as a researcher might delineate stages for a long-term project, learners benefit from segmenting their academic journey into tangible milestones (Franklin & Harrington, 2019). These provide direction, imbue a sense of purpose, and furnish moments of accomplishment that rejuvenate intrinsic motivation (Venkatesh et al., 2020).

Another effective strategy for increasing motivation revolves around cultivating a growth mindset (Thathsarani et al., 2023). Embracing challenges as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks allows learners to perceive difficulties as stepping stones (Zhang & Hwang, 2023). Liu et al. (2019) and Sridharan et al. (2019) found that this perspective reframes potential threats to motivation as hurdles waiting to be surmounted, thereby enhancing motivation levels. Engaging with peers and forming study groups can also prove advantageous. Collective efforts can act as motivational boosters (Thoo et al., 2021), and shared challenges and diverse perspectives can foster a conducive environment for sustained motivation (Zhang & Hwang, 2023). The communal spirit of pursuing academic excellence and mutual encouragement can mitigate feelings of isolation and amplify motivation (Thoo et al., 2021).

Finally, seeking guidance or mentorship can trigger growth (Gamage et al., 2020). Similar to how professionals seek out mentors to navigate intricate career paths, learners can also gain from the wisdom of experienced academicians or seasoned peers (Thathsarani et al., 2023).

Their perspectives, rooted in their own experiences, can provide practical advice and emotional encouragement (Michailidis et al., 2022).

### *Engaged*

Engagement is critical for online learners to flourish (Fiorini et al., 2022). However, in a digital world of learning, being “actively engaged” signifies more than just participation—it calls for lively involvement peppered with an innate passion and unwavering commitment towards education (Elshami et al., 2022). Those who are actively engaged set themselves apart through distinct attributes. First, these learners have an intrinsic motivation that runs deep within them—they are interested and fascinated by their subject matter—their curiosity is satisfied through a relentless pursuit of knowledge encapsulated by their chosen online courses (Kennedy, 2020). This drive urges these individuals to explore additional resources actively and with a desire to participate in their studies with enthusiasm (Michailidis et al., 2022).

Moreover, engagement is not solely concerned with one's connection to the material at hand; it also involves interaction with peers and educators (Heo et al., 2021). Learners who thrive online collaborate with their colleagues, nurturing unity and shared learning (Elshami et al., 2022; Kennedy, 2020). They add constructively to discussions, support fellow learners when needed, and appreciate varying viewpoints (Franklin & Harrington, 2019). Those exhibiting this trait may have solid time management skills; they have self-discipline and organization down to a science, ensuring all course deadlines are met while carving out ample study hours for themselves (Kara et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2020). Elshami et al. and Pratiwi and Priyana (2022) found that their ability to remain actively engaged helps keep them on track despite the complexities of online learning. Engaging requires learners to leverage educational strategies to maintain engagement.

**Strategies.** Participating effectively in online learning requires a strategic approach to understanding the successful online learner (Fiorini et al., 2022). One popular strategy is active participation, and successful online learners do not simply take a virtual seat; they participate in discussions, share important information, and engage in their learning experience (Michailidis et al., 2022; Zhang & Hwang, 2023). Through this strategy, adult learners acquire additional knowledge about the subject and create a participatory educational environment in the classroom (Zhang & Hwang, 2023). Zhang and Hwang found that active participation promotes a sense of community and association, essential for motivation and continued commitment.

Online students have multiple roles, and understanding time management is crucial. Planning and managing proactively is critical (Kara et al., 2019). Successful learners begin their study sessions with planning; they break complex assignments into smaller parts that can be managed and follow the deadlines closely (Han, 2021). The active pursuit of knowledge is a hallmark of successful online students (Franklin & Harrington, 2019). They recognize that online courses have a large resource base that extends past the intended curriculum. As such, these learners seek out pertinent resources like articles, videos, or forums. This approach enriches their educational experience and allows them to explore their specialty and interests more extensively (Diep et al., 2019).

Furthermore, another strategy these learners employ is seeking out and utilizing technology. According to Zhang and Hwang (2023), online learners embrace digital tools and resources, such as learning management systems, forums, and collaborative platforms. Learners who use this strategy are proficient with these tools and leverage them to access course materials, interact with peers, and submit assignments (Franklin & Harrington, 2019; Heo et al., 2021).

Another strategy to consider is effective communication with educators, which significantly impacts participation (Han, 2021). Successful learners are quick to ask questions or for clarification when they perceive issues (Diep et al., 2019). Effective and frequent communication ensures they receive the necessary guidance and assistance, ultimately leading to success (Michailidis et al., 2022).

Ultimately, strategies for participation, technology, and communication are the critical components of online learning success (Fiorini et al., 2022). Participative, active, time management, proactive learning, and effective communication with teachers are all essential strategies for a successful online student learning plan (Han, 2021; Zhang & Hwang, 2023). These strategies help online learners have the confidence to traverse the landscape of online education (Franklin & Harrington, 2019). After exploring these engagement strategies for online learning, it is clear there is a need to recognize and address the unique challenges that learners encounter with engagement while enrolled in online programs (Fiorini et al., 2022).

**Challenges.** Navigating the area of education comes with its unique set of obstacles, especially when it comes to keeping students engaged (Fiorini et al., 2022). Overcoming these challenges requires thought and proactive measures from learners and educators (Kara et al., 2019; Regmi & Jones, 2020). One major hurdle is the feeling of isolation. Some students who study online often miss the opportunity to interact with their peers, typically found in classrooms (MacRitchie et al., 2022). The lack of interactions with teachers and classmates can result in isolation and loneliness. Feelings of isolation often affect students' engagement levels, making staying motivated and actively participating in their courses challenging (Zimmerman, 2000).

One of the hurdles people encounter in learning is efficiently managing their time. The flexibility of learning can be a double-edged sword, offering benefits while presenting challenges



(Altmann et al., 2019; Kara et al., 2019). The adaptable nature of education opens the door to distractions that can hinder learning (Regmi & Jones, 2020). To overcome these distractions, learners must actively allocate time to balance coursework and family and social obligations. This balancing act often poses a risk (Kara et al., 2019). According to Altmann et al. and Schlimbach et al. (2023), online classrooms provide an environment for learners to fulfill the requirements of self-paced courses. Engaging actively in an online setting demands proficiency and the ability to leverage technology effectively; however, technological barriers can present challenges when it comes to engagement (Kara et al., 2019). Dewan et al. (2019) highlighted that access to internet connections, suitable devices, and tool proficiency are crucial factors contributing to success in online learning.

Moreover, maintaining focus in a distance learning environment presents a formidable challenge (Zimmerman, 2000). The temptation to multitask or succumb to distractions, such as social media, email, multimedia, or unrelated websites, is always present (Regmi & Jones, 2020). Multitasking while seeking to persist in courses requires learners to exert considerable effort to stay on task while maintaining concentration during online lectures or reading course materials (Zimmerman, 2000). Even the absence of immediate feedback can deter engagement. In traditional classrooms, learners can ask questions and receive instant clarification; however, online learners often wait for queries, potentially slowing the learning process and hindering comprehension, thus reducing learner engagement (MacRitchie et al., 2022).

Participating in learning can be challenging. Obstacles include feeling isolated, struggling with time management, facing difficulties dealing with distractions, and experiencing delays in receiving feedback (Fiorini et al., 2022; MacRitchie et al., 2022). To effectively address these difficulties and conquer them, online learners can adopt strategies that have been proven

successful (Fiorini et al., 2022; Regmi & Jones, 2020). One practical approach is to prioritize study with effective time management. By managing their time, learners can maintain focus and actively participate in their studies (Muljana & Luo, 2019; Thanawala et al., 2022).

### ***Time Management***

Time management plays a role in the success of individuals who pursue education while juggling responsibilities such as work, family, and personal commitments (T. James et al., 2021). For these learners' efficient time management is not a strategy but a lifeline (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020; Thanawala et al., 2022). Non-traditional learners often have schedules as they balance work hours, duties, and coursework (Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021). The key to time management lies in planning and setting goals and priorities (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020).

A structured routine is integral, and creating a fixed schedule with dedicated study periods is paramount (Iyer & Chapman, 2021; Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021). This routine should align with individual preferences and peak productivity hours (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). Consistency is vital; adhering to a routine ensures that coursework is covered and creates a sense of discipline and predictability (Neroni et al., 2022). Iyer and Chapman indicated that non-traditional learners often need help with additional commitments that can encroach on study time. Politely declining non-essential requests or delegating tasks to others can free up precious time for educational pursuits (Neroni et al., 2022; Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021).

Hill and Lawton (2018) suggested that using technology can be beneficial when managing time effectively. Through calendars, task management applications, and reminders, learners can stay organized and ensure they never overlook essential deadlines, as Iyer and Chapman (2021) indicated. These tools help us understand our obligations, making it more straightforward to manage time efficiently. Nonetheless, learners must prioritize tasks by

prioritizing what is important and not essential (Barrot et al., 2021; Knowles et al., 2005; Neroni et al., 2022).

Finally, learners who approach learning in non-traditional must understand the importance of caring for themselves while managing their time (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). Striking a balance between endeavors and sufficient rest is crucial for maintaining wellness and avoiding exhaustion (Knowles et al., 2005, 2020; Schlimbach et al., 2023). Effective time management is the key to success for those pursuing education through traditional means. These individuals can manage their schedules by setting clear objectives, establishing routines, learning to prioritize tasks, and using technology (Barrot et al., 2021; Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021). Effective time management is not a strategy; it is a skill that empowers non-traditional learners to achieve their educational goals while organizing their complex lives (Hill & Lawton, 2018; Iyer & Chapman, 2021).

**Strategies.** Effective time management is essential for success in online learning, especially for non-traditional learners who juggle various responsibilities (Azubuike et al., 2021; Paudel, 2021). One core strategy is a structured schedule, and non-traditional learners should create well-organized schedules that allocate specific time blocks for different aspects of their coursework (Aldowah et al., 2019; Hill & Lawton, 2018). Other strategies include dedicated periods for reading materials, attending virtual classes, participating in discussions, and completing assignments (Iyer & Chapman, 2021). Establishing a routine fosters discipline and ensures that educational commitments receive the attention they deserve (Uzir et al., 2020). This structured approach helps learners balance academic responsibilities and personal life, providing a sense of order in the flexible world of online learning (Azubuike et al., 2021; Hill & Lawton, 2018).

Leveraging digital tools is another crucial aspect of efficient time management in online education (Hill & Lawton, 2018). Non-traditional learners can harness digital calendars, task management apps, and reminder tools (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). These digital aids provide visual cues and timely notifications, simplifying the allocation of time effectively (Iyer & Chapman, 2021). Furthermore, embracing cloud-based tools for document management and collaboration streamlines the learning process, allowing learners to access course materials from anywhere and collaborate seamlessly with peers (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). This technological proficiency enhances time management and productivity (Hill & Lawton, 2018).

Moreover, prioritization is fundamental when managing time effectively in online learning (Paudel, 2021). Liu et al. (2019), Loureiro and Gomes (2023), Sridharan et al. (2019), and Wang et al. (2021) posed that learners should adeptly differentiate between urgent tasks and genuinely important ones. Critical tasks may encompass assignment submissions and live class sessions, while essential duties involve focused studying, conducting in-depth research, and planning long-term projects (Rautela et al., 2022; Surahman & Wang, 2022). Paudel (2021) and Neroni et al. (2022) found that learners can allocate more time and attention to activities that significantly contribute to their comprehensive understanding of the subject matter by discerning and prioritizing essential tasks. This approach prevents learners from being perpetually reactive to immediate demands and enables them to maintain a broader perspective aligned with their educational goals (T. James et al., 2021).

Finally, incorporating time management strategies into the online learning journey empowers non-traditional learners to optimize their time effectively, enhance productivity, and balance their academic endeavors and other life commitments (Azubuike et al., 2021; MacRitchie et al., 2022). Establishing achievable goals guides their learning experience, helps

them make informed decisions about allocating their time and effort, and motivates them to achieve their desired educational outcomes (Barrot et al., 2021). Learners encounter time management challenges to manage their online learning effectively (Uzir et al., 2020).

**Challenges.** Challenges to time management in online education encompass a broad spectrum of complexities that impact various facets of life and learning (Adams & Blair, 2019; Barrot et al., 2021). These challenges often manifest in the professional, financial, and familial domains, each presenting unique demands (Samra et al., 2021; Syahri, 2021). In the professional sphere, online learners frequently need help balancing work commitments and coursework needs (MacRitchie et al., 2022). Financial challenges also play a significant role (Agormedah et al., 2020; Maqableh & Alia, 2021). Many online learners must manage their finances, including tuition fees, alongside their educational journey. Balancing the financial aspects of learning can be a substantial challenge, requiring budgeting, financial planning, and potentially seeking scholarships or financial aid (Agormedah et al., 2020; Unger & Meiran, 2020).

Furthermore, familial obligations present another layer of complexity for many online learners, especially non-traditional students (MacRitchie et al., 2022). Balancing the roles of a student, parent, or caregiver demands meticulous scheduling and efficient time allocation (Adams & Blair, 2019). Non-traditional adult learners often navigate the dual responsibilities of fulfilling familial duties and dedicating ample time to their educational journey (MacRitchie et al., 2022). In our exploration, we explore these challenges to understand how they collectively influence time management decisions and persistence (Jafar et al., 2023).

**Professional.** Balancing the demands of work and academic pursuits can be challenging for non-traditional online learners (Hill & Lawton, 2018; Hite & McDonald, 2020). It requires planning and precision to manage commitments and coursework requirements (Boca, 2021).

According to Craig and Churchill (2021), many non-traditional learners wear multiple hats as employees and students, which adds complexity to their schedules. Meticulous time management becomes necessary to ensure that their professional responsibilities and educational goals receive attention.

It can be challenging to stay focused and productive while juggling work responsibilities and finding study time (Fong et al., 2022). The convenience of online learning enables learners to interact with their coursework based on their schedules, which is a significant benefit (Hill & Lawton, 2018). This freedom also brings expectations for self-discipline (Hachem, 2023; Zhang & Hwang, 2023). The online learner must ensure their work responsibilities do not interfere with the importance and value of their education (Fong et al., 2022; T. James et al., 2021). Individuals who are not typically considered learners often face a learning challenge when they return to the role of being a student (Cleary et al., 2022). Initially, they may find it unfamiliar, which may result in the need to take additional time to adjust to the rhythm and requirements of coursework (MacRitchie et al., 2022). This transition and the pressures of maintaining performance can make effective time management complex (Cleary et al., 2022).

In today's changing landscape, various factors contribute to the challenges faced by non-traditional learners, such as remote work arrangements, virtual meetings, and unpredictable schedules, and to adapt to these demands, non-traditional learners must reassess and adjust their time management strategies (García Morales et al., 2021; Jafar et al., 2023). Effective time management in education requires planning, clear communication with employers, and personal discipline (Boca, 2021; Fong et al., 2022). By addressing these challenges, learners can effectively juggle their work and studies while optimizing their time to succeed in both areas (T. James et al., 2021).

**Financial.** For non-traditional learners pursuing online education, financial challenges often play a significant role in their time management journey (Hill & Lawton, 2018). These challenges stem from the necessity to manage finances, including tuition fees and related expenses, alongside their educational pursuits (Baticulon et al., 2021). One of the primary financial challenges lies in budgeting and financial planning (Hill & Lawton, 2018). Baticulon et al. noted that many learners already balance various financial responsibilities, such as mortgages, rent, bills, and family expenses. Adding tuition fees and educational materials to the economic equation requires careful budgeting to allocate resources efficiently (Baticulon et al., 2021; Hill & Lawton, 2018). This financial planning can be time-consuming and demands meticulous attention to detail (Hill & Lawton, 2018).

Additionally, seeking financial aid, scholarships, or grants can become time-consuming (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). Non-traditional learners may need to explore various options to make their education more affordable (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). Researching and applying for financial assistance opportunities can add a layer of complexity to their time management efforts (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Furthermore, the need to work part-time or full-time jobs to finance their education can impact non-traditional learners' time availability (Hite & McDonald, 2020). Balancing work commitments with study time requires careful planning to ensure sufficient time for coursework while meeting financial obligations (Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021; Thanawala et al., 2022).

Moreover, the financial strain can contribute to stress and anxiety, affecting the overall well-being of non-traditional learners (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). Managing these emotional aspects while navigating economic challenges adds another layer of complexity to their time management journey (Barrot et al., 2021). Successfully addressing these challenges

empowers learners to navigate the financial aspects of their educational journey while optimizing time utilization for academic success (Barrot et al., 2021; Blankenberger & Williams, 2020).

***Familial.*** Non-traditional learners pursuing online education grapple with familial challenges that impact their time management endeavors (Alshebou, 2019; Jafar et al., 2023). These challenges arise from the need to harmonize their roles as students with familial responsibilities (Saavedra et al., 2021). One of the significant familial challenges is the dual role of being a student and a parent or caregiver (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). Alshebou indicated that balancing coursework demands with familial duties demands meticulous scheduling and efficient time allocation. Non-traditional learners may find themselves navigating the delicate balance between fulfilling their familial responsibilities and dedicating ample time to their educational journey (Samra et al., 2021).

Moreover, familial obligations can include caring for children, elderly family members, or other dependents (Alshebou, 2019; Zamecnik et al., 2022). Meeting these responsibilities while ensuring dedicated study time can be particularly challenging (Saavedra et al., 2021). Learners often need to develop creative strategies to ensure that their familial duties are fulfilled without compromising the quality of their education (T. James et al., 2021). The familial challenges may also extend to the need for support and understanding from family members (Azubuike et al., 2021). Effective communication with loved ones is crucial to explain the demands of online learning and garnering the necessary support (Diep et al., 2019).

Furthermore, non-traditional learners may experience guilt or anxiety when their familial responsibilities momentarily take precedence over their studies (Jafar et al., 2023). Another aspect that requires attention is managing these emotions and finding ways to focus on coursework amidst familial challenges (Hill & Lawton, 2018). Familial challenges in time



management for non-traditional learners in online education necessitate skillful scheduling, effective communication with family members, and navigating emotional aspects (Azubuike et al., 2021; Samra et al., 2021). Addressing these challenges empowers learners to fulfill their familial roles and educational success (T. James et al., 2021).

### ***Integrated***

Integration plays a role in supporting learners and empowering them in various ways, as highlighted by Tinto (1993) and Galesic et al. (2021). Regarding integration, the main objective is to create inclusive learning environments that cater to learning styles while offering diverse teaching methods for accessing course materials (Jafar et al., 2023; Tinto, 1993). Social integration fosters community and support among learners, recognizing their life experiences (Syahri, 2021). Economic integration addresses challenges by offering assistance options and ensuring education (García Morales et al., 2021; Heo et al., 2021). Familial integration acknowledges the roles of learners as parents or caregivers. Strives to balance family responsibilities with pursuits (Rajabalee & Santally, 2021; Zhu & Doo, 2022). Together, these dimensions create an approach that enriches the journey of non-traditional learners, helping them navigate their unique obstacles and achieve academic success (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022).

**Academically.** It is of utmost importance to acknowledge the experiences and preferences of conventional learners when it comes to their integration into academics (Syahri, 2021; Tinto, 1993). These students, who often find themselves balancing full-time occupations, familial obligations, and various other commitments that demand a flexible approach to learning, require comprehensive incorporation of teaching methods (Azubuike et al., 2021; Samra et al., 2021; Syahri, 2021). This incorporation encompasses utilizing resources, multimedia tools, and traditional classroom methodologies (Fiorini et al., 2022; Ucar & Kumtepe, 2020). By using

technology, educational institutions can offer accessible and adaptable course materials that cater to the needs of traditional learners (Coghlan et al., 2021; Regmi & Jones, 2020). Accessibility allows learners to actively participate in their studies, regardless of their preferred style of learning (Diep et al., 2019; Syahri, 2021). The main goal of integration is to remove obstacles in education, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective in the area of online learning (Rajabalee & Santally, 2021; Syahri, 2021; Ucar & Kumtepe, 2020). Furthermore, educational institutions can address non-traditional learners' unique requirements and backgrounds by incorporating various teaching methods. In doing so, they promote inclusivity and ensure equal opportunities for success (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022; Samra et al., 2021).

The integration of academics recognizes the significance of education that revolves around the needs of learners (Ives & Castillo Montoya, 2020; Tinto, 1993). It emphasizes tailoring learning experiences to suit requirements allowing non-traditional students to progress at their pace (Ucar & Kumtepe, 2020; Zhu & Doo, 2022). This approach considers their life circumstances and encourages a more profound and meaningful engagement with course materials (Syahri, 2021). Essentially, integrated approaches ensure that non-traditional learners are not left behind due to their backgrounds or learning styles. These learners are welcomed into an environment where their diverse perspectives and experiences enrich the learning journey (Rajabalee & Santally, 2021; Tinto, 1993).

**Socially.** For individuals engaging in online learning, the main goal is to establish a sense of social cohesion, which plays a crucial role in fostering a feeling of belonging and support within this diverse array of learners (Fong et al., 2022; Galesic et al., 2021). This integration aspect is tailored explicitly to those from distinctive backgrounds and life circumstances (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Tinto, 1993). Social integration involves acknowledging that non-

traditional learners have many experiences and responsibilities contributing to their education (Diep et al., 2019; Tinto, 1993).

Valued and connected, a supportive environment is essential for students to feel like they are an integral part of their educational environment (Fong et al., 2022). Building support networks is a component of promoting integration (Michailidis et al., 2022). These networks play a role for non-traditional learners by providing them with valuable assistance (Venkatesh et al., 2020). Galesic et al. (2021) found that guidance and motivation to navigate challenges are provided by support systems such as mentorship programs, peer support groups, or dedicated counseling services.

Nevertheless, creating an environment supporting student integration is necessary to build a strong sense of community and promote student collaboration. This idea has been endorsed by Tinto (1993) and Venkatesh et al. (2020), who have highlighted the positive effects of encouraging student interactions. Additionally, Fong et al. (2022) go a step further to emphasize that these interactions can manifest in various forms, such as engaging in forums, participating in discussion boards, attending on-campus events, and forming study groups. These engagements enrich the learning process and offer crucial emotional support, mitigating feelings of isolation (Babu & Koduru, 2022).

Understanding the significance of social integration is a critical element of integration, and researchers acknowledge that the vitality of a learning community is derived from its diversity (Samra et al., 2021; Tinto, 1993). Educational establishments have the potential to cultivate an all-encompassing and encouraging ambiance by embracing the distinct backgrounds and life encounters of non-traditional learners (Fong et al., 2022). Accepting all learners fosters an environment that empowers these students to flourish while establishing a sense of belonging

within a larger community of individuals who share similar ambitions (Babu & Koduru, 2022). According to Derzhavina et al. (2021), socially integrated approaches ensure that non-traditional learners do not feel isolated on their educational journey. On the contrary, these learners are welcomed into a caring and helpful community where their distinct viewpoints and life encounters enrich the educational experience (Babu & Koduru, 2022; Fong et al., 2022). Through social integration, individuals who do not follow conventional paths are empowered to attain academic accomplishments while fostering acceptance (Galesic et al., 2021; Tinto, 1993).

**Economically.** Gamage et al. (2020) and Kara et al. (2019) found that online learning is crucial in eliminating obstacles that prevent non-traditional learners from seeking higher education. Some challenges included financial constraints due to work responsibilities, family commitments, or social influences (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022). Kara et al. discovered that through the implementation of economic integration, learners can access higher education without being overwhelmed by financial burdens.

Additionally, Gamage et al. (2020) further emphasized the importance of financial support options as a vital part of student integration. Educational institutions make efforts to offer a range of financial aid opportunities, including scholarships, grants, and flexible payment plans. These mechanisms help traditional learners navigate the financial obstacles of pursuing a degree (Gamage et al., 2020; Tchamyou et al., 2019). There is also evidence that scholarships and grants from universities contribute to economic integration through financial assistance, and these valuable resources help eliminate the burden of educational expenses and help improve opportunities for education among learners who may not fit the mold of the traditional learner (Derzhavina et al., 2021; Gamage et al., 2020). Flexible payment plans are another critical component of economic integration (Gamage et al., 2020). These plans allow non-traditional

learners to spread their educational expenses over manageable periods. Institutions accommodate these learners' financial realities by breaking down tuition and related costs into smaller, more digestible payments (Al-Hawamleh et al., 2022; Gamage et al., 2020).

Syahri (2021) acknowledged that economic integration considers that non-traditional students often have part-time or full-time jobs to support themselves and their families. To cater to these, educational institutions should offer scheduling options that allow learners to manage their work commitments effectively alongside their pursuits (Tchamyou et al., 2019). This flexibility empowers traditional learners to make the most of their time, ensuring they can fulfill their financial responsibilities while advancing their education (Syahri, 2021). Economic integration helps non-traditional learners eliminate financial obstacles and provides opportunities for higher education (Gamage et al., 2020; Kara et al., 2019). By embracing integration, these learners are empowered to invest in their education, ultimately improving their career prospects (Azhari & Fajri, 2022).

**Familial Integration.** Rangraz and Pareto (2021) and Hill and Lawton (2018) found that recognizing and supporting the roles of non-traditional learners as parents, caregivers, and family members while they pursue their educational goals is a big part of familial integration. It acknowledges that many non-traditional learners need help to balance responsibilities with their educational goals (Rangraz & Pareto, 2021). By implementing policies that benefit families, educational institutions have a role in promoting family integration (Arghode et al., 2017; Feraco et al., 2022). These academic policies are designed to meet the needs of learners who have responsibilities towards their families, and they include options for flexible scheduling, on-campus childcare facilities, and academic support tailored explicitly for learners with family responsibilities. Flexible scheduling plays a crucial role in integrating familial obligations, and it

allows non-traditional learners to personalize their class schedules according to family commitments (Rajabalee & Santally., 2021; Zhu & Doo, 2022). By attending evening classes, weekend courses, or utilizing online learning opportunities, these options empower learners to strike a balance between their roles as parents, caregivers, and students.

Collaborating with childcare providers on campus is essential to successfully integrate families and have childcare facilities (Arghode et al., 2017). These facilities give traditional learners a sense of security, knowing their children are being well looked after while attending classes or studying. These facilities create an environment that enables non-traditional learners to pursue their academic goals without compromising their parental responsibilities (Arghode et al., 2017; Feraco et al., 2022). Feraco et al. and Liu et al. (2019) found that academic support services tailored to learners with family responsibilities are integral to familial integration. These services may include access to academic advisors who understand the challenges of balancing family and education, guidance on time management strategies, and resources for managing coursework demands alongside family duties (Havard et al., 2023; Syahri, 2021). This personalized support empowers non-traditional learners to thrive while fulfilling familial roles (Havard et al., 2023; Mezirow & Associates, 2000).

Finally, the idea of integration recognizes the difficulty of juggling education and family commitments (Pratiwi & Priyana, 2022). Many non-traditional learners feel guilty or anxious when temporarily prioritizing their family responsibilities over their education (Havard et al., 2023; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Assistance from support networks and counseling services can assist learners in managing these emotions, offering a layer of emotional backing (Samra et al., 2021).

## Summary

Chapter Two offered an exhaustive examination of the various elements that impact time management decisions and persistence among non-traditional online learners. The chapter was organized into discrete sections that tackle diverse yet interconnected facets of the research topic. Initially, the chapter laid down a rigorous theoretical foundation that anchors the study. It borrowed insights from Knowles's theory of adult learning, a conceptual lens to explore the unique challenges and opportunities presented to non-traditional online learners. The chapter then transitioned into a discussion of empirical studies that have examined time management and persistence in online learning environments. It critically evaluated these studies, highlighting both their contributions and limitations. Furthermore, the chapter addressed the gap in the existing literature by pointing out that most studies have predominantly focused on traditional learners, thus necessitating this research. Lastly, the chapter summarizes the key themes and sets the stage for the following empirical investigation. Chapter Two serves as a scholarly review and a roadmap, contextualizing the study within the broader academic discourse on time management, persistence, and online learning for non-traditional learners.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. Non-traditional online learners drop out of programs at higher rates than their traditional counterparts (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2022). Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that transcendental phenomenological studies aim to understand participants' experiences by researching participants who have experienced the phenomenon. This research uses the transcendental phenomenological method to analyze participants' experiences. To reduce researcher bias, bracketing and epoché are used, as discussed by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth. This method helps to eliminate unconscious researcher bias by focusing solely on the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, the participants, the setting, and the researcher's positionality. It includes discussions on the interpretive framework, selected philosophical assumptions, and the role of the researcher. The study also discusses the processes of interview questioning, journal prompts, and focus groups to assist with member checking. Finally, the study introduces trustworthiness and ethical considerations and concludes with a chapter summary.

### **Research Design**

My study employs a qualitative research approach ideally suited for exploring the experiences of non-traditional learners over 30 persisting in online programs offered by large institutions in the United States. Qualitative research excels at uncovering the nuances of human experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), aligning seamlessly with my objective of gaining insights into the experiences related to time management decisions that may contribute to the persistence



of these learners. By aligning with Creswell and Poth's (2018) description of qualitative research characteristics, my design uses multiple methods, including virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups, to investigate the experiences of persistent non-traditional learners over 30. The research is conducted in virtual settings within the participants' environment. It relies on me as the primary data collection instrument and ensures a sound exploration of participants' approaches to time management decisions.

I selected transcendental phenomenology for my methodology. Husserl sought to understand reality deeply through phenomenology, which involves going beyond our natural assumptions using mental reduction (Kidd, 2021; Norgaard, 2021). Husserl's approach involved transcending real attitudes toward the world through cognitive reduction to achieve a transcendental state of consciousness (Norgaard, 2021). Moustakas (1994) expanded on this methodology, defining it as a scientific study of how phenomena appear in consciousness. This design provides a structured framework for exploring lived experiences, making it particularly well-suited for investigating how non-traditional learners perceive and navigate time management decisions in online programs. This research centers explicitly on fundamental principles defined by Knowles et al. (2005), including the need to learn, motivation, and readiness to learn, while examining how these principles intersect with the participants' time management decisions.

Transcendental phenomenology aligns with my research questions, which aim to uncover the fundamental nature of time management decisions within this demographic and how these decisions may influence persistence. I seek to reduce potential bias by using bracketing and epoché, as Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas (1994) discussed. My study will follow systematic steps outlined by Moustakas and adapted by Creswell and Poth. These steps involve

identifying the phenomenon of interest, specifying philosophical assumptions, collecting data from participants, generating themes, developing textual and structural descriptions, reporting the phenomenon's essence, and presenting the understanding of experiences. By implementing this methodology, I aim to identify meaningful insights from the lived experiences of my participants, providing an accurate representation of their time management decisions, persistence, and motivation in online educational programs.

### **Research Questions**

Adults' experiences when attending online courses vary, and for adults to be successful, the courses must provide challenging content and an engaging atmosphere. Without these aspects, studies suggest that adults fail to complete online courses (Hachem, 2023). The questions posed by this study seek to answer several questions relating to non-traditional learners' lived experiences about time management decisions that may assist them in persisting in their online degree programs. This transcendental phenomenological study aims to address the following research questions.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the shared time management experiences of persistent non-traditional online students over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What challenges do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States experience with time management decisions while persisting in online degree programs?

## **Sub-Question Two**

What best practices do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States use to foster good time management decisions while enrolled in their online program?

### **Setting and Participants**

The rates at which non-traditional online learners persist in their studies are lower compared to those of traditional learners, as indicated by the research studies conducted by Delnoij et al. (2020), Hamilton (2023), J. L. James (2019), Lee (2017), and Muljana and Luo (2019). It has been demonstrated that possessing effective time management skills can enhance persistence among non-traditional learners in online learning environments, as supported by the works of Delnoij et al., Hamilton, and J. L. James. However, additional investigation into the decision-making processes related to time management is required to broaden our understanding of how time management aids in improving persistence, as highlighted by Syahri (2021). Therefore, it is appropriate to select large educational institutions that offer online degree programs for further examination in this study.

### **Sites**

The sites selected for this study are large institutions in the United States offering online programs. Two large institutions, Horizon State University (HSU) and Patriot State University (PSU), were selected and are pseudonyms for the sites. Each site offers online programs. The study will be conducted virtually and does not require direct access to conduct the research; however, these sites were selected due to their online student population and the sites' long history of offering online programs. HSU (n.d.3) was founded in 1997 by a group of U.S. governors seeking to make online education available to more residents as technology was

quickly becoming available that provided the platform for a new and innovative model that would revolutionize the way students learn, master concepts and progress to a degree. This institution was selected because it offers a variety of online degree programs, and over the past 25 years, the institution has had more than 300,000 graduates. Furthermore, HSU offers degree programs for bachelor's and master's programs and serves a wide array of student demographics.

The second site selected to participate in this research is PSU (n.d.), which also offers online programs. Established in 1971, PSU has experienced remarkable growth, evolving from a modest 154 students to a distinctive institution with over 15,000 residents. PSU's online campus enrollment exceeds 94,709 annually. PSU provides many online educational opportunities for undergraduates, graduates, and post-graduates. Its extensive online program offerings span these academic levels, enabling learners to access a quality education. Both universities provide programs that allow me to identify participants across a broad spectrum of online learners who meet my non-traditional learner criteria. To obtain a diverse set of participants, I intend to obtain permission from both universities to recruit participants. Student populations for both institutions are similar in size and scope, and the demographics are presented in Table 1. All data for demographics is provided via Univstats (n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

**Table 1**

	Total Enrolment	Undergraduate	Graduate	Men	Women
HSU	150,116	107,952	42,164	53,754	96,362
PSU	94,709	47,696	47,013	38,704	56,005

*Note:* All information presented is from Univstats for 2021–2022.

## Participants

The study's participants consist of non-traditional learners over 30 who demonstrate persistence during their online programs at large universities in the United States. I sourced the participants for this study from HSU's LinkedIn Alumni Group and PSU's Online Students Facebook Group, with the assistance and approval of the administrators managing each group. Maximum variation sampling was used to select participants with diverse characteristics, including demographic factors, educational background, culture and ethnic identity, linguistic diversity, and geographic location; this was not a complete list of possible traits. Gardner et al. (2022) found that online adult learners are between the ages of 24 and 50. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), maximum variation consists of determining some criteria that differentiate the sites and participants in advance and will enable the selection of very different participants. The selected age bracket for this study was online learners over 30; however, these learners typically fall into the classification of non-traditional learners, as defined earlier. The participants had to be actively enrolled in one of the selected site's undergraduate online programs. Liberty University guidelines mandate at least 10 participants up to a maximum of 20 participants. A total of 12 participants were recruited to participate in the study. According to Patton (2015), once saturation has occurred, there is no need to expand the number of participants selected for the study. According to Patton, saturation in qualitative research is when the data collection reaches a stage where no fresh or extra information is gathered. According to Patton, saturation is achieved around 15 participants, and adding more participants to the study is unlikely to reveal new themes or sub-themes. This study aimed to recruit 12 participants to ensure saturation. During analysis, data saturation occurred at eight participants; however, all 12 participants participated in the study (see Appendix B). Since the study leveraged two sites to acquire

participants, the approach was to split the participants between both sites. Five participants were recruited from HSU, and seven were recruited from PSU. Saturation occurred in eight participants; however, all 12 participants participated.

### **Recruitment Plan**

This qualitative study was on non-traditional learners enrolled in online programs at HSU and PSU. Given the distribution and diverse backgrounds of online learners attending these institutions, the study used convenience sampling to select participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used convenience sampling to find individuals open to discussing their experiences with time management and persistence. To mitigate potential biases associated with this sampling method, rigorous data collection and analysis techniques were employed to address the constraints of convenience sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The recruitment process started by identifying participants based on traits that align with the research inquiries posited in the study. Participants were enlisted by Patton's (2015) observation that data saturation generally transpires within a group of 15 or fewer individuals. Following Patton's guidance towards recruitment, I was committed to continuing participant selection until I achieved saturation.

Underlying my recruitment strategy lay the principle of maximum variation sampling. By adopting this approach, I discerned and selected participants by considering a range of characteristics. These characteristics included (a) educational background, (b) cultural and ethnic affiliations, (c) linguistic diversity, (d) geographical location, (e) religious convictions, (f) disabilities, (g) family and household composition, (h) work and employment status, (i) life experiences, (j) motivations and goals, as well as technology usage and access. It is important to note that the selection process was not restricted solely to these characteristics. This sampling

strategy adhered to Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendations on convenience and maximum variation sampling.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

In our rapidly evolving work environment, the shifting dynamics demand a heightened emphasis on acquiring a comprehensive education to secure success within today's technology-driven world. It has become increasingly critical for individuals to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills. However, it is disheartening that numerous non-traditional online learners often need help to persist in their chosen educational programs. Having completed three online degree programs and fitting the mold of the non-traditional learner, my personal bias is extensive in this area of study. However, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018), bracketing was used to reduce any bias I brought to the study. My personal experiences with time management decisions and my ability to persist in my programs drove my desire to conduct and understand the findings of this critical research area. Understanding these experiences will help policymakers, future learners, and educators develop online programs to improve non-traditional learners' persistence in online programs (Hachem, 2022; J. L. James, 2019).

### **Interpretive Framework**

The interpretive framework that aligns with my study is social constructivism. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that in social constructivism, individuals seek an understanding of the world where they live and work and develop subjective meanings of their experiences. As my study aimed to understand the lived experiences of non-traditional online learners persisting in large institutions in the United States, I sought to understand how learners' experiences with time management decisions helped them persist in their programs. Leveraging social constructivism

enabled me to understand these influences through learner experiences through the lens of the world in which we live. This framework is often used for interviewing, observing, and analyzing texts. It allows for honoring individual values and offers a means of negotiating them among the participants and the researcher.

Researchers use qualitative research to understand how people learn and socialize (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a researcher, I focused on constructing a reality shared between the participants and me, emphasizing social interactions and collaborative processes. I aimed to understand non-traditional learners' lived experiences and how their time management decisions may have helped them persist in their degree programs (Delnoij et al., 2020; Eynon & Malmberg, 2021).

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), philosophical assumptions influence qualitative dissertations, affecting the researcher's design, methodology, and conclusions. These assumptions guide the researcher's beliefs and viewpoints. In the upcoming sections, I will discuss these assumptions from my point of view. The following sections discuss the assumptions from my perspective.

#### ***Ontological Assumption***

The ontological assumption is the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Adopting the social constructivist ontology in this dissertation acknowledges that knowledge is grounded in social and cultural contexts. Creswell and Poth indicate that ontological assumptions assume there is a need for the researcher to understand the individuals participating in the study while exploring participant viewpoints to develop themes and sub-themes. It recognizes reality as socially created through the interpretation and interaction that



individuals bring to specific contexts by exploring participants' perspectives and experiences. According to Creswell and Poth, the social constructivist framework suggests that our experiences lead to the creation of multiple realities based on ontological beliefs. This belief guides this study and enables me to approach this research with an open mind.

Furthermore, as illustrated by Creswell and Poth (2018), adopting a constructivist ontology underscores the need for the researcher to collect data and comprehend the individuals who are part of the study. This assumption drives me to explore participant viewpoints while creating an environment where participant experiences highlight meaningful themes and sub-themes. This research was guided by a commitment to listen openly and receptively (Moustakas, 1994), creating a space where the participants' experiences were analyzed without bias.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed that when it comes to understanding things, it is essential for the researcher to have a close connection with the people taking part in the study. As a researcher, I intended to close the distance between me and the participants. This way, I could prevent my beliefs, biases, and values from affecting the data from the participants' lived experiences. By following Moustakas's (1994) theory, which says that we must minimize our internal biases if we want to use the transcendental phenomenological methodology, I aimed to use epoché to reduce potential bias and listen to what participants have experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

As a researcher with constructivist beliefs, I believe knowledge is not a universal truth just waiting to be revealed. Instead, it is something that learners actively generate through their own experiences and interactions. When it comes to non-traditional learners and their perspectives on time management decisions and how they influence academic persistence, these

viewpoints are affected by their personal stories, backgrounds, and the various circumstances they find themselves in. I acknowledged that no solution fits everyone's time management and persistence needs within this constructivist framework. Each learner's journey was distinct and individualistic as they are. I saw these learners as active participants in constructing their knowledge about time management. Their views were like pieces of a puzzle, and by collecting and piecing together these viewpoints, I could understand the complex relationship between time management decisions and persistence.

### *Axiological Assumption*

In research, axiology pertains to the researcher's beliefs on values and ethics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In an axiology assumption, the researcher values the participants' independence, secrecy, and seclusion and secures their informed agreement before data retrieval. The axiological assumption refers to the researcher's standpoint and probable partiality and aspires for openness and contemplation throughout the research, understanding that the researcher's values, beliefs, and biases all play a part in the researcher's interpretation of the gathered data. The goal was to perform an in-depth analysis, enabling participants to express their opinions while preserving privacy.

I believe individual experiences are pivotal in shaping how individuals learn and interact with others. My beliefs are rooted in the Christian doctrine that each person's inherent worth and uniqueness reflect personal experiences. My Christian perspective emphasizes empathy, compassion, and a commitment to understanding the stories and struggles of non-traditional learners. This worldview guided my approach to research, particularly in the qualitative paradigm, which centers on exploring the richness of personal narratives. I recognized the importance of fostering an environment of trust and respect when engaging with research

participants, valuing their experiences as integral to the broader discourse on education. However, it was essential to acknowledge that my assumptions could introduce bias into the research process and data interpretation. To mitigate this, I maintained a reflexive stance throughout this study, critically examining my beliefs and their potential impact on the research.

### **Researcher's Role**

As the principal investigator for this qualitative research study, I undertook comprehensive oversight of all aspects, encompassing the design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings. Drawing upon Patton's (2015) insight that the researcher functions as the human instrument in qualitative research, I recognized the paramount importance of establishing a solid rapport with the study participants, defined as non-traditional learners over 30, persisting in large institutions across the United States. My connection to this demographic is noteworthy, as I can directly relate to the experiences of these participants.

As someone who has completed several online degrees, I have a connection that allows me to empathize with non-traditional learners and understand the challenges and circumstances they experience in their education. This connection underscored the significance of bracketing techniques in my research methodology, as discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018). Using bracketing and epoché helped me ensure the study was authentic and expressed the participants' experience without the influence of my personal bias.

The idea of epoché, as explained by Moustakas (1994), was a guiding principle that urged me to adopt a thoughtful posture throughout my research journey. I limited the impact of my background and preconceptions, which enabled the study to develop naturally within the context of the participants' experiences. Furthermore, I was committed to transparently sharing my research methodology and analytical processes, enabling peers and scholars to evaluate and

potentially replicate my research. Finally, I employed Moustakas's reduction method to meticulously craft textural descriptions that illuminated the experiences of non-traditional learners, thereby unveiling themes and sub-themes that contributed to the broader understanding of the time management decisions that may help participants persist in their online programs.

### **Procedures**

I have identified a five-step procedure to follow the study guidelines. In the first step of this research study, I was focused on securing the essential Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix C). This critical process ensured the study's ethical foundation. The second step was to obtain site approval (see Appendix D and E). Site selection and authorization were critical to the study as I needed to work with the selected sites to obtain contact information for participants.

The third step addressed the vital aspect of informed consent. Ethical considerations were paramount, and participants' consent forms were obtained before data collection with that participant began (see Appendix F). Following that, the fourth step delved into the procedures for data collection. I collected data through individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. First, interviews were scheduled with individual participants via email with an invitation to join an online Microsoft Teams meeting. Once a participant's interview was completed, they received the journal prompts via email with access to the journal prompt website to submit their weekly journal prompt responses. They were provided a username and password to log in to provide their responses to the week's journal prompt. I transcribed the recorded interviews (see Appendix G) and used the transcriptions for analysis and to inform the focus group questions. All participants were invited to join one of the two focus groups via email notification with an invitation to join the Microsoft Teams meeting, which took place virtually. Subsequently, the

fifth and final step outlined the procedures for data analysis. All three collected forms of data were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) steps for data analysis, namely highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes to understand how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using three data sources to understand this study's central phenomenon ensured the findings were triangulated to establish credibility and ensured findings were transferable between the researcher and those being studied.

### **Data Collection Plan**

Transcendental phenomenology, as an essential qualitative research approach, underpins my investigation into the experiences of non-traditional learners regarding their persistence and time management decisions. This section offers a comprehensive rationale for selecting data collection approaches and their order within my research design. My choice of data collection techniques encompasses individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. I chose these methods to help me explore the experiences of the people I interviewed in a virtual setting. I wanted to understand their experiences on another level, so I used transcendental phenomenology as my guiding principle. I got a clear picture of what they went through by conducting individual interviews and asking specific questions about time management and persistence.

Additionally, journal prompts, as a supplementary approach, enabled participants to capture their experiences while engaging in online courses and subsequently reflect on how their perceived time management decisions helped them persist in their online programs. This method follows individual interviews and complements them by encouraging participants to engage in introspective reflection over an extended period (Trinkely et al., 2023). Moreover, focus groups served as a unique data collection method for member checking, thereby validating the themes

and sub-themes identified during data analysis from in-depth interviews and journal prompt exercises. These focus groups played a crucial role in confirming the credibility of the findings and adding robustness to the overall data collection strategy.

The order of my data collection followed a logical sequence to maximize the depth of my inquiry. Commencing with individual interviews, I established a framework for discussion that enabled participants to recall experiences related to time management within each question. This approach aligns with the principles of phenomenology, where in-depth individual exploration is essential (Moustakas, 1994). Subsequently, journal prompts encouraged participants to capture and reflect on their experiences, building upon the insights gained during interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, focus groups were conducted to validate the emerging themes and sub-themes, fostering collaboration and further enhancing the credibility of the findings (Trinkely et al., 2023).

### **Individual Interviews**

As defined by Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological interview process often begins with an informal social conversation to help create a safe environment for sharing information. I started each interview with a brief conversational dialog with my selected participants to facilitate this approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas indicated that, as researchers, providing a relaxed and trusting environment during the interview process is critical, as these can be stressful for the interviewer and the interviewee. The design of the interview questions supported my research topic while initiating an engaging one-on-one dialog.

Open-ended questions (see Appendix H) allowed participants to provide detailed and descriptive responses, offering rich insights into their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). I selected open-ended questions to support the interview data collection

method. Using open-ended questions helped frame the context while allowing the participants adequate time to reflect on their past and current experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, Creswell and Poth indicated that carefully selecting questions that bracket and categorize parameters is necessary. Using this approach to question development, I developed questions (see Table 2) that limited researcher bias and allowed participants to reflect on current and past experiences with time management strategies and how they helped them persist in their online program. My in-person interview approach helped me understand the world from the participant's point of view and unfolded the meaning of their experiences in the real world. I also used video and audio recordings during each interview to replay the entire interview. Using video and audio recordings, I focused on listening to the participant's responses and less on capturing notes during the interview. Listening is vital to the in-person interview process, so researchers must ensure the participant feels engaged (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Table 2**

### *Individual Interview Questions*

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1. Please introduce yourself to me with a brief explanation of who you are, what you do, and why you chose to pursue your current online degree.
  2. What requirements does your program have for participation each week? (CRQ)
  3. What motivates you to persist in your online degree program? (CRQ)
  4. What role does time management play in your success as an online learner? (CRQ)
  5. How do you manage your time while participating in your online degree program? (CRQ)
  6. How has the online classroom impacted your ability to manage your time well or your decision regarding your time management? (CRQ)
  7. What connection exists between your motivation and your time management decisions? (CRQ)
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8. What challenges do you encounter in balancing your educational pursuits with your other responsibilities? (SQ1)
  9. What are some time management strategies you use consistently to maintain your persistence in your online program? (SQ1)
  10. How have your time management practices evolved since you first started pursuing your online degree? (SQ1)
  11. What experiences have you had when facing conflicts between time management and participation requirements in your program? (SQ1)
  12. Please share a time you did not manage your time well and it impacted your timely participation; please include the result. (SQ1)
  13. How does this practice help when managing your time is difficult? (SQ1)
  14. What methods do you use to prioritize your academic tasks and other commitments? (SQ2)
  15. How often, if ever, do you take time to remember your motivation? (SQ2)
  16. Provide examples of instances where your motivation wavered and explain if your time management decisions contributed to maintaining or regaining your enthusiasm for your online degree program. (SQ2)
  17. Reflecting on your journey, how have your past experiences influenced how you approach time management in your educational pursuits? (SQ1, SQ2)
  18. Based on your insights and experiences, what recommendations would you offer to other non-traditional online learners regarding effective time management and maintaining motivation? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
  19. How does time management help when you encounter challenges like the ones you just noted? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
  20. How does your time management impact your ability to meet these weekly participation requirements? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
- 

The initial question in the interview protocol served as the introductory phase, allowing participants to acquaint themselves. This question encouraged participants to provide insights into their background, the affiliated university, and the specific degree program they were presently enrolled in. Such an introductory exchange played a crucial role in forging a rapport



between me and the participant, setting the foundation for a productive working relationship throughout the interview. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), interviewers must consciously participate by showing sincere interest in the interviewee's remarks but in a non-valuative manner. Thus, the first question helped to build rapport with the interviewee. Questions 2 and 3 focused on the interviewee's current degree program and requirements for the program; these aligned with the central research question. Questions 4 through 7 focused on gaining insight into the specific time management decisions and any adaptive approach the learner used to help them persist in their program; these questions aligned with the central research question. Questions 8 through 13 focused on the challenges with time management and strategies for managing time; these aligned with sub-question one. Question 14 asked the participant to discuss their methods to prioritize their academics and relate to sub-question two. Questions 15 and 16 focused on motivation and related to sub-question two. Question 17 asked the learner to reflect on their academic journey and discuss their experiences with time management and motivation; this question aligned with sub-questions one and two. The final questions, 18 through 20, related to all three research questions. They asked the participant to discuss how time management and motivation impact their ability to meet weekly participation requirements.

### **Journal Prompts**

Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that journaling is a popular data collection method for qualitative designs. This study used journaling to gather data over three weeks and enabled participants to write about their experiences with time management decisions as they occurred. The journal prompts (see Table 3) supported the central research questions and allowed participants to focus on their journal activities. Creswell and Poth further indicate that journaling raises additional issues for researchers when participant handwriting is illegible. Additionally,

Creswell and Poth suggest that journal prompts should be short transcriptions that enable the participant to focus on the prompt without requiring elaborate responses (see Appendix I).

Therefore, to ensure answers were short enough for the participant to respond, they were asked to keep their responses to less than 300 words. To overcome this issue, I provided a website that enabled participants to submit their journal entries via the website form.

### **Table 3**

#### *Journal Prompt Questions*

- 
1. Reflect on a typical day as an online learner. How do you allocate time for various activities, including coursework, work, family, and personal time? (SQ1)
  2. Discuss instances when you have had to adapt or modify your time management decisions while pursuing your online degree. What prompted these adjustments? (SQ1)
  3. Consider significant life experiences that might have influenced your time management decisions and motivation as an online learner. What experiences shaped your perspective on education and your desire to persist? (SQ2)
- 

Journal prompts provide a means for participants in the study to provide short responses to prompts while the action or activity is occurring (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, journal prompts were executed for three weeks; prompts were provided to participants each week to respond. Questions 1 and 2 are related to Sub-Question 1 and focus on responses to time allocation and adapting to changing time management needs. Question 3 was associated with Sub-Question 2 and referred to participants' experiences with time management decisions and motivation as an online learner.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups provide a similar way of collecting data to in-person interviews; however, a focus group can pose a question to the group and obtain group reactions and responses to the

question (Baker & Chenery-Morris, 2020). The focus group provided a safe environment for participants to openly share their experiences about the posed focus group questions (see Appendix J). Creswell and Poth (2018) mention that a safe sharing environment during focus groups will help participants openly engage; however, participants were informed at the beginning of the session that they were only required to share their experiences if they were comfortable.

The questions created to support the focus group are designed to enable the group to share their experiences in a group setting. The 14 questions (see Table 4) are grouped by research question or combination of research questions to facilitate more accessible translation and analysis of the focus group transcript (see Appendix K). The focus group questions were used here to help determine if new themes and subthemes or responses occurred in a group setting that needed to be identified from individual interviews and journal prompt responses.

**Table 4**

*Focus Group Questions*

- 
1. Please share your experiences with the most significant time management challenge you have faced while pursuing your online degree. (CRQ)
  2. How do you balance your studies with your personal or work commitments? (CRQ)
  3. Could you share an experience of feeling stressed or overwhelmed with managing your time during your studies? (CRQ)
  4. Can you describe a specific instance where balancing school responsibilities with personal or work life was challenging? (SQ1)
  5. What unique time management challenges have you encountered specifically because your program is online? (SQ1)
  6. Please share your experience with a strategy or tool that effectively manages your time during your online studies. (SQ2)
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7. What was a key learning moment for you in developing your time management skills while pursuing your online degree? (SQ2)
  8. Can you share an experience where you faced a significant challenge in managing your time during your online studies and how you overcame it with a specific strategy or approach? (SQ1, SQ2)
  9. Please describe a situation where you initially struggled with time management in your online program and what changes or practices you implemented that led to improvement. (SQ1, SQ2)
  10. Could you share your journey of managing time as a non-traditional learner over 30 in your online program, focusing on the challenges and strategies that have helped you persist in your studies? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
  11. Can you share how you have had to modify your personal organization or study methods in response to academic pressures and what impact those changes have had on your personal and family life? (Triangulation Theme 1)
  12. Can you describe a situation where your academic obligations tested your usual time management strategies, and how did you adapt to meet those challenges? (Triangulation Theme 2)
  13. Can you discuss your approaches to managing the interplay between your educational pursuits and work responsibilities, particularly when transitioning to or from online learning environments? (Triangulation Theme 3)
  14. Reflecting on your experiences, can you identify recurring strategies or tools that have helped you simultaneously navigate personal organization, time management, and work–life balance? (Triangulation, Cross Theme Corroboration)
- 

Researchers use focus groups to validate themes and sub-themes identified during interviews and journal prompt exercises, providing additional confirmation of the data analysis and establishing the credibility of the findings (Trinkely et al., 2023). To facilitate the tracking of questions during the focus groups, the questions were grouped by research questions. Questions 1, 2, and 3e focused on the shared experiences of persistent non-traditional learners. Questions 4 and 5 related to Sub-Question 1 and explored the experiences these learners have with time management and persistence challenges and the strategies they have developed to overcome

them. Questions 6 and 7 addressed sub-question two and the experiences non-traditional learners have with tools and best practices they used to manage their time, motivation, and persistence in online learning. Questions 8 and 9e addressed a combination of sub-questions one and two and explored the best practices, challenges, strategies, and balance these learners required to persist. Question 10 addressed all three questions and examined how non-traditional learners managed their time, motivation, and persistence through various strategies and methods. Questions 11, 12, and 13 focused on the three preliminary themes and triangulated the data analyzed with the initial theme development. Question number 14 was aimed at cross-theme corroboration and was designed to assist in the initial theme development triangulation.

### **Data Analysis**

My study used a transcendental phenomenological approach, consistent with Moustakas' (1994) principles and Creswell and Poth's (2018) guidance. This approach underpinned all three data collection methods: interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. Transcendental phenomenology, as a qualitative research methodology, emphasizes exploring individual experiences and perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). This aligns perfectly with my research objective: to gain a profound understanding of non-traditional learners' experiences with time management decisions and persistence in online degree programs.

The data analysis strategy for this phenomenological study prioritized the development of composite textural and structural descriptions to reveal themes and sub-themes within the data, following the recommendations of Creswell and Poth (2018). At the outset of the research, I engaged with epoché and bracketing, as detailed by Moustakas (1994) and further refined by Creswell and Poth. This step allowed me to set aside my personal biases consciously. Using a

dedicated journal, I consistently documented and reflected on these biases, safeguarding the authenticity of my exploration of participants' experiences.

After each virtual interview, I promptly and accurately transcribed the audio/video recorded dialogues. This step facilitated the crafting of textural descriptions and the engagement with Moustakas' (1994) imaginative variation technique, an avenue to uncover the myriad influences shaping participants' decisions. In parallel, I applied horizontalization, treating each statement with equal reverence, resonating with Saldaña's (2021) in-vivo coding principles. I horizontalized significant statements as I sifted through the data from individual interviews and journal prompts. Then, I used thematic analysis to identify and cluster meaningful statements into thematic categories. During this step, I remained vigilant to the point of data saturation, where the emergence of new themes or insights ceased, as articulated by Patton (2015). These refined clusters, grounded in Moustakas and Creswell and Poth (2018), illuminated non-traditional learners' unique challenges, decisions, and experiences.

Once data saturation was achieved in thematic analysis, I transitioned to organizing virtual focus group sessions. Adhering to Morgan's (1997) guidance, these groups were kept small, ensuring rich, detailed discussions. I anticipated multiple sessions to accommodate all participants. Questions posed during these focus groups evolved based on the insights gleaned from the thematic analysis of interview transcripts and journal prompt responses. Additionally, these focus group sessions acted as another layer to ensure saturation, reaffirming Patton's (2015) principles by ascertaining that no new insights or themes surfaced.

Concluding the research, my emphasis moved toward synthesis. I crafted a structural description capturing the depth of participants' feelings, societal pressures and encountered challenges. This description paved the way for the composite description (Moustakas, 1994), a

synthesized portrayal weaving together individual experiences to present a holistic narrative of their online learning journey. This approach, framed by Creswell & Poth (2018) and enriched by Saldaña (2021), ensured the authentic representation of each participant's lived experience.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was a critical component of any study. Without trustworthiness, the research begins with a flawed assumption, and researchers sometimes discount the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), researchers should address four essential questions regarding trustworthiness. The terms relating to the questions posed by Lincoln and Guba are truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Each of these terms aligned with the naturalistic time defined in this paper. Each element's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability provided additional context to support the trustworthiness of this study.

### **Credibility**

To enhance the trustworthiness of my study, I used a systematic approach that guaranteed the strength of my selected research design. I approached data collection and analysis in an organized way. This organized process helped me accurately determine the research questions and ensured that the chosen methods for collecting data were suitable. This commitment contributed significantly to establishing the overall credibility of the study. In addition, I considered any potential biases in my research and took steps to mitigate these factors.

I used multiple approaches to thoroughly review the data and confirm its accuracy, which improved the reliability of my study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that credibility involves conducting research carefully, leading to interpretations and conclusions that are considered valid and trustworthy by both participants and the wider research community. Additionally, I

built credibility using strategies like member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing, as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Lincoln and Guba. I sought other researchers' input to ensure the research methods and results were dependable.

My plan for member checking enabled me to analyze data and use focus groups and study participants to review the data and the analysis for accuracy and consistency. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe triangulation as using different kinds of information to check research results. I used triangulation to ensure the data was correct and trustworthy. I carefully sorted and grouped the transcribed data into themes and subthemes. These came from interviews, journal entries, and focus group discussions. This way, I fully viewed the research results to see if the phenomenon was real.

### **Transferability**

Transferability, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is about figuring out how the results of a study might be relevant or valuable in situations or with similar groups. It lets other researchers or practitioners decide how much they can apply these findings to their work. Lincoln and Guba also point out that transferability usually depends on the specific context and time of the research. The results of this study will help other researchers determine which findings can be transferred between similar contexts; it is essential to consider the original study's particular circumstances and time frame. Therefore, transferability is generally limited to describing each context. To provide transferability in my study, I used rich descriptions emphasizing depth and context in my research. These detailed descriptions accounted for the research findings while providing interconnected details (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I incorporated maximum variation sampling into my research approach when developing the context of lived experiences from virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups conducted during the



study's data collection step. According to Creswell and Poth, maximum variation sampling consists of determining in advance criteria that differentiate the sites or participants and selecting participants that differ on the criteria. By selecting differing participants from multiple sites, I enriched the contextual descriptions in my study, thus enhancing the potential for transferability. As Lincoln and Guba suggest, transferability is contingent on contextual representation, and maximum variation sampling aligns with this principle by ensuring a comprehensive view of the experiences of non-traditional learners and their time management decisions and the interplay between motivation, orientation, and the need to learn about persistence in various educational settings.

To further ensure the repeatability of this study, I incorporated an audit trail into my research methodology (see Appendix L). An audit trail means keeping a detailed record of every part of the research, including how data is collected, sorted, and understood, as Creswell and Poth (2018) and Nowell et al. (2017) explain. By doing this, I hoped to make my study more reliable and accessible for other researchers to repeat the research in the future. This approach to keeping track of everything aligned with what Lincoln and Guba (1985) said about transferability. It means other people can repeat my study methods in different situations.

### **Dependability**

The need to establish dependable data collection methods and documentation is critical to the validity of this study. Dependability and consistency stem from the fact that instruments must produce long-lasting results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, I carefully documented the methods used in data collection and analysis and any changes made to the methods throughout my study. This approach allowed for transparency, accountability, and replication of this study. As Lincoln and Guba suggested, I selected techniques such as member

checking, peer debriefing, and an audit trail, which involved meticulous documentation of every aspect of the research process, from data collection methods to coding procedures and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017) to increase dependability.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is about whether other people can check and confirm the data from a study. Riazi et al. (2023) noted that in qualitative research, confirmability is critical. It focuses on how verifiable and trustworthy the collected data is. A study that can be replicated gives a clear and detailed description of its methods, including how data is coded and analyzed. This transparency in methodology helps others verify the findings and trust the research. In this qualitative study, I used several strategies to enhance confirmability as I explored the experiences and engagement of non-traditional learners with time management decisions and persistence.

First, combining diverse data collection methods promoted confirmability through data triangulation. These methods encompass in-depth virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. As advocated by Creswell and Poth (2018), this approach allowed for the convergence of insights from multiple sources, reducing the potential for bias while enriching the depth of understanding regarding non-traditional learners' experiences with time management decisions and persistence. Member checking was another component used for confirmability in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend involving participants in the research by having them review and confirm the accuracy of the data collected. This approach, known as member checking, ensured that participants' views were heard and helped verify the study's findings.

Additionally, keeping a detailed audit trail of the research process was essential for ensuring confirmability, as emphasized by Maxwell (2013). The audit trail was intended to

document every step carefully to show that the results were based on the data and methods, not personal biases or motivations. This audit trail involved writing research procedures, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and interpretation processes. The study achieved transparency and consistency by adhering to these documentation procedures, enabling the verification of the research steps.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized obtaining college and university approval before conducting a study. I obtained approvals to adhere to the ethical guidelines outlined by the IRB of Liberty University. I created and followed a process for identifying potential ethical concerns to ensure confidentiality, minimize harm, and maintain ethical data management practices. Before conducting the study, I obtained the participants' written authorization. The ethical principle of informed consent was maintained by giving prospective participants detailed information about the study's goals, methods, possible risks, and benefits. I stressed that participant involvement was vital, and all participants were told their participation was voluntary. Participants were also assured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to. It is imperative to highlight the stringent measures to safeguard participants' identities, ensuring confidentiality. Their data is being used exclusively for analytical purposes, aligning with ethical standards and preserving the trustworthiness of the research process.

In addition, a pseudonymous approach was applied throughout this research's data collection and analysis phases to bolster the protection of participants' privacy and anonymity. Any personal information was removed from research materials like transcripts and observations, and participant identities were anonymous. Data is stored in Microsoft Azure blob storage using full data encryption while the data file is in transit between the cloud platform and while the data

file is stored at rest in the Azure storage account. Azure storage ensured the data was protected and eliminated the need to maintain copies locally on the hardware, thus safely protecting participant data and identifiable information. Azure storage accounts require multi-factor authentication and user accounts to access the stored data files; therefore, only authorized individuals can access persisted research data. I prevented participants' distress, discomfort, or undue anxiety by ensuring the study's design was low risk.

Furthermore, I informed participants of their inability to answer questions that caused discomfort. I used sensitive language in addressing challenging topics to ensure my ethical and responsible approach. Prioritizing the well-being of participants was a crucial aspect of this study. To ensure their safety, I provided enough resources and support participation. Following the IRB guidelines was a top priority, and I was committed to maintaining privacy and confidentiality. Following IRB guidelines helped to create an ethical environment that protected the participants' privacy.

### ***Permissions***

Before collecting participant information from selected sites or personal data from participants, the IRB is used to gain approval (see Appendix C) to allow me to contact selected sites to request access and recruit participants for my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After obtaining IRB approval, I got written permission from the LinkedIn and Facebook administrators to recruit participants for my research (see Appendix D and E). Upon receiving authorization from site administrators, I posted my recruitment materials to solicit participants for the study; each participant signed a digital consent form before gathering personal information and data. This written authorization defined the data protection, retention, and archival policies relating to participant information. The written consent also detailed participants' ability to request access

to their data and how to exit the study. Obtaining permission from the IRB and the participants was essential to this study. Researchers are responsible for taking necessary precautions and acquiring proper authorizations before gathering, accessing, or examining participant data. Providing methods and measures that protect participant data ensures that the information used throughout the study is protected and administered appropriately; this, in turn, contributes to enhancing the overall trustworthiness and reliability of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Summary**

In Chapter Three, I discussed my study's research and design methodology. I explored the experiences of non-traditional learners' and their experiences with time management and persistence. This chapter is the foundation for the study and covers the research questions that guided the study. This chapter covered three data collection methods: virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. I selected a sample size according to Patton (2015) to ensure saturation occurs. The study used thematic analysis, as discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018), to generate composite textural descriptions from the interview transcripts, journal prompt responses, and focus group transcripts. To ensure trustworthiness and rigor, I used member checking to allow focus group participants, peers, and mentors to validate my findings (Trinkley et al., 2023). Chapter Three served as the framework for my study and set the stage for exploring non-traditional learners and their experiences with time management, motivation, and persistence in online education.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. Chapter Four explores the lived experiences of study participants, providing rich descriptions of participants in narrative form. Using horizontalization to extract exact phrases from transcripts and journal responses provided insight that identified three key themes that include (a) Personal Organization and Reflection, (b) Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and (c) Work–Life Balance in Education. This chapter illustrates the themes and subthemes while directly correlating responses to the study's central research question and sub-questions. Additionally, a single outlier was identified and discussed to offer additional support for the study from perspectives outside the study's central research question and supporting sub-questions. The chapter concludes with a summary that highlights the chapter's key insights and sets the stage for the subsequent in-depth discussion in Chapter Five.

### **Participants**

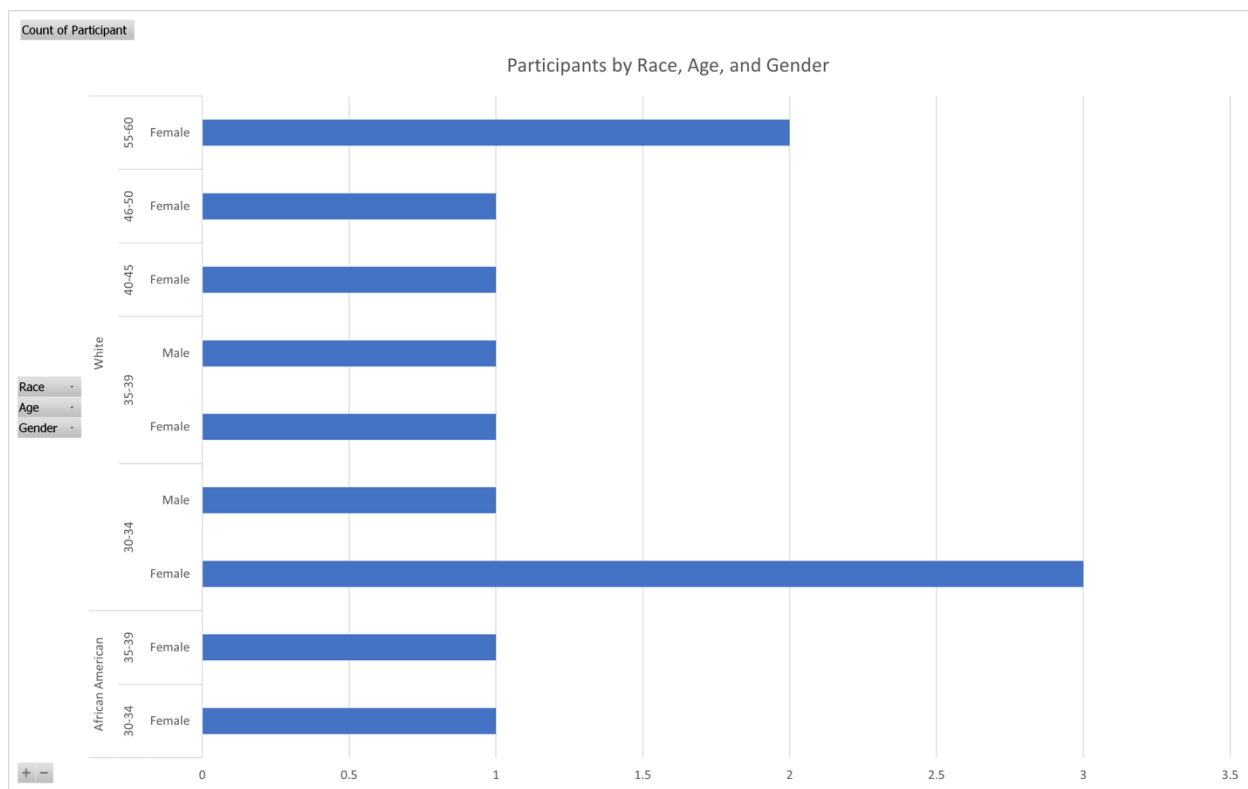
For the study, I recruited 12 participants from two university social media groups, PSU's official online Facebook group and HSU's official alumni LinkedIn group, to ensure access to diverse participants. The participant groups were intentionally varied, comprising both White and African American individuals, including both Male and Female participants who met the criteria of being over 30 and persisting in an online degree program. Demographic details of the participants, including their university affiliation, ethnicity, and gender, are illustrated in Table 5 and are further visualized in Figure 1. The visualizations provide a graphical view of the study's

participants across a variety of characteristics, which include (a) race, (b) gender, (c) age, (d) highest degree, and (e) university.

**Table 5**

*Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Degree	Program	University
Alex	40/45	Female	White	MBA	Juris Doctorate	HSU
Avery	35/39	Female	White	Associate	Interdisciplinary Doctor Studies	PSU
Baily	35/39	Female	Black	Master	Strategic Leadership	HSU
Cameron	30/34	Male	White	High School	Business Admin IT	HSU
Jamie	35/39	Male	White	Master	Doctor Strategic Leadership	PSU
Jordan	30/34	Female	White	Bachelor	Clinical Mental Health/Counseling	PSU
Morgan	30/34	Female	White	Associate	Bachelor Elementary Education	HSU
Parker	55/60	Female	Whited	Master	Ph.D. Education	PSU
Quinn	55/60	Female	White	Associate	Psychology	HSU
Riley	30/34	Female	White	Associate	Business/Data Analysis	PSU
Skyler	30/34	Female	Black	Bachelor	MBA	HSU
Taylor	46/50	Female	White	MBA	Clinical Mental Health/Counseling	PSU

**Figure 1***Participants by Race, Age, and Gender*

Rich descriptions of each participant are presented to narrate their individual experiences and how these experiences relate to the study's focus on time management decisions and persistence.

### **Alex**

Alex is a female between 40 and 45 attending HSU who has demonstrated a commitment to education and career development. With advanced degrees in speech–language pathology and healthcare administration, she currently holds a significant role in compliance for a healthcare company and works part-time as a speech therapist. Alex is pursuing a law degree through an accredited online program to further her education. She registers for 12 credits of classes each



semester while balancing her full-time job with her studies. Early in her childhood, a teacher told her mother that she would never amount to anything. This criticism and judgment only motivated her to succeed and follow in the footsteps of a family member who achieved academic success later in life.

Despite a successful career and rigorous academic schedule, Alex faces the challenge of maintaining a work–life balance. She uses detailed planning methods, such as color-coded calendars, to manage her professional and academic responsibilities effectively. However, this commitment often requires personal sacrifices, including limited time for family, self-care, and social activities. Alex indicated that she uses strategic planning to help navigate the complexities of pursuing personal and professional growth.

### **Avery**

Avery Brook is a female learner between 35 and 39; she blends a robust professional background with a rich personal life. Avery is pursuing a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies at PSU, interweaving IT and health studies, which builds on her two associate degrees. Her educational journey is partly financed by a military offer, underscoring her commitment to leveraging opportunities. With a decade-long IT career, Avery notes that she balances professional, family, full-time work, and military duties. She spoke about her time management skills and strategic use of a planner to organize and orchestrate her many responsibilities.

Additionally, Avery's academic environment at PSU integrates biblical scripture into learning goals. She states she is dedicated to her studies, even in the face of personal challenges, like her daughter's hospitalization and her marathon training.

**Bailey**

Bailey is a female aged 35 to 39 attending HSU, serving as a project manager at a health institute, and the founder of an educational consulting company. After completing a master's in management and strategy, Bailey is pursuing an online doctoral degree in strategic leadership. She works hard to adapt to her field's limited number of doctorate programs. As a parent, Bailey states that she is motivated to demonstrate the importance of education to her children, one of whom is a university freshman and the other a high school junior.

Bailey discussed her journey of balancing advanced education with professional and family responsibilities and indicated that time management helps her persist. Initially, she managed her education without a calendar; however, she now relies on detailed scheduling, which is particularly important as a doctoral student. Bailey uses time blocking and prioritization to juggle work, running a business, and academic studies. Facing challenges like postponing a semester or staying up late for coursework, she remains focused on completing the doctoral program within seven years. Bailey mentioned that she finds the power of education to be transformative, and her belief drives her desire to serve as a positive role model for her children.

**Cameron**

Cameron is male, between 30 and 34, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a focus on Information Technology at HSU. He mentioned that his technical expertise and business acumen complement his role. Cameron's educational journey started with only a high school diploma, and he stated he has successfully forged a distinctive professional path with just a high school diploma. He said he climbed the career ladder through sheer determination, achieving milestones typically associated with higher education. He works for a leading technology corporation and collaborates with a popular philanthropic organization. He

shared his experiences with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and depression and how he navigates the spectrum of neurodiversity; he also discussed his balancing act with work responsibilities, studies, and his personal life.

In addition, he stated that to persist, he must remain self-aware and use visual organizational tools. His intellectual curiosity extends beyond his immediate environment, delving into environmental changes, business trends, and human relations.

### **Jamie**

Jamie is a male between 30 and 34 currently working as a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the healthcare management industry. Despite obtaining a bachelor's degree in accounting, he seeks knowledge and personal growth. As a result, Jamie is currently pursuing his doctorate from PSU to enhance his understanding and expertise further. Jamie mentioned that professional and personal motivations are his main drivers. He sees himself as a lifelong learner dedicated to learning a skill, and he is passionate about sharing this with his family, especially his daughter, who is also pursuing higher education. He opted for online education because of its flexible nature. Jamie balances his work, family, and academic roles by carefully planning and prioritizing work, family, and school activities using time management strategies. He often dedicates late nights to his studies to ensure his academic goals are consistent with his professional and family duties.

### **Jordan**

Jordan is a female between 30 and 34 who balances her roles as an IT professional, student, mother, and wife. Her daily life involves working full-time in the IT department of a law enforcement facility while pursuing a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from PSU. On top of education and work, she navigates the responsibilities of raising two young

daughters and being a partner to her husband. Her academic background includes two associate degrees, highlighting her dedication to continuous learning. Jordan desires to transition to counseling to advance her growth and positively impact others, a choice inspired by her life's journey and her goal to be a robust role model for her children.

Jordan stated that managing such a busy life requires strong time management skills. Her experiences in demanding roles have shaped her ability to balance high-stakes tasks and education effectively. She uses a mix of digital tools and traditional methods to stay organized. Jordan's story, however, is more than about managing a busy schedule or academic achievements; as she mentioned, her educational story is about personal growth. Facing challenges head-on, such as returning to work shortly after her second child's birth, she remains steadfast in her goals.

### **Morgan**

Morgan is a female between 30 and 34 years old and is committed to her educational journey. She currently works as an emergency substitute teacher while pursuing a higher degree through online learning, a mode she selected for flexibility and her past positive experiences. Morgan holds an associate degree in elementary education and is striving to complete her bachelor's degree from HSU, a journey that started in 2018. A personal goal drives this commitment to education to become a fully qualified teacher, as well as the encouragement of her employer, who supports her academic progress.

Managing time effectively has been challenging for Morgan, who admits to struggling with online learning and time management. Initially, she experienced more success, but over time, she found it increasingly difficult to stay on track, especially when facing setbacks like not passing exams. Her struggle with class, grades, and time management has led to consequences

such as losing financial aid and needing to self-fund her education. Morgan typically studies during breaks at work and on weekends, often using tools like Quizlet. Despite the challenges, she stated she anticipates completing her degree in 2024.

### **Parker**

Parker is a female learner between the ages of 55 and 60 PSU. Currently pursuing her doctoral degree in Leadership and Higher Education, Parker's journey combines rich professional experience and academic rigor. Her career, rooted in education, spans multiple roles, from teaching to serving as an administrator in K–12 education, focusing on special education. Presently, she represents the college as the Director of Accessibility Services. Parker has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, where she specialized as a reading specialist and in educational leadership.

Parker mentioned that she has developed an ability to juggle her intensive doctoral studies with a full-fledged career. Despite encountering personal challenges, including health issues and family responsibilities, she focuses on her goals. She discussed her strategic use of tools like the Outlook calendar, Microsoft Teams, and written notes, which she uses to plan her daily activities, ensuring a delicate balance between her professional duties and academic commitments.

### **Quinn**

Quinn is a female between 55 and 60 who demonstrates resilience and dedication. With aspirations to become an LPC, Quinn aims to earn her bachelor's degree in psychology and a counseling minor. Coming off as determined as ever since completing her associate degree, Quinn has her heart set on graduating from HSU in 2024. Nevertheless, she is not stopping at just her bachelor's. She mentioned that she has big ideas for her education and will proceed to

her master's. Quinn's educational journey is a balancing act. Juggling family life with her role as co-founder of a non-profit, she is committed to supporting women facing domestic challenges. Being a mother of five and grandmother is no obstacle to her dedication to her organization's cause, which matches her education.

Moreover, adapting to the demands of a large family and running a non-profit, Quinn has embraced online learning, fitting her studies into her busy schedule. Her approach to education is both proactive and disciplined. With her computer in tow, she constantly moves, seizing every opportunity to study. This disciplined approach shows her determination to overcome procrastination and stay focused on her educational goals. Quinn's dedication to her family and community shines through her concerns about balancing time with her grandchildren and studies. Nonetheless, her motivation and determination keep her on track toward achieving her dream of earning a degree and becoming an LPC.

### **Riley**

Riley is a female between 30 and 34, a dedicated single mother of two, and a former military veteran who demonstrates resilience and adaptability despite life's unpredictable challenges. Her separation from the military marks her educational journey. Upon leaving the military, she began earning her bachelor's degree in business administration from PSU. She stated that earning her bachelor's degree is the cornerstone for this chapter of her life. After serving eight years in the military and encountering early career setbacks, she recognized the importance of formal education. Initially, she completed an associate degree over four years, marked by challenges and a determination to succeed. However, she soon realized her associate degree limited her career progression, and she decided to further her education. Her commitment

to education requires motivation, given her responsibilities as a single parent and her reliance on veterans' benefits, which she views as obtaining her bachelor's degree without high risk.

She prioritizes tasks based on immediate necessity and potential opportunities, applying this mindset to her studies. Her experiences with PTSD, following personal challenges, add a layer of complexity to her educational pursuits. Despite these challenges, she is committed to her education, viewing it as a positive way to utilize her time. Her desire to continue her education has been instrumental in her recovery and reinforces her dedication to her children and personal growth.

### **Skyler**

Skyler is a female between 30 and 34 and a first-generation college graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management, currently pursuing an MBA from HSU. Initially drawn to criminal justice inspired by crime shows, she soon realized her true calling lay elsewhere, and she switched to psychology before settling on business. This journey reflects Skyler's evolving understanding of how best to help people. Skyler has been an entrepreneur since age 13, engaging in assorted ventures like styling hair, babysitting, and even selling lemonade. She works full-time for an employment and labor law firm, handling business and contractual issues. She aspires to move into law with a focus on business while hoping to support new business owners and large corporations and be a resource across various industries.

Her mother serves as a motivational influence on her commitment to education. Skyler stated that her mother sacrificed everything for her family, which drove Skyler's desire to be a positive role model for her younger family members. Managing time is crucial for Skyler, and good time management skills enable her to juggle work, run a company, and study. She prioritizes reading and understanding course materials thoroughly, often setting personal

deadlines ahead of actual ones and using logical strategies to manage tasks. Despite challenges like financial constraints and balancing time with loved ones, Skyler remains dedicated to her studies, seeing education as a tool for personal and professional growth.

### **Taylor**

Taylor is a woman between the ages of 46 and 50. She had worked in the corporate world for over 25 years before changing direction to earn her degree in counseling from PSU. Her professional path had a profound effect on Taylor's physical and emotional welfare.

Consequently, she decided to transition away from the corporate arena, following her passion for counseling. Her faith and family provided the support she needed to make this career change.

Equipped with an MBA and a background in psychology from her undergraduate studies, Taylor reached a defining moment through self-reflection and spiritual guidance, marking the beginning of her new journey. Her narrative goes beyond academics, venturing into self-discovery and resilience. Before stepping into her role as a counselor, Taylor faced personal challenges.

Balancing her counseling studies with a demanding job and family life, including parenting two children, Taylor demonstrates good time management and organizational skills. Perseverance, practicality, and self-awareness guide the approach she takes in her counseling program.

Moreover, she employs a systematic strategy of setting objectives, prioritizing tasks, and methodically tackling them. However, Taylor's story extends beyond a mere career change. Taylor indicated that her career change represents a quest for more profound meaning and purpose. Her transition from the intense corporate world to the field of counseling underscores her desire for a life that is not just successful but also rewarding.



## Results

I conducted virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups to gather participant data for analysis. The data was analyzed using horizontalization to maintain the true essence of the participant's responses. The extracted phrases were organized into themes and further categorized into subthemes. During the virtual interviews, journal prompt responses, and focus groups, participants shared their experiences with time management decisions and how their approaches to time management helped them remain motivated to persist in their online degree programs. From the data analysis, three themes emerged: Personal Organization and Reflection, Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and Work–life Balance in Education. Each theme was supported by subthemes uncovered during clustering and reduction of phrases extracted from the gathered data (see Table 6). Participants shared their experiences and how their experiences with time management decisions positively and negatively influenced their ability to persist in their online programs.

**Table 6**

*Themes & Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges Family and Personal Life Prioritizing Tasks Time Management Tools
Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning Personal Development and Schedule Management Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation Challenges in Education, Work, and Life
Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling Balancing School and Work Priorities Time Management and Personal Organization

## **Personal Organization and Reflection**

In online education, non-traditional learners face complex challenges relating to their personal and professional responsibilities. Participants in this study indicated that organization and self-reflection were necessary to persist in their online degree programs. They engaged in a balancing act between their academic pursuits, personal life, work life, and self-care. This theme underscores the role that self-discipline and thoughtful planning play in the success of non-traditional learners navigating online programs. It highlights how deliberate self-reflection on time management decisions fosters a structured approach to learning and contributes to persistence and achievement in the face of challenges. Jamie indicated that “Allocating time for learning can be a challenge and requires a degree of discipline. For me, the most impactful way to accomplish all I want to accomplish is by blocking time on my calendar.” This balancing act is accomplished through thoughtful organization and reflection on their organizational strategies and established priorities. During horizontalization and clustering, I identified 106 significant statements aligned with the theme (see Appendix M). Out of the final 333 horizontalized phrases extracted from the study data, this represented 32% of phrases. Additionally, all participants provided responses that directly supported the theme. As indicated by participants, the need for organization and reflection was critical to their persistence. The need for time management skills played a significant role in their ability to remain motivated to persist, and this is represented in the scale of phrases extracted during analysis. During the interviews and focus group sessions, Bailey added, “Time management is everything; I’m super dependent on my calendar because I have to use time blocks to really get things done.” Avery supported this thread during her interview by commenting that:

Time management is a big thing. I used this planner; I just go through every module and write down when things are due so I can look at my calendar and plan out when I will do certain things you know and not forget them either.

Four subthemes are forecasted to include within this theme: (a) Adapting to Academic Challenges, focusing on the modification of study habits, adjusting to online education, and time blocking; (b) Balancing Family and Personal Life, emphasizing intentional scheduling to help manage educational pursuits with family and personal time; (c) Prioritizing Tasks, highlighting strategic planning to manage academic, personal, and professional responsibilities efficiently; and (d) Utilizing Time Management Tools, highlighting the use of calendars, planners, and digital tools to help organize and track tasks and commitments. Moving from the broader theme of Personal Organization and Reflection, one must explore the Adapting to Academic Challenges subtheme, emphasizing tailored study habits and strategic breaks.

### *Adapting to Academic Challenges*

Non-traditional learners need help managing their time and the workload of online academics. These learners understand the importance of planning, prioritizing tasks, and making sacrifices in their personal lives to meet their academic goals. In her interview, Parker stated, “You really have to manage your time because. It can really sneak up on you if something comes up and you don't work on your assignments.” However, they also understand that along with the challenges of school and external commitments, these strategies often involve restructuring study habits to address challenges with their persistence and productivity to ensure they can remain engaged in their studies. Morgan is an excellent example of adapting study habits when she mentions: “I do little things like a little brain break, I work for a couple maybe like an hour or so, and then I'll like to do something I enjoy and then get back to work.” In addition, these learners

indicated that remaining motivated to complete their degrees is a consistent challenge in their day-to-day educational routines. Four of the 12 participants showed in their journal prompts and focus groups that they use strategies that include setting small achievable goals, taking short breaks, blocking out time, and developing a planner to help them maintain their momentum and motivation. Jamie also supported this during the focus group: “You’ve gotta use your calendar. You gotta make sure you block time.”

Furthermore, the constant balancing act between academic responsibilities and commitments like family, financial, and social activities introduce additional challenges that influence their motivation and persistence. To overcome the challenges, they indicated they developed personal strategies that helped them make wise time management decisions to help them persist. Parker highlighted this when she stated, “I try to put in the time almost like an appointment. To reserve it,” and Taylor adds to this when she mentions, “I have to remember to plan things out, or you’re just going to get lost in the shuffle.” While adapting to academic challenges is critical to organization and reflection, managing family and personal life is equally important.

### ***Family and Personal Life***

Family and personal commitments were deeply ingrained in the study data and were found in the interviews, journal prompts, and focus group sessions. Participants' responses indicated that balancing academics with external commitments and personal time requires constant vigil. In her journal responses and interview, Taylor mentioned, “My kids are in school in the day. So, I try so hard to get things done.” In the focus groups, Riley and Parker expressed the need to be diligent and intentional in the scheduling to ensure their family life, including time with spouses, children, friends, and family, did not suffer due to their educational goals. Many

participants indicated they struggled with managing their time, the guilt of not being present, and the sacrifices they needed to make, such as giving up hobbies or caring for family members to complete their education. Avery responded:

Having a full-time job and a family, I use a different color for each of us for our activities. However, I still make time for physical activity, which usually runs 4–5 days a week. Running is a big part of my life for relieving stress in a healthy way.

Furthermore, participants noted the influence their roles as family members and role models have on their education. Jordan emphasized the importance of being a role model and her ambition for a change in her career when she stated, “I need a more growth career; I have picked a new career where I could grow, and then like being an example for my kids.” Bailey also mentions her role as a mother as a motivator for her, “My biggest motivation is to earn my doctorate; I have two daughters, and I want to set a perfect example for them.” These quotes illustrate the personal incentives that drive participants to persist through their educational challenges of balancing school with work and family life. Family and personal factors are significant factors that influence non-traditional learners, and prioritizing tasks becomes a critical skill.

### ***Prioritizing Tasks***

To succeed as a non-traditional learner in online education, most of the study participants reflected on their ability to strategize and reflect on balancing their academic responsibilities with their personal and professional lives, highlighting the importance of organizing and prioritizing tasks. The essence of this subtheme is the conscious effort to organize and prioritize tasks to ensure successful academic outcomes without neglecting other aspects of life. One common approach highlighted was to dedicate specific time to academic work. Morgan stated, “I

think what I usually do is during the day I work on my schoolwork, and then at night I hang out with my friends and my family,” her approach demonstrates a deliberate separation of the day for work and evening for personal time.

Others, like Taylor and Parker, discussed in their journal prompts and the focus group that deciding when to focus on different tasks and keeping their motivation aligned with their goals helped keep them motivated. Taylor supported this when she stated in her interview, “I just have to figure out which pockets I'm gonna fit it in,” indicating a strategy of finding the right moments for each task. Several participants touched on the need for strict time management, like Bailey, who mentioned using a calendar and time blocking to maintain persistence. Avery also expressed the financial motivation behind prioritization: “I think no one wants to fail a class, especially when you're paying for it.” Prioritizing tasks often requires more than simple determination. Often the need for supporting elements like calendars, whiteboards, and notebooks are necessary tools used by non-traditional learners.

### ***Time Management Tools***

Tools to help organize academic activities are apparent throughout the horizontalization phrases extracted from the interviews, focus groups, and journal responses. Participants shared that they use various tools to manage their time while juggling multiple responsibilities. Using different tools and techniques to create structure and order is foundational to success. Various tools helped the participants to track tasks, deadlines, and personal commitments. Taylor used a written notebook to list and cross off tasks, providing a sense of accomplishment and visible progress. Four of the 12 participants found that calendars, whiteboards, visualization, and notebooks helped them manage their courses. Cameron mentioned during the second focus group that “visualizing tasks and deadlines on a whiteboard enhances my focus.” For many of these

learners, technology plays a significant role, and learners like Jordan, who combined Google Calendar with reminders on her phone, and Bailey and Cameron, who have transitioned from a technology-based system to whiteboards and checklists-based approaches. Quinn continues this thread in her journal response: "I keep a calendar to plan my work, school, and family events."

Moreover, five of the 12 participants responded in their journal responses that calendars, notebooks, and whiteboards help them manage their time efficiently. Parker and Bailey highlighted the importance of calendars to block out time for specific tasks, indicating a need for a visual representation of their time allocation to avoid conflicts and overlaps. Avery highlighted her use of traditional and digital planners to help her keep track of assignments and deadlines. This is further supported when Taylor responded during the focus group session, "Each week's tasks are written out and tracked meticulously, and there is a need for a tangible system to manage time effectively." Alex provided additional support when she offered insight during the focus group about using "a color-coded outlook calendar" and technology like "Do Not Disturb" on her phone, which helps her maintain focus during study time. From exploring Time Management Tools, we move into a broader theme of Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, where non-traditional learners must confront the complexities and obstacles faced in effectively orchestrating their daily lives and education.

### **Time Management Challenges and Scheduling**

Challenges with time management were found throughout the study data. Many participants indicated that their time management practices have evolved since they started their online programs. Participants openly shared their experiences with time management and their approaches to scheduling. Morgan shared, "That one's really hard because I honestly struggle with this online learning, and sometimes, I just don't find the time to do it." Data analyzed from

the interviews, journal responses, and focus group sessions revolved around life events like motherhood, poverty, mental health, and personal trauma. These events did not alter how they dealt with time management challenges but motivated their need to address them through scheduling. Cameron has ADHD, and he indicated that:

It's especially difficult in a remote environment where. It's just you. I'm sure that other students probably have a support network, and for a while, I did. I don't right now, so I'm the only one that says when to study, and you know how long or how hard or how distracted during that study time I can or can't be.

Their responses highlighted that self-motivation is crucial in meeting challenges with time management, and scheduling helps with their ability to persist in their online programs. During horizontalization, 89 phrases aligned with the theme, and all participants offered responses that directly aligned with the theme's essence (see Appendix N). The responses represented 27% of the horizontalization phrases, and participants felt that addressing time management challenges through scheduling and motivation contributed to their overall success. Bailey, Jamie, and Skyler highlighted the practical implications of scheduling during the focus group sessions by discussing how personal circumstances compel learners to adopt and refine their time management and scheduling strategies to succeed in their education.

Bailey mentioned that "I allocate time by putting blocks on my calendar; it is hard to plan when I have so many competing priorities unless I use a calendar," Skyler added, "There have been countless instances where I needed to adapt, most notable for several months I cared for my elderly godmother, and I have begun working a part-time job in addition to my full-time job." Jamie mentioned, "Scheduling and blocking time and being dedicated to what you're doing is necessary to be disciplined enough to say, OK, I've got to spend time doing this."



For the theme of Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, the following subthemes are forecasted: (a) Academic Challenges and Planning, emphasizing the struggle of managing time in self-directed learning environments and the need for effective planning and visual tools to balance academic and external responsibilities; (b) Personal Development and Schedule Management, highlighting the importance of scheduling for personal and professional growth while balancing educational goals; (c) Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation, addressing the specific challenges related to motivation and the struggles of online learners; and (d) Challenges in Education, Work, and Life, revealing the complex connections between managing family, work, and education, and the need for strategies to navigate these challenges. Time management and scheduling challenges represent the overarching theme; however, one subtheme of this theme is the challenges with school and planning. Let's explore the subtheme Academic Challenges and Planning, addressing the specific hurdles and strategies in navigating academic tasks and objectives.

### ***Academic Challenges and Planning***

With the overarching theme of time management and scheduling, participants expressed that managing time effectively in a self-directed learning environment is a constant struggle.

Avery captures the essence of this struggle when she mentions this dilemma:

A lot because I have a family. I have two kids. I work full-time. Time management is a big thing. If I didn't use this planner, and like I said, Well I wrote it in my journal entry for you was that as soon as the class begins, I just go through every module and write down when things are due so I can look at my calendar and plan out when I will do certain things you know and not forget them either.

Finding time to focus on academics while managing external responsibilities is a recurring challenge among each participant. Taylor outlines the relentless academic pace: “I have quizzes almost every week, and typically papers in each class.”

In addition, the intense pace of online learning programs and the lack of solid time management skills present challenges, and many of the learners indicated that procrastination and sincere work outside of education only add to the difficulties of self-directed learning. Riley said that planning and time management skills are critical in this environment when she stated that they moved from “very stringent” planning to approaches that are more flexible and accepting of making changes. Alex evolved her organization strategy from handwritten schedules to a whiteboard system, which highlighted the necessity of visual tools to track, manage, and plan for external and educational commitments. To address the challenges with time management and planning, it is necessary to understand how Personal Development and Schedule Management saw their evolution of personal growth through effective time allocation and self-management strategies.

### ***Personal Development and Schedule Management***

The participants’ responses highlighted their need to balance educational goals with their personal and professional lives. Scheduling time for personal growth through online programs is a common thread mentioned by many of the participants. Each saw their education as a way to expand their capabilities personally and professionally; however, many also felt that schedule management was necessary to succeed. Morgan emphasized the importance of a consistent study plan: “My study plan, I work on it every day.” In the focus group, Taylor revealed the urgency of task management: “I’ve gotta get this done now. I’m not gonna have time later.”

Furthermore, Jordan mentioned in her journal response and interview that her newborn's arrival prompted her to adjust her study routine to find more freedom to do schoolwork during the day. Changing schedules was one element of their approach to scheduling; however, many even found that they needed a schedule to meet their program requirements to keep from negatively impacting their ability to grow professionally and personally. Cameron initially relied on technology to organize and schedule his tasks but quickly realized that without structured time management, his productivity suffered: "Without a structured time management approach, I didn't get any work done." Parker and her husband are both working to complete online programs, and they each support each other's academic pursuits, dedicating Thursdays to work on their studies together. The ability to prioritize and sacrifice is common, and Riley spoke to the necessity of prioritizing commitments when she stated: "Priorities always come first, unfortunately, and not my education." While Alex approached scheduling from a different perspective, "Making time for my spouse and myself, not just school or work," shows the importance of balancing personal and professional growth using scheduling and straightforward communication to prioritize what is necessary to persist and grow. However, scheduling doesn't solve struggles with motivation in an online environment. Many participants struggled to remain motivated in their programs and stay engaged.

### ***Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation***

Participants were able to describe the struggles they face with online learning and motivation. Many of the participants who struggle with online learning mentioned struggles with ADHD. Two of the 12 participants found that their ADHD added to their struggles with motivation and time management. Morgan stated, "I worked with my school to receive ADA

accommodations that allowed longer testing times.” Cameron found that his ADHD influences the way he studies when he stated:

Brutal honesty with the way that my brain works. Uh, it's a cycle. It's an unfortunate cycle of procrastination followed by a binge. When I'm under deadline pressure, I enter a phase of intense, exhaustive, hyper-focused ADHD work, you know, which is, you know, fairly unsustainable.

In some way, every participant struggled with online learning and motivation, and each found strategies to address these struggles. They also found that their motivation was influenced when the struggles were not adequately managed. Avery expressed, “Like I said in a previous question is that things have to give,” this highlights that sacrifices are often needed to manage schoolwork. Struggles with balancing education with personal life are echoed by Parker, who manages guilt and familial responsibilities by setting specific study goals, “that’s another reason why I like to be at a certain point by Friday.” These quotes reflect the need to adapt and prioritize to address educational struggles and motivation in an online learning environment. The struggles these learners shared with their online learning reflect their academic, work, and personal life challenges. This leads to the exploration of the next subtheme.

### ***Challenges in Education, Work, and Life***

The responses provided by participants revealed the intricate balancing act of time management in work, life, and education. All the participants expressed that the challenges they face are significant, especially when pursuing higher education. Taylor mentioned in the focus group and her interview that the structure of her day represents a significant challenge, “I wake up early naturally, then I get breakfast ready for my sons, after that I work out, shower, and then study. I do it in blocks based on my schedule for the week.” Managing family, friends, work, and

education adds complexity to their lives and introduces challenges that must be addressed to persist. Prioritization becomes a critical element of their ability to address the challenges of life, as discussed by Jordan when she stated in her interview that: “I typically prioritize my day by importance, then I decide where schoolwork fits into that,” Cameron supported this when he mentioned that he requires a tailored approach to time management to address these challenges when he states that as “a non-traditional learner and a neurodiverse person,” he further said that he must “add chunks of time to my personal calendar.”

Moreover, time management is a technique each participant uses to manage the challenges and complexities of persisting in online learning. Avery and Jamie noted in their journal responses that organizational strategies help them address challenges and stay on track. Jamie mentioned in the focus group that “scheduling and blocking time, and being dedicated to what you’re doing is necessary to be disciplined enough to say, OK, I’ve got to spend time doing this.” With the understanding of the challenges in education, work, and life, let’s explore how work–life balance and education intersect to shape our daily experiences and overall well-being.

### **Work–Life Balance in Education**

Participants highlighted that the right balance between work, life, and education was critical for their well-being. All participants shared that striving to harmonize their academics with their personal and professional responsibilities is essential to their ability to persist in their online programs. The essence of this theme is the participant’s detailed structuring of their day-to-day lives and their use of tools such as color-coded whiteboards, calendars, notebooks, and planners to manage the time they dedicate to work, family, friends, and school. Of the 333 final phrases, 138 supported the theme, representing 41% of the analyzed phrases (see Appendix O).

All participants offered responses aligned with the theme and provided insight into the theme's essence. Taylor mentioned during her interview that:

I wake up early naturally, and I work on balancing each day's requirements. My studies were a way of being rewarded for good performance, and I threw myself into my studies and did well in school.

Skyler, in her journal response, further supported the essence of the theme when she stated:

My family grew up in poverty, and as the youngest child, I failed a great deal of responsibility to excel and achieve in any and everything I could to positively change the course for our family's lineage. I also lost an ex-husband and sister who, like my mother, were very encouraging and supportive and believed that I could achieve anything. It is my forever commitment to prove them right.

Furthermore, work–life balance is a component that drives these learners to succeed. Their ability to persist in their programs demands that their lives are balanced, and the flexible nature of online learning supports their ability to survive. Jordan defended this theme by saying, “I have a newborn and a three-year-old. I work full-time too, so I prioritize my day by importance, then decide where school and work fit into that.” Another participant, Quinn, elaborated in her journal response:

My husband is retired, and my job is part-time. We maintain this flexibility so that we can travel. Since beginning my online classes, I have had to start taking a hotspot; that way, I can work on my schoolwork in the car while traveling. I take my computer everywhere that I go. He also has been battling cancer for the last year. He is cancer-free now! He still has treatments. He has a doctor's visit this morning. So, I am bringing my

computer and working on school while I wait for him. It is a blessing to have the flexibility of online schooling.

Work–life balance and education are critical to the overall success of these learners, and their shared experiences highlight that the ability to maintain a good balance between their personal lives and their educational pursuits is necessary. They can keep motivated to persist in their degree programs when there is a good balance.

Finally, for the theme of Work–life Balance and Education, three subthemes are forecasted:(a) Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling, highlighting how learners leverage the flexibility of online education to balance their studies with personal and professional commitments and schedules; (b) Balancing School and Work Priorities, showing how learners strategically allocate their time between professional commitments, school, and personal motivations; and (c) Time Management and Personal Organization, focusing on the challenges and strategies of managing time effectively, particularly in the context of online learning. Understanding how work, life, and education experiences influenced these non-traditional learners is critical to understanding their motivation and desire to persist. However, just understanding how they balance these elements leads to a need to know how these learners adapt to online learning and how schedule flexibility helps them succeed.

### ***Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling***

This subtheme reflects participants’ shared experiences balancing educational pursuits with external commitments like family, friends, work, and social. The significance of online learning is highlighted by Morgan, who stated that she chose online learning for its flexibility, noting, “I chose online learning because I thought it would be easier for me in my schedule with work and everything.” The ability of learners to adapt to online learning demands through

flexible scheduling is represented across nearly all participants. Participants highlighted in their journal responses, focus groups, and interviews that adaptability and adjusting their schedules to meet their commitments are crucial elements in their ability to persist. Morgan mentioned in her journal response that:

Instances that required adjustments were two parts. The first is just shifting my attitude and motivation for online learning. Being on a schedule that isn't as strict as attending in person classes requires more dedication because the time for coursework has to be made by me. I had to adapt my schedule to allow for more time to complete assignments and to study for assessments. I also have ADHD and found completing timed tests was difficult for me. I worked with my school to receive ADA accommodations that allowed for longer testing times. This improved my ability to complete assessments in a less stressful environment in which I was competing against the effects ADHD has on my schoolwork.

Jamie elaborated in the focus group, "Allocating time for learning can be a challenge, but with online learning, I can fit it into my schedule however it works best for me." This ability to adapt their online learning to fit into their schedules is further supported by Cameron when he stated in his interview that "transitions have been the constant backdrop of my education; online learning has allowed me to stay in school no matter where I am." Adaptability and flexible scheduling enabled self-directed learners in online learning programs to remain motivated to persist, and further analysis of the data revealed that balancing school and work priorities is another element these learners view as a key to their success.

### ***Balancing School and Work Priorities***

Participants reveal a common thread of strategic time allocation and personal motivation in managing their work and school commitments. Morgan mentions, "I work a full-time job, so



most of my day is spent there. However, when a class has a larger amount of coursework, my after-work time shifts to completing that.” Morgan’s approach to managing her work and school priorities highlights the need to adapt to the changing demands of online education. Taylor echoed Morgan’s sentiment:

I’m also doing substitute teaching; next week should be lighter. So, I’ve already signed up for some days, but that pushes me like I can’t slow down. I’ve got to get ready so that I don’t fall behind since I need to make money next week,

highlighting the balancing act of meeting professional and academic demands.

Moreover, the need to balance school and work often influences these learners to focus on their ability to balance work and school and set priorities. Parker indicated that setting priorities can sometimes be forced upon them when she stated:

I think it kind of made me have to do it because this particular like beginning the dissertation course, I felt like was really hard on me as a time manager because it's not as structured and it was relying on me to do that.

Prioritizing and balancing work and educational commitments is also seen in Jamie’s response in his interview when he discussed, “My job often requires me to attend events, board meetings, etc., after normal business hours; I chose not to attend because I had to work on my final that was due the following Friday.” As revealed in the data, the need to prioritize educational commitments with work sets the stage for the next area related to time management and personal organization.

### ***Time Management and Personal Organization***

Establishing priorities about school and work is one component non-traditional learners use to succeed; however, solid time management and personal organization are other crucial

components the participants discussed during interviews. Many participants shared that time management and personal organization help them to persist in their online learning. Morgan admits that she tends to fluctuate in efficiency with time management, “I think it’s gone a little bit more downhill since I first started; I probably should work on time management a little bit more,” this indicates the complex and sometimes challenging journey of personal organization that non-traditional learners face when attending online programs. Cameron elaborated in his journal response and the focus group, “Time management is critical, especially when you have other commitments; I have to be very structured with my day.” Jordan supported this when she stated, “It will not happen successfully if I don’t manage my time; I have to be very disciplined,” these experiences may indicate that learners feel there is a need for a solid approach to time management to remain motivated to persist.

Two participants also shared that integrating academic responsibilities with personal life is a balance they seek to achieve. Quinn noted, “I schedule out my work and my school to ensure I have enough time for both.” Riley added to this by saying, “What’s the most important like I use a hierarchy of needs if my family needs me, they’re gonna come first. But then school and work are right there.” These quotes highlight the effort necessary to balance education and personal relationships, thus driving the need to be adaptive to challenges with time management, organization, motivation, and persistence. The data revealed that good time management decisions are necessary elements in the success of these non-traditional learners; however, there were data elements in the study that fell outside the area of time management and persistence. One such outlier is discussed in the next section.

## **Outlier Data and Findings**

Many participants in this study shared similar experiences, like being single parents, veterans, full-time professionals, and those looking for career change. The participants shared that they turned to online education to balance their educational pursuits with external commitments. Despite their diverse backgrounds, these participants shared that the adaptability and flexibility of online learning enables them to pursue personal and professional growth without the time demands of traditional classrooms. Though the reason non-traditional learners approach online learning was consistent across most participants, Cameron offered a different reason for starting his journey with online learning. Cameron initially moved towards online education because of external challenges unrelated to motivation, career growth, or a passion for lifelong learning.

Cameron offered a unique motivation to obtain his degree. Cameron stated in his interview that his motivation to seek a degree using online education resulted from a challenge his father offered. Cameron spoke intensely about this challenge when he noted: “Honestly, this is a strange reason, but my dad, my father, offered a \$20 pure gold coin for any child who graduates. That's the original motivation.” Cameron’s motivation to obtain an online degree fell well outside the shared experiences of the other participants. Though ultimately, he found other reasons to be motivated to earn a degree, the original motivation was an outlier among the other analyzed data. Cameron’s motivation shifted from being driven by the \$20 gold coin to one of personal growth, and this is evident when he stated:

Generally you make a life of starters but not finishers so. I want to be one of the finishers, and you know that maybe you change from being motivated for career growth, and maybe that change is becoming more personal growth, you know, growth from within.

## **Research Question Responses**

The study was designed to explore a central research question targeting persistent non-traditional online learners' shared time management experiences and two sub-questions. This section provides direct and to-the-point answers to the main research question and the two sub-questions. The answers to the questions are based on the study data results and detailed in previous sections of the chapter. This chapter highlights the study's findings and enables the discussion of further study analysis in Chapter Five.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the shared time management experiences of persistent non-traditional online students over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States?

Multiple themes and subthemes answered the question about non-traditional learners' shared time management experiences. Two specific themes addressed the question: Personal Organization and Reflection and Time Management Challenges and Scheduling. The subthemes that stood out were Adapting to Academic Challenges and Balancing Family and Personal Life. As noted earlier, Jamie indicated, "Allocating time for learning can be challenging and requires a degree of discipline. For me, the most impactful way to accomplish all I want to accomplish is by blocking time on my calendar." Parker continued this as demonstrated in Adapting to Academic Challenges, noting, "You really have to manage your time because. It can really sneak up on you if something comes up and you don't work on your assignments." The shared time management experiences are prevalent across these themes and subthemes.

Moreover, to further demonstrate the criticality of time management in online program success, Taylor noted in her journal response, "I keep track of what I have due for the week for school on a weekly written list in my notebook." Time management among these learners is

prevalent across all aspects of their online learning. Though not unique, their strategies and techniques influence their ability to remain motivated to persist. In her interview, Quinn commented:

I keep a calendar to plan my work, school, and family events. My life has become very structured. My personality is flexible, so it has been challenging to become more intentional with every day. I do not have much room for friends, and when I make a plan, it has to be on my calendar.

Her ability to manage complex life events and educational goals is shared among most participants in various ways; however, each participant consistently mentions that a disciplined time management strategy enabled them to persist in their online education. The participants shared that time management plays a significant role in their success, and the flexibility of online programs helps them balance their educational requirements with their personal, familial, and professional responsibilities. Alex's experiences were representative of the participants in the study when she mentioned:

You have to identify at the beginning how much time you have and want to dedicate to the process and then work within that means. If I weren't managing my time, my full-time job would struggle, as well as my coursework.

### **Sub-Question One**

What challenges do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States experience with time management decisions while persisting in online degree programs?

Two themes answered this sub-question—Time Management Challenges and Scheduling and Work–life Balance and Education. Multiple subthemes provided insight to support the

conclusion of this question. These subthemes were Adapting to Academic Challenges, Prioritizing Tasks, Academic Challenges and Planning, and Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation. The participants reflected on the challenges they faced when attending online programs. Balancing the demands of family, work, and studies forced them to constantly adjust their daily schedules to accommodate unexpected work deadlines and family emergencies.

Morgan's experiences reflected other participants' challenges when she stated

I struggle with this online learning; sometimes, I just don't find time to do it. It's really a struggle for me to make time to actually do it. I feel like I don't put school as a top priority, and I'll just take my time with it, but I need to realize there are still end dates

Furthermore, Cameron mentioned that he struggles with ADHD just as Morgan does and that "It's an unfortunate cycle of procrastination followed by a binge. When I'm under deadline pressure, I enter a phase of intense, exhaustive, hyper-focused ADHD work, you know, which is, you know, fairly unsustainable." These struggles and family, work, and education challenges significantly influenced the participant's persistence. Parker and Alex highlighted how these challenges influenced their learning and persistence. Parker stated, "She and her husband are working on completing online programs, and they each support each other's academic pursuits, dedicating Thursdays to work on their studies together." Alex approached scheduling from a different perspective, "Making time for my spouse and myself, not just school or work," shows the importance of balancing personal and professional growth using scheduling and straightforward communication to prioritize what is necessary to persist and grow.

## Sub-Question Two

What best practices do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States use to foster good time management decisions while enrolled in their online program?

The themes of Work–Life Balance and Education, Personal Development, and Schedule Management, along with the subthemes of Time Management Tools and Time Management and Personal Organization, provided insight into this question. The participants shared that they used a variety of best practices and techniques to manage their time. They stated that their time management decisions have evolved since starting their programs. Participants shared that they began with one approach, and as they progressed through their programs, their approaches began to support the demands of their external and educational commitments. Alex’s experience with an evolving time management strategy is representative of the participant's shared experiences; she stated:

They evolved multiple times, even across the semester. When I started, I was doing a handwritten study schedule by the day in OneNote and then realized, Oh, that doesn't work if I don't look at it every day, so then I went to print it out, and then I could make adjustments. A classmate shared her whiteboard, and that's what I went to. Oh my gosh, that is a much better approach. In my original format, I couldn't see the future. The whiteboard system allows me to see what's in the immediate and what's coming up in the future.

Quinn noted, “I schedule out my work and my school to ensure I have enough time for both.” Additional strategies these learners used to foster good time management were discussed earlier when Jordan mentioned using Google Calendar with reminders on her phone. Bailey and

Cameron noted the transition from a technology-based system to whiteboards and checklists-based approaches. Quinn stated, “I keep a calendar to plan my work, school, and family events.” All the participants used strategies and best practices that they identified over time to support their online learning. These best practices enabled them to persist in their programs and adapt to the demands of life and education.

### **Summary**

This study highlighted that good time management decisions and strategic planning are essential elements that help foster motivation and persistence among non-traditional learners over 30. This chapter presented narratives for each of the 12 participants and revealed that personal organization may influence their motivation and ability to persist in online educational programs. The analysis of horizontalization phrases extracted from interview transcripts, journal prompt responses, and focus group transcripts found that three key themes, which included Personal Organization and Reflection, Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and Work–Life Balance in Education, were central to the study. The themes demonstrate the complex nature of managing academic responsibilities and maintaining personal and professional commitments. Experiences shared by participants like Alex, who balances a professional career with legal studies, and Bailey, a project manager working on completing her doctoral degree, highlight how strategic time management helps them meet their educational objectives but also helps them maintain a healthy work–life balance. The shared experiences show that this balance is essential for non-traditional learners to sustain motivation and persistence while completing their online degrees. The findings underscore that for non-traditional learners, mastering time management skills is critical for academic success and maintaining balance in their day-to-day roles as parents, friends, and peers.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. This study used a transcendental phenomenological methodology and triangulated data through virtual interviews, reflective journal entries, and focused group discussions. Twelve participants were recruited from two official university social media groups after obtaining explicit consent from the groups' administrators and securing IRB approval. The study relied on the participants' lived experiences through a comprehensive analysis to explore the central research question and two sub-questions that guided this study. This chapter examines the emergent themes and findings. It deliberates on the repercussions of these insights for policy and practical application. Additionally, it touches upon the empirical and theoretical implications, acknowledges the limitations and delimitations of the study, and offers recommendations and a conclusion.

### **Discussion**

I examined participant data and insights and identified three overarching themes from the triangulated data gathered from interviews, journal responses, and focus groups. These themes comprise (a) Personal Organization and Reflection, (b) Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and (c) Work–Life Balance in Education. Each theme aligned with the central research question, one or more sub-questions, or a blend of these questions. In this section, the analysis is linked to outcomes and further linked through a critical discussion, which outlines implications and suggests future research.

## Summary of Thematic Findings

Chapter four presented three overarching themes revealed during the thematic analysis of the data. The data used during analysis was gathered from the lived experiences of 12 participants, and from that data, the following themes were revealed. These themes were (a) Personal Organization and Reflection, (b) Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and (c) Work–Life Balance and Education.

The first theme of Personal Organization and Reflection dealt with non-traditional learners' journey in their online education. The theme highlights the critical balance necessary between academic responsibilities, personal life, work, and social experiences that influence non-traditional learners' ability to remain motivated and persist in their education. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of self-discipline, personal reflection, and planning. Additionally, the theme offers insight into the challenges these learners face and details this through various subthemes revealed through thematic coding and analysis of the data. The subthemes identified were—Adapting to Academic Challenges, Balancing Family and Personal Life, Prioritizing Tasks, and Time Management Tools. The subthemes offered additional depth and insight into the challenges learners faced with managing their family and personal lives and the tools and techniques used to remain motivated to succeed.

The second theme, Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, is deeply ingrained in the learner's ability to prioritize and manage life, work, and school. The theme highlighted that time management challenges posed significant motivation challenges. The theme further identified that learners faced challenges with family, evolving schedules, motherhood, poverty, mental health, and personal trauma. The theme further detailed that adopting sound time management skills and scheduling techniques allowed learners to overcome challenges and

improved their motivation and persistence. Four subthemes support this theme—Academic Challenges and Planning, Personal Development and Schedule Management Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation, and Challenges in Education, Work, and Life. These subthemes revealed learners' difficulties when navigating self-directed learning environments. The analysis indicated a need to develop strategies for effective planning and a reliance on custom aids to help juggle personal, professional, and school commitments. Personal development and schedule management were seen as significant, and scheduling helped learners manage the stress of balancing educational objectives with their personal lives. Challenges with time management and scheduling were shown to have an even more significant negative influence on learners that indicated they had disability challenges. These challenges revealed the role of self-regulation and support in overcoming these challenges.

The final theme is Work–Life Balance and Education. This theme demonstrates the need to find the right balance between work, life, and education. Finding the balance between professional and personal responsibilities is essential to remaining motivated about persisting in an online program. The essence of this theme is the structuring of a learner's day-to-day life and the selection and use of tools and support mechanisms to plan and manage the time dedicated to work, school, family, and friends. This theme is supported by three subthemes—Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling, Balancing School and Work Priorities, and Time Management and Personal Organization. Adapting to the online learning environment is critical to the success of non-traditional learners. The ability to modify one's schedule to support a well-balanced life is crucial to one's ability to maintain a work–life balance and meet the demands of online programs. The data analyzed found that setting priorities, learning to say no, and adapting personal organization and planning strategies helped non-traditional learners to remain motivated

about completing their degrees. A lack of organization or insufficient time management skills showed that motivation wavered and the ability to persist was diminished.

### **Critical Discussion**

Time management decisions influence persistence, and time management is critical to online learners' success in their degree programs. The findings from the study indicate that good time management decisions have a positive influence on persistence. The 12 participants shared their experiences with time management and persistence, showing that their ability to remain motivated to persist needed sound time management strategies and decision-making processes. Current research supports this as Iyer and Chapman (2021) noted that non-traditional learners often need help with additional commitments that can encroach on study time. The findings found that time management was critical to success, and organization and personal reflection are necessary elements of online learning success for non-traditional learners. Personal reflection is an element of self-directed learning, one of the concepts identified by Knowles (1978). The ability to self-direct one's learning and reflect on one's ability to learn is well established in current literature, and Hachem (2023) and Rangraz and Pareto (2021) highlight the importance of self-directed learners being adept at identifying their learning needs.

However, time management has its challenges. All participants shared that though their time management skills have improved over time, they still shared that their time management skills need to improve. Findings in the study indicated that participants found that their initial approach to time management have evolved since starting their programs. These learners identified time management challenges and developed strategies that enabled them to remain focused, motivated, and engaged in their programs. Developing sound time management strategies is necessary to persist as indicated in the findings, Uzir et al. (2020) note the

importance of carving out dedicated time segments for coursework to navigate online learning efficiently. This technique is evident throughout the findings. Participants all indicate they block time for study and use digital calendars, whiteboards, and notebooks to block time. Just as Uzir et al. and Syahri (2021) found that time blocking was important and Jamie, Bailey, and Parker shared that they often study late in the evening when their family sleeps to ensure they are uninterrupted in their studies. Time management strategies like this help shape their time management approach and help them persist; however, these strategies require scheduling to be effective. This is supported by current literature as Syahri acknowledges that the freedom to choose learning schedules, while empowering, requires learners to engage in significant planning and prioritization to ensure effective learning outcomes. This planning and prioritization lead directly to a discussion on the findings related to work–life balance in education.

Achieving that work–life balance is critical. The findings showed that work can impact learners' ability to operate efficiently, and learning can take a back seat to work, family, and social commitments. Cameron, Jamie, and Parker shared that they had to learn to say no to certain commitments to maintain progress in their programs. For non-traditional learners in an online environment, work–life balance, though engaging, brings with it complex challenges that necessitate careful planning and prioritization. Al-Hawmleh et al. (2022) and Zhu et al. (2024) indicated that online programs provide avenues for educational success without significant disruptions to personal and professional responsibilities. However, in the professional sphere, online learners frequently need help balancing work commitments and coursework needs (MacRitchie et al., 2022). Sofia shared that financial challenges play a significant role in her education. Affording online courses is critical, and finances and student loans often present challenges to learners completing their courses (Agormedah et al., 2020; Maqableh & Alia,

2021). Morgan mentioned that she failed to complete one of her semesters, ultimately losing her financial aid. She shared in her journal responses and interview that because of the loss of financial aid she struggled to complete her courses due to financial obligations. These challenges can be overcome; however, the study's findings show that this results in unwanted stress and a need to add work hours to pay for the courses. It becomes a double-edged sword. Agormedah et al. noted that many online learners must manage their finances, tuition fees, and education.

Financial hardship is one challenge that participants regularly dealt with in persisting in the online programs; however, family commitments are another challenge online learners face. MacRitchie et al. (2022) indicated that familial obligations present another layer of complexity for many online learners, especially non-traditional students. This is consistent with the findings in the study, as the participants all juggled family, work, and social commitments alongside their online learning. Alex shared in her interview that “Making time for my spouse, making time for myself. That's not school or work related. Both can be very difficult and something that I have to consciously choose to do.” Most participants shared to some extent that challenges with commitments outside of their education often resulted in them needing to find a way to adapt their schedules to meet these challenges. Time management is heavily involved in the scheduling of time and Paudel (2021) indicated that time management is another crucial facet, and online learners need help to balance autonomy and discipline. Jordan supported this concept when she shared that “I typically prioritize my day by importance. A chunk of my day is work so that is a given for 8–5 then I prioritize my family and their needs and then I decide where schoolwork fits into that.” Being able to prioritize and say no was a common experience shared by all participants and Iyer and Chapman (2021) and MacRitchie et al. found that effective communication is paramount to the success in remote learning environments.

Furthermore, some areas in the findings deviated from the original topic of time management decisions on persistence. Though indirectly related, there were barriers identified that also played into the challenges of online learning. Direct access to reliable internet connections often results in technical challenges (Azubuike et al., 2021; Hill & Lawton, 2018). Technical challenges were experienced during the virtual interviews with participants, as two participants chose to use mobile devices during the interview process, and unfortunately, bandwidth and network access limitations resulted in limited connectivity. Dewan et al. (2019) highlighted that access to internet connections, suitable devices, and tool proficiency are crucial factors contributing to success in online learning. It is not always the speed of the internet that is the biggest challenge. For non-traditional learners, there are barriers around digital literacy that also present persistence, motivation, and accessibility challenges. Lang (2021) and Heidari et al. (2021) identified that digital literacy is another challenge facing online learners and often results in declining motivation due to limited skills with technology; however, digital literacy issues were not supported in the findings. The only technical challenges were due to poor network connectivity which resulted in challenges with audio/video recording and transcription.

Finally, time management decisions influence our ability to persist in online education (Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021). Not only is time management critical to non-traditional learners' success, but without sound time management approaches, many of the participants shared that they would have failed to complete their degrees. Politely declining non-essential requests or delegating tasks to others can free up precious time for educational pursuits (Neroni et al., 2022; Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021). Online courses are more involved and come with their own unique challenges. As Cameron stated, "it is up to you. No one is there to help you." This experience was shared by most of the participants. Online learning is a self-directed exercise.

You need to be able to focus, block out time, and manage motivation and engagement to a level that will allow you to complete your programs. Effective time management is not a strategy; it is a skill that empowers non-traditional learners to achieve their educational goals while organizing their complex lives (Hill & Lawton, 2018; Iyer & Chapman, 2021). The experiences of participants regarding time management decisions and their ability to persist were found throughout the findings. Most of the participants leveraged technology to schedule their days and this was supported by current research as Hill and Lawton suggested, utilizing technology can be beneficial when managing time. The use of calendars, task management applications, and reminders help learners to stay organized and ensure they do not overlook deadlines (Iyer & Chapman, 2021).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The study highlights several implications for policy and practice opportunities geared toward non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in online degree programs. The policy changes identified are necessary to provide learners in online programs with the support needed to succeed. In practice, shifting focus to improving communication regarding time management decisions with these students while streamlining administrative and educator support processes can facilitate motivation and persistence in their programs.

#### ***Implications for Policy***

To succeed in online education, policies that enable personalized learning (PL) and improvements in learning tools are necessary to support non-traditional learners in an online environment (Bernacki et al., 2021; Cevikbas & Kaiser, 2022). Though online learning was viewed as a flexible learning environment by all the participants in the study, the PL, and educational tools available to these learners were limited to calendars, whiteboards, notebooks,



and the content management systems used by their respective universities. Iyer and Chapman (2021) and MacRitchie et al. (2022) found that effective communication is paramount; the use of digital tools helps to foster collaboration. Azionya and Nhedzi (2021) noted that non-traditional learners can harness digital calendars, task management apps, and reminder tools to simplify their online studies. This is consistent with the experiences shared by participants. Jamie noted, “Allocating time for learning can be a challenge and requires a degree of discipline. For me, the most impactful way to accomplish all I want to accomplish is by blocking time on my calendar.” Bailey added:

You know, going to school online makes it possible for me to do other things. So, while it's time-consuming, it's also flexible, so I can do what I need to do around the current schedule that I already have. Moreover, that makes managing my time a lot easier.

Furthermore, using calendars, whiteboards, notebooks, and the flexible nature of online learning was viewed by all participants as a benefit. However, many participants felt that online learning was difficult to manage and that improvements to online courses are necessary to improve learning outcomes. According to Bernacki et al. (2021), the desire to achieve these outcomes motivates the adoption of PL; educators and policymakers often lack the resources necessary to determine which PL design is best suited to achieve their ends. As indicated by the participants adopting policies that enable flexible PL approaches, streamlined course schedules, and learning tools specifically designed to support online learning, the motivation to persist could be improved. Many participants self-identified as lifelong learners. Maghsudi et al. (2021) indicated that advancing one's educational process and lifelong learning, i.e., pursuing additional professional qualifications, are essential components of educational policy worldwide. This leads to a need to address specific changes in policy around the development of PL tools that can

support non-traditional learners during their online studies. Bernacki et al. stated that, in contrast, policymakers have agreed that students should receive a good PL experience; policies provide broad latitude to allow schools to define personalization and how to implement it. With the need identified to develop personalized means for learning, university policymakers must work with learning course designers and online tool developers to create policies that enable a more inclusive online experience that leverages new learning tools designed to support the online learner.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Though policy implications are necessary to improve the online learning experience, there are many implications for practice. Two specific implications for practice are presented in this section. These are (a) the Integration of Flexible Learning and (b) the Creation of Peer Support Networks. The study findings showed that most participants found online modalities appropriate for their learning due to their flexibility. However, some participants shared that the flexibility of online learning introduced challenges, and they mentioned that flexible course schedules would enable them to adapt their personal learning experiences and complete their courses using an approach that suited their learning styles. Riley noted, “Adjusting academic workload each semester for a better life balance” supports the need to change online learning that supports the online learner’s ability to change course modules and adapt those changes to fit into the complex lives of non-traditional learners. According to Bekmanova et al. (2021), personalization of training is essential to organizing training that meets modern expectations. For lifelong learning, the most important thing is the ability to learn from anywhere, at a convenient time, and in an individual way. To support the need for flexible learning, Müller et al. (2023) identified that flexible learning addresses students’ needs for more flexibility and autonomy in

shaping their learning process and is often realized through online technologies in a blended learning design and while higher education institutions are increasingly considering replacing classroom time and offering more blended learning, current research is limited regarding its effectiveness and modifying design factors. Improving and integrating a more flexible form of online learning will help non-traditional learners meet the demands of work, family, and education while preserving their ability to remain engaged in online courses. Orientation to learn, one of the principles of adult learning identified by Knowles et al. (2005), is a critical element of non-traditional learning. Integrating a more flexible learning environment for adult learners can help learners with time management strategies, scheduling, and persistence.

Another implication for practices is that universities should create peer support networks to provide support networks for online learners enrolled in courses (Pointon-Haas et al., 2023; Rotar, 2022). As identified in the study, participants often felt isolated when attending online learning due to the remote nature of this modality. Cameron expressed his limited support network when he noted:

It's especially difficult in a remote environment where it's just you. I'm sure that other students probably have a support network, and for a while, I did. I don't right now, so I'm the only one that says when to study, and you know how long or how hard or how distracted during that study time I can or can't be.

Creating peer support networks for online learners would offer learners like Cameron a support network during courses to engage with other online learners. Both Morgan and Cameron struggled to remain motivated due to the isolation of online learning. Morgan even mentioned that she failed to complete her course workload due to time management and motivational challenges, thus losing her financial aid. Having a support network, she felt, would have kept her

engaged and motivated to persist during the semester. Cameron, due to his ADHD and isolation, lost motivation and ultimately failed to complete any courses in one semester; he shared that having a support network would have helped him remain engaged. Though most online courses provide announcements, wikis, and discussion forum groups, these are not the same as an interactive peer support network. Rotar found that a community of learners is a “powerful motivator and a powerful mechanism” for supporting online students and their learning experience. He argued that the online learning experience can be enhanced by reinforcing the “social nature of learning” through the community where learners can socialize and support each other’s learning. With persistence rates in online learning below that of traditional in-person learning, creating peer support networks would positively influence these learners by enabling more interaction with classmates, as Rotar indicated. In addition to peer support networks, Pointon-Haas et al. (2023) mentioned in their research that convening people with similar experiences creates a supportive space underpinned by respect, collective responsibility, and an agreement on what is helpful. Collaboration and networks would integrate online learners attending courses and enable more interactive interactions. This interactive nature resonates with in-person classes that have provided interactive courses by design. Online learning is already a challenge for non-traditional learners. The practical implication of creating support networks that mimic the interactive nature of traditional learning may positively influence these learners' time management, motivation, and persistence.

Finally, the findings show that there is no single best practice for time management. Universities may wish to develop courses in time management that explore the various time management challenges discussed by the participants in this study to enable future online

learners to learn about and identify time management approaches that may help them in their online programs and personal lives.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

This research enhanced both empirical understanding and theoretical perspectives by investigating time management practices used among a specific population: non-traditional learners over 30 persisting in online degree programs. The research shed light on the time management challenges these learners face. The study broadens theoretical discussions around adult learning and self-regulation by examining how non-traditional learners prioritize tasks, set goals, and allocate their time. It contributes new empirical insights into the persistence mechanisms of a group often overlooked. This exploration into the time management decisions of non-traditional online learners fills a gap in the existing literature while highlighting the essential role of effective time management in supporting academic success and persistence.

#### ***Empirical Implications***

The time management decisions, motivations, and persistence of the non-traditional learners engaged in this study were consistent with the existing literature. Many participants revealed that the flexible nature of online learning was a motivating factor that led them to register for their online program. As mentioned by Lee (2017) and Lu et al. (2022), unlike its traditional counterpart, online learning frees adult learners from fixed schedules and physical constraints. The ability to adapt their schedules and study times to meet their demanding schedules demonstrated that non-traditional learners seek educational experiences that do not impose the limitations of traditional modalities, just as Fabriz et al. (2021) indicated in their research. Not only were the participants motivated to persist and complete their programs, but many of these learners self-identified as lifelong learners. They found themselves committed to a

continuous learning journey of growth. Just as Szabo (2019) and Tang et al. (2023) found in their research, lifelong learners are committed to expanding their skills and knowledge, and these learners often start with a profound realization: learning occurs beyond formal education (Drewey & Pretti, 2023).

In addition to the attraction of lifelong learning, these learners had explicit purposes for seeking out online learning. Most were devoted to earning their first degree or seeking more advanced degrees. The literature found that the educational and professional backgrounds of online learners provide the context for their studies and give these learners a clear purpose for pursuing further education (Singh, 2019). The study findings supported this empirical relationship in that 11 of the 12 participants sought out online education to further their professional and academic careers. The study expanded on this understanding by narrowing the definition of non-traditional learners to those over 30 to understand if these learners used online learning because of its flexibility. The study found that these learners were self-directed and actively took control of their learning to distinguish themselves by using time management strategies that helped them enhance their learning experience. This was supported through literature as Feraco et al. (2022), Jafar et al. (2023), and Yu (2023) noted in their research that non-traditional learners seek to distinguish themselves by using strategies to enhance their learning experiences. All participants in this study used time management strategies to keep them engaged in their program to improve their learning experiences.

Though improving their learning experiences and motivation to succeed were prevalent in the findings, these learners found that online learning posed significant challenges. Many of the learners felt overwhelmed with online learning, and just as Schlimbach et al. (2023) indicated in their study, non-traditional learners in online environments often feel overwhelmed when

deciding on the most appropriate learning materials. Folayan et al. (2022) supported being overwhelmed in their research when they noted that isolation could also be a concern for these learners, leading to feelings of isolation, which can narrow their perspectives on learning strategies. The feeling of isolation, being overwhelmed, and a lack of time management skills resulted in many participants feeling less motivated to complete their courses. Holford et al. (2018) and Li and Pei (2023) identified that sustaining motivation over long periods is a hurdle that online learners face and challenges self-directed learning, and just as Cameron and Morgan noted in their interviews and journal responses that they often experience procrastination due to a lack of solid time management skills, organization, and limited interaction in an online environment. The literature supported the concept that procrastination can easily seep in without the external pressure of deadlines (Al-Hawmleh et al., 2022).

Moreover, as expected, the findings highlighted that good time management decisions were critical in the online learning environment. All participants indicated that their time management strategies evolved throughout their online learning. Some, like Morgan, even mentioned that their time management strategies were better initially; however, they began to diminish over time. As the literature supports, a structured routine is integral, and creating a fixed schedule with dedicated study periods is paramount (Iyer & Chapman, 2021; Nieuwoudt & Stimpson, 2021). The findings supported this, as many of the findings identified that using calendars, whiteboards, notebooks, and visual aids was paramount in these learners' persistence in their programs.

Finally, time management decisions that supported improved persistence appeared throughout the findings, and existing literature endorsed the concept that these learners needed more motivation to persist in their studies with solid time management strategies. Participants

like Jamie, Taylor, and Bailey mentioned carving out specific time blocks in their daily schedules to maintain motivation in their programs. This was supported in the literature by Aldowah et al. (2019) and Hill and Lawton (2018) when they denoted that a core strategy is a structured schedule, and non-traditional learners should create well-organized schedules that allocate specific time blocks for different aspects of their coursework. Iyer and Chapman (2021) also indicated that the dedication periods for reading materials, attending virtual classes, participating in discussions, and completing assignments are critical to persistence. The findings supported this, as participants noted that they used scheduling and planning to read course materials. These learners used digital and physical tools like whiteboards and notebooks to manage their time and motivation to succeed. The literature supported these findings as digital aids provide visual cues and timely notifications, simplifying the allocation of time and allowing learners to access course materials and collaborate seamlessly with their peers (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021; Rautela et al., 2022; Surahman & Wang, 2022). The empirical data suggests that good time management decisions result in an increased motivation to persist among non-traditional learners. The findings in the study are supported by empirical research, and these findings were able to expand on the existing literature to identify aspects of online learning that, though evident in the current literature, still require additional research to understand how time management decisions can further motivate these learners to persist.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The focus of the study and the findings were viewed through the lens of andragogy (Knowles, 1978; Knowles et al., 2005, 2020). The theoretical implications are important. The findings support the theory of andragogy by understanding how non-traditional learners approached learning. Most participants were self-directed learners, often identifying as lifelong



learners with a drive toward self-improvement. These learners were oriented towards learning one of the critical principles in Knowles' theory of andragogy. However, the principle of sound time management should be considered and possibly used to extend Knowles' theory by incorporating the critical role of time management in the process of self-directed learning. According to Wolters and Brady (2021), it has been over 25 years since any real exploration of time management relating to self-regulated learning; therefore, time management remains a theoretically significant but underdeveloped and underexamined dimension of self-regulated learning. A systematic effort to consider time management within a model of self-regulated learning is overdue. The findings support that motivation and time management are intrinsically linked; participants who demonstrated sound time management strategies were highly motivated to succeed, and participants who struggled with time management found themselves less motivated to persist or complete coursework. Morgan and Cameron indicated in their interview and journal prompts that they struggled with time management, and Cameron even failed to complete courses. Morgan furthered this when she mentioned that, at times, she ignores class and is not motivated to attend or complete assignments. Knowles (1978) indicates that the trait of learners' experience is the defining trait of the adult learner. Each participant noted that the online learning experience drove them to register for online courses. However, adult learners' traits do not consider how time management influences the learner's experience. In the findings, the lack of good time management resulted in participants noting that their online experience suffered. This directly ties to Knowles' trait of learner experience; the connection between experience, readiness to learn, and orientation appears to be linked to time management. Without sound approaches to time management, these traits, though evident in adult learners, suffer due to the complexities of work, school, and personal challenges that these learners must manage.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study identified both limitations and delimitations, which are distinct from one another. Limitations arise unexpectedly and are beyond the researcher's control, whereas delimitations are boundaries intentionally set by the researcher. The limitations and delimitations are outlined below.

### ***Limitations***

The first limitation was that of the participants recruited to participate in the study, ten were female, and only two were male. Though the distribution across university social media groups was sufficient, most study participants were female. Having only two male participants in the study limited the breadth of the study from the viewpoint of male non-traditional learners. An additional limitation was on the race demographic. Of the 12 participants, 10 participants fell into the race white, and only two participants were African American. In addition to the race, the two African Americans were both females, once again limiting the viewpoint of males and, specifically, African American males. As the method used to recruit participants was only from two university social media groups, recruitment was limited, and the recruitment of participants fell short of obtaining a maximum variation sample. The recruitment process, though efficient, had the limitation that it was entirely dependent upon members of the group being willing to reach out via direct email or message to participate. This limitation resulted in a selection process completely reliant on participants willing to participate and reach out on their own, as the intent was to refrain from enlisting the support of the group administrator in identifying study participants.

Finally, the last limitation was that the study included online students at different stages in online education. The study did not limit the participants to either undergraduate or graduate

levels. Instead, the study allowed non-traditional learners to be enrolled in an online program and over the age of 30. Across the 12 participants, there was a mix of degree types. Four participants sought to earn their doctorate, five were working on their bachelor's, and three were completing a master's degree. By allowing the study to use differing degree levels, the potential for bias relating to time management skills could have influenced the findings.

### *Delimitations*

The main delimitation identified for this study was restricting the recruitment pool to only two university social media groups. This resulted in a narrow pool of potential participants. Recruiting from PSU and HSU further restricted the participant pool and limited the ability to use maximum variation sampling as the number of participants from these groups was small; furthermore, limiting the scope to participants over 30 forced learners between the ages of 24 and 30 to be excluded. This demographic could have provided insight into the study as non-traditional learners encompass individuals aged 24 and up (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002).

Moreover, the decision was made to restrict the size of the participant pool to up to 12 participants. This decision may have introduced a limited data view during horizontalization and thematic coding. Though the data was triangulated using virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups, the amount of data gathered limited the insight available from a research standpoint. As indicated by Patton (2015), saturation occurred in this study with eight participants; however, that could have happened due to the limited size of the participant pool. Increasing the number of participants very well could have revealed additional insight into the data and potentially revealed other themes and subthemes.

Finally, the last limitation was that the study restricted non-traditional learners to individuals who persist in an online degree program and are over 30. The restriction on age may

have resulted in fewer participants reaching out and participating in the study. Though the study defined non-traditional learners as those learners attending online programs and over 30 years of age, the research describes non-traditional learners as being based on researcher-imposed demographic criteria (e.g., age, work/marital status); however, there has been a lack of agreement in terms of the type of students being described as ‘non-traditional’ (Chung et al., 2014; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). This lack of agreement on the definition of non-traditional may have resulted in a smaller recruitment pool due to demographic limitations imposed by the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results and analysis of the findings, several critical recommendations for future research are noted. The first is for a similar study with expanded participant diversity. Though the study focused on non-traditional learners over 30, the study should be developed to solicit a broader range of demographics, including different age groups, cultural backgrounds, employment status, marital status, and sexual orientation. Expanding the participant diversity will deepen the understanding of challenges, strategies, and self-reflection techniques used to remain motivated to persist in online learning. Another area for future research is to conduct comparative studies. Comparing time management strategies and outcomes between traditional and non-traditional learners will help researchers understand how learners use different strategies and techniques to persist in their education.

In addition, future research should focus on technology’s role in time management and how different technologies influence motivation and persistence among non-traditional learners. Research should also investigate different technologies to determine if one technology is better online than others. Understanding the benefits of these tools will drive the industry to change

technology to address the challenges in time management and influence persistence among online learners. Moreover, longitudinal studies should analyze how time management strategies evolve throughout the non-traditional learner's education. This study can help us understand if non-traditional learners adapt their time management strategies to effect change in their ability to maintain motivation and persist in their degree programs.

Another area for future research centers around introducing Artificial Intelligence (AI). There is a need to research the potential benefits of AI-enhanced applications and their influence on time management and scheduling. This research is necessary to understand how AI could support non-traditional learner's motivation to succeed. With dropout rates for these learners exceeding traditional learners by 10 to 20 percent (Delnoij et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2023; Muljana & Luo, 2019), finding options that could help with persistence is significant. Researchers can understand and identify how these technologies influence persistence by researching how AI can support online learning and analyzing student data to drive the automated selection of suitable course sequence recommendations based on the new student's background (Maghsudi et al., 2021). AI is now an expanding part of society, and advances in AI and Machine Learning (ML) will play an essential role. Research into AI and its influence on time management and persistence may help administrators and educators make sound decisions relating to online learning.

Finally, another area for future research would be adapting persistence models developed by Tinto (1993). The findings in this study suggest that modifications to Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure could incorporate time management as a critical element influencing non-traditional learners' decisions to persist or withdraw from their online degree programs. From the findings in the study, time management is viewed by all participants as critical to their

persistence. Tinto identified two links to a learner's persistence: intention and commitment. However, this study sheds light on another link to persistence, “time management.” From the findings, I would suggest researching if time management plays a role in Tinto’s theory of Institutional Departure. The findings suggest that other elements influence persistence among learners, including sound time management decisions or strategies. Though goals, work commitments, and values all drive persistence, according to Tinto, there is no mention of whether these have underlying reasons for supporting persistence. Research could help to determine if time management may help to explain why learners persist or depart from their online programs.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. This transcendental phenomenological study is guided by Moustakas (1994) and Knowles’ (1978) principles of andragogy; it recruited participants over 30 from university social media groups. The study used virtual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups for data triangulation, member checking, and validation. Analysis of 12 participants indicated saturation (Patton, 2015) at eight, with epoché and bracketing employed to minimize bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Three main themes—Personal Organization and Reflection, Time Management Challenges and Scheduling, and Work–Life Balance and Education—emerged alongside 11 subthemes.

In addition, to capture and understand researcher bias, an audit log captured biases and notes to reduce potential bias during analysis (see Appendix L). Outliers were identified and documented to capture and understand their influence on time management decisions and

persistence. The study highlighted policy, practice, empirical, and theoretical implications. It concluded with a series of recommendations for future research. These recommendations included expanding demographics, technology's role in time management, and outlier experiences.

Finally, this research offered insight into non-traditional learners' time management decisions and persistence. The study explored the experiences of selected participants and how their time management decisions influenced their ability to persist in their programs. Online learning is complex, and as Morgan Sage so eloquently stated:

I chose online learning because I thought it would be easier to fit into my life, but it's actually a lot harder to manage than I expected. The flexibility is great, but it requires a lot more self-discipline and time management than I was prepared for.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Research Questions**

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the shared time management experiences of persistent non-traditional online students over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States?

#### **Sub-Question One**

What challenges do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States experience with time management decisions while persisting in online degree programs?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

What best practices do persistent non-traditional learners over 30 enrolled in large institutions in the United States use to foster good time management decisions while enrolled in their online program?

## Appendix B

### Recruitment

#### HSU Recruitment

ATTENTION [REDACTED]: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. To participate, you must be over 30 and enrolled in an online degree program at a large educational institution in the United States. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview, complete three journal prompts, and participate in a focus group, which will require approximately five hours of your time over a three-week interval. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please direct message me or email me at [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule an interview. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview.

#### PSU Recruitment

ATTENTION [REDACTED]: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States. To participate, you must be over 30 and enrolled in an online degree program at a large educational institution in the United States. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview, complete three journal prompts, and participate in a focus group, which will require approximately five hours of your time over a three-week interval. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please direct message me or email me at [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule an interview. A consent document will be emailed to you one week before the interview.

## Appendix C

### IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 21, 2023

James Lawrence  
[REDACTED]

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-667 Exploring Non-Traditional Learner's Time Management Decisions with Persistence

Dear James Lawrence, [REDACTED]

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

**For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.**

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,  
[REDACTED]

*Administrative Chair*  
**Research Ethics Office**

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## Appendix D

### Site Permission Request

Horizon State University (HSU) [REDACTED]

September 27, 2023

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. The title of my research project is Exploring Time Management Decisions on Persistence Among Non-Traditional Learners: A Phenomenological Study in Online Learning, and the purpose of my research is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States.

I am writing to request your permission to utilize the [REDACTED] to post a request to group members to recruit participants for my research.

Participants will be asked to contact me through [REDACTED] to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Participating 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 digitally sign the attached response letter via DocuSign.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

James Dale Lawrence  
Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University Online

[REDACTED]

Patriot State University (PSU) [REDACTED]

September 20, 2023

¶

[REDACTED]

¶

Dear [REDACTED]

¶

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. The title of my research project is Exploring Time Management Decisions on Persistence Among Non-Traditional Learners: A Phenomenological Study in Online Learning and the purpose of my research is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners at large institutions offering online programs in the United States.

¶

I am writing to request your permission to utilize your membership list to recruit participants for my research.

¶

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Participating 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 respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

¶

Sincerely,

¶

[REDACTED]

¶

James Dale Lawrence  
Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University Online

¶

## Appendix E

### Site Permission Approval

Horizon State University (HSU) [REDACTED]

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DocuSign Envelope ID: EC12CA1B-A0F1-4E28-8F95-CE4C698E70F8

September 27, 2023

James Dale Lawrence  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University Online

[REDACTED]

Dear James Dale Lawrence:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled Exploring Time Management Decisions on Persistence Among Non-traditional Learners: A Phenomenological Study in Online Learning, I have granted you permission to our [REDACTED] and permit you to post an introduction to your study and a request to have members contact you to participate in your study.

We will provide access to our [REDACTED] to James Dale Lawrence, and James Dale Lawrence may use the [REDACTED] to post a message to members inviting members to contact him via [REDACTED] to invite them to participate in his research study.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Group Owner

Patriot State University (PSU) [REDACTED]

September 20, 2023

James Dale Lawrence  
Doctoral Candidate  
Liberty University Online  
[REDACTED]

Dear James Dale Lawrence:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled Exploring Time Management Decisions on Persistence Among Non-traditional Learners: A Phenomenological Study in Online Learning, I have granted you permission to our [REDACTED] and permit you to invite them to participate in your study.

We will provide access to our [REDACTED] to James Dale Lawrence, and James Dale Lawrence may use the [REDACTED] to contact group members to invite them to participate in his research study.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Group Administrator

## Appendix F

### Consent

#### EXPLORING TIME MANAGEMENT DECISIONS ON PERSISTENCE AMONG NON-TRADITIONAL LEARNERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN ONLINE LEARNING

**Title of the Project:** Exploring Time Management Decisions on Persistence Among Non-traditional Learners: A Phenomenological Study in Online Learning

**Principal Investigator:** James Dale Lawrence, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be over 30 and enrolled in an online degree program at a large educational institution in the United States. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the time management decisions of persistent non-traditional online learners over 30 at large institutions offering online programs in the United States.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. The First procedure is to participate in a virtual, audio/video-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. The Second procedure is to participate in a journal prompt exercise once a week for three weeks. These exercises will take no more than 1 hour each week to complete.
3. The Third procedure is to participate in a virtual, audio/video-recorded focus group that will take no more than 1 hour.

The total time estimated to complete the study will be no more than 5 hours.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include access to the final study results which may help you understand the benefits of time management decisions and persistence in online learning.



Benefits to society include providing awareness to non-traditional learners in the value of time management decisions with respect to persisting and succeeding in their online degree programs. This study will also benefit educators and educational institutions in developing tailored support services and curricula specifically aimed at non-traditional learners, thereby potentially improving retention rates, overall academic performance, and the educator's and institution's reputation of inclusivity and effectiveness.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a virtual environment with only the participant and researcher present.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored in a private cloud-based storage account. The data will be encrypted and password-protected to prevent unauthorized access. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored in a private cloud-based storage account. The audio/video recordings will be encrypted and password-protected to prevent unauthorized access. Recordings will be maintained for five years or until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, at this time the recordings will be deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

#### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

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

### What should you do if you decide 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, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is James D. Lawrence. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED], at [REDACTED].

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED], [REDACTED]; our phone number is [REDACTED], and our email address is [REDACTED].

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree 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 of the signed document 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/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date

## Appendix G

### Participant Transcript

#### \* Transcript ¶

James Lawrence ¶

Little bit. And should be going OK. Alright. So my name is James Lawrence. I'm. I'm a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. So I'm working on my PhD in education. Been at it for about 3 years now, so I've finally got through chapters 1-2 and three and I'm starting my studies. Now I've had to find participants and I greatly appreciate you being willing to be a participant because you you fit the criteria for what I'm doing in my study. So with that, I'll go ahead and start the interview. ¶

If you would please introduce yourself who you are, what you do, and why you chose to pursue your online degree. ¶

Taylor Ash ¶

Yeah. So I'm Chris Spencer. I'm 45 years old. I worked in corporate America in the business world for the past 25 plus years, and I got my MBA from VCU before I, you know, started all that. And when I was getting my undergraduate degree from VCU in the 90s, I. Minored in psychology, but I still had a lot of healing to do, so I wasn't gonna be a psychologist, even though I was on my mind. And so all these years past and corporate America was just so challenging 60 hours a week. I have two little kids, just constant challenges. And I just like God, what do you want me to do? I'm 45. I feel like I just wanna make a change. You know what? I'm not getting any younger. I might as well. So I just felt like I was saying, you know, go ahead and be a counselor. And I kept seeing all this stuff from the liberty just pop up and I asked my husband because he leads us and I said. Can I do it? What do you think? Has God spoken to you? He said no, I said oh, my gosh, I kept praying and praying and asked him and then he said go for it, which was very interesting because he would have never done that without God telling him. And then my friend, she had sent me a card. I got it the next day and the card on. The front said go for it. I was like, God, it's just so. So incredible. So I did the whole liberty thing. I told my boss and everything, and I'm going full steam ahead, so I'm already like, halfway through. I'm gonna start practicing. God willing, this summer. And, you know, it's just interesting to, like, have a whole career change. ¶

James Lawrence ¶

Well, that's great. That's great. So are you working on a masters or another bachelor's? ¶

Taylor Ash ¶

So unfortunately have to get a second masters because you have to have clinical mental. Counseling. And I thought, gosh, how am I gonna be able to write a paper? I haven't done this for decades, you know, so I'm just so thankful that God has helped me be able to write the papers and the discussion threads and the replies. And, you know, when I went to college, it was in person. It wasn't this online. I mean, of course, I understand online in terms of meetings and things like that. ¶

James Lawrence ¶

OK. ¶

Taylor Ash ¶

That not papers and discussions and sure video threads and all that you know. ¶

James Lawrence ¶

Awesome. Awesome. Well, sounds like you're on the right path. That's good. So I like that. That's great. Alright, so first question. ¶

What requirements does your program have for participation each week? ¶

Taylor Ash ¶

Oh wow. So since it's the masters and I usually take about three to four classes at a time at 5:00 or semester, I have quizzes almost every single week. Sometimes it's multiple. I have discussion threads. Every week, and sometimes they're video, sometimes they're just. In writing and it's either one reply or two replies that same week, so that's a lot. And then I typically have papers in each class and it's not every single week, but like this week I've got two papers due same week. So I just have to try to space it out and plan how am I gonna get all this stuff done? ¶

James Lawrence ¶

Well, that's that's good because that leads me into the next question. ¶

What motivates you to persist in your online degree program? ¶

So what are some of the motivations? ¶

Taylor Ash ¶

Yeah, I'm not a competitive person, but I do want to meet my I wanna meet expectations. Like I want to. Finish what I set out to do. So if I told everybody, I'm gonna get this degree, I'm gonna do anything to finish this degree, you know? And so in my mind, I'm like, OK, I wanna get A's. And so there's like this one class where I've got A's already. All of them. But one I might possibly get a B. And I'm thinking, oh, my goodness, I don't like to get a B like to get an A. So it's such a weird thing because, like, My son is in 6th grade and he's getting AB and C and I'm like we daddy and I've never gotten C what are you doing? Getting C's. You know, it's just this achievement oriented. Personality that I have where I'm so driven from within and my dad was like a farmer like, even from three he was doing all this stuff all day. So I'm like, I guess that's been given to me this this very strong work ethic. ¶

James Lawrence ¶

Great, great, great. So so with that, ¶

What role does time management play in your success as an online learner? ¶

Taylor Ash ¶

I have to have remember when I was like, getting ready for liberty. They were like you have got to make sure that you. You are. You know, planning things out or you're just gonna get lost in the shuffle, you know, so every time the courses come out with the syllabus, I actually write in my notebook each week. And I say every class I'm gonna have how many chapters I have to read because this, and I didn't mention the story, but it's so much reading chapters. It's sometimes it's five to six chapters. Per class. ¶

## Appendix H

### Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me with a brief explanation of who you are, what you do, and why you chose to pursue your current online degree.
2. What requirements does your program have for participation each week? (CRQ)
3. What motivates you to persist in your online degree program? (CRQ)
4. What role does time management play in your success as an online learner? (CRQ)
5. How do you manage your time while participating in your online degree program?  
(CRQ)
6. How has the online classroom impacted your ability to manage your time well or your decision regarding your time management? (CRQ)
7. What connection exists between your motivation and your time management decisions?  
(CRQ)
8. What challenges do you encounter in balancing your educational pursuits with your other responsibilities? (SQ1)
9. What are some time management strategies you use consistently to maintain your persistence in your online program? (SQ1)
10. How have your time management practices evolved since you first started pursuing your online degree? (SQ1)
11. What experiences have you had when facing conflicts between time management and participation requirements in your program? (SQ1)
12. Please share a time you did not manage your time well and it impacted your timely participation; please include the result. (SQ1)

13. How does this practice help when managing your time is difficult? (SQ1)
14. What methods do you use to prioritize your academic tasks and other commitments?  
(SQ2)
15. How often, if ever, do you take time to remember your motivation? (SQ2)
16. Provide examples of instances where your motivation wavered and explain if your time management decisions contributed to maintaining or regaining your enthusiasm for your online degree program. (SQ2)
17. Reflecting on your journey, how have your past experiences influenced how you approach time management in your educational pursuits? (SQ1, SQ2)
18. Based on your insights and experiences, what recommendations would you offer to other non-traditional online learners regarding effective time management and maintaining motivation? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
19. How does time management help when you encounter challenges like the ones you just noted? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
20. How does your time management impact your ability to meet these weekly participation requirements? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

## **Appendix I**

### **Journal Prompts**

1. Reflect on a typical day as an online learner. How do you allocate time for various activities, including coursework, work, family, and personal time? (SQ1)
2. Discuss instances when you have had to adapt or modify your time management decisions while pursuing your online degree. What prompted these adjustments? (SQ1)
3. Consider significant life experiences that might have influenced your time management decisions and motivation as an online learner. What experiences shaped your perspective on education and your desire to persist? (SQ2)

## Appendix J

### Focus Group Questions

1. Please share your experiences with the most significant time management challenge you have faced while pursuing your online degree. (CRQ)
2. How do you balance your studies with your personal or work commitments? (CRQ)
3. Could you share an experience of feeling stressed or overwhelmed with managing your time during your studies? (CRQ)
4. Can you describe a specific instance where balancing school responsibilities with personal or work life was challenging? (SQ1)
5. What unique time management challenges have you encountered specifically because your program is online? (SQ1)
6. Please share your experience with a strategy or tool that effectively manages your time during your online studies. (SQ2)
7. What was a key learning moment for you in developing your time management skills while pursuing your online degree? (SQ2)
8. Can you share an experience where you faced a significant challenge in managing your time during your online studies and how you overcame it with a specific strategy or approach? (SQ1, SQ2)
9. Please describe a situation where you initially struggled with time management in your online program and what changes or practices you implemented that led to improvement. (SQ1, SQ2)



10. Could you share your journey of managing time as a non-traditional learner over 30 in your online program, focusing on the challenges and strategies that have helped you persist in your studies? (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)
11. Can you share how you have had to modify your personal organization or study methods in response to academic pressures and what impact those changes have had on your personal and family life? (Triangulation Theme 1)
12. Can you describe a situation where your academic obligations tested your usual time management strategies, and how did you adapt to meet those challenges? (Triangulation Theme 2)
13. Can you discuss your approaches to managing the interplay between your educational pursuits and work responsibilities, particularly when transitioning to or from online learning environments? (Triangulation Theme 3)
14. Reflecting on your experiences, can you identify recurring strategies or tools that have helped you simultaneously navigate personal organization, time management, and work–life balance? (Triangulation, Cross Theme Corroboration)

## Appendix K

### Focus Group Transcript

0:2:44.760-->0:2:46.420<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

Anyone else have any feedback on that?¶

0:2:47.770-->0:3:16.290<sup>+</sup>

Alex River<sup>+</sup>

I think the only thing I would add is I'm really trying to make sure that within that time management, there is still avoidance of the burnout because I have found if I don't allow myself some type of time away, even if it's a lunch out with a friend, then it makes it much more difficult to accomplish all my assignments before the end of the week when they're due.¶

0:3:17.40-->0:3:17.930<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

OK, awesome.¶

0:3:17.980-->0:3:18.430<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

Awesome.¶

0:3:18.820-->0:3:19.780<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

I think that's a good point.¶

0:3:19.240-->0:3:20.120<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

How do you balance?¶

0:3:21.130-->0:3:22.530<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

No, I decided it's a good point.¶

0:3:20.880-->0:3:23.230<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

Yeah, I miss somebody, OK.¶

0:3:25.800-->0:3:25.980<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

Sure.¶

0:3:23.270-->0:3:33.580<sup>+</sup>

Cameron Reed<sup>+</sup>

I've had one more subcomponent under time blindness would be, I guess we'll say estimation difficulty depending on which school you attend.¶

0:3:33.740-->0:3:36.470<sup>+</sup>

Cameron Reed<sup>+</sup>

Some of the assignments, they don't have a.¶

0:3:36.800-->0:4:2.860<sup>+</sup>

Cameron Reed<sup>+</sup>

This is how long things should take generally, and so when you're looking forward, it's hard for you to figure out do I do I crunch all this today and before I go out activity tomorrow or do I do I how do I break this up so I can, you know, stay sane throughout the process and if you procrastinate you because of that lack of time estimation you might not get it all done.¶

0:4:2.870-->0:4:5.30<sup>+</sup>

Cameron Reed<sup>+</sup>

So it's just difficult all around.¶

0:4:5.920-->0:4:6.810<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

OK, awesome.¶

0:4:6.820-->0:4:7.670<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

Good, good.¶

0:4:8.120-->0:4:11.240<sup>+</sup>

James Lawrence<sup>+</sup>

How do you balance your studies with your personal and work commitments?¶

0:4:15.880-->0:4:28.290<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

I think like for me and I know we talked a little bit about it, when I when we did the interview, but for me I kind of took I think it was I'm trying to remember, umm the professor's name.¶

0:4:28.300-->0:4:36.820<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

But when you and I were were in our summer class, our instructor kind of said make a schedule and stick to it like as you're moving forward.¶

0:4:36.880-->0:4:38.370<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

Talk to your family about it.¶

0:4:38.840-->0:4:44.210<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

Make a schedule that you can that you can live with, and then you know when it's time.¶

0:4:44.260-->0:4:52.380<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

When you have time to spend, and if you're going to make a change, you could make it, but at least you already know you have a plan of when you're going to do assignments.¶

0:4:52.390-->0:5:0.880<sup>+</sup>

Parker Lake<sup>+</sup>

## Appendix L

### Bracketing Journal Audit Log

**Personal Reflections:** Notes on the researcher's beliefs, values, and experiences that could influence their interpretation of the data.

**Methodological Decisions:** Document why particular methods were chosen and how the researcher's perspectives might impact these choices.

**Data Interpretation Notes:** Reflections on how personal biases might affect the interpretation of qualitative data, like interview transcripts or observational notes.

**Emotional Responses:** Acknowledgment of the researcher's emotional responses during the study, which could influence data interpretation.

\*\*\*\*\*

**November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

Tomorrow will be the first virtual interview for the data collection component of the study. I currently have eleven participants recruited for the study. I am still actively recruiting in case any participants who have agreed to participate in the study become unavailable or if saturation is not within the current number of participants.

**Personal Bias Affirmation:**

**November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

I am going into this data collection phase with an open mind. Though I know I have biases towards online learning, I intend to actively listen during the interview process to ensure I allow participants to engage openly. I want to ensure I do not introduce my biases into the interview. I want to engage and support my participants; however, having completed three degrees in an online environment, I already have preconceived biases toward time management and motivation. I firmly believe that time management decisions play a heavy role in one's ability to persist in an online degree program. I am almost certain that had I not had strong time management skills, there is no way I would have remained motivated to complete my degrees. I will let the data tell the story, and using horizontalization and thematic codes, I hope to extract themes that support what I feel from my own beliefs. However, I am not going to impart my bias into the study. Instead, I aim to capture and document the data as the participants share it with me and use their experiences and data to show how time management decisions influenced their motivation and persistence.

**Methodological Decisions:**

The methodology selected for this study is transcendental phenomenology. I have chosen this methodology because, according to Creswell & Poth (2018) and Moustakas (2005), using epoche and bracketing techniques helps me reduce my potential bias. I have done online degrees, and since I seek to understand the true essence of the data without interpretation, this methodology aligns with my approach. Also, Moustakas's description of horizontalization to extract exact phrases that carry the essence of the participant's feelings and personal convictions is of great interest. Though I also feel I'll need to use some form of thematic coding to help with identifying the themes and, to some extent, the subthemes, I think that the nature of qualitative research is somewhat subjective to begin with, which will enable me to use my best analysis and through the reduction of my bias and being open-minded, I should be able to manage the data analysis with limited influence adequately.

\*\*\*\*\*

**November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

My first interview starts in about an hour. I felt a bit anxious as this is the first of eleven interviews, and my goal is to be open and actively listen. The plan is to use Word dictation tools to transcribe the recorded interview. We will see how this goes. As a backup, the Stream recording application also has a transcription capability, so I will also capture transcripts through that tool. I want the transcripts to be precisely representative of the interview. I am only planning on editing where necessary for clarity. I also plan to send the transcripts to the interviewee so they can review the transcript for accuracy.

This will help to support the accuracy and credibility of the study.

**Interviews:**

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**November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023:*****Taylor Ash***

The first interview was with Taylor Ash on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 10:00 am to 11:00 am EST.

The interview went very well; Taylor was able to offer a great deal of insight relating to the interview questions. I consciously tried to listen and avoid interrupting her when she was responding to the questions. Taylor was open and honest during the interview and is already proactively working on the first of three journal prompts.

**Biases: I relate to Taylor's desire to leave the corporate world and move on a new path. I, too, took this path when I turned thirty. I have been on that path for many years.**

However, I could openly and actively listen, and the transcription through the Word dictation tool worked quite nicely. Only minor edits were necessary.

Transcriptions will be sent to her for review as soon as I finish saving them to Azure for storage and protection. One change that will be made once she is OK with the transcripts is that I will make a copy and remove her actual name from the transcripts and replace it with her pseudonym of Taylor Ash. I will save both versions; however, for horizontalization, I want to ensure I am working with the pseudonym version.

She has also already started on the journal prompts and will be completing them over the next three weeks.

***Riley Stone***

The second interview was with Riley Stone on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm EST.

This interview was also on time, and Riley was open to the interview process. Riley provided additional insight to my study's interview questions and had experiences like Taylor's; however, she is a single mother and veteran of the Marine Corps. She freely discussed some trauma that resulted in her separating from the military, and this was one reason she began to pursue her online degree. Her experiences with being a runaway at 15 and her drive even as a runaway to complete her high school diploma were outside the study and may be seen as outliers. However, her ability to manage this demonstrated excellent time management skills and motivation, critical elements of the study.

**Biases: Tough interview to get through. Riley had a tough childhood, and it did not get much better when she was in the military. She openly discussed some trauma that occurred during her military service, and this resulted in her being discharged with some disability. She was also a runaway at 15, living day to day in shelters and putting herself through high school. My heart was struggling in this interview, and I found it challenging to focus as she**

**discussed some of the trauma. I have had trauma in my past and could see how it impacted her approach to time management and persistence. I kept my mind open, though, and worked through the interview. The tricky part is that during transcription and analysis, I need to see the data for what it is and not try to apply my feelings.**

Again, horizontalization and transcript updates and email her with the transcript to enable her to review for accuracy. She is also planning to start working on the journal prompts. Hoping that all the participants will be able to complete journal prompts by the end of December so most data can be analyzed and processed before January.

***December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023:***

***Jordan Blaze***

Jordan's third interview was held on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm EST. Jordan lives in Texas and has two children, one of which is a newborn. This presented a challenge during the interview as she needed to care for the newborn during the interview. However, her ability to juggle this while formulating good responses to the interview questions was remarkable. Again, to keep my biases to a minimum, I focused on listening during her responses to ensure she could take her time to answer and respond to each question. Jordan struggles with ADHD, as she noted in the interview, and this resulted in some loss of focus during the session; however, I did my best when beginning a new question to give her time to regain her focus. Jordan provided solid responses, and after just three interviews, I already see some commonality across each participant's responses. I would not say saturation has started, but themes are beginning to appear in the data.

**Biases: Tough interview. She has a newborn, and keeping her focused on the interview was difficult. I had to put more emphasis on my ability to listen as she struggles with ADHD actively, and this made it a challenge for her to stay focused on questions when responding. I made my role as the interviewer a bit more challenging. I am not sure I agree with her being a good time manager, as some of her responses were highly conflicting, but I am open-minded and will analyze the data to see what it shows.**

***Jamie Frost***

Jamie's interview occurred on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm EST. Jamie is vital at a hospice organization, which consumes much of his time. He was, however, very open during the interview, and due to his time restrictions, I tried to respect his limited time. Jamie is also working to complete a Doctoral degree, so he is one of the candidates who screams non-traditional learner. He already holds an MBA and is in the first semester of his Strategic Leadership Doctoral program. His openness about family being a priority and that he must be sure to place them and his education in check highlighted his ability to manage complex tasks like work, family, and education. He felt that time management was pivotal to his success. Again, this interview provided great insight.

**Biases: This was an excellent interview. Jamie's role as a CEO aligns with my past roles as a CTO, so we had quite a bit in common. This could present challenges for me when analyzing his data. I am confident I would be interested to see if what has motivated him as a CEO influences him, like how my CTO role influenced my motivation. However, I will avoid this during analysis and wait until after the study is complete to make some after-the-fact comparisons.**

Journal prompt responses for Jamie are already coming in. It worked well getting the participants access to complete their journal prompts earlier than after the interviews. This is bearing fruit as the responses align with the interviews and are helping to consolidate the data.

***December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023:***

***Cameron Reed***

Cameron's interview was held on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, from 2:00 to 3:00 pm EST. Cameron is a very proactive individual. He was the first to respond to my recruitment post and was extremely willing to participate in the study. He was open during the interview process that he struggles with ADHD and undiagnosed Aspergers. However, knowing this, I took my time to allow him to navigate through his responses to my questions. I remember from previous interviews with individuals with ADHD to provide enough time for them to focus on the question and respond. I ensured that I listened to their responses to allow them to stay focused without distractions that may cause them to wander. Cameron found time management of great importance, especially since he struggles if he does not schedule his time for study. He even mentioned that one semester after first moving to Florida, he dropped his time management approach using scheduling and did not complete any classes that semester. His ADHD and Aspergers just took over, and he could not motivate himself to complete the courses. He is now back scheduling and whiteboarding with sticky notes to stay on track to complete his degree.

**Biases: So, I am starting to see a pattern in the interviews; the ones that I am struggling with, the interviewees all seem to work with ADHD. This one with Cameron was difficult to keep going in one direction. There is something with ADHD that causes time management challenges and motivational issues. I am not sure. I know I think there probably is. But then again, each of the ones with ADHD so far has been highly motivated to complete their degree, so maybe it is just a big challenge. Data may show they have strategies to deal with it. I am open and will let the data tell the story.**

**Notes:**

No interviews are scheduled until December 6, 2023, so I plan to do some more horizontalization and see what I can start to see within the data. I need to continue with the color-coding by the participant. Excel is the way to go, but extracting phrases is complex, and right now, I am going through the transcripts and copying out short, exact phrases by the participant and just pasting them into Excel. I am not looking for themes just yet. I need more data to work with, and I only had a couple of interviews before that process. I see some trends in the data, so themes should be clear to identify.

***December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023***

***Skyler Vale***

First, no show for a participant. I allowed all participants to select the day and time that fit their schedule, as I wanted to be as accommodating as possible. No email or message that she would not make the interview. I will reach out and see if she wants to reschedule. Life happens; I must remember this.

***December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023:***

***Avery Brook***

Avery's interview was held on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm EST. Avery works in a hybrid role, so we had to schedule the interview to coincide with a day when she was working from home, as her current position does not allow outside network connectivity due to the sensitive nature of her job. Avery is also a veteran and serves in the National Guard. Her time management skills evolved from electronic schedules to her favorite type of paper. She uses a daily planner to plan all her work, family, friends, and educational commitments. She has found that time management is critical; however, pursuing her degree has forced her to make required sacrifices, like giving up soccer, to ensure she can make adequate time for her studies. She is a

lifelong learner and enjoys learning. Her motivation is to obtain her degree and her love for learning. She noted that proper time management has been crucial in reducing stress and anxiety, which were more pronounced when she did not plan effectively.

**Biases: Avery is another military veteran with a much different experience than Sofia's, so the interview went smoothly. Her military background is very similar to mine, and her responses about time management and motivation align with mine, so most assuredly, there is some bias there. I can relate to her desire for growth and her lifelong learning discussion. I am right there; I am so heavily biased on this interview. Doing everything to be open to allowing the data from her transcripts to let the data come out naturally.**

**Notes:**

Skyler has rescheduled her interview. That is a good thing; she completely forgot all about the interview. Hmm. Time management... The next time slot is on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

For member checking, I have provided the participants with their original transcripts for review. So far, everyone is okay, with just a few minor edits and corrections to the transcripts. These have been incorporated into the final transcripts with pseudonyms.

**December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

***Parker Lake***

Parker had to reschedule her interview. We had a time conflict, so this interview is being rescheduled.

**December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

So again, a no-show, no message or email. I am sending reminders, but this is the second time for a no-show. I need to get another recruit. I am not sure Skyler will be able to do her interviews, and that concerns me some as journal prompts are coming in for others, but how would she do with no actual prompt other than once a week? I am rescheduling one last time, and if she does not show up, I will move on. In the meantime, we are back to recruiting one additional participant.

**December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

***Parker Lake***

Parker's interview occurred on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 10:00 am to 11:00 am. Great interview. Parker is working on her Ph.D. in Education, the same as I am, and at Liberty. She is at the same point in her degree as I am, so I need to be aware that we know each other through classes we have taken as cohorts. Parker shared many great experiences relating to her motivation for pursuing her degree. Her mother and husband are both significant elements of her life and serve as motivators for her. Time management is also crucial, as she indicated that she plans out her coursework, and since her husband is also in school, they set aside time on Thursdays to review each other's papers and assist each other. Her life is busy, and she has faced challenges getting back on track due to taking extra time off in the summer. She felt that it took her extra effort to regain her motivation.

Her transcript shows the same themes as the others; saturation appears to have occurred around seven or eight interviews. Right now, I have narrowed the themes to three: "Personal Organization and Reflection," "Time Management Challenges and Scheduling," and "Work-Life Balance in Education." The horizontalization and thematic codes are all pointing to these themes. Subthemes are coming along quite nicely. I have been looking at the grouping of horizontalization phrases, color-coded by participant in each theme, and so far, there are four in theme 1, four in theme 2, and three in theme 3.

**Biases:** As noted above, Parker and I know each other from classes we have attended as cohorts. I need to pay special attention when analyzing her data to ensure I remain open-minded and do not use any information I know about her from previous courses. Also, Parker is around my age and has a similar educational background. Hence, we are both in the generation older than most participants and could be outliers—doing my best to keep my bias in check.

**Notes:**

Skyler has rescheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup> of December. Fingers crossed. Also, journal prompts are complete for about a third of the participants, and I have been analyzing these, too. I am still unaware that journal prompts are as valuable as interviews. Participants are not seen as willing or capable of giving good in-depth writing for these. Some do better than others.

**December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

*Alex River*

It is a no-show for Alex; it is another reschedule, like herding cats. This has now been rescheduled for the 18<sup>th</sup> of December.

**Notes:**

A new participant, Bailey Thorn, was recruited. The interview is going to be scheduled for the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December.

The second journal prompt is for participants who have completed interviews since the end of November. First set for most of the others. For analysis purposes, I have started adding journal prompt responses to the end of the transcript file copies. I have them separate, but extracting phrases from single files is more accessible. Journal prompts are questions, so they align well with the transcript.

I have also created a new worksheet for research questions. I am using extracted phrases and trying to align them to the research questions, hoping to see themes align across interviews, journal prompts, and research questions. I have produced various themes and am doing some clustering to reduce the themes I have begun to see. There are just too many right now; I need these to reduce to 3 or 4 at some point.

I shared my first pass of phrases, themes, and subthemes with Dr. Motte, and she reminded me that clustering will help to reduce the number of themes. We do not want ten themes; there would be too much data. I am doing a second round of clustering. I am down to three themes, and the data is starting to lock on them. I am not seeing new stuff. Dr. Motte thought this would happen after six interviews. I have done eight and feel good about the three themes. I seem to align with my feelings but keep my bias out until I finish.

*Skyler Vale*

Skyler's interview was successful today, December 14th, 2023, from 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm. It took three tries, but we finally got through the interview. Skyler is an amazing young woman. She is self-motivated to complete her degree and looks to serve as a role model for her younger nieces and nephews. She is a big social media person; the interview was conducted on her phone instead of a PC. But that is the norm for this generation of learners over thirty. She is currently working full-time, so she struggles with time commitment challenges. She manages her time by taking advantage of every moment of study, such as setting tighter deadlines than actual ones and using logical strategies to divide her workload. This approach, though personalized, allows her to balance her educational responsibilities with her full-time job and other commitments. Skyler emphasizes that school is her number one priority, a mindset that has guided her through numerous challenges, including personal hardships and professional demands.



Skyler's motivation is deeply rooted in her background. Her mother, a homemaker who sacrificed everything for her family, is her primary inspiration. Skyler strives to be a positive example for younger family members and to demonstrate that one's background does not define one's future. This motivation and time management strategies have enabled her to persist in her educational pursuits despite numerous obstacles—lots of great content during this interview. This interview's horizontalization and transcription follow the same path as the others.

**Biases: I have a few biases that I need to control. Though I use social media, I am no fan of it. Social media has distorted our family environment, and we now have multiple generations of adults who cannot focus on quality conversations and in-person interactions. Though this is not true for everyone, we should limit social media and mobile platform use. We need to have young adults and old adults who can interact in person. Knowing this, I will emphasize the analysis of Skyler's transcripts and journal prompts to enable me to remain open-minded and avoid bringing my bias into the analysis.**

**Notes:** I am getting close to completing the interviews, and the journal prompts are coming in quite nicely. I anticipate that all journal prompts will be completed by the end of the month. Horizontalization is going well; however, my background as an Engineer has me struggling a bit with the nature of qualitative research. It is just a bit bland. I know this is subjective, but I like numbers, and unfortunately, there just are not any with this research methodology.

Most definitely see alignment with the principles that Knowles identified in his theory of andragogy. Especially the need to learn, orientation to learn, and motivation. All the phrases across participants demonstrate that learning is critical and that time management, or “good time management decisions,” helps them remain motivated to complete their degrees. Some have even stated that without good time management and organization, there is no way they could meet their programs.

**December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

*Morgan Sage*

Morgan's interview occurred on December 15th, 2023, from 7:00 to 8:00 pm. Morgan is the youngest of the participants; she barely meets the study criteria. She is thirty ½ years old. She is just over the threshold; however, her information is valuable as she provides some insight into non-traditional learners just entering the range of my study parameters. It will be interesting to see if any new themes arise from her responses and transcripts. Morgan is a part-time educator for elementary students. She struggles with time management and motivation as she has been working to complete her bachelor's degree for six years. She indicated that she also struggles with ADHD. This causes issues; however, from what I can tell, it is not a theme or subtheme. The time management challenges and motivations are still there, even with ADHD. Some do well at time management and are highly motivated, so I think something else is happening here that may be outside my study. It might be interesting to do further research on how non-traditional learners with ADHD manage their degrees—just a thought.

**Biases: I have children her age, and taking six years to complete a bachelor's degree rings home. My youngest son is about her age, and he also took forever to finish his online degree. I am unsure if it is generational, but I am biased toward the procrastination this generation exhibits. I see it in the work environment, school environment, and society in general. Again, this goes back to my dislike of social media, which is the most significant part of this generation's life. We have ruined them by introducing mobile devices that make access easy. I will keep this bias in check when I analyze this transcript and the journal prompts.**

**Notes:** I will be interested in seeing and hearing Morgan's interactions in the focus group. She may very well bring a unique perspective to the group. I am hoping to begin planning the focus group for late January 2024. I need to see how to adjust the focus group questions to perform member-checking against the themes and subthemes. I will discuss this with Dr. Motte after the Spring semester starts. I do not want to wait too long to finish the focus group, as getting the participants to engage and show up is tough. Getting them all into a focus group is going to be a massive challenge for sure.

Transcripts were provided to participants who had just completed their interviews. No changes are required from this set of transcripts. Member checking and accuracy check completed.

**December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023:**

***Alex River***

Alex's interview occurred on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from 10:00 am to 11:00 am. Alex is a unique participant. She is taking one of the first approved Jura doctorate programs that is fully accredited in an online environment. The program is not 100% online as the Bar Association still requires a few hours of in-person instruction, so she attends some classes at the university. She must fly to the school "Mitchell Hamlin University School of Law." She has multiple master's degrees and is working to complete her JD. Alex is right in the middle of the age range of my participants and has excellent time management skills. She uses a variety of mechanisms to maintain her persistence, and from what I see in her data, she has done this consistently throughout her education. She also has a unique motivator for school. When she was young, one of her teachers told her and her mother that she would never amount to anything. What a horrible educator. If you want to set someone up to fail, this is a great way to do it. However, she has excelled and should return to that teacher and say you were wrong.

**Biases: Another participant that I relate to. I hold three master's degrees, and when I was young, I wanted to join the band. My band instructor told my mother he could not play in the band because he had no rhythm. Later in life, I learned to play the piano and the guitar to prove him wrong. Life is strange; some too many people seek to tear others down. I must keep an open mind when analyzing prompts and transcripts here; I have too much in common. However, I am doing well at just looking at the data for what it is and not interpreting the results.**

**Notes:** Still no new themes or subthemes. Even Morgan's transcripts and journal responses align with the themes. I am sure at the final three themes and eleven subthemes—one last weekly interview. Journal prompts are done for everyone except Bailey; she should finish hers just before or after the interview. Even this data aligns with the themes and subthemes.

Current themes with subthemes look like this:

Themes	Sub-Themes
<b>Personal Organization and Reflection</b>	<i>Adapting to Academic Challenges</i>
	<i>Family and Personal Life</i>
	<i>Prioritizing Tasks</i>
	<i>Time Management Tools</i>
<b>Time Management Challenges and Scheduling</b>	<i>Academic Challenges and Planning</i>

	<i>Personal Development and Schedule Management</i>
	<i>Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation</i>
	<i>Challenges in Education, Work, and Life</i>
<b>Work–Life Balance in Education</b>	<i>Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling</i>
	<i>Balancing School and Work Priorities</i>
	<i>Time Management and Personal Organization</i>

This will be my final set of themes and subthemes unless focus groups or the last interview show different ones. Early on, before starting this study, I was not sure where the issues with persistence and motivation occurred; I had thought time management was an influencer. This is a subjective study and can be viewed from different viewpoints. However, from the data I have gathered, these themes and subthemes dominate the data collected. I could see where someone else would extract critical phrases and potentially identify other themes and subthemes; however, this is what I found during the analysis. I am looking forward to completing the last interview. They are draining on me. I am outgoing; however, active listening is not my strong suit, so it consumes my energy.

**December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023:**

***Bailey Thorn***

The last interview is done. Bailey's interview occurred on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm. Bailey is an exciting individual. She started her own business despite spending most of her childhood in foster care. She struggled with family life and motivation. Working on her doctorate in strategic leadership and being a mother of two daughters, she is motivated to complete her degree to serve as a role model for her two girls. What a monumental reason to continue one's education. She mentioned that education became an escape for her, fueling her desire to persist and complete her degree. She often skips terms and hopes to complete her Ph.D. within six years; however, her career and family are a big part of her life, so she must fit education into the mix. Her transcript again supports the themes and subthemes: Time management is critical, an organization from a personal perspective, work, and family balance, and scheduling are all found in her responses.

**Biases: There are no natural biases to mention here that I have not seen. Other than the motivation to serve as a role model. I have obtained my degrees to be a role model for my boys. Though they are both grown, I started my degrees early in my thirties and continued through my fifties. I was the first in my family to earn a college degree, and I can relate to Bailey's desire to be a role model to her girls.**

**Notes:** Interviews are complete; Bailey completed her journal prompts before today's interview on Friday evening. So, all journal prompts are now incorporated into the data set. All participant videos, transcripts, and journal prompt responses are now stored for security in Azure storage. They are working to finalize the horizontalization, thematic codes, themes, and subthemes. No new themes or subthemes occurred. I am not expecting anything from the focus group that would add to the themes and subthemes.

The next plan is to start to build out Chapter Four. I should be able to complete most of the writing before the focus group. I cannot finalize the chapter, but I have been able to write the

participant descriptions and build participant tables and charts by characteristics. I am starting to write the chapter's themes, subthemes, and research questions components.

I still need to meet with Dr. Motte to verify how the focus group needs to be done for member checking.

### **Focus Group Session:**

**Notes:** I plan to hold the focus group after the 18<sup>th</sup> of January. Dr. Motte is available on the 16<sup>th</sup> to discuss chapter four, and after this, I will plan and schedule time with the participants to attend the focus group. Before the focus group, I will create, instead, I will modify my focus group questions to support member checking. I hope to have all twelve participants attend the focus group; however, I know that one has already indicated she may be in class for her JD work on campus and will not be available until after the middle part of February. I do not want to wait that long for one person, so I plan on eleven participants. Dr. Motte said I need at least eight. That should be easy.

### **January 5th, 2024:**

The analysis is completed for journal prompts and interviews. I'm beginning to write chapter four, starting with the detailed descriptions of all 12 participants and moving on to demographics.

Final themes and subthemes were consistent, and saturation occurred at eight participants. I did not see any new themes that could not be clustered into the last themes and subthemes.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>
<b>Personal Organization and Reflection</b>	<i>Adapting to Academic Challenges</i>
	<i>Family and Personal Life</i>
	<i>Prioritizing Tasks</i>
	<i>Time Management Tools</i>
<b>Time Management Challenges and Scheduling</b>	<i>Academic Challenges and Planning</i>
	<i>Personal Development and Schedule Management</i>
	<i>Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation</i>
	<i>Challenges in Education, Work, and Life</i>
<b>Work–Life Balance in Education</b>	<i>Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling</i>
	<i>Balancing School and Work Priorities</i>
	<i>Time Management and Personal Organization</i>

Perhaps focus groups may reveal something new; however, I don't expect anything new.

**Biases:** Kept an open mind during analysis and let the horizontalization and thematic codes speak for themselves.

### **January 8th, 2024:**

Detailed descriptions are completed, demographics charts and participant tables, and themes/subthemes tables are complete. They are starting to work on writing the themes, subthemes, research questions, and outliers.

**Notes:** I did identify two outliers. So, I'm adding those to the chapter too.

**January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

The chapter is entirely populated; I'm sure Dr. Motte will identify a ton of work; however, it is a great start. All four chapters are now completed and run through Grammarly.

**Notes:** I'm starting to dislike Grammarly. I have the professional version, and unfortunately, it can only handle 50 pages at a time; when you use the online version to check for passive voice, the results are always different. It doesn't seem to maintain your previous checks, and it changes and makes suggestions that are different every time. Annoying.

**January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

I'm still in the holding area for EDUC988 and have not been moved over. I had planned a meeting with Dr. Motte to review Chapter Four on the 16<sup>th</sup> but had to cancel. Bad cold. Ugh, setbacks. I am on hold until next week when I can meet with Dr. Motte on Wednesday. In the meantime, I'm working on focus group questions and the intro section for focus groups, as they were just placeholders until I could write questions to support member checking. I should have them done this week and have an introduction written to wrap up that section of chapter three.

**January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024:**

I just heard back from Dr. Motte on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Member checking is primarily done through sending the transcripts to participants for review and accuracy. I have completed this, so member checking will not be done through the focus group. I also asked about sharing the results in Chapter Four, and Dr. Motte stated, "Do not do this, as it would bias the results." So, instead, I'm developing new focus group questions to use in the focus group session. This will address the CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2 research questions to determine if any new themes or subthemes are found.

I am back to writing the focus group questions and will have these done by tomorrow.

**Notes:** I have a meeting with Dr. Motte on the **17<sup>th</sup> of January 2024** to discuss the focus group and Chapter Four. After this meeting, I will email each participant to query for good days and times to conduct the focus group session.

I want to complete this by the end of the first week of February 2024.

**February 2nd, 2024 (6:00 to 7:00 pm Eastern):**

Tonight is the first of two focus groups. A bit anxious as this is the first time, I will be conducting a focus group session with multiple participants. Group session is scheduled to start at 6:00 pm Eastern time via Microsoft Teams. This is the smaller of the two focus group sessions with just four participants scheduled to attend. The participants in this group session are Bailey Thorn, Avery Brook, Jamie Frost, and Riley Stone. However, during the focus group only Bailey Thorn, and Jamie Frost were able to attend due to time conflicts.

**Biases:**

As with all the interviews, I'm going into the focus group with an open mind and will be using active listening to ensure I allow each participant to share their experiences. I am making it a priority to focus on their responses and not try to interpret the meaning of their answers. Instead, I'm hoping to listen and confirm through triangulation some of the preliminary themes and subthemes that have presented themselves during the interview and journal prompt data analysis and horizontalization done prior to the focus groups.

**Post Focus Group:**

First focus group session went really well. Lots of engagement and cross talk amongst the attendees. I was pleasantly surprised at just how well I was able to actively listen and engage the participants. Transcribed and recorded the session and will be preparing the transcript this weekend and will provide the copy for member checking to the participants to ensure accuracy.

**February 3rd, 2024 (1:00 to 2:00 pm Eastern):**

Second focus group session really was great. Of the eight participants invited, five were able to attend the session. Three participants had conflicts that prevented them from attending. However, the session included: Alex River, Taylor Ash, Riley Stone, Cameron Reed, Parker Lake. I was able to actively listen and keep the communication flowing amongst the participants. Everyone provided great information and I was glad to see that the triangulation of the three preliminary themes was on target.

**Biases:**

I've become quite good and putting my biases in check for interviews and the focus groups. I was able to keep an open mind, not make any interpretations, and I was able to keep the group sharing valuable information that I will be able to use to add to my study data.

**Notes:**

Can't believe today is the culmination of more than 30 days of data collection and analysis. I've learned a ton from my participants, and my thoughts of how I approached my online learning programs is very similar from what the data is telling me. Though I'm not interpreting the results, I definitely see that online learning among non-traditional learners is challenging in many ways. I'm looking forward to completing the work on Chapter Four and presenting the results of the data collection and analysis.

## Appendix M

### Personal Organization and Reflection Horizontalization

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Phrase</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>
<b>Alex River</b>	"Without it you there is no success".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Alex River</b>	"I think it's made it easier because I know I know the expectation of when office hours are going to be held. So if I have a class and it's office hours are on Tuesday that's the class that I want to try and have my reading done so I know what questions to bring"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Alex River</b>	"A ton. Making time for my spouse making time for myself. That's not school or work related. Both can be very difficult and something that I have to consciously choose to do"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Alex River</b>	"I learned to say no. That was a big one. Up until March April of last year in addition to my full time job as a speech therapist I was working in a PR and capacity for four other companies which meant on the weekend they could call me to come in in the evenings".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Alex River</b>	"That's a really good question. I don't know that I necessarily do. On purpose I think sometimes it just happens indirectly right? Like. You're sitting there and you're like oh my gosh why did I torture myself? Why did I do this to myself? And you're kind of like well because to do the job I want to do this is what I have to do"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Alex River</b>	"Definitely the calendar. So whether it's used I use the calendar to identify work projects also. So if there's a work project due and I may need to work a little later. I can adjust my school schedule and vice versa".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Alex River</b>	"A ton. I think they evolve multiple times even across the semester. When I started I was doing like a handwritten study schedule. By the day in my OneNote book and then realize ohh that doesn't work if I don't look at it every day and so then I went to printing it out and then I could make adjustments that way and it was actually a classmate who shared her white board. And that's when I went Oh my gosh. That is a much better. Your resource and style than what I'm trying to accomplish because my original format I couldn't see the future. I had to have a whole different separate document to see future assignments and so forth whereas the whiteboard system allows me to see what's in the immediate and then what's coming up in the future"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"A lot because I have a family. I have two kids. I work full time. Like I said I'm in the I'm in the Air National Guard so time management is a a big thing. If I didn't I used this planner and like I said well I I wrote it in my. My journal entry for you was that as soon as the class begins I just go through every module and write down when things are due so I can look at my calendar and plan out when I will do certain things you know and not forget them either".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"So so many years ago. So the last time I set foot in. The classroom that was. 2009. I think because you're in the classroom you're there and you have to be there. So online I feel like it's more on the individual to get things done than being. In the classroom"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Like some things have to give. Like I used to play soccer I stopped doing that. You know there's just some things that you have to be like. Oh I can't do	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life



	that. Just so you can get the you know studying done or assignments done".		
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Once the semester begins I write down all my assignments/test/etc. due dates on my planner and use a specific highlighter color for school. Having a full-time job and a family I use a different color for each of us for our activities. I used to play soccer but have taken a break to have more time for school. However I still make time for physical activity 4-5 days a week usually runs. Running is a big part of my life for relieving stress in a healthy way"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"I think no one wants to fail a class especially when you're paying for it. So that is a huge motivation is I you know when I want good grades anyways. But you know it's it's money and. Yeah that's just a big motivation is I I don't. What I don't want to you know get a bad grade. But also I don't want to fail because that is money that you know is basically thrown away".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"No. Like if there is a class like there was one Class 1 semester that was definitely. Harder for me I would. Put more time into it"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"My planner at 100%".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"So I didn't do the planner. I would just. Look weekly of what was due and I. I felt more anxiety or stressed. Because if they're like what's with this week? What's this week so? Now that like. Especially at the end of the semester you know there's. You know we have. A couple of days to do a few things so I'm more prepared to do that because I already know what's coming".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Avery Brook</b>	"I would say like you don't have to do the planner like me but I would say using uh Google Calendar or something like. That and putting all your assignments in. I think that helps cause you you you're not blinded because you know we get all the assignments as soon as the semester begins"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Time management is everything... I'm super dependent on my calendar because I have to use time blocks to really like get things done".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"My motivation is to finish and to be successful and so that means that the time that I have to spend and do my work. Is a. Priority"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"I know that whenever I have a class coming up... I shouldn't plan a lot of other. Stuff outside outside of that" (Discussing the need to balance education with other responsibilities).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"As someone who spent time in the foster care system education quickly became my escape... Finally as a mother I want my daughters to be proud of me and I want them to have a good example to follow at all times so I am persistent"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Well good question. My motivation is to finish and to be successful and so that means that the time that I have to spend and do my work. Is a. Priority".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Prioritizing using a calendar, time blocking" (Regarding strategies used to maintain persistence in the program)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Again it would be my calendar. That's pretty much it... I mean the calendar is is" (Explaining reliance on a calendar for time management).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"I allocate time by putting blocks on my calendar. Without my calendar my entire schedule would be a mess because for me it is hard to plan when I	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

	have so many competing priorities unless I use a calendar".		
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Use a calendar. Use a journal. Talk to people about what you're working on because they might be able to support you in some. Way or help you. Keep encouraged and motivated and celebrate your successes" (Advice for other non-traditional learners)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"I'm the only one that says when to study and you know how long or how hard or how distracted during that study time I can or can't be".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"It's an unfortunate cycle of procrastination followed by binge... intense exhaustive hyper-focused ADHD work".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Time management is not based on signaling... the motivation for going to school is not connected to how I manage time at work"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Eating and paying attention to my partner... I'm lazy and I don't like saying no to people too... mentally lazy".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"I don't even have a friend in Florida that I could like drive to so. It's like call them randomly and just have a random conversation after work hours"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"When my strategy changed to be Lacey Fair reactive do it whenever you want. Without a structured time management approach I didn't get any work done".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Most of life right now is reactive... Because I have a desire and a motivation to finish school and because of last semesters. Less than satisfactory results. I'm going back to something that's tried and true"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"I had a whiteboard... I'm swinging back that direction... I have to go back to sticky notes and or whiteboards and or uh calendar-based reminder systems".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"I originally was using a very technology-based approach with Outlook... Then my strategy changed to... whiteboard based and uh checklist based".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Invest in... You can either use a technology system to help you, you can use pen and paper... Start by writing down what you have to"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Time management is a challenge and that's something that I've had to... So what I have to do is be very diligent if I have time during my week. To work on. A couple of things here and there or read some things I try to do that and knock out some of the initial parts of it"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Challenges. Well sometimes I feel like I've neglected my family and that's a big deal to me... So it comes to the detriment of sleep sometimes. But that's the choice I make".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"My wife is also a integral component of this because she understands... We homeschool our kids so we have some flexibility... It's just more intentional so for me it's the whole construct"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"For the degree has I mean has very specific deadlines. And so I I just try to manage it within that deadline... But yeah it it's something where it. It's not like I have to be at a certain. Like on a discussion board at a certain time".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"I haven't had any thus far but we are expecting our 6th child. This will likely create time conflicts to some degree so I will have to be sure that I get ahead in my coursework as much as I can to not get behind"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"I keep a calendar to plan my work school and family events. My life has become very structured. My personality is flexible so it has been challenging to become more intentional with every day".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Allocating time for learning can be a challenge and requires a degree of discipline. For me the most impactful way to accomplish all I want to accomplish is by blocking time on my calendar"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"Typically it's just one or two assignments a week... Some of the papers are lengthy so those require boatload more time but just on average it's like 1 to 2 assignments".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"Career change? I... have picked a new career where I could grow, which is counseling something I particularly love".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I have to be very upfront and specific about how when we're we cannot do general... It's got to be like day by day hour by hour like I set alarms in the morning" (Discussing the importance of precise time management)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"The biggest struggle I have is balancing it with the kids... I want to spend time with my kids as much as possible".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"One of my biggest motivations for going back to school... was watching my mom go back to graduate school... Working in a field that did not require education strangely enough pushed me to get more education"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I typically go again. Obviously my family will always come first but as far as like prioritizing after that I kind of... Do my easier stuff first"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I personally follow a schedule. Everything is on my calendar... I tend to do the same things in the same order every day".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"We have whiteboards... and then I have a Google Calendar. That has everything on it... I have reminders on my phone"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I chose online learning because I thought it would be easier for me in my schedule with work and everything".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"That one's really hard because I honestly... struggle with this online learning and sometimes I just don't find the time to do it".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"Instances that required adjustments were two-part. The first is just shifting my attitude and motivation for online learning... I also have ADHD and found completing timed tests was difficult for me"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I feel like I don't put school as a top priority... mostly because at WGU it's like at your own pace... but I need to realize like. So there are still end dates".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"In the typical day as an online learner, I like to keep a balance between completing coursework, working my job, and spending personal time with friends and family"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I think what I usually do is during the day I work on my school work and then at night I hang out with my friends and my family"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I'm like a first grade teacher so I kind of like do little things I would do for them like little brain breaks... Like take a little break and do something I enjoy and then get back to work".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I actually like to study at work when I have a break... So I do take about 40 minutes at work to study there and then I do study on the weekends a lot".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"So it does make me feel bad so I am trying to get really better at it and like right now I am doing my study plan and I have been working every day on it"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"You really have to manage your time because. It can really sneak up on you if something comes up and you don't work on your assignments".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges

<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I think it kind of. Made me have to do. It because this particular like beginning the dissertation course I felt like was really hard on me as a time manager".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I think when I. Was having a lot of trouble with the chapter. Two I thought. Am I really cut out for this? Should I really? Am I really going to be able to get these you know?"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"Well sometimes I feel guilty because my mother lives in town... But then on Sunday I'll go and just hang out with my mom".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"One I know in this one class... But he you know he was away from home for the first time really like living away from home. So my husband's like we should go make sure he's OK" (Referring to a situation with her son)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"Well one thing I do is. I have certain days of the week that I really focus on the academic things... Always on Saturdays I'm writing".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"How? How often if ever do you take time to remember your motivation or why you're going back to school?" (Reflecting on keeping motivation aligned with goals)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I do. I'm really use the outlook calendar a lot because for my job I have to use it but I also give myself I block time on. There for things that I like working on things".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"And then and then my husband and I. Because he's getting his masters. We what we decided to do because we're both busy and we're both working and everything. We made a deal that on Thursdays would be the night that we would reserve that we would be working on our things but also reserve time to help each other edit and read".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I would say make a schedule and really. And look at. The even at the beginning of the. Semester. Look at your syllabus. For the whole semester and figure out when the big things are due and how you're going to back back out time".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"It helps me because I can say ohh well this other thing happened but you know like say an event an unexpected event happened but then I've already been planning so I'm not far behind" (Discussing how time management helps handle unexpected events)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"Sometimes I don't think that I manage my time well but what I've learned to do is take my computer everywhere and anytime I have extra time. I'm working on my class so I might listen to my class on my phone. I'm always finding little gaps of time where I can work on that".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"How have your time management practices evolved since you first started pursuing your online degree? Well they started evolving before liberty with other classes. I took it like university where it was self-paced and that was when I was getting up at 7 and completing the classes"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"Challenges. Well sometimes I feel like I've neglected my family and that's a big deal to me because we're very community family based and you know I have grandchildren who sometimes I think I don't spend enough time with".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"My husband is retired and my job is part-time. We maintain this flexibility so that we can travel. Since beginning my online classes I have had to start taking a hotspot; that way I can work on my school work in the car while traveling. I take my computer everywhere that I go"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life



<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"I've learned to put school first. Often I have to say no to a lot of things so that I mean for instance the. Last two days. Other than church I was at home. Working on school and it took two solid days".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"What methods do you use? To prioritize your academic tasks and your other commitments... Well yes I have a work calendar and in that work calendar I schedule out my work and my school so that I I make sure that I've got time available and I'm not scheduling clients"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"I keep a calendar to plan my work school and family events. My life has become very structured. My personality is flexible so it has been challenging to become more intentional with every day. I do not have much room for friends and when I do make a plan it has to be on my calendar".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"Well something that I do. Even with my children... I have them do what I do which is lay out all of my classes in a spreadsheet. I highlight the classes when I've completed them. That motivates me because I like to tick things off. I'm a little type A I guess. And I put them in an order of completion"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"A lot because of being a single parent being a single parent kind of sets that standard to begin with and then trying to task manage throughout the the courses and being able to orientate yourself to knowing what you should prioritize first".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Ohh I would see them being more flexible but I wouldn't see them helping the student learn how to manage time sort of opening the opportunity for time management but not necessarily giving those tools and enabling the student to learn how to manage that flexibility"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges

<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So right now I do not work and that's to the grace of God through a disability that I have for the VA. So I do have a source of income where I am able to be more flexible with my time. But I do have to manage it around the school hours".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Motherhood poverty mental health and marital abandonment have greatly both changed and motivated my decisions on online schooling. Education used to be a self-enhancing thing but now it has become something for my family (children) and a way to keep healthy and in high-spirits"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"What challenges do you encounter in balancing your educational pursuits with your other responsibilities like you you've got you know children single mother or working tutoring?".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So I would probably do one with the withdrawals. It was because I entered a class that I thought I was gonna be good at and I found very quickly out that I was not"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So I budget a lot not necessarily because it impacts my. Indebtedness with student debt and my ability to continue in education. But because budgeting gives me the ability to not work. And to pursue an education".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"By being smart and wise with prioritizing things. Sometimes that means my brain needs a break so I opt to do homework later when I'll be more effective with my homework"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Skylar Vale</b>	"I believe it may be the single most important thing. I think you can be great at a lot of things but if you can't manage your time. In an online learning situation I mean you. I mean there's also that factor of like you know some people need to be more in a traditional. Environment and that's understandable	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges

	but the. Without it's like you're not in high school anymore"		
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"What challenges I don't face? Uh well first and foremost let's talk money because I'm at I'm at a stage where I've I elected some years ago to start trying to pay out of pocket and apply for a scholarship because I didn't want to amass any more loans. And so that right there in and of itself. Just obviously you know it's worth it. It's an investment but it does take away from you know things I can do in other areas".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"There have been countless instances where I needed to adapt. Most notable for several months I cared for my elderly godmother and her twin sister I lost my own sister to Cancer in September 2023 and have since taken on additional roles for her children"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"It's a bit of a cycle for me because. I'm like I told you my my my mom is the biggest motivation. Then I mean being motivated just pushes me to make a way to make time you know make that time regardless. And when I get say that one chapter that I. Need to do and. You know X amount of time. It kind of reinforces you know that motivation I have"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"Well for one I I take advantage of every you know possible time I can make for. City something I do as well as it's worked in the past for me. I do not recommend it to others but it works for me. I literally kind of do a quick assessment of a how much time I have left to finish what. I've got to do".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"That first one uh I mentioned before is definitely setting my deadline tighter than what the actual deadline is. I love doing that cause you just never know what could happen that could set you back that you have no control over".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"It kind of went from being. Non existent to. To very kind of well defined and tailored to me at first I've I've been the person in my family that just runs to everyone's back and call... And so I really just kind of was more of a reactive person".	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"I basically leverage any free time I have to study. Right now recreational time is not a priority however I do reserve a great deal of my Saturdays for rest/relaxation/recreation"	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"So I just have to try to space it out and plan how am I gonna get all this stuff done?" (Describing balancing multiple assignments and quizzes).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I don't like to get a B, I like to get an A." (Discussing the drive to meet high expectations).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I've got to get ready so that I don't fall behind since I need to make money next week." (Balancing work as a substitute teacher with academic responsibilities).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"There are times where I just have to turn something in and pray it goes well because I simply don't have enough time to make it perfect." (Dealing with time constraints and perfectionism)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Adapting to Academic Challenges
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"My kids are in school in the day. So I try so hard to get things done." (Balancing academic pursuits with family life).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I have to be very diligent with my planning efforts to make time for my family and for some hours being a substitute teacher." (Juggling family, work, and studies)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Family and Personal Life
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I just have to like figure out which pockets I'm gonna fit it in." (Deciding when to focus on different tasks).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I'm not gonna go out this day because I've gotta finish." (Choosing to prioritize schoolwork over social activities).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks

<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"So like for instance my neighbor she likes to go on walks with me... I've gotta get up and go with her and then I've gotta get myself back into it." (Balancing social activities with study time)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Prioritizing Tasks
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I write in my notebook each week... and I'm crossing it off cause that's my favorite. Cross it off. It's done you know." (Using a written notebook to track tasks).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I do it in blocks based on my schedule for the week." (Implementing block scheduling to manage various activities).	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I keep track of what I have due for the week for school on a weekly written list in my notebook." (Using a weekly list to manage schoolwork)	Personal Organization and Reflection	Time Management Tools

## Appendix N

### Time Management Challenges and Scheduling Horizontalization

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Phrase</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>
<b>Alex River</b>	"Started with a handwritten study schedule in OneNote, switched to printing it out, then to a whiteboard system."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Alex River</b>	"Realized the need for a visual system that shows immediate and upcoming tasks."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Alex River</b>	"Making time for my spouse and myself, not just school or work."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Alex River</b>	"Consciously choosing to allocate time for friends and family."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Alex River</b>	"Explained to everyone the sacrifices required for my education."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Alex River</b>	"Learned to say no to additional work and social invitations."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Alex River</b>	"Accepted prioritizing school over lucrative part-time work."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Alex River</b>	"Using a whiteboard color-coded with dates for assignments."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Alex River</b>	"Employing a color-coded Outlook calendar."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Alex River</b>	"Using 'Do Not Disturb' on iPhone and setting aside specific study times."	Time Management	Time Management

		Challenges and Scheduling	Challenges in Work and LI
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"A lot because I have a family. I have two kids. I work full time... time management is a big thing. If I didn't I used this planner and like I said well I I wrote it in my... journal entry for you was that as soon as the class begins I just go through every module and write down when things are due so I can look at my calendar and plan out when I will do certain things you know and not forget them either".	"Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"So so many year' ago. So the last time ' set foot in. The classroom that was. 2009. I think because you're in the classroom you're there and you have to be there. So online I feel like it's more on the individual to get things done than being. In the classroom"	"Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Like s'me things have to give. Like I used to play soccer I 'topped doing that. You know there's just some things that you have to be like" Oh I can't do that. Just so you can get the you know studying done or assignments done".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"I think no one wants to fail a class especially when you're paying for it. So 'hat 's a huge motivation is I you know when I want good grades anyways. But 'ou know it's it's money and. Yeah that's just a bi' motivation is I I don't. What I don't want to you know get a bad grade. Bu" also I don't want to fail because that is money that you know is basically thrown away"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Like I 'aid in a previous question is that things have to give so there'll be nights that I can't. Well I will say I can't hang out with m' husband. I'll sit next to him and I'll b' doing the discussion post you know so we can't watch a movie. Or something and. Yeah I'm not. I'm trying to you know. You know submit an	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation

	assignment so things like that will come up" is that I have to say no to certain things to. Complete you know assignments or reading".		
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"My planner at 100%"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"So I didn't do the planner. I would just. Look weekly of what was due and I. I felt more anxiety or stressed. Because if they're like what's with this week? 'hat's this week so? Now that like. Especially at the end of the semester you know there's. You know we have. A couple of days to do a few things so I'm more prepared to do that because I already know what's coming".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Like I think occasionally. It it hasn't happened often like how 'any I could tell you how many classes I've taken. 123456788 classes I want to say there's only like maybe a handful of times that I've passed in a an assignment late. ' think that's just from things. Yeah I'm very. It's already been almost a year so I can't remember that. Far back like. What happened? Specifically if I missed an assignment but I? Want to say like? Recently maybe like things out of my control like my daughter being in the hospital. That I would fall behind and. It would just be like a couple of points deducted because I wouldn't let it go that far in advance but we're that far off due"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Time management is everything I while I was working on my undergraduate and graduate degree which I ultimately finished online as well. I started as a I was always a non traditional student but I started working on my undergrad. On ground at AA Regional University and then I transferred probably about two	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning



	years in and started taking courses online. Time management is everything working on my undergrad and a masters degree"		
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Again it would be my calendar. That's pretty much it. I mean I also have to communicate and you know let other people know that I'm working. You know I'm studying for my doctorate degree. There are times when I have homework. So you know I have to set expectations".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Well that is a really blessed question. You know going to school online makes it possible for me to be able to do other things. So while it's time consuming it's also flexible so I can do what I need to do around the current schedule that I already have. And that makes managing my time a lot more easier"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Well good question. My motivation is to finish and to be successful and so that means that the time that I have to spend and do my work. Is a. Priority. And so whatever time it takes is what time has to be you know blocked and utilized so that I can get work get. The work done"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"I allocate time by putting blocks on my calendar, it is hard to plan when I have so many competing priorities unless I use a calendar."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"You know I know that whenever I have a class coming up. Especially going to liberty. It's eight weeks. You know I shouldn't plan a lot of other. Stuff outside outside of that. So that's what I know yeah. So I can't really do a lot of stuff or take on a lot of extra responsibility especially if it's not planned ahead of time while I'm also taking a class so I tend to choose a class when I don't have a lot of stuff scheduled on my calendar"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"It's especially in a remote environment where. It's just you. I'm sure that other students probably have a support network and for a while I did. I don't right now so I'm the only one that says when to study and you know how long or how hard or how distracted during that study time I can or can't be".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"It's an unfortunate cycle of procrastination followed by binge. When I'm under deadline pressure I enter a phase of intense exhaustive hyper focused ADHD work you know which is you know fairly unsustainable"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"I originally was using a very technology based approach with outlook I would create. UM multiple tasks for each class and then I would kind of like push those into the task fields on my calendar then drag and drop them based on when I think I had time to do those things each. Day it was during the pandemic and I would work. Intermixed between school and work during. The day".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"When my strategy changed to be Lacey Fair reactive do it. Whenever you want. Without a structured time management approach I didn't get any work done so the participation tanked to almost none"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Learning the skills that could drive me forward... The actual value of what I'm doing now more than ever because of the onset of different artificial intelligence technologies".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"My motivation has definitely changed since ChatGPT got released. And I now have to kind of make up a new reason to finish my Bachelors of Science"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Well that's like. It's an interesting question. Here's a little bit of history I have been to college five times... I think the time management is stronger when the motivation is stronger... And as the	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

	strategies change so does the time management".		
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"As a non-traditional learner and a neurodiverse person... I have to chunk my time. In two blocks... I have to add chunks of time to my personal calendar"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Yeah. So time management is a challenge and that's something that I've had to. Again with having a family that creates even even more even more time constraints".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"For the degree has I mean has very specific deadlines. And so I I just try to manage it within that deadline"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Well it it forces you. To you you know I think it's something where. You you if you wanna do it because because the. Because the assignments are so specific in both like it it it will work there's nothing you can just quickly run through on it. You have to take the time to do it".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Yeah it so it's it's a. At the end of the day it's a decision that if I'm going to do. This I have to decide to spend time there"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Yeah I think. I think there anytime there are unknowns that kind of pop up and you have to sort of navigate those that becomes a challenge".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Schedule I'm good. You don't have anything super fancy. I mean mostly it's just blocking time and being dedicated to what you're doing disciplined enough to say OK I've I've got to get you know I I know the yard work needs to be done. I. Know this. You know the games on I know but I've got to spend time doing this too"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Scheduling and blocking time, and being dedicated to what you're doing in necessary to be disciplined enough to say OK I've got to spend time doing this."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Yeah. I mean I think you just kind of. I think you have to take each semester or each time as its own. It's something new. I mean yeah you learn the you learn little tips and and you kind of fine tune it with each. With each semester".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"I would say no real conflicts I. Mean it you you know. The thing about that what I've found at least with this class and it's it's there's 8 modules you can go and. Look and see what is due"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"Typically it's just one or two assignments a week... Some of the papers are lengthy so those require boatload more time but just on average it's like 1 to 2 assignments".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"Career change? I have picked a new career where I could grow, which is counseling something I particularly love"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I personally follow a schedule... I tend to do the same things in the same order every day. Just to keep myself on schedule".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I recently had a baby so going from 1 child to 2 forced me to change how I work on school. Another adjustment was changing departments at work which moved me from the office everyday to working at home most days. This gave me a bit more freedom to do school work during the day"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I think it's more like a positive impact because I have that flexibility... I've always done online to some degree".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I have to be very specific about what I'm doing. I can be very literal when it comes to time management because if I don't then I won't function"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"There is a lot of juggling... It will not happen successfully if I don't manage my time... our house will not function if we	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

	don't have some sort of time management going on".		
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I typically prioritize my day by importance... A chunk of my day is work so that is a given for 8-5 then I prioritize my family and their needs and then I decide where school work fits into that"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"That one's really hard because I honestly... struggle with this online learning and sometimes I just don't find the time to do it".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"Instances that required adjustments were two part. The first is just shifting my attitude and motivation for online learning. Being on a schedule that isn't as strict as attending in person classes requires more dedication because the time for coursework has to be made by me"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"So it does make me feel bad so I am trying to get really better at it and like right now I am doing. My study plan and I have been working every day. On it. So I think I'm getting a little better at it to get this course done".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I do block out time to sit down and study. I actually like to study at work when I have a break... So I do take about 40 minutes at work to study there and then I do study on the weekends a lot"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"Instances that required adjustments were two part... I also have ADHD and found completing timed tests was difficult for me. I worked with my school to receive ADA accommodations that allowed for longer testing times"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"A significant life experience that influenced my decisions and motivation is my employer. I have been at this particular school as an employee for many years. My role there has shifted over the years but they have continued to encourage and support me"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

<b>Parker Lake</b>	"You really have to manage your time because. It's it can really sneak up on you if something comes up and you don't work on your assignments and everything might be like your discussion your original post should be due on Thursday but if something comes up and you haven't written it you've not only got to write it but then you still need to write back to two other people. By Sunday and then. And then there's papers and things like that. I know for myself. I would set goals to be either at least halfway done or 3/4 of the way done by Friday afternoon"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I do. I'm really use the outlook calendar a lot because for my job I have to use it but I also give myself I block time on. There for things that I like working on things and I find that it kind of gives me. It allows me to".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"And then and then my husband and I. Because he's getting his masters. We what we decided to do because we're both busy and we're both working and everything. We made a deal that on Thursdays would be the night that we would reserve that we would be working on our things but also reserve time to help each other edit and read"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I I think it kind of. Made me have to do. It because this particular like beginning the dissertation course I felt like was really hard on me as a time manager because it's not as structured and it was relying on me to do that".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"Well sometimes I feel guilty because my mother lives in town and my two sisters do not live in town and I feel. I was feeling guilty because I really would like to spend more time with her. So what I did is that's another reason why I like to be at a certain point by Friday	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation

	because then on Sunday I'll go and just hang out with my mom"		
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"Was sick. But that first class was tough and. And the professor said to me you might want to get an editor and. I was like".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"That I wasn't that accountable I guess. And I did. I kind of let myself. Slack off and then I started freaking out under one day and I was like what in the world are you doing you know? And so I really had to get after it. And so I felt like it got me a little bit. It took me a couple of weeks to get back into the groove of. It and I was really struggling with"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"Sometimes I don't think that I manage my time well but what I've learned to do is take my computer everywhere and anytime I have extra time. I'm working on my class so I might listen to my class on my phone. I'm always finding little gaps of time where I can work on that"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"I've learned to put school first. Often I have to say no to a lot of things so that I mean for instance the. Last two days. Other than church I was at home. Working on school and it took two solid days".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"Well I I have certain days of the week that I try and dedicate to schools specifically. One of the strategies I've used in the. Past it was a different type of class but I got up at 7:00 every morning and I worked through that class knowing that was the time slot I had and I could get done with it if I would just dedicate that time"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"Well they started evolving before liberty with other classes. I took it like university where it was self-paced and that was when I was getting up at 7 and completing the classes. As far as liberty and I don't know if this is liberty specific. Being determined I think it's more of a	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation

	mindset. I have a determination so I'm always knowing what's on my schedule. I look ahead to see what do I need to do. I plot it out. I have a spreadsheet for all of my classes. I've been much more determined intentional"		
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"My husband is retired and my job is part-time. We maintain this flexibility so that we can travel. Since beginning my online classes I have had to start taking a hotspot; that way I can work on my school work in the car while traveling. I take my computer everywhere that I go. He also has been battling cancer for the last year. He is cancer-free now! He still has treatments. He has a doctor's visit this morning. So I am bringing my computer and working on school while I wait for him. It is a blessing to have the flexibility of online schooling"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"In the beginning, I was very stringent with trying to make a plan and stick to it. But now I have become more flexible and accepting of making changes and adapting to whatever comes."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So I do have a source of income where I am able to be more flexible with my time. But I do have to manage it around the school hours."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Priorities always come first unfortunately and not my education."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"It takes a lot of effort to make that a priority in our daily lives."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"I use hierarchy you know God family and stuff like that. So whatever's most hierarchy and whatever's like most needed at this time."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"You have to also look for those opportunities in those openings and say OK I didn't expect this."	Time Management	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation



		Challenges and Scheduling	
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Budgeting gives me the ability to not work. And to pursue an education."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"The same methods of I have how many hours in a day I have."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Practicing. The same methods of I have how many hours in a day I have."	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"I believe it may be the single most important thing. I think you can be great at a lot of things but if you can't manage your time. In an online learning situation I mean you. I mean there's also that factor of like you know some people need to be more in a traditional. Environment and that's understandable but the. Without it's like you're not in high school anymore"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"Well for one I I take advantage of every you know possible time I can make for. City something I do as well as it's worked in the past for me. I do not recommend it to others but it works for me. I literally kind of do a quick assessment of a how much time I have left to finish what. I've got to do"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"I would say. It's a bit of a cycle for me because. I'm like I told you my my my mom is the biggest motivation. Then I mean being motivated just pushes me to make a way to make time you know make that time regardless"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	There have been countless instances where I needed to adapt, most notable for several months I cared for my elderly godmother, and I have begun working a part-time job in addition to my full-time job	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"What challenges I don't face? Uh well first and foremost let's talk money because I'm at I'm at a stage where I've I elected some years ago to start trying to pay out of pocket and apply for a scholarship because I didn't want to amass any more loans"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I usually take about three to four classes at a time... I have quizzes almost every single week... I have discussion threads... and typically papers in each class".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"Every time the courses come out with the syllabus I actually write in my notebook each week... It's sometimes five to six chapters per class"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Academic Challenges and Planning
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I have to have remember when I was like getting ready for liberty... you are... you know planning things out or you're just gonna get lost in the shuffle".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I just really have to keep saying OK I've gotta get this done now. I'm not gonna have time later"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Personal Development and Schedule Management
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I absolutely love the style we have on canvas... It's very helpful for my family because I can go in there and watch the videos when I can. I can read when I can"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"Yeah just being very excited to achieve it it motivates me to continue to push"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Struggles with Online Learning and Motivation
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I'm kind of a perfectionist so I could keep going and going... I just need to send it because I have to do these other things".	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I wake up early naturally... Then I get breakfast ready for my sons... After that I work out, shower and then study. I do it in blocks based on my schedule for the week"	Time Management Challenges and Scheduling	Time Management Challenges in Work and Life

## Appendix O

### Work–Life Balance and Education Horizontalization

Participant	Phrase	Theme	Subtheme
<b>Alex River</b>	"Weekly recorded lectures... It can be anywhere from 50 to 150 pages of reading per class. Each professor offers a live office hour usually scheduled in the evening to accommodate the working student schedule"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Alex River</b>	"A ton. Making time for my spouse, making time for myself. That's not school or work related. Both can be very difficult and something that I have to consciously choose to do".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Alex River</b>	"I learned to say no... I was working in a PR capacity for four other companies which meant on the weekend they could call me to come in in the evenings... And I finally had to accept that I was starting to make that more of a priority than school"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Alex River</b>	"Without it you there is no success... I have a whiteboard over here... color-coded with dates. So I know upcoming assignments when I need to work on each one".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"The whiteboard is one of them, color-coded outlook calendar that merges with all my other... I use the timer feature on my phone so much that to not have it with me while I study doesn't work either".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"I think it's made it easier because I know the expectation of when office hours are going to be held... I have a little more time to read... And be able to get those questions for that professor".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"Well I like to think they're very well tied, some days the motivation no matter how hard you try your brain just needs a break... I also have kind of built in excessive study time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"Definitely the calendar. So whether it's used I use the calendar to identify work projects also... I truly like having that visual	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management

	calendar is the biggest helper around anything also".		and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"A ton. I think they evolve multiple times even across the semester... My original format I couldn't see the future. I had to have a whole different separate document to see future assignments and so forth whereas the whiteboard system allows me to see what's in the immediate and then what's coming up in the future".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"That's really how I identify where I can adjust if an assignment I'm worried about and stressing on is only worth 3% of my grade... It's OK if I don't do as well".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Alex River</b>	"Finding a schedule and method that works for you... You just have to identify at the beginning how much time you have and want to dedicate to the process and then work within that"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"So so yeah I would say time management is even more important. For for online. Because it's it's up to you to get you know to do the the reading the whatever you know all that stuff"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Like I said in a previous question is that things have to give so there'll be nights that I can't. Well I will say I can't hang out with my husband. I'll sit next to him and I'll be doing the discussion post you know so we can't watch a movie"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"A lot because I have a family. I have two kids. I work full time... If I didn't I used this planner... As soon as the class begins I just go through every module and write down when things are due".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Like some things have to give. Like I used to play soccer I stopped doing that".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"My planner at 100%".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Avery Brook</b>	"So I didn't do the planner. I would just. Look weekly of what was due and I. I felt more anxiety or stressed... Now that like. Especially at the end of the semester you know there's. You know we have. A couple of days to do a few things so I'm more prepared to do that because I already know what's coming".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"I think no one wants to fail a class especially when you're paying for it... I don't want to get a bad grade. But also I don't want to fail because that is money that you know is basically thrown away".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Provide an example where your motivation waivered and explain if your time management decisions contributed to you getting back on track... When my daughter was in the hospital. I was just. Like I you. Know should I just? Take the semester off or... I was also training for. A marathon... I was doing way too much and I definitely. Burnt out a little bit".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Reflecting on your journey how have your past experiences influenced how you approach time management? Last year I didn't. I didn't. Put in my assignments ahead of time. You know what I mean. And I felt that I was stressed out more so learning from that and getting ahead of the ahead of it helped a lot with that".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Avery Brook</b>	"Based on your insights and experiences with time management what recommendations would you offer to other non traditional learners regarding time management and maintaining their motivation? I would say like you don't have to do the planner like me but I would say using uh Google Calendar or something like. That and putting all your assignments in"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Every week we do discussions... we have to reply to at least two of our classmates... and then we also have to reply to a response that we received"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling

<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"My biggest motivation is to earn my doctorate degree... I have two daughters... I want to set a really good example for them... I spent some time in the foster care system... I feel like having these degrees behind me will make me more credible"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Time management is everything... I'm super dependent on my calendar because I have to use time blocks to really get things done".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"My motivation is to finish and to be successful... so that means that the time that I have to spend and do my work is a priority".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Whenever I have a class coming up... I shouldn't plan a lot of other stuff... I tend to choose a class when I don't have a lot of stuff scheduled on my calendar".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"Prioritizing using a calendar, time blocking... I mean prioritizing... that's how I manage my time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"I've had to stay up late at night... maybe I lose a little sleep probably".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"In the last class that I took... I didn't manage my time as effectively as I should have because of work... I have a full time job, I run a company".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"I allocate time by putting blocks on my calendar... it is hard to plan when I have so many competing priorities unless I use a calendar".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"While working on my doctorate I've had to adjust my time management decisions... I quickly realized that I couldn't complete some of my research papers in a weekend or at the last minute... I would instead need to spend time over several days leading up to the assignment's due date to write a portion of the paper on each day".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Bailey Thorn</b>	"As someone who spent time in the foster care system, education quickly became my escape... Also as a former foster child my voice is not strong enough if I don't have the education or title to make me matter as a person so I am persisting"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"The requirement is that you log in and engage with the learning resources... If you're not making progress then you start getting emails... You can complete a course in a day or you could take the entire six months and not do anything".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Transitions have been the constant backdrop of my life... One notable transition was joining Microsoft Corporation. This career move significantly altered my focus, compelling me to prioritize work over school"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"The hope that the learning I am going through right now will translate into a better understanding of how to deliver value through the work that I do... Signaling to my current employer that I'm worth more than what they currently perceive me as and potential other employers as well"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Time management is critical especially when you're working also a full time job... but it's not easy".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"It's a cycle of procrastination followed by binge. When I'm under deadline pressure I enter a phase of intense exhaustive hyper-focused ADHD work".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"My initial approach to managing time during my online degree was methodical and visually oriented. I relied heavily on whiteboard reminders... The ridicule... led me to dismantle part of my visual setup... Without the visual breakdown of tasks and schedules, my once-structured approach began to falter".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"I originally was using a very technology-based approach with Outlook... Then my strategy changed to whiteboard based and checklist based like study chapter one and complete chapter two".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Reflecting on my typical day... my approach to time management is largely reactionary. I lack structured methods for task identification, prioritization, and goal planning".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"When my strategy changed to be Lacey Fair reactive do it whenever you want... I didn't get any work done so the participation tanked to almost none".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Cameron Reed</b>	"Motivation is important because if you're not motivated to fulfill your time management tasks then you're not gonna do it"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Allocating time for learning can be a challenge and requires a degree of discipline. For me the most impactful way to accomplish all I want to accomplish is by blocking time on my calendar"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"My job often requires me to attend events board meetings etc. after normal business hours... I chose not to attend because I had to work on my final that was due the following Friday".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"We are expecting our 6th child. This will likely create time conflicts to some degree so I will have to be sure that I get ahead in my coursework as much as I can to not get behind"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Time management is a challenge... I have to be very diligent if I have time during my week. To work on a couple of things here and there or read some things I try to do that and knock out some of the initial parts of it".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"I just try to manage it within that deadline... But I think because it's just you have these known deadlines I can structure my day kind of around that".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization



<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"The assignments are so specific... You have to take the time to do it... You can't wait till the last second and turn anything in".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"At the end of the day it's a decision that if I'm going to do this I have to decide to spend time there".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"I just don't get as much sleep that night. If I don't get it done during that day so it has like built-in accountability to some degree".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"I think you have to take each semester or each time as its own... It's for a very specific reason".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"Everything is laid out for you in terms of deadlines and I think it's just a matter of making sure that you can block your and schedule your time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"There were times where I started at 8:30 in the evening and worked until 2:00 AM to get these papers done".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"There's a word count for example on your papers... So I made sure I got that kind of squared away first before I moved into the other".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"You have to triage what's important and what's not important... Asking a couple of questions sometimes will save you some time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jamie Frost</b>	"If you don't have time management you eventually will fall behind... You absolutely have to have some form of it"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I have done online learning since I started in 2010... That's always given me the flexibility to work when I can and around my work schedule".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling

<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I recently had a baby so going from 1 child to 2 forced me to change how I work on school. Another adjustment was changing departments at work which moved me from the office everyday to working at home most days. This gave me a bit more freedom to do school work during the day"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"Career change? I need a more growth career... I have picked a new career where I could grow... and then like being an example for my kids".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I have a newborn and a three-year-old. I work full-time too so, I typically prioritize my day by importance, then I decide where school and work fits into that."	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I typically prioritize my day by importance. A chunk of my day is work so that is a given for 8–5 then I prioritize my family and their needs and then I decide where school work fits into that"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"It will not happen successfully if I don't manage my time... our house will not function if we don't have some sort of time management going on".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I personally follow a schedule... everything is on my calendar... I tend to do the same things in the same order every day".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"Typically I block out time at night when the girls are sleeping... it's a little bit better right now because it's three months the last two months have been hectic".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I put everything on the calendar... I have whiteboards... I have a Google Calendar that has everything on it".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"They definitely have [evolved]. When I first started... I learned real fast that grad school is no joke".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"I typically go... on difficulty and how much time it's going to take me to complete those tasks. I tend to try to get my easy stuff done first".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"If I can plan it out then I'm not so stressed... if I have that pressure if something's already overdue if something has to be done, it's sometimes my brain will not engage in it until it's got some sort of pressure".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Jordan Blaze</b>	"If I block out time to get stuff done, then I tend to do better quality work"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I chose online learning because I thought it would be easier for me in my schedule with work and everything".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"There's no interaction with any other people besides my course instructor...they don't really require you like every day to do it at least for me".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"Instances that required adjustments were... Being on a schedule that isn't as strict as attending in-person classes requires more dedication because the time for coursework has to be made by me"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I want my degree and also my employer really wants me to get my degree as well so that they can put me as a teacher".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I feel like I don't put school as a top priority and I feel like mostly because at WGU it's like at your own pace... you do have like an end date".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"A significant life experience that influenced my decisions and motivation is my employer... they have continued to encourage and support me".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I work a full-time job so most of my day is spent there. However, when a class has a larger amount of coursework, my after-work time shifts to completing that"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I do struggle with this online learning and sometimes I just don't find the time to do it... I really have to make a lot of time for that".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I'm getting a little better at time management".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I just make sure that I do plan my time wisely... knowing that it's almost over I think that helps my motivation a lot".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I think it's gone a little bit more downhill since I first started... I probably should work on a time management a little bit more".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I sometimes I don't get them done by a certain date and... I feel like I can just keep slacking off".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"So actually a big one with me right now is my financial aid... So if I just had staying on track and got my class done on time then I would still have financial aid".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I usually do is during the day I work on my school work and then at night I hang out like with my friends and my family".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I do block out time to sit down and study. I actually like to study at work when I have a break".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"I am trying to get really better at it and like right now I am doing. My study plan and I have been working every day".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Morgan Sage</b>	"Make sure that you... have the time to do this. Like you can have time and you have to prioritize it as well and make it important"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"There's usually a discussion that we would write our own post and then respond to at least two others... And then we also usually have some other kind of a paper or parts of the proposal that we might be working on and then some quizzes and things like that"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling

<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I think it kind of made me have to do it because this particular like beginning the dissertation course I felt like was really hard on me as a time manager because it's not as structured and it was relying on me to do that".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I made a big mistake after that course and took a break from writing instead of continuing on my Chapter 2... I was able to refocus and I talked to my husband who is also in school and we dedicated Tuesdays and Thursdays to school work with Thursday evenings reserved for proofing for each other"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"You really have to manage your time because it can really sneak up on you... I would set goals to be either at least halfway done or 3/4 of the way done by Friday afternoon".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"So I do use the outlook calendar. I also write things down as far as in my Home Office. I have kind of some lists that I keep of things that are like top priority kind of things".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I think definitely there is [a connection between motivation and time management] because I think I might say oh I can do that later. But then I say but my goal I really want... I've always been really intrinsically motivated".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"Well sometimes I feel guilty because my mother lives in town... So what I did is that's another reason why I like to be at a certain point by Friday because then on Sunday I'll go and just hang out with my mom".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"I think one of those is planning ahead for sure. And then also I think I like to plan to print out the things that I'm reading... So I do that and then I like to plan ahead so that I know like what appointments do I have".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Parker Lake</b>	"Because... we have certain nights that we both are going to work on things. So saying that out loud... was really helpful in getting me back on a schedule that would work".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Parker Lake</b>	"As an online learner working on my second master's degree several years ago my marriage broke up... I worked at the dining room table after dinner and my sons worked on their homework at the same time... I wanted to show my sons that when you have a goal you keep working on it even when things get tough"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"My husband is retired, and my job is part-time. We maintain this flexibility so that we can travel. Since beginning my online classes, I have had to start taking a hotspot; that way, I can work on my school work in the car while traveling"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"I schedule out my work and my school so that I make sure that I've got time available. I'm always finding little gaps of time where I can work on that."	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"I keep a calendar to plan my work, school, and family events. My life has become very structured... I do not have much room for friends and when I do make a plan, it has to be on my calendar".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Quinn Storm</b>	"I am eager to gain my LPC license... My husband has battled cancer twice. This life experience has forced me to consider that I may need to be financially independent and able to sustain a decent income in the future... Online schooling has given me the ability to complete that goal"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"I don't think that there is any sort of great impact on the online classroom on the student is sort of the curriculum and the rubric for the class is portrayed and is the only thing that really designates timelines in helping with time management is the due dates and those are consistently on a weekly or BI weekly or mid mid weekly basis"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling

<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So right now I do not work and that's to the grace of God through a disability that I have for the VA... But I do have to manage it around the school hours... It takes a lot because... Would the family member include? And I guess with any external sources those priorities always come first unfortunately and not my education"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"A lot because of being a single parent being a single parent kind of sets that standard to begin with and then trying to task manage throughout the the courses and being able to orientate yourself to knowing what you should prioritize first".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"I'm a perfectionist at heart so I think that the commitment value that I have to an education requires the best parts of me if I am going to fulfill that commitment".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Every day is a new day I I try not to plan. I prepare I prepare for whatever can come or whatever is expected to come by".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So I budget a lot not necessarily because it impacts my. Indebtedness with student debt and my ability to continue in education. But because budgeting gives me the ability to not work. And to pursue an education".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Definitely more flexible absolutely more flexible. I think I started out with really stringent like typical like writing down my task and doing that. And I think as muscle memory develops you sort of move into a fluidity".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"I entered a class that I thought I was gonna be good at and I found very quickly out that I was not... I just decide to withdraw and then the next time I did that class I had a big strategy".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"What's the most important like I use hierarchy you know God family and stuff like that. So whatever's most hierarchy and whatever's like most needed at this time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Sometimes. The reasons for me going to school. Are really discouraging when I try to think of more to motivate me is what good can come out of this. And so I try to look forward like not not the needs for me going to school but what. Good can come forward and so I try to project myself and forward and. And just let that be something that keeps pulling me".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"So another personal story I I was a runaway at 15 so I put myself through high school and I traveled the United States doing this... Those time management skills I learned as a kid sort of. Came forward later where I just said OK. What do I do? I don't. I'm not gonna sit here. I'm just gonna do something that gets me sort of doing it".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"I think you should always pray about everything. First I really think that that's that's where the totem pole of priority sort of comes into play and you bring to God first and sort of like figuring out OK what's his will first?".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"You don't have control. Over the tasks given but you do have control over your response. I think that's what that time management is all about. It's taking control over your response to the variables that you're meeting".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"It helps quite a bit helps me not to get discouraged when I can't meet something as I wanted to and so by not getting discouraged and knowing that I have the skills to still meet this demand. And flex things around makes me more confident in when I go into the tasks then I'm not as discouraged so then I'm more capable of actually performing the tasks now".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"By being smart and wise with prioritizing things. Sometimes that means my brain needs a break so I opt to do homework later when I'll be more effective with my homework. Sometimes that means having	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization



	to do homework when I'm not needed for other things".		
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"In the beginning I was very stringent with trying to make a plan and stick to it. But now I have become more flexible and accepting of making changes and adapting to whatever comes".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Riley Stone</b>	"Motherhood poverty mental health and marital abandonment have greatly both changed and motivated my decisions on online schooling. Education used to be a self-enhancing thing but now it has become something for my family (children) and a way to keep healthy and in high-spirits"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"So right now...there is like no real requirement. Now there is like a term requirement. I mean obviously the main thing is for you to complete the level of courses that you've enrolled in"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"My biggest motivation is my mom... I just push really for her for what I know she wanted me to have... it's important to me to be a good example for the younger ones coming up in my family"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"I believe [time management] may be the single most important thing... You have the charge to make sure you can balance everything you have going on".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"I take advantage of every possible time I can make for... I always set my deadlines far ahead of the actual deadline".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"It's a bit of a cycle for me... being motivated just pushes me to make a way to make time... It kind of motivates me to get it done now and no time is better than now"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"First one I mentioned before is definitely setting my deadline tighter than what the actual deadline is... Another strategy I use is... not accepting last minute invitations".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization

<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"It kind of went from being non existent to very kind of well defined and tailored to me... I always have loved writing so writing is actually what helped me get into a time management space".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"The biggest... It's a culmination of things that just kind of all relate to my youth and my childhood... That was my main motivation for implementing these things".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"I basically leverage any free time I have to study... I work full-time for an employment law firm... During the few downtimes I have at work I take time to study and review".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Skyler Vale</b>	"There have been countless instances where I needed to adapt... I have begun working a part-time job in addition to my full-time job... so much of that requires some modification of my time"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"It's very helpful for my family because I can go in there and watch the videos when I can. I can read when I can. I can play back...on my time. I'm not forced to do a specific time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"Online school is different. I have consumed all of the videos...and if I am short on time and can't read every word of the book I will pour over the section that I am being asked about and translate it into what they are looking for in the assignment"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Adaptation to Online Learning and Flexible Scheduling
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I usually take about three to four classes at a time...I have quizzes almost every single week...discussion threads every week...and then I typically have papers in each class...So I just have to try to space it out and plan how am I gonna get all this stuff done?".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I'm also doing substitute teaching...next week should be lighter. So I've already signed up for some days but that pushes me like I can't slow down. I've got to get ready so that I don't fall behind since I need to make money next week".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities

<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I'm going to work until 11:30 and then I'm gonna go get my snack...But I'm gonna work on this project and that project...Then my son gets off the bus...OK. I've gotta focus on getting as much done before he gets off the bus"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Balancing School and Work Priorities
<b>LI</b>	"I have to have remember...every time the courses come out with the syllabus I actually write in my notebook each week...And I look ahead like if I'm gonna I can't hang out with friends or family. Certain times I have to say OK well that's a week that's gonna look good for me".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I'll try to do quizzes first...So I'm like OK I'll do that and then...Like I'm in a statistics types class right now and I have to...I can't keep waiting cause. I've gotta do it or else I'm not going to get it done on time".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I would be turning discussion threads in at 11:58 PM...So now I will like try to do it. Like finished by Wednesday. And then I feel so much better and so stressed".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I just need to send it because I have to do these other things and if I spend so much time trying to fix all these things I'm never gonna finish".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I just have to turn something in and pray it goes well because I simply don't have enough time to make it perfect".	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization
<b>Taylor Ash</b>	"I wake up early naturally and start the day with prayer and Bible reading...Then I work out shower and then study. I do it in blocks based on my schedule for the week...After I work on my schoolwork through the morning I take a few breaks for snacks and lunch and then in the afternoon I continue to work on school"	Work–Life Balance in Education	Time Management and Personal Organization