

The Pedagogical Experiences of Online Correctional Education English Composition Faculty

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Abstract: *With increasing efforts to expand correctional education college programs, previous research has primarily explored the experiences of instructors teaching in face-to-face settings. However, little is known about the experiences of faculty teaching in online correctional education programs within the United States. This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of five online English composition correctional education instructors. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group. Findings revealed that instructors adapted their teaching practices to accommodate the online format, faced challenges in building relationships with students, and desired more professional development. These insights can inform correctional education program directors and writing program administrators in improving faculty support and instructional strategies.*

Keywords: *Correctional Education, English Composition, Online Education, United States*

Introduction

As of 2019, the United States' (U.S.) criminal justice system incarcerated nearly 2.3 million citizens in correctional facilities such as state and federal prisons, local jails, and juvenile justice centers (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Compared to other countries, in 2020, the United States had the highest incarceration rate globally, with 655 incarcerated individuals per 100,000 persons (Statista, 2020). With the U.S. experiencing a 500% increase in incarceration rates over the past 40 years, there have been continuous discussions concerning ways to rectify the issue of mass incarceration (The Sentencing Project, 2020).

To address mass incarceration rates, the National Institute of Justice (2021) has deemed recidivism as one of the most “fundamental concepts in criminal justice” (para. 1). Recidivism is defined and measured by criminal acts that result in a return to prison within a three-year period after a person’s initial release from incarceration after committing a previous crime (National Institute of Justice, 2021). In order to reduce the recidivism of incarcerated persons, educational efforts have been one facet of rehabilitation approaches in the United States since the late 1800s (Correctional Education Association [CEA], 2020).

A main method for reducing rates of recidivism is correctional education (Davis et al., 2013; Esperian, 2010). Correctional education is defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2021) as “a fundamental component of rehabilitative programming offered in juvenile justice confinement facilities, most American prisons, and many jails and detention centers” (para. 1). This rehabilitative programming is often categorized under two main umbrellas: “vocational,” which includes the offerings of employment skills training and certifications, and “academic,” which includes courses for Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED), or Adult Secondary Education (ASE). ASE programming leads to a 2-year, 4-year, or postgraduate degree (Lee, 2018). Incarcerated persons who participate in correctional education programs

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have a 43% lower chance of recidivism (Davis et al., 2014). For this paper, the phrase, “correctional education” will be used broadly to cover education within a correctional facility, whether for higher education or vocational training.

Specifically for ASE, college programming has played a significant role in correctional education reform (Carver & Harrison, 2016; Costelloe, 2014; Gehring & Muth, 1985). Before the passing of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994, incarcerated individuals had access to Pell Grant funding from the federal government to fund their college courses while incarcerated (Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, 1993-1994). Due to tougher laws on crime, this privilege was revoked under the Clinton Administration, causing students who were interested in college programming to seek other methods to pay for their college education or lose the opportunity to engage with this form of education altogether (Gehring, 1997; Hobler, 1999). In 2016, the Obama Administration restored the privilege of accessing Pell Grants with the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program through its commitment to reducing recidivism and promoting reintegration into society (White House, 2016). Through the pilot program, 67 colleges and universities partnered with more than 100 federal and state correctional institutions to enroll 12,000 students in educational and training programs (White House, 2016). Instruction was to be delivered through hybrid, classroom-based, and online methods (White House, 2016). Three years later, the Second Chance Pell program had serviced approximately 17,000 students within 28 states across the nation (Delaney & Montagnet, 2020). Two thousand seventy-one certificates or diplomas, 2017 associate degrees, and 365 bachelor’s degrees were awarded within the three-year time span (Delaney & Montagnet, 2020).

The Second Chance Pilot program was expanded in April 2020 under the Trump administration, inviting a new cohort of 67 schools to participate in the program (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). This expansion doubled the size of the program with the participation of 130 schools in 42 states, including the District of Columbia (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Schools were selected based on their programmatic, institutional, and geographic diversity; eight schools planned to deliver instruction through distance learning, while 13 schools proposed instruction through hybrid methods (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Then, in December 2020, through a bipartisan effort, Congress restored the eligibility of federal Pell grants to incarcerated individuals in the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act, reversing a 26-year federal ban on access to funding for this population (Binkley, 2020). These policy shifts have expanded access to online college education for incarcerated students. However, little is known about how faculty adapt their teaching in these unique environments. Additionally, while prior research has examined correctional education faculty experiences broadly, little is known about instructors teaching online English composition—a foundational course for many degree programs. This study addresses that gap.

Problem Statement

With the restoration of Pell Grants and the expansion of college programs at correctional facilities across the country, there have been discussions surrounding the need for accountability and assessment (Cantora, 2020; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2019; Walter, 2021). The 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act has set requirements for higher education institutions that provide programs for incarcerated individuals with the goal of assisting students in being successful after their release (Walter, 2021). Eligibility of initial and the continued determination of participation in these programs includes factors such as “job placement rates,” “rates of recidivism,” “the offering of relevant academic and career advising services to participate individuals while they [students] are incarcerated, in advance of re-entry and upon release,” and “the experience, credentials, and rates of turnover or departure of instructors” (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, p. 2002).

Specifically in the context of evaluating the “experience, credentials, and rates of turnover or departure of instructors,” this element of evaluation has had continued measurements of study within the field of correctional education over the past two decades, including the seminal study of Osberg and Fraley (1993) which gleaned the experiences of college correctional education instructors in 67 facilities in New York state. However, with new advances in the delivery of courses, specifically distance learning and hybrid methods, there is a need to build upon the work of Osberg and Fraley (1993) within the context of the experiences of instructors who teach in online college correctional education programs. Since the Appropriations Act requires the reporting of “the mode of instruction (such as distance education, in-person instruction, or a combination

of such modes) for each prison education program” along with “rates of instructor turnover or departure for courses offered in prison education programs,” gathering information from instructors on the front-lines of instruction, especially digital instruction will provide necessary context behind the required rates to be reported by the U.S. Department of Education (Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, p. 2003).

Additionally, when the global COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, many colleges and universities that were providing correctional education college courses had to transition to virtual learning. With the spread of the virus at high rates at correctional facilities, visitors from college programs were not allowed inside correctional facilities (Burke, 2020; Klarreich, 2020; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020). Therefore, many college programs across the nation transitioned to a paper correspondence model, which consisted of the drop-off and pick-up of educational materials (Burke, 2020; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020). Others switched to using any form of technology available, such as existing email or telephone systems, to allow students to communicate with instructors, and many colleges and universities suspended their programs due to the lack of ability to continue in a digital environment (Burke, 2020). Although some programs were not able to be maintained, there were a few programs that were able to continue their courses during the ills of the pandemic.

Now, after the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, digital instruction has continued in correctional education. Therefore, correctional education programs must adapt to balancing quality digital instruction with government accountability requirements. They must also identify best practices for online learning in correctional settings. Although there are concerns that online learning will not provide the same interpersonal interactions between students and their classmates along with their instructors (Burke, 2020; Tanaka & Cooper, 2020), providing digital learning options are an additional way to allow students to obtain their education. Evaluation is needed to determine the effectiveness of these online programs, and correctional education teachers are the voices at the forefront of this assessment.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the experiences of online correctional education instructors, focusing on their teaching methods, student relationships, and professional development needs. Since instructors are often the faculty who experience the most direct contact with students rather than program administrators, gleaned their experiences provided insight into the effectiveness of online correctional education programs. More specifically, previous studies have focused on how the origins of correctional education are based in the area of literacy, and many college programs require their students to take gateway English/composition courses as a part of their degree program requirements. Therefore, the voices of online English composition instructors are paramount to discussions concerning digital modes of instruction. These instructors are at the frontlines of many programs as they teach gateway, introductory level English courses and, therefore, are able to encounter many of the students who enroll in correctional education programs. Therefore, this qualitative study gathered the insights of online English composition correctional education instructors concerning methods of pedagogies, challenges and successes to teaching within a digital environment, and their perceived needs for professional development. This information can provide insight for correctional education program administrators into the possible needs of instructors to be more effective in their teaching methods to increase engagement with students in a confined environment and ways that instructors' pedagogical identities can be developed within these online spaces.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What pedagogical strategies do online English composition correctional education faculty use in writing instruction?
2. How do online English composition correctional education faculty cultivate relationships with their students in online spaces?
3. What are perceived areas of needed professional development and support identified by online English composition correctional education faculty?

Review of the Literature

Correctional education offerings include classes for the attainment of a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), vocational education programs, life-skills courses, and access to college programs that yield higher education degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Previous literature has explored the benefits and challenges of correctional education for students within correctional facilities and how this access to education affects their lives after release (Esperian, 2010; Graffam et al., 2014; Vacca, 2004). Additionally, the modality of instruction within correctional education programs has been mainly delivered through face-to-face instruction, but with recent advances in technology, more programs are expanding their reach online (Burke, 2019, 2020). The literature review covers the scope of national and international literature. It will examine (1) the evolution of correctional education in the context of literacy, (2) the role of literacy and writing in rehabilitation, (3) technology's impact on instruction, and (4) faculty perceptions of pedagogy in online correctional education.

Literacy- focused efforts within correctional education for incarcerated adults

Within correctional education, many efforts by program officials have focused solely on literacy as a gateway to increase learning in facilities that are and are not able to participate in higher education initiatives. In this review, literacy is discussed as an interchangeable term to include reading and writing skills, and also having a competence in an area of knowledge. Historically, from as early as the latter 1800s, literacy has been positioned as a way to “save” individuals from a life of crime by rehabilitating them through the skills of reading and writing. These narratives were continuously perpetuated through rehabilitation programs for incarcerated individuals with a focus on education, literacy, and religious conversions (Berry, 2017a; Myrick, 2004). Conversations surrounding the goal of literacy programs are still situated in the idea that literacy can provide redemption, but recent studies have explored this power in opening doors of self-realization of students' roles within the correctional system (Appleman, 2019; Ginsburg, 2019; McQuaide, 2019).

Specifically, one example of a program that provides students with opportunities to express themselves through literacy is the Bard Prison Initiative offered through Bard College in New York. Students enrolled in a degree program take a minimum of six academic writing courses focused on informal, exploratory writing techniques (Bard Prison Initiative, 2020). Some courses within the curriculum include Grammar, Rhetoric and Style, Reading to Write, and Philosophy, and the City (Bard Prison Initiative, 2020). The goals of the courses are to create “habits of inquiry, dialogue, and engagement through a distinctive writing-based curriculum” (Bard Prison Initiative, 2020, para 3). Other examples of partnerships between English departments at universities and correctional facilities include the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project at Auburn University, the Prison University Project hosted at San Quentin Prison in conjunction with Patten University, and the Prison Creative Arts Project at the University of Michigan (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011). These partnerships are often housed in English departments with the goal of allowing students to learn the elements of writing through argumentation and narrative (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011).

Also, other programmatic approaches have allowed students to express themselves through a sense of escape from their current environment by writing creatively. Shotland (2019) expressed that the essential part of the creative writing class within a carceral setting was, in fact, the writing process. Students are able to engage in finding meaning in stories and poems and then discover meaning through making (Shotland, 2019). By allowing students to express their agency as writers, they can begin to understand writing as a way of becoming through the development of their self-identity (Shelledy, 2019; Shotland, 2019). These writing experiences are designed to foster personal liberation and social change not only within prisons but allow for a mental escape outside of the confines of the space (Castagnetto & Shanley, 2019; McQuaide, 2019; Shelledy, 2019). An idea of hope as a critical rhetorical writing practice allows students to experience boundary-crossing as they use writing as resilience (Shelledy, 2019). Students are able to revise their sense of self through a “reconsideration of their histories, their current conditions, and their futures” (Appleman, 2019, p. 50). Thus, these programs are essential to correctional education and serve as a foundation for many programs across the country.

Yet, caution has been discussed in the literature pertaining to literacy, serving as a panacea to the social issues surrounding the causes of incarceration in the United States (Appleman, 2019; Berry, 2017a). Literacy efforts are often described as a catalyst and cure of redemption through what philosopher Paulo Freire called

a “Pedagogy of Hope” (Freire, 1994). This belief can distract policymakers from the socio-economic and political roots related to incarceration, which often contribute to rates of illiteracy and imprisonment and also disproportionate rates of incarceration among minorities and low-income individuals (Berry, 2017b). Berry (2017a) argued that taking on a lens of hope is arguably a stance to ignore societal issues that contribute to the ills of the carnal system. Therefore, the limits of these efforts must continuously be addressed to not shy away from the persistent social, educational, and economic problems faced by many people who become incarcerated (Karpowitz, 2017; Trounstone, 2008).

Writing/Composition initiatives in correctional education programs

With efforts to focus on literacy-based initiatives in prisons, writing instruction has been at the crux of correctional education programs since its beginnings (CEA, 2020). Focuses on reading and writing serve as the basis for these programs, and writing has been used as a tool to assist incarcerated individuals with exploring how literacy plays an important role in their lives. Appleman (2019) explained that a liberal arts education, which focuses on reading and writing, provides students with the ability to express their ideas through expository and creative writing. This form of education is a way to counter the dehumanizing effects of the prison environment through the cultivation of freedom of thought and expression despite physical confinement (Appleman, 2019). Writing allows students to craft and explore their identities by reclaiming their personal power (Appleman, 2019). Using literacy in this regard is now increasingly being fostered through the use of technology.

Use of technology within correctional education

Incarcerated individuals are often exposed to digital technologies to find employment and housing, but solutions for a continuous decrease in the rates of recidivism also include access and exposure to digital technologies for the purpose of earning a college degree (Kim & Clark, 2013; Schaub & West, 2015). In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Technology expanded its National Education Technology Plan to not only increase learning with technology use in traditional classrooms but also within correctional facilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This plan hoped to assist with decreasing recidivism rates and prepare incarcerated students by providing them with digital access for re-entry into society (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Overall outcomes of increasing student access to technology were to provide access to online college courses and online assessments, provide an education continuum, expand the reach of correctional education services, and offer technology-based instructional tools such as a learning management system (LMS) (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) reported that out of 42 reporting states offering correctional education, 93% provided desktop computers for student use, 40% reported providing mobile laptops, and 24% provided mobile tablets. They also reported the type of network used to access the content. Sixty-two percent provided a Local Access Network, while 26% used a statewide or wide area network for content delivery (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, the top issue in conversations surrounding technology use within correctional facilities is security. Only 14% of prisons nationwide allowed direct access to the Internet for their students, which is a low number compared to the European correctional system (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

In countries such as Ireland, Denmark, and the United Kingdom, the focus of online education is on the quality of content and instruction rather than a restriction of access (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011). However, similar to the United States, Australia has imposed a strict ban on internet access for correctional education students, which limits their college programming availability and access to online research tools that are available to students who are not incarcerated but attend the same institutions of higher learning as traditional, nonincarcerated students (Harrison, 2014). Although external sources evaluate the necessity of technology within correctional education programs, the issues surrounding technology use have oftentimes been gleaned from the students themselves. In a project conducted by Monash University in Australia, incarcerated students reported their inability to enroll in various modules within their college programming, and they reported their continuous reliance on prison education officers to access their learning material (Harrison, 2014). Likewise, a study conducted in New South Wales found that students also relied heavily on prison education staff to access their material and print resources from the internet as supplements for their coursework

(Harrison, 2014). Therefore, providing quality technological access in correctional facilities is an ongoing debate due to potential security breaches and a lack of state funding, and it is also often deemed to yield inferior educational offerings to students.

Online learning within correctional institutions

As more correctional education programs are utilizing digital platforms for the delivery of coursework for students (Burke, 2019), there is an overlap in conversations surrounding effective online learning in correctional settings and traditional educational settings with non-incarcerated populations. Specifically for correctional education, there has been a charge to ask not if there will be an adoption of digital learning but when the global shift to digital formats will occur (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011). One digital format used in correctional education programs is the LMS. These systems deliver content to incarcerated students through online platforms provided by the college, university, or workforce development program providing educational services.

For example, although incarcerated individuals are not allowed to access the internet throughout Australian correctional jurisdictions, which inhibits them from participating in higher education courses online, one program has been able to use an LMS isolated from internet use (Farley, 2016). The Making the Connection program is funded by the Australian government and allows digital technologies that do not require internet access to be used for students to enroll in college programs through the University of Southern Queensland's LMS. At 13 sites across Queensland, Australia, students are able to use the LMS to access pre-loaded course materials (Farley, 2016).

Furthermore, the adoption of online learning within a correctional program was also found within the Pen Project program of the New Mexico Corrections Department (Lockard & Rankins-Robertson, 2011). Student interns were able to provide feedback on writing samples submitted by incarcerated students. The hand-written samples were submitted through an LMS to be critiqued with comments by the interns over a 15- 29-week period. This use of the LMS was effective in delivering the course content from intern to student through this electronic method of delivery.

Online writing instruction

With an increase in digital-based learning within correctional education programs and a focus on literacy within many programs, there is a need to determine best practices concerning online writing instruction in correctional programs. Since there have been few studies that discuss the effectiveness of online writing instruction within correctional education programs, this review will focus on best practices provided within traditional higher education spaces with non-incarcerated populations for online writing instruction to inform the study.

A seminal work in the field of writing instruction with an emphasis on technology was the work of Hawisher and Selfe (1991) concerning the rhetoric of technology in the writing classroom. The authors emphasized how technology has influenced the way people write and also the ways people are taught writing. Additionally, they challenged practitioners to recognize how online writing classes have the potential to serve as sites of paradox and promise, and although they provide a sense of freedom in creating effective learning environments, they can also contradict notions of effective teaching (Hawisher & Selfe, 1991). Eight years later, in 1999, composition scholar Cynthia Selfe laid a foundation within writing studies that emphasized how technology is linked to literacy and literacy education. She argued that technology and literacy were linked in ways to "exacerbate current educational and social inequities in the United States rather than addressing them productively" (Selfe, 1999, p. 414). With her direction to "pay attention to technology," more studies within the field of writing instruction have focused on how technology plays a role in literacy education (Hewett, 2015; Rendahl & Breuch, 2013; Warnock, 2009).

In 2013, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the flagship organization for college composition, released its Online Writing Instruction Principles and Effective Practices. The 14 principles and practices address pedagogy, institutional-level concerns, teacher concerns, and research (Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), 2021). These principles are the guiding forces behind many college writing programs throughout the U.S.

Teacher perceptions of online writing instruction in traditional educational settings

Furthermore, there have been discussions concerning the writing teacher's experience with online instruction within traditional educational settings with non-incarcerated students. Henning (2012) emphasized that online professional development is essential to developing faculty to teach online. He argued that faculty members must be aware that online teaching may require them to experience a change in their teaching styles from that of an expert to a facilitator. He also stated that they might have to work outside of traditional working hours, learn how to use technology for their pedagogy, and learn to teach without verbal and visual cues (Henning, 2012). Although new technologies are being integrated into writing spaces, high-quality training for faculty has been deemed the best and most necessary practice (Griffin & Minter, 2013; Salisbury, 2018). Also, there have been concerns about college writing instructors' lack of technical training, which could serve as a major influence when creating their courses (Bair & Bair, 2011; Salisbury, 2018). Therefore, Salisbury (2018) suggested that instructors be trained on how to implement best practices using this tool for writing instruction.

Teacher perceptions of correctional education

Just as the perceptions of writing instructors have been gathered throughout the literature, it is also important to discuss the perceptions of correctional education instructors for the sake of the research. Currently, there have been no studies that have been located that discuss the experiences of online writing instructors within correctional education college programs, so the review will cover what is present in the literature: teacher perceptions of correctional education.

Before discussing the perceptions of teachers, the research warrants a discussion concerning the role of correctional education instructors within the scope of democracy and liberation. Carver and Harrison (2016) emphasized that correctional educators "stand at the crossroads of liberation and incarceration" (p. 11). These educators have a unique position between education's yielding of mental freedom and a place that provides avenues of confinement of a loss of personal agency (Carver & Harrison, 2016). The researchers suggest Freire's theoretical work of Critical Theory as an underpinning to how the work of correctional educators can assist disenfranchised students in developing a sense of ownership in their learning, which could then counterbalance the structures of the prison with the liberating force of education (Carver & Harrison, 2016). There have also been discussions surrounding the parallel between educational and correctional reform. Gehring and Muth's (1985) seminal study, which spanned from 1840-1900, determined that correctional education and prison reform overlap through progressive corrections management. Both reform methods are concerned with developing better citizens and providing more opportunities for internalized responsibility (Gehring & Muth, 1985). Within this scope of reform, researchers have advocated for correctional education teachers to place citizenship as a key dimension within the learning experience for their students (Carver & Harrison, 2016; Costelloe, 2014). Costelloe (2014) suggested that civic competency should be seen as an accompanying literacy to enable incarcerated students to conceptualize their place in society.

Furthermore, a seminal study in gathering the perceptions of teachers within correctional education was performed by Osberg and Fraley (1993). The researchers sought to determine faculty members' sources of motivation to teach in college prison programs, their suggestions for improving these programs, barriers to teaching, and their comparisons to programs with traditional, non-incarcerated students. After interviewing 67 faculty members across three correctional facilities, Osberg and Fraley found that 24% of instructors noted the characteristics of their students as reasons why they chose to teach in prison college programs, 19.7% noted the pay, and 19.3% of instructors mentioned rehabilitation/helping as a motivation to teaching. Some barriers presented were limited teaching aids and negative student characteristics. The instructors suggested the improvement of learning resources and student services.

Similar studies have been conducted since Osberg and Fraley's (1993) study. Some instructors have noted intrinsic motivators to teaching in college prison programs, while others identify extrinsic motivations for their choice in the placement of pedagogy. Additionally, Michals and Kessler's (2015) qualitative research determined that teachers love their work and think of their students as dedicated, hardworking, and hungry for knowledge. Additionally, through interviews, they found that teachers deemed teaching in prisons to be more rewarding than traditional teaching. Furthermore, although many reasons for the establishment of college prison programs involve the outcome of a decrease in recidivism rates, none of the teachers in Michals

and Kessler's study mentioned recidivism when answering questions about their motivation to teach in prison.

This idea of the enjoyment of the work was also expressed by Barringer-Brown (2015). Using semi-structured questionnaires, Barringer-Brown found that 80% of instructors were satisfied with their job. Motivations for teaching included characteristics of the students, the pay, and rehabilitation/helping. Unlike Michals and Kessler's (2015) findings, instructors in Barringer-Brown's (2015) study perceived education in correctional facilities as substandard in relation to traditional colleges. Some reasons may be their reported obstacles of limited teaching aids and negative student characteristics, which was the same evaluation found decades earlier. In a similar study, Weaver et al. (2020) heeded the call to move beyond the outcome of recidivism but sought to determine how to better support correctional education instructors by gleaning their experiences. Through a 26-item survey, 25 full-time faculty at Boston University's Prison Education Program reported they loved to teach in the program but had challenges such as limited access to students, tardiness, and difficulty in accessing academic resources for students. Recommendations by faculty included the formation of better relationships between the Department of Corrections, program staff, and faculty, along with mentorship and support for new faculty (Weaver et al., 2020).

Another theme expressed in research concerning teacher motivations is the valuable interactions between students and instructors. Bannon (2014) recruited 21 prison educator participants to respond to a web-based questionnaire to report on their experiences with students in correctional facilities and in traditional college settings. They asked the instructors similar questions as previous studies concerning levels of job satisfaction, perceptions of students, and access to instructional materials, but the researcher also included memorable messages received from students. Memorable messages included any feedback related to the evaluation of the course, evaluation of the instructor, gratitude, or an impact of their experiences. Bannon (2014) found that instructors reported messages from students that displayed a deep emotional connection. Their messages reflected the value they saw in the relationships with their teachers as transformative compared to non-incarcerated students, who tend to view their relationships as transactional. Bannon (2014) concluded that the messages were not just about recidivism but spoke to the life-saving experience of correctional education for their students. One limitation of Bannon's study was the homologous makeup of the participants since many of the educators were volunteers. This difference in involvement could imply a difference in motivation and interaction with students since their engagement was voluntary rather than compensating.

Summary

Studies have explored the importance of literacy-based programs within correctional education. Specifically, scholars have conducted research on the power of writing-based courses, whether expository or narrative, in allowing students to cultivate their own identities while interrogating the world around them. Furthermore, the gathering of teacher perceptions has given insight into the experiences of instructors who teach within correctional settings. However, the gap in the literature involves the gaining of correctional education teacher perceptions, specifically those who teach English/writing composition courses, on their experiences teaching in a distance learning environment. Although there have been conversations within the field of composition studies concerning online writing instruction, there is a gap in the literature concerning the experiences of teachers who teach within the same digital medium but within correctional education spaces. Additionally, many of the studies have used large sample sizes of instructors (e.g., 21, 25, 67), and therefore, a closer detailed look at the experiences of correctional education instructors through a qualitative approach with a smaller sample size could reveal more specific themes.

Therefore, this study explored the pedagogical experiences of these instructors using a small sample size. The study builds upon the foundational work of Osberg and Fraley (1993) from the lens of gathering teacher motivations and perceptions of their experiences teaching within online correctional spaces. The work also builds upon Berry's 2017 study about the power of writing instruction within correctional settings. It carves a new path in the literature with the merging of the correctional education teachers' experiences within the field of writing but with an added lens of the implications of operating within a digital space. It is the hope that the discussion will connect to past and contribute to ongoing and future discussions as it gleans the successes and challenges of these teachers' experiences and their approaches to instruction, motivations to teach the correctional population within an online space, and how they cultivate identity with their students within the medium of digital technology.

Methods

Qualitative practices were employed to learn about the experiences of online English composition correctional education faculty. Within the scope of qualitative methodology, Moustakas' (1994) logical process for transcendental phenomenological research was followed, which will be explained further, to focus on the phenomenon of the experiences of online English composition instructors of correctional education.

Sampling

For eligibility for this study, the English composition instructors were required to be over the age of 19 and have taught in the selected correctional education program within an online capacity for at least one semester. The distinction of one semester was so that instructors could share their perspectives on teaching for a full semester instead of a partial semester, which may have impacted the scope of their experiences to their limited insights. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants received a \$15 Amazon gift card for their participation in the study.

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher emailed the Director of Composition at the sample site in May of 2021 to inform her about the study and its purpose. The researcher asked her if they could email the study's information through the correctional education composition faculty's listserv. She agreed, and before the researcher sent the email, she allowed them to give a brief overview of the study at the correctional education composition instructors' faculty meeting.

After the meeting, the researcher sent the initial email to the listserv for the study, which detailed information about the study, including its requirements, benefits, and time commitment. After the first email request for participation, the researcher received one email response from an instructor. After one week, the researcher sent a follow-up email to request more participants. Four more instructors responded, which brought the sample size to five participants. No other instructors responded to the email requests. Since the listserv was a direct contact with the instructors, the researcher did not consider an additional recruitment method since the instructors were all online and other methods would have required face-to-face contact. Therefore, five participants were chosen. Once the instructors accepted the invitation for the study, they received a consent form to sign digitally, and we determined a time for each of their semi-structured interviews, which occurred in June of 2021.

Study's participants

Five of the interview questions asked the instructors about their educational background, their teaching experiences, and their introduction to correctional education. The researcher chose to only ask about the instructors' identities in the context of how they engage pedagogically with their correctional education students in the online setting. Therefore, the researcher did not ask questions regarding factors such as their race, socioeconomic background, or family life because they wanted to focus solely on their approach to teaching without external influences on how the researcher would interpret the data. The researcher acknowledges that these factors can impact their pedagogical approaches considering personal biases and cultural influences, but the researcher did not want these external factors to play a role in this particular data analysis.

However, for data analysis, the researcher decided to include gender. Based on the instructors' responses, in the correctional education setting, the students only know of an instructor's educational background if provided by the instructor during their initial, written introduction to their students and/or their gender based on the instructor's name or request for their students to call them by a title such as Ms. or Mr. Also, the instructors are only formally aware of a student's classification such as freshman or sophomore and their preferred gender if they ask for the teacher to call them a title such as Mr. or Ms. Therefore, these are the only identifiers the researcher has included in describing the participants to cause alignment in how the students identify them in the online teaching space (Gender/Name). These were the only identifiers the researcher used in interpreting the data.

Four females and one male participated in the study. The five instructors' bachelor's and master's degrees were in the following subjects: creative writing, women's gender and sexuality studies, communication, English composition, English literature, philosophy, fiction, and psychology. Their years of teaching experience ranged from five years to 20 years. All of the instructors had previously taught face-to-face and online English composition courses at institutions prior to teaching at the sample site, including at community

colleges and colleges/universities. Also, all of the instructors had at least one year of teaching experience at the sample site.

One of the instructors was a site director at the site and an instructor, meaning that she also physically worked inside of the correctional facility overseeing the educational logistics of the correctional education program and served as a liaison between other instructors and their students. Another of the instructors was also a subject matter expert, meaning that she oversaw instructors for one of the English composition courses. Four of the instructors were introduced to correctional education from an introduction to the corrections program by the English department in which they were currently teaching at the sample site. One instructor was introduced to correctional education from her husband's involvement as a correctional education program director at another site that offered a correctional education program.

Site selection

The site selected for the study was a four-year, private, non-profit university in the Midwest. The university's correctional education program is the longest-continually running post-secondary program in the United States. The program offers face-to-face and distance learning instruction for students in more than 120 facilities across more than a dozen states. Their distance learning correctional education program predated the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 4,000 students are served within post-secondary education, and more than 175 adjunct and full-time instructors are employed each semester. Distance education courses are offered for students and instructors through a distance learning modality with a secure online connection and a secure device in the form of a tablet or computer.

The sample site offers ENG 100, ENG 101, and ENG 102 courses for their correctional education instructors. ENG 100 is titled College Writing Improvement, and ENG 101 and ENG 102 are courses in a two-part sequence that focus on the writing process, critical thinking, research skills, and the rhetorical nature of writing. Four of the five instructors had previously taught ENG 100, ENG 101, and ENG 102 courses at the sample site. One of the instructors had only taught an ENG 100 course. All of the online correctional education courses in the English department at the sample site are asynchronous, meaning that the instructors and the students do not meet simultaneously for a course session. Additionally, they are also unable to meet with the students via video platform or speak to the students using audio voice methods. Lastly, the instructors are unable to know their students' identities in regard to race, gender, or offense.

Methods of data collection

For this study, semi-structured interviews, document collection, and focus groups were used as primary sources for data collection. Moustakas (1994) recommended two broad questions as a guide: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?

For this study, the overall questions used to guide the interviews were as follows: What have you experienced in terms of being an online correctional education English composition instructor? and What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences being an online correctional education English composition instructor? Using these overarching questions as a guide in creating the interview questions, the researcher utilized an Interview Guide for the semi-structured interviews, as seen in Appendix A. All of the questions from the Interview Guide were asked in each participant's one-on-one interview, with some variation in the follow-up questions that were asked.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted via the online video conferencing platform, Zoom. This video conferencing platform was most appropriate because the university's correctional education faculty live across the United States since the correctional education program offers a 100% online teaching position. Therefore, it would not have been viable for the researcher to travel across the United States to conduct all of the interviews. All five participants completed their separate semi-structured interviews of 60-90 minutes. Therefore, five interviews were conducted in the study, with an average interview lasting 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded using the recording option on Zoom, and then they were transcribed using the transcription service, Temi. The researcher then stored the transcripts in a confidential Box folder.

Document collection

Since the English department at the university required a self-assessment (See Appendix B) from the online correctional education English composition faculty, the researcher asked the participants to either provide an excerpt from their self-assessment or write an original reflection. This form of data collection was essential to the study as it allowed the instructors to reflect on their pedagogical practices in written form without any pressure of a live interview or focus group. The researcher asked them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as instructors and provide any other additional commentary regarding their pedagogy as an online correctional education English instructor. Four of the five instructors submitted their reflections, and they were stored in the secure Box folder.

Focus group

Lastly, a focus group was held with the participants. Focus groups allow participants to gather in a common space to discuss topics provided by the interviewer to generate a range of opinions and ideas (Roulston, 2010). The focus group format was chosen because the researcher wanted the instructors to talk with each other about their experiences. Documenting their shared experiences could allow the researcher to draw more conclusions from the data than they would have received only from the individual interviews and reflections. The researcher created broader questions for the focus group instead of specific questions as asked in the one-on-one interviews. Two examples of those questions are “When you think of teaching online, what comes to mind?” and “When you think of teaching in correctional education, what comes to mind?” The more general questions could allow the researcher to potentially have more data to address the research questions because the instructors were able to give their insights without a structured question that could yield a more direct answer (See Appendix C).

All five participants were invited to the focus group session, and the researcher used a focus group guide during the interviews. Three of the five instructors participated. To the researcher’s knowledge, the instructors who participated did not know each other professionally before the focus group, although they taught within the same correctional education program. The researcher also was unable to witness any power dynamics that could have influenced responses.

The researcher served as the moderator for the group. Five focus group questions were created as guiding questions to allow for the discussion of each question (Krueger, 1988; Roulston, 2010; Stewart et al., 2007). The focus group session lasted approximately one hour, and the researcher used the insights provided to explore and examine findings from key points provided during the semi-structured interviews and document collection method (Roulston, 2010). The focus group responses expanded data from the interviews since the instructors were able to hear others’ sentiments and agree/disagree or provide separate insight for their own experiences of teaching in the correctional education setting. After the focus group session, the researcher used the software Temi to transcribe the interviews.

Ethical considerations

For this study, risks were minimal. The researcher practiced confidentiality among participants with all collected data. The IRB at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte approved the study. The researcher emailed all instructors who met the study’s criteria using the listserv provided by the Director of Composition. After the instructors volunteered to participate, the researcher distributed a consent form to the participants. The participants were asked to sign the consent form, which outlined the confidentiality of the study and their right to withdraw from the study voluntarily. Additionally, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity during the data analysis process. Upon completion of the study, all identifiers were removed, including the pseudonym key.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed Moustakas’ (1994) logical process for transcendental phenomenological research. Key methods within transcendental phenomenology include epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). All coding was completed manually.

Epoche

Epoche involves setting aside prejudgments about the research topic to present an unbiased and open presence to the research (Moustakas, 1994). For epoche, the researcher followed Moustakas' (1994) approach by reflecting on their experiences as an online English composition instructor within a correctional education program. The researcher dedicated time during the morning hours to write reflections in a digital document concerning my preconceived biases related to the research. They also included the researcher's thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon that could influence the data collection and analysis. Some of these biases included that teaching in correctional education is rewarding work and that instructors consider teaching incarcerated students as a specific population within a larger scope than traditional college students due to their carceral setting. To ensure that these biases did not influence the research process, the researcher created questions that were open-ended and did not make assumptions or implications regarding the instructors' teaching experiences. The researcher's desire was for the questions to allow the instructors to paint their own picture of how they viewed their roles as correctional education instructors.

Phenomenological reduction

Moustakas (1994) described phenomenological reduction as a process that involves a reflection on the description of things and a reduction of the themes presented. Before conducting the phenomenological reduction, the researcher reviewed each transcript of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews to refresh their memory of the conversations that occurred with the participants. The researcher also read each submitted reflection from the participants. Lastly, the researcher reviewed the transcript from the focus group session.

Next, the researcher participated in Moustakas' (1994) process of horizontalization. In this process, each statement concerning the phenomenon has equal value when attempting to determine its essence. The statements are initially placed in a table in no particular order. Statements that are irrelevant to the topic and questions or are repetitive are deleted. The remaining statements are the horizons or textural meanings, which explain what was experienced.

Therefore, the researcher identified non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements from each participant's interview transcripts and documents that were related to the phenomenon. They identified these statements by finding sentences and phrases that presented new information that another participant had not shared in their transcript and deleting repetitive statements. These statements were placed on one document. Afterward, the researcher followed the same process and found non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements collectively from the focus group transcript and placed them on the same document. The statements were not grouped in a particular order or in a particular category.

The researcher then made a new page of the document and grouped the statements under the headings of each research question. If a statement was related to the research question, the researcher placed the statement underneath the question. Statements that were not directly aligned with a research question but were not repeated amongst the participants were placed at the bottom of the document. All statements that did not align with the study or were repetitive were deleted. The remaining statements were the horizons.

Imaginative variation

Imaginative variation seeks to identify possible meanings of the phenomena in order to arrive at structural descriptions of the experience. For imaginative variation, the researcher closely aligned the procedure with those of Moustakas (1994) and Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) by separating the textural descriptions of "what" from the structural descriptions of "how." The researcher used a different document to label which statements represented the textural descriptions and which were structural descriptions. They made this distinction by labeling statements that discussed what the job of being an online correctional education English instructor entailed as textural and how the teachers conduct their jobs within a larger context as structural. Afterward, the researcher created categories or themes for each research question based on the remaining statements. These themes were developed from the statements provided by the participants as overall descriptions. After creating the themes, the researcher aligned the participants' original statements from the transcripts with the structural descriptions.

Synthesis of meanings and essences

The final step of the transcendental phenomenological research process was the synthesis of the textual and structural descriptions into a unified, composite description of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) noted that the essence may never be fully exhausted since it is derived from the vantage point of the individual researcher and their study of the phenomenon. Moustakas' statement means that since the researcher is the sole person conducting the data analysis, then there could be meanings not included since the analysis is only through the vantage point of one person. Therefore, for this study, the researcher defined essence as the characterization of what it means to be an online correctional education English instructor. The researcher chose to intertwine the work of these instructors with their reasoning for their work.

For this step of the study, the researcher layered additional meaning to the descriptions and findings of the research questions to define the essence of the experience of being an online correctional education English instructor. These themes were created from repeated statements by the instructors. The final conclusion of the research process entailed an overarching descriptive statement of the phenomenon. The statement allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomena of the experiences of online correctional education English composition instructors. To conclude, the researcher ensured intercoder reliability as the sole analyst since they followed Moustakas' process, which allows for a singular coder within the parameters of the logical process for transcendental phenomenological research.

Results

The results cover the pedagogical strategies used by the instructors, the ways they form relationships with students, and areas of perceived professional development.

Research Question #1

What pedagogical strategies do online English composition correctional education faculty use in writing instruction?

With this question, the researcher sought to learn about the instructional practices utilized by correctional education English composition faculty with attention to how they employ teaching practices in their English courses. The participants all explained that their courses at the university were pre-built, meaning that the curriculum is pre-designed and established when the instructors are assigned to their courses each semester. The instructors did not mention if they are included in curricular decisions, but only that the course's modules and lessons are pre-built by the department in the LMS at the start of the semester. Therefore, the instructors are only charged with assisting students with the writing process, responding to their inquiries, providing suggestions for revision, and assessing their written compositions, all via written text within an LMS. Although the correctional education department provides tips and best practices for the instructors to follow regarding feedback and communication, ultimately, the instructors' style of teaching with regard to their communication styles and approach to feedback is related to their individual personalities. This lack of instructor input in curricular decisions may have implications for pedagogical autonomy and the ability to tailor instruction to student needs. However, the themes for this research question speak to the way in which these instructors present themselves to their students within a pre-built online course.

Teaching using feedback

All five instructors expressed that their method of written feedback was influenced by their 100% online teaching environment. They also shared that they used various approaches to providing this feedback. The instructors' primary communication method with their students is through two forms: messaging through the LMS or via comments on their students' assignments. One participant described, "The teaching that I do takes place in the written feedback on their assignments and via email." Another participant stated, "Most of my actual intensive feedback is really in those comments." The instructors emphasized the importance of these two methods of communication because these channels are how they are able to connect with their students in the 100% asynchronous online environment and due to the constraints of the LMS.

Focusing on higher-order concerns for students' writing development

All five participants shared that they strive to focus on higher-order concerns when helping students develop their writing. Higher-order concerns can be described as focusing on the content and organization of the writing, and lower-order concerns are a focus on grammar and mechanics (Bean, 1996). One participant described: "I focus chiefly on higher-level issues in their writing. So, a lot of the time, I find myself teaching like organization, and critical thinking, more of those skills." Three of the five instructors mentioned that they might not approach their critique of students' writing as English instructors in traditional and correctional spaces since they focus on higher-order concerns, which could feed into notions that grammar tends to be a primary focus amongst the assessment of writing for other instructors.

Summary

Overall, the participants' approach to their pedagogy is influenced by the environment in which they teach and the students they encounter. The participants utilize consistent communication when interacting with their correctional education students in consideration of the student's learning environment. They use feedback to guide students in improving their writing and often over-communicate in an effort to ensure students are grasping the material since they do not have the same type of access as in a traditional online environment. They also focus on higher-order concerns to help students critically think through their thoughts concerning the subject matters of their compositions.

Two points of departure from the participants' experiences were one instructor's use of the textbook as a resource in her teaching and that another instructor did not consider that her students were in prison but rather as non-traditional students. While the use of a textbook can be seen as a positive addition to supplement one's teaching, the lack of consideration of students' positionality within the carceral system can yield a lack of acknowledgment of what these students may face that a traditional, non-incarcerated student may not face. This finding was particularly surprising since the other instructors acknowledged the setting of their students as important to how they approach their instruction. More insights into the instructors' perceptions of their incarcerated students in regard to relationship formation were discovered in Research Question #2.

Research Question #2

How do online English composition correctional education faculty cultivate relationships with their students in online spaces?

The focus of Research Question #2 was to learn more about correctional education instructors' strategies for cultivating relationships with their online correctional students. The instructors discussed the tone they use with their students, how they form connections and barriers to forming relationships.

Friendly and professional tone with responses

All five participants expressed that they adamantly work to form an initial connection with their students at the beginning of each semester. They referenced that this contact is encouraged by the Correctional Education department at their university in order for them to help their students become acclimated to the online learning environment. All instructors send an initial message introducing themselves to their students to open the lines of communication on the students' tablets and to welcome them into the course. After the instructors made initial contact with their students, all five of them mentioned that they strive to keep a friendly and professional tone in their responses. Another participant emphasized his use of an encouraging tone through grading. He stated,

I remind them... that everyone is not a natural writer. Sometimes I tell them of how I failed math three times in college. Sometimes, they'll still email and be like, I feel like I did so bad on this piece. And I'll highlight like, well, don't forget you did good on this and this.

Since the correctional online instructors' primary mode of communication is through asynchronous written communication, these messaging spaces are where the interchanges of dialogue occur regarding positive, encouraging feedback.

Challenges and barriers to forming relationships

All five participants expressed that there were challenges and barriers to forming relationships with their students. They expressed difficulty in cultivating in-depth relationships due to the restrictions afforded by the correctional education online environment. One participant stated, “I think with correctional teaching, it really lacks any of that social dimension. Especially the fun part. It’s just grading and just answering emails. Without that face-to-face, it’s sort of hard for me to get that emotional register.” Since the participants had all previously taught face-to-face courses, it can be theorized that they brought learning expectations influenced by their experiences in face-to-face courses to their task of teaching in correctional education in the context of forming relationships.

Additionally, all five participants mentioned that extra security measures prevent them from engaging with their students in ways that would be available if they were teaching traditional students online. One participant stated,

You don’t really get to meet the students. You don’t get to really ever see them. It’s not like when I teach online at another university where we can do video chats and I can have open office hours. So there’s a lot of ambiguity.

To address this challenge of communication and foster relationships, all five of the participants resort back to messaging to maintain open lines of communication, which often takes more effort than in traditional online courses. One participant stated,

I do a lot of messages and I’m checking my messages every day. If I have students on JPay, those messages go straight to my email. So if I’m out, as soon as I get home, I’m going to answer those emails. I’m pretty much 24/7. If I’m awake and my phone goes off and I know it’s an email, I’m going to read it.

As demonstrated, this instructor is adamant about maintaining communication with her students. Her availability speaks to a larger notion that since the primary method of communication between correctional education students and faculty is through messaging, the students may have an expectation that their instructors should be available to answer their inquiries in a timely manner.

Summary

The online correctional education English instructors work within the confines of correctional education to form relationships with their students. They set the foundation and encourage open communication at the beginning of the semester, and they actively encourage students through their grading feedback and messaging. There are barriers to communicating and forming relationships with students that the instructors wish were overcome with more means of interaction with their students. However, they adapt to the students’ methods of communication within the online carceral environment in order to provide the best learning environment for their correctional students. Regarding cultivating the most suitable learning environment, many instructors expressed a need for more professional development which was explored in Research Question #3.

Research Question #3

What are perceived areas of needed professional development and support identified by online English composition correctional education faculty?

This research question sought to learn about the instructors’ perceived areas for professional development and support. All five participants mentioned that the Correctional Education Department at the university provides training for all correctional education faculty at the beginning of each semester, which all five participants had attended. The training entails an introduction to teaching in correctional education, information about challenges incarcerated students face, such as lockdowns and violent occurrences, and best practices for teaching in correctional education pertaining to using the learning management platforms and communicating with the liaison or site director at each correctional facility. Pertaining to the training, one participant stated,

If there are any updates in the technology and stuff like that, they teach you. Etiquette: how to communicate with site directors and students; they teach you. The technology and different

challenges: they show you what the students' equipment looks like.

However, two participants noted the need for training for more seasoned instructors. One stated, *They [the training] feel very remedial to me in that a lot of them are about here's how to grade, here's how to send messages again, and a lot of training for the platform. I'll maybe hear something new, but a lot of that is kind of more for people who are doing it for the first or second time.*

While all five participants attended the initial professional development sessions provided by the Correctional Education Department at the university, they all expressed their desire for more options for training for instructors who continue to teach in the program. Understanding how race, class, and environment play a role in their teaching was one suggestion from the participants. Receiving more guidance on using the learning management platforms was also suggested. Lastly, the participants requested more opportunities to learn from and connect with their fellow English correctional education instructors as a form of professional development.

Synthesis of meaning and essences: Impact

All five participants mentioned their desire to leave an impact on their students through the work that they do. They provided insight into what it means to them to teach English online to their incarcerated students. All five instructors emphasized the larger purpose of their instruction within the correctional education program and the U.S. correctional system. They focused on the humanity of their students and saw their role as instructors as impactful for not only their students while they are incarcerated but also for their students after they leave prison. The instructors saw their identities as changemakers within a larger institution of incarceration through the work that they do on the ground, with close contact with their students.

Discussion

This study connects with previous studies in correctional education in its approach to gleaning the experiences of instructors who teach in carceral environments. The seminal study from which this research draws is Osberg and Fraley's (1993) study, which gathered the perspectives of correctional education instructors who teach within in-person environments. Unlike Osberg and Fraley's (1993) study, which explored teachers' motivations and student comparisons, this study focused exclusively on instructional methods and professional challenges in online settings. This shift in focus is crucial because the online modality impacts the pedagogical approaches of correctional education instructors. Similarly, this study relates to Weaver et al.'s (2020) study, which had a similar purpose of learning how to support correctional education instructors. The study also answers Lewis' (2006) call for the evaluation of the effects of correctional education to focus on the teaching methods of correctional education instructors.

Implications for professional practice

This transcendental phenomenological study was designed to gather the experiences of online correctional education English instructors. Past literature has looked at the experiences of correctional education instructors who teach face-to-face settings (Bannon, 2014; Barringer-Brown, 2015; Michals & Kessler, 2015; Osberg & Fraley, 1993; Weaver et al., 2020), but no attention has been placed on the experiences of correctional education instructors who teach within 100% online settings. Therefore, this study fills the gap of the need for information concerning how the modality of online instruction contributes to the field of correctional education. The study adds to the literature on correctional education, online writing instruction, and English composition. It connects these three fields through the insight gathered from the online correctional education English instructors.

The study contributes to the field through the instructors' suggestions on changes that can assist correctional education programs with developing existing hybrid programs or with enhancing 100% online programs. It can also provide insight for correctional education programs that may be considering the start of online instruction for their incarcerated students. The implications will be provided for correctional education program directors and writing program administrators of correctional education programs.

Correctional education program directors

The study's findings, especially for Research Questions 2 and 3, can assist correctional education program directors in the training and development of their new and experienced online correctional education instructors.

Training for new instructors. Some practices of the seasoned correctional education instructors that could be shared with new instructors included providing encouragement to their students, maintaining a friendly and professional tone, and working to form connections with students. Instructors can also be encouraged to frequently contact their students to establish a rapport. This establishment may include asking students about their favorite holidays, books, hobbies, etc. Instructors can also encourage students to message them about their progress in their other courses. These practices can foster relationships between instructors and their students and can be emphasized in monthly professional development meetings and training. It may be helpful for seasoned instructors to serve as special guests for these sessions to share their practices and model how they provide encouragement and maintain a welcoming tone with examples of written text. There are also implications for experienced instructors.

Training for experienced instructors. Program directors can provide continuous training for instructors once they have begun teaching in the online correctional education environment. One concern of the instructors in the study was that they wanted more training to deal with the challenges they were facing semester to semester. One area of professional development mentioned was a need for sensitivity and cultural awareness training. Therefore, it is important for program directors to educate their online instructors about the context in which they teach; this suggestion also stems from the instructor's response that she does not consider the setting of her students as a point of acknowledgment. This perspective could be shared by other correctional education instructors, especially those who teach online since they are often not as exposed to the carceral setting face-to-face. So, more cultural and sensitivity training could benefit them and potentially help them develop their awareness of how a carceral setting could impact a student's educational experience.

Also, as noted by the study, one characteristic of correctional education online instructors that may differ from non-correctional instructors is the fact that the online correctional education instructors' students are incarcerated within correctional facilities. This added context, as told by the instructors in the study, is vital to the way the instructors engage with their students and how they deliver their instruction. Therefore, it will be helpful for program directors to integrate this type of training continuously for experienced online correctional education instructors. Some approaches could be assisting instructors with learning more about prison culture, inviting formerly incarcerated people who experienced correctional education to speak about their experiences, or integrating a book club to discuss current literature on cultural diversity. Program directors can also encourage their online correctional education instructors to join professional organizations such as the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison and the Correctional Education Association.

Training for all instructors. Lastly, the instructors in the study mentioned a need for more training concerning the learning management platforms used by their students and more opportunities to connect with other faculty members. Again, these two suggestions are mainly based on the modality in which the instructors teach. Providing instructors with an opportunity to learn more about the way in which their students access their learning content will be helpful in how the instructors connect with their students, whether through the same form of a learning management system or technological device. Since online correctional students have limited access to technology, instructors must tailor their instructional methods accordingly. Understanding these constraints allows faculty to design feedback and coursework that align with students' restricted technological capabilities. Additionally, allowing the instructors an option to observe other instructors' interactions within their online course modules may be beneficial. Instructors can see what type of feedback others provide to students on assignments or by messaging. These items can be located in a shared folder for accessibility. Furthermore, these findings also have direct implications for writing program administrators.

Writing program administrators

The findings from Research Question #1 provide insight into how writing program administrators can support online English composition faculty by helping them balance the amount of feedback they provide and by helping them focus on guiding students in developing the content of their writing. The instructors of this study mentioned their challenges with providing feedback in their fears of providing too much feedback or

their fear of providing too much-written text. Writing program administrators of online correctional education programs can assist these instructors with helping them develop strategies for providing feedback in the online setting. Some examples of strategies can include providing models of sample feedback on written assignments for instructors to utilize and training/workshops held for instructors to share their ideas on how they balance feedback. Also, program administrators can train their instructors on how to determine when to focus on higher-order concerns versus lower-order concerns. Since the instructors of this study did not mention how they learned to focus on one type of concern over another, it will be important for writing program administrators to provide training for all online correctional education instructors because there could be a variation in their pedagogical background.

Limitations of the Study

This study has notable limitations. First, the sample size of the study was five participants. Only five instructors responded to the two requests for participation. However, five participants were sufficient for saturation since phenomenological studies often use small samples. However, this small sample size does not represent the full scope of the number of online correctional education instructors across the United States, and the small size provides limited insights into the phenomenon. Another limitation of the study is that the study was conducted at one university, and the instructors all taught at the same university. Therefore, their insight is limited to how the correctional education department is designed at that learning institution. Also, the study's data was collected during the summer months, which could have impacted the instructors who chose to participate in the study, causing a decreased participant sampling pool. Another considerable limitation of the study was that the researcher did not conduct member checking with the participants of the study. Member checking could have allowed the instructors to review the findings and improve the validity of the study. Without participant validation of the findings, the study lacks an additional layer of verification that could have ensured interpretations accurately reflected instructor experiences.

Secondly, the positionality of the researcher could have had an unintended impact, either negatively or positively, on the participants in the study. The researcher did not know any of the participants personally, but the participants knew of the researcher's past experiences as an online correctional education instructor. Their knowledge could have impacted their responses since the researcher would be considered an insider, and they may not have known if they agreed or disagreed with their statements since she had a similar teaching background.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study initiates a discussion on the experiences of online correctional education instructors. It is recommended that future research expand the study in various ways. One way for an extension of the research is for a larger sample size for the study. A larger sample size can assist in gathering more insights into the phenomenon of an online correctional education instructor. Although the sample size of the study fell within Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation of five to 25 participants, adding more participants to the study would help in understanding more factors that contribute to pedagogy, relationships, and professional development. It is recognized that the small sample size of this study of five instructors does not represent the number of instructors who teach in this capacity. Future research can also explore this phenomenon at a different university that houses a 100% online correctional education program. Furthermore, future research could study the phenomenon with online correctional education faculty members who teach additional subject areas other than English composition. Future research could also employ a quantitative or mixed methods approach to the study and collect survey data from the instructors along with interviews. Also, this study only focused on instructors who teach within online correctional education programs that serve adults. Future research could be valuable to learn about the experiences of instructors who teach incarcerated juveniles through online education programs. Lastly, this study could be re-designed to focus on how external factors such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status could influence how correctional education instructors teach, whether in person or online.

Conclusion

This study gathered the perspectives of online English composition correctional education instructors. It addressed the problem that the insights of these instructors have not previously been included in the literature. Using a transcendental phenomenological methodology, the research questions were answered. The instructors approach their pedagogy by providing substantial feedback, delivering encouragement to their students, and focusing on higher-order concerns. They use a friendly and professional tone and work to form connections with students despite challenges. Lastly, they desire more sensitivity and cultural awareness training, assistance with technology, and more opportunities to connect with faculty members for professional development. Overall, the instructors see their work as impactful as they hope to equip their students not only with writing and critical thinking skills but also with a sense of empowerment. Therefore, this study attempted to provide additional perspectives on the role of correctional education instructors, with a focus on including the voices of those who teach online.

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Individual Interview Guide

The in-depth interviews in this study will cover the topic of your experience of being an online English correctional education instructor. However, the topic will be explored in an organic way. Questions will not be phrased in precisely the same way from one interview to the next; neither will the questions be asked in the same order. What follows are the key topics to be explored and examples of the types of questions that will be asked. It is possible that interviewees will raise unanticipated topics. These emergent topics will be explored at the discretion of the researcher and will be incorporated into future interviews if they prove relevant to the study.

Guiding Questions:

1. What is your educational background?
2. How did you start teaching English composition/first-year writing?
3. What other schools have you taught English composition/first-year writing at?
4. How long have you been teaching English composition?
5. How did you hear about correctional education?
6. What type of training did you receive before starting your position?
7. What type of training do you wish you received?
8. How does teaching writing differ in this environment than in others in the context of correctional education?
9. How does teaching writing differ in this environment than in others in the context of online learning?
10. How does your previous teaching experience inform your current teaching methods?
11. Describe your interactions with your students?
12. Do you feel connected to your students?
13. Do you believe the environment plays a role in your teaching?
14. What are best practices you implement in your teaching?
15. How do you approach feedback?
16. How do you approach the writing process when teaching?
17. How do you foster encouragement with your students?
18. How do you approach assessment?
19. Why did you choose to teach within corrections?
20. How do you view your role on a larger scale?
21. Correctional education has been tied to themes of recidivism and redemption. What are your thoughts?

APPENDIX B: DOCUMENT COLLECTION PROMPT

Please see me a 300-word minimum reflection about your experiences of teaching English composition in the online correctional education program. You can speak to your strengths and weaknesses as an instructor, or you can include what you would like concerning your experiences in general. It's open to your interpretation.

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Focus Group Guide

Welcome and thank you for being here today. The purpose of this gathering is to get your feedback on your experiences as an online correctional education English instructor.

Let me introduce myself. I am Candace Chambers, and I will be the moderator in today's discussion. The format we are using is a focus group. A focus group is a conversation that focuses on specific questions in a safe and confidential environment. I will guide the conversation by asking questions that each of you can respond to. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Just be honest. If you wish, you can also respond to each other's comments, like you would in an ordinary conversation. It is my job to make sure that everyone here gets to participate and that we stay on track.

Before we get started, I want to let you know two things. First, the information we learn today will be compiled into my dissertation. This compilation will include a summary of your comments. Secondly, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. This focus group today is confidential. Confidential" means that what we say in this session should not be repeated outside of this session

I cannot control what you do when you leave, but I ask each of you to respect each other's privacy and not tell anyone what was said by others here today. Although we hope everyone here honors this confidentiality, please remember that what you say here today could be repeated by another focus group member. So please, do not say anything that you absolutely need to keep private.

As you can see, I will be tape recording this focus group. The recording will only be used to make sure our notes are correct and will not be heard by anyone outside of this project.

Let's begin with introductions.

Opening Question: Please share with us your name and something you love to do in your free time.

Transition Questions:

When you think of teaching online, what comes to mind?

When you think of teaching in correctional education, what comes to mind?

When you think of teaching as an English instructor, what comes to mind?

Key Question: What are your overall pedagogical experiences teaching as an online correctional education English instructor?

Probing Question: Does anyone share the same experiences?

Key Question: Are there any needed improvements to your teaching in this capacity in the context of professional development?

Probing question: Does anyone share the same experiences?

Ending questions:

What advice would you give other online correctional education English instructors?

What advice would you give writing program administrators or correctional education program directors based on your pedagogical experiences?