

CAN A REFORM TRANSFORM THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE FOR
LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE SUBURBS OF LONG
ISLAND?

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ABSTRACT

CAN A REFORM TRANSFORM THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE FOR LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE SUBURBS OF LONG ISLAND?

Mariana A. Gil

“Me pregunto si las estrellas se iluminan con el fin de que algún día, cada uno pueda encontrar la suya” – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

In this phenomenological, qualitative study, the researcher analyzed the lived experiences of Latin American immigrant students in the current school culture in Long Island schools. The purpose of this analysis was to identify a relationship between the school culture and social structure with the academic advancement and overall development of these students. The primary data was collected through individual interviews with the participants. Following a snowball method of research, the participants were carefully selected to represent demographically the general Latin American immigrant population on Long Island, and they included high school graduates and nongraduates to arrive to an effective conclusion. In addition, this method was intentionally selected to provide a direct assessment from this specific student group of the impact that the most current educational reform has made in the enhancement of the school culture, and the students' academic attainment and development.

The literature reviewed in this study revealed that the Latin American student immigrant population is currently the larger immigrant group in Long Island schools. Therefore, the insight obtained from this study will be significant and will serve as a guide for school agents at the local and the state levels in their decision-making process

and future creation of programs. In addition, Banks' multicultural education, theoretical framework guided this analysis and study to determine the current level of readiness of the school culture to embrace the academic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity represented by Latin American immigrant students.

DEDICATION

I acknowledge the encouragement and mentoring that I have received from each of the members of the dissertation committee—Dr. Annunziato, my mentor, Dr. Bernardo, and Dr. Clemens—all three of them are professionals whom I admire for their knowledge and willingness to gift their students with their experience and guidance. I also want to thank Dr. Gil, my first dissertation mentor, for setting me on the right path at the start of this process. I also recognize a dear friend, Dr. Carlos Falcon; you have adopted me as your “hermana,” you pushed me to start the Ed.D program, and you never let me forget that I had to finish this por nuestra gente!

Throughout my life and this process, I have been gifted with people who always held me in high regard and have shared with me a word of wisdom when I hesitated to take the next step. Dr. Hector Rivera is a wise mentor and dear friend who always stood by me and my family. Mrs. Michele Harriott, a person whom I admire for her passion and dedication to our community and someone who, with her genuine friendship and support, has helped me always to believe. Of course, dedicate this work to my parents, my siblings, and my beloved nephews and nieces, the future! My two sons, Joshua and Jacob, my heart and everything I am, have always belonged to you. My husband, Vinicio, the person who has believed in me the most, from the moment we met, you always believed that I was capable of reaching the stars and even more if more existed. You are the real Ed.D!

Lastly, I dedicate this achievement to the student community that the participants of this study represent. The walk is long, the journey is full of challenges, but your dreams are real and your resilience will never allow you to give up. Adelante!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The academic advancement and overall development of the Latino immigrant, high school student are factors that state and local schools authorities must continue to carefully research and analyze. As schools strive to reach overall academic success through the creation of programs, policies, and even state-level mandates, it is important to learn from the Latin American immigrant students themselves how their experiences in the new academic context influence their academic attainment and personal success. Understanding the importance of the contextual variable in the academic journey of these students is an essential ingredient that school authorities must examine and consider in their initiative to provide effective educational services and reforms (Sibley & Brabeck, 2011). The researchers identified school, home and community environments as promoting factors for optimal development in immigrant children.

From its origins, many struggles are part of the Latin American history, from poverty to chaotic political environments in the native country, many Latin Americans are placed in a condition of disadvantage at a very early age. These imposed conditions experienced in the native land blocks the pathway to reach a fulfilling and prosperous future (Montaner, 2001). For many Latin American immigrant families and students, these factors are predictors for the most strenuous personal decision: to migrate in pursuit of their dream of a better future. The personal dream or goal does not differ from that which is referred by the local society in the United States as the American Dream, a pursuit of personal and communal success and fulfillment. The desire to improve their living conditions and provide their children with opportunities for personal and academic

progress serves as the accelerator that leads parents to a search for a new horizon in an unfamiliar land. Earlier research that has included the voices of Latin American immigrant students and their families has shed light on the personal emotions that play a part in the decision-making process to migrate from the homeland (Becerra, 2012). Emotions of hope, solitude, fear, and uncertainty are some of the many feelings that flood the soul of the immigrant as they walk and sometimes run towards a new life and the possibility of personal and academic advancement. These are factors of the immigrant student experience that are important to consider in conjunction with the experiences in the new school community to serve them efficiently.

Although generally the decision to migrate has been attributed to a desire to seek financial well being, opportunities for a high-caliber, academic education that includes a college degree is the very definition of personal success and the primary reason for Latin American parents and students (Orozco-Suarez, Orozco-Suarez, & Todorova, 2008). Both external and internal factors within the academic system must be considered to assess efficiently the success or lack of success in achieving the immigrant goal. Contemporary research and theories assert that the education of the immigrant students must depart from an approach of embracement of the cultural identity and values that these students represent, hence links between the current academic results among immigrant students and the school culture and environment must continue to be studied. Gonzales (2010) established a relationship between the lack of access to a positive and empathetic social network and capital with the stagnant academic advancement that this group of students reported. Beyond educational reforms and policies, Patterson, Hale, and Stessman (2007) concluded that schools must consider making a shift in the way that

local schools organize and structure the academic environment to welcome and embrace the cultural asset the newcomers offer. Patterson et al. further asserted that meaningful connections between the immigrant students—whom state authorities identified as English Language Learners (ELLs)—and educators must exist for this group of students to achieve successful performance.

A very popular statement summarizes the Latin American immigrant goal, “Solo queremos una mejor vida” (“We only want a better life”). Although this goal might be perceived as simply a common human goal, the trajectory of the Latin American immigrant population is far from simple. In fact the journey has been characterized as diverse and complex, whether from a low socioeconomic or academic background or a middle class in their native countries, immigrant students commonly must confront a process of adaptation and integration which generates a greater challenge for the host school community. Furthermore, among the immigrant Latin American student subgroup, those entering the country as unauthorized immigrants have an additional challenge in their journey to establish themselves in the new host community. This is asserted by research that finds that the immigration status in many cases hinders their chances to reach their personal goals (Leach, Brown, Bean, & Van Hook, 2011). As Orozco-Suarez (2008) identified, the desire or pursuit of an improvement of the living conditions, and the access to opportunities for success and growth are the generators for the most difficult decision to leave the motherland and all that it represents emotionally, cognitively, culturally, and socially. Hence, in an effort to understand better the role that the social and cultural context of the new school community has in the academic advancement of the Latin American immigrant student, the researcher has analyzed the readiness of the

school culture through an exploration of the experiences of these students with the traditions of the new host community, the priorities of the educational organization, the beliefs and perceptions of who or what defines success, their policies and protocols, the decision-making process and mainly the interest to learn about and from these students through the lens of the phenomenon of immigration. This approach is expected to help gain an insight on how the current school culture defines what it mean to be an immigrant Latin American high school student in Long Island. At what level have Long Island schools with large Latin American immigrant population move from acceptance, tolerance, or embracement towards a desire to affirm the diversity of these students with the goal of providing them with equitable access to high-caliber academic programs and opportunities and the supportive social networks needed to achieve academic and personal success.

Key Words

School culture: Traditions; social, logistical and pedagogical practices, beliefs and perceptions; social networks; and extracurricular activities and structure all form the school culture.

Latin American: Students natives from countries from Central America, South America, and Mexico where Spanish is the main language.

English Language Learners: Students identified with the need to receive English language acquisition instruction are called ELLs.

Students With Interrupted Formal Education: Students identified upon entry from another country lacking 2 or more years of academic preparation are considered SIFE

students. These students are placed in a remedial academic program in which the curriculum offers basic concepts.

Advanced Regents Diploma: A regents diploma is a diploma with advanced designation that requires a 65 or greater passing grade in additional courses beyond the regents diploma requirements.

Seal of Biliteracy: The State of New York provides to students who have demonstrated in high school a proficiency in two or more languages a recognition called a seal of biliteracy.

Statement of the Problem

It is undeniable that the waves of immigration have not dissipated in the public school system in the United States, for instead of dissipating schools have experienced a constant statistical growth in recent times (Fakhrl, Jameshoorani, & Majidipour, 2017). Although it is important to recognize the numerical increase of immigrants entering the school system, it is pivotal to also identify the academic, linguistic, and cultural diversity this increment represents. In this study, the researcher has demonstrated that, although the administrators in the school system in the United States have consistently made efforts to address the needs of immigrant students through the creation and implementation of reforms and mandates, Latin American immigrant students are still not graduating from high school nor are they prepared to attend college at the same rate when compared to nonimmigrant students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). As school agents seek to address the academic gap among subgroups such as the Latin American immigrant students to create an effective roadmap towards their success, the issue must be studied through a qualitative lens that includes the analysis of professional theories in conjunction

with opinions as has been done so far in previous studies. However, in this study, the researcher has highlighted the importance of constantly evaluating academic programs through a phenomenological approach in which students themselves voice their struggles and success, and the factors that drive them to make crucial decisions such as embracing the school community or or disengaging from it completely.

Currently, the rate of the academic performance of the immigrant student group is allocated for statistical purposes under the identification of ELLs in the New York State School Report Card (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2018). This subgroup is evaluated each year and accounted for within the general school performance (NYSED,2018). From the annual reported academic performance, immigrant students have been part of the NYSED'S (2018) efforts to identify the most relevant and cohesive language programs that will provide these students with equal opportunities to reach academic success. From the educational reforms (e.g., the Bilingual Act of 1968, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, and the most recent CR 300 Part 154 of the 2015), NYSED promotes an emphasized effort towards the improvement of the academic performance of ELLs. Some of the unique characteristics of the current reform CR 300 Part 154 set it apart from previous educational reforms that targeted the academic programs of ELLs. This revised law includes innovated elements that are intended to address the language acquisition process and the social and emotional needs of immigrant students (i.e., ELLs; NYSED, 2019a). As members of the first cohort since the implementation of the revised CR 300 Part 154 complete their high school journey, the numbers show that the efforts will once again disappoint local schools and the larger community.

Results prior to the revisions of CR 300 Part 154 in 2015 showed that ELLs continued to be one of the main groups with a high rate of chronic absenteeism and, as of 2015, they were the main high school dropout group (Brady-Mendez, 2017). The most recent results of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and CR 300 Part 154 showed that ELLs continue to fall behind academically and continue to represent the highest high school dropout rate (NYSED, 2019a). These results pose a challenge to school officials and the need to assess further the effectiveness of the programs and services created thus far. Traditionally, the assessment of academic programs departs from valuable statistical data, results, and the number of students opting out of state tests. However, as schools, state agencies, and community school boards assess the level of impact that the revised CR 300 Part 154 has made in the academic advancement of the immigrant student group, it is important to recognize and consider the significant emotional and social elements mentioned previously in this study and the transfer into the school culture with the intentions of CR300 Part 154 to address them. To gain an insight into the influence that the school culture and social structure has in the academic attainment among Latin American immigrant students, school agents must consider including the social and emotional factors through a phenomenological lens.

As immigration waves have become a steady part of school communities in regions such as Long Island, New York, school authorities need to identify the patterns, trends and the diversity among newcomers. Nieto (2009) concluded that, to move away from a stagnant academic achievement and high dropout rate among Latino immigrant students, the education of these students must be analyzed through the perspective of the phenomenon of immigration and its implications. By adding the readiness of the school

culture and social structure to welcome and motivate immigrant students to the assessment of the impact of educational reforms and academic programs, state and local school agencies will have the opportunity to gain an in depth insight into the alignment between the prescribed academic expectations and the immigrant student's perspective.

In this analysis, the researcher has examined through the phenomenon of immigration the impact that the school environment and social structure have on the cognitive and emotional aspects of the Latin American student experience. Furthermore, In this analysis, the researcher has explored the effect that these experiences have on the decision-making process for some students who ultimately detach or disengaged themselves from the education system, in pursuit of other options that will enable them to achieve their goals and dreams for "a better life." To gather the insight needed to identify any possible relationship, in this phenomenological study, the researcher has asked pivotal questions:

1. What is it like to be a Latin American high school immigrant student in Long Island, New York?
2. How do the social and cultural experiences of these students in the new school community affect their academic and overall advancement?

Purpose of the Study

Students that are actively engaged in school have been found to experience academic success and positive adolescent development (Quin, 2017). These researchers have also asserted that engagement is not a personal attribute, but instead is influenced by one main external factor, the contextual factor. Therefore, in this study, the researcher has explored the experiences of the immigrant, Latin American students during their high

school journey in the new school community and identified how these experiences relate to the reported outcome of the New York State Report Card postimplementation of the most recent educational reforms that were implemented to address the needs the immigrant students.

Beyond addressing the linguistic needs of the immigrant students, the CR300 Part 154 educational reform intends to create educational paths and social–emotional support to prepare ELLs for college and career by providing all schools in the State of New York with a blueprint that addresses all these components (*Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages*, 2017). CR300 Part 154 has been structured to include innovative elements such as a detailed registration process in which the level of the English language proficiency of the immigrant student is assessed to recommend academic placement efficiently. In addition, it promotes respect and embracement of the multilingual and multicultural skills that immigrant students represent, for it provides both students and families with the right to receive any communication from the new school in their preferred language (*Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages*, 2017).

Although different in its approach from previous educational reforms, CR 300 Part 154 does not differ in results thus far. According to the most recent graduation rate data report from the State of New York, of 12, 267.00 immigrant students who were labeled as ELLs, 27% reported having dropped out of high school, while only 1% of the total number was reported as a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) transfer. In comparison to the identified nonimmigrant population, ELLs represent the third largest percentage who graduated with a local diploma (13%), compared to students in foster care (14%) and students with disabilities (27%) (NYSED, 2018).

The lack of alignment between the academic performance and the intentions of law CR300 Part 154 raises an interest to explore further the areas of the immigrant student academic journey through a phenomenological lens to learn the typology of interactions within the new school community, the caliber, and even consistency of the social interactions. The purpose of the exploration that the researcher performed in this study was to identify a possible relationship between the school culture, the manner in which state mandates and guidelines are transferred into practices at the local school level, and the effect this transfer has in the everyday interaction and communication among the immigrant Latin American student and the school agents and their new peers.

Furthermore, the purpose to provide recent graduates or nongraduates with an opportunity to express their opinions and assessment of their experiences in high school was to learn how these experiences mold their perspectives of academic and personal success, and learn how they are able to define their role and identity upon completion of their high school journey. Beyond taking into consideration the number of Latin American immigrant students a school will welcome every year to organize logistical elements (e.g., staffing, physical space, or amount of academic material), and intrinsic socioemotional factors must also be considered. Among the crucial factors that schools must consider are the level of knowledge and sensitivity towards the diversity represented by immigrant student population. Academic and social programs must be expected to align with the ethnic, cultural, and the philosophical diversity of the Latin American immigrant students arriving into their communities. Nieto (2009) identified that the largest immigrant student groups entering American schools in the last 10 years are mainly from Mexico, and Central and South America. They are different from the Latin

American immigrant students who entered the country in the past from parts of Caribbean. As Nieto (2009) identified, it is pivotal to understand that the current influx of immigrant groups are resistant to assimilation. This change in idiosyncrasy represents a challenge to a school system that traditionally expects these students to abandon their national and cultural identities starting with their native language (Nieto, 2009).

Theoretical–Conceptual Framework

Honig (2016) confirmed that, for immigrant students to develop fully and succeed in the new school community, a wide variety of elements must be available that represent and embrace their values, life experiences, aspirations, history, and culture. Furthermore, the analysis of development of an individual and society must be examined from attitudes and aptitudes among members of a common social circle (Fakhrl et al., 2017). Departing from these perspectives, the researcher analyzed the relevancy of the school culture and environment with the academic performance of Latin American immigrant high school students in Long Island schools through Banks (2006) multicultural education theory. The major goal of Banks' theoretical framework was to serve as a pathway to help students from ethnic, language, and religious diversity to develop the knowledge attitudes and skills needed to participate in a meaningful manner in their cultural communities and within the civic culture of the nation or state (Banks, 2006). From the research and conclusion, Banks (2006) recognized that, in the demographic shifts that have been experienced in the last 20 years, groups of color will make up 50% of the population of the United States by 2050. As the phenomenon of immigration and its implications are explored in this research, this theoretical framework connects the influence of the school culture with the academic attainment and advancement of students

through the dimensions of content integration, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure, as illustrated in Figure 1.

One of the expectations in this research is to learn how the changes in the school culture and social structure since the implementation of the CR300 Part 154 have helped students to feel welcome, embraced, and valued. As part of the most recent effort of the NYSED to address the achievement gap and school abandonment rate among immigrant students and ELLs, the revised CR 300 Part 154 included a Culturally Responsive–Sustaining Education (CRSE) framework with the purpose of guiding schools to create a landscape that would be conducive to creating a multicultural and multilinguistic school environment (NYSED, 2020). The dimensions presented in CRSE align with the general concept that Banks (2006) presented and that recognizes that, to serve efficiently students from a diversity of cultural and ethnic background, a whole school reform must be the goal among school authorities and agents. As a result, the research for this study was embedded in an exploration of (a) the level of inclusiveness in the curriculum and assessment creation and implementation, (b) the level of support for ongoing professional development towards multiculturalism, (c) the level of expectations and the manner in which they are communicated to the immigrant Latin American student.

The dimension of prejudice reduction from Banks' (2006) theoretical framework was the point of departure in the analysis of the questions of social interactions within the newcomers and peers, and school agents. The level and caliber of these interactions was explored to determine how the expectations or perceptions of the host community are transferred or communicated to this group of immigrant students with the purpose to identify both failures and/or success in their academic journey. Delpit (2006) established

that the discussion of culture and education are most important not to intend to create the perfect culturally matched learning condition, but to instead to recognize the particular needs of specific individuals and help look at methods and pathways in a broad spectrum.

This research departed from a starting point that, to close the academic gap and significantly improve the pattern of school abandonment among these students specifically, school administrators and agents must consider a whole school culture reform that attempts to service all life aspects of the immigrant student. Each of the dimensions that Banks (2006) established plays a crucial role in the exploration of (a) the experiences of the immigrant Latino student with the curriculum or content, (b) the instructional practices, (c) the access to build their knowledge about their own and other cultures, and (d) the multiculturalism within the school community.

Both Banks' (2006) multicultural education and the New York State's CRSE move beyond a traditionally approach that was adopted for the creation of educational programs in which immigrant Latin American students have been placed upon arrival to the new host community. Honig's (2016) assertions also bring to light that the possible reason for failure has been the approach that national and state agents adopted to create academic programs according to their English language skills without taking into consideration other essential factors. On this topic, Nieto (2009) concluded that historically the educational programs made available to immigrant students have traditionally been concentrated on the new acquisition, perhaps presenting the language proficiency or mastery as the ultimate goal of their academic journey. A highlight of the new, revised educational reform Law CR 300 Part 154 and the theoretical framework of multicultural education is the identification of the essential role that the involvement and

participation of all stakeholders plays in the success of these initiatives. Therefore, in this study, the researcher has also explored the level and caliber of the interactions of the Latino immigrant students with their teachers, schools, and district leaders.

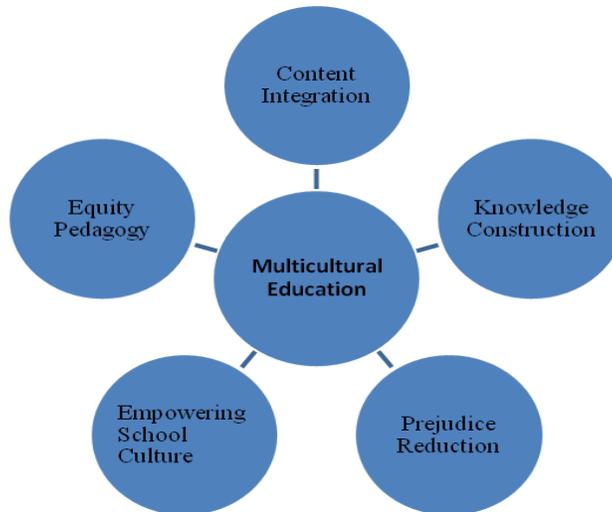
Banks' (2006) theory highlights the importance that the concept of diversity within school organizations must move beyond discussions and conversations among school authorities, a behavioral pattern that could be perceived as superficial when planning programs and curriculum for the academic preparation of ELLs. According to Banks, the diversity in a school must be the main driving factor in the creation of the curriculum, the planning process of instruction, the social structure, and the school environment. In this theoretical framework, Banks promotes an approach that moves away from reforming content or subject areas one dimension at a time, and towards linking the needs of one student group to the entire organization by reforming the way that the entity functions as a whole.

Banks (2006) promoted that to reach educational equity, schools must be reformed in their totality, including curriculum, teaching materials, and the social environment by taking into account teaching and learning styles, attitudes, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds and perceptions. These efforts could be identified as a landscape to enrich immigrant student experiences within the new school communities and to present school agents with the challenge to assess the need of the whole immigrant student through a whole school reform approach. As educational institutions adapt a genuine interest to help immigrant students succeed academically and personally, the attempts must include adjustments of external elements such as content integration and knowledge construction. In addition to these these elements, Banks also

included, in his five dimensions of multicultural education, inner elements such as prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and empowering school and social structure, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Dimensions of Multicultural Education



Although access to academic programs is crucial for high school immigrant Latino students to fulfill their graduation requirements, Banks (2006) identified that access to meaningful relationships throughout all sectors of the new school community is equally important for their success. According to previous research, beyond the struggles generated by their personal experiences, many Latino immigrant students are faced with systematic inequalities and discrimination, hostile school environments, omissions, and errors—all of which are elements that translate into academic underachievement and school abandonment (Harklau, 2016). Through the analysis of the lived experiences of the Latino immigrant student in the public school system, the researcher has sought to learn whether the dimensions of the whole school reform through multicultural education

will generate a much-needed shift in the treatment that Harklau (2016) described (see Table 1).

Table 1

Description of the Dimensions of Multicultural Education

Dimension	Goal
Content integration	The use of a variety of cultural examples to illustrate key concepts and principles within any subject or content area.
Knowledge construction	Educators build knowledge through instruction related with the purpose to help student understand the relationship between course content and cultural assumptions and perspectives.
Prejudice reduction	Educators use instructional strategies and expertise to mold racial attitudes.
An equity pedagogy	Educators diversify teaching styles and materials to facilitate academic proficiency to students from diverse racial, cultural, and social class groups.
An empowering school culture and social structure	All dimensions create inclusiveness and representation of all students in activities, sports, and academic initiatives. It also creates positive interactions across students, teachers, and school authorities.

Significance of the Study

The NYSED has recognized that an effort must be made to enhance the current services that ELLs and/or immigrant students are provided in schools. Departing from a concerning academic gap among ELLs, CR Part 154 was revised in 2014 to layout a blueprint for schools to implement in 2015 (D’Agati & Angelica, 2019). Although the revisions of the law include several requirements and mandates that intend to achieve improvements in student performance among this subgroup through revised academic and language programs, the most current results that the NYSED (2018) reported demonstrated a need for further research. As schools strive to serve effectively Latin American immigrant students, the school community members (e.g., classroom teachers,

school leaders, and school board of education teams) must scrutinize their idiosyncrasies, their life experiences, perspectives of the new community, and the school environment.

Among the characteristics and needs found in a group of immigrant students entering the country, Colorín Colorado (2019) concluded that providing immigrant students with social emotional support is essential in building student confidence and, in many cases, helps them to heal from traumatic experiences because of their unique migrant journey to the United States. Following this conclusion, this researcher's study provided an opportunity from the immigrant student perspective, if a need exists, for stakeholders to perform consistently an analysis of instructional practices and everyday student interactions with school representatives and peers. Although, quantitative surveys and test results might provide important information, the researcher believed that gathering data through interviews of students (which would represent students from similar backgrounds and life experiences) would provide local school authorities, teachers, board representatives, and other school districts (that share similar demographics with the study school) a valuable, in-depth insight of these student's lives and critical influences as academic programs and pathways are created.

Although, CR 300 Part 154 was intended to establish a system in which educational equity is achieved for the benefit of all stakeholders, the results lead the researcher to the conclusion that, once again, a reform or a revision in legislation was not sufficient for the immigrant student population to reach academic and personal success within the school community. Previous research presents the need to reform the school culture into one that is more welcoming and appreciative of the cultural capital that Latin American immigrant students can offer the school community as they pursue molding

students into global citizens who would be equipped to compete in the professional fields. Harklau (2016) asserted that the Latino immigrant student population continues to experience rejection, neglect, and discouragement; ultimately, in many cases, these experiences result in a total abandonment of the educational system that, from the students' perspective, has first rejected them. Therefore, through this study, the researcher intended to learn from immigrant Latino students about the state of the current school environment, and how the culture and social structure shapes their perspective of their role in the school community.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the possible connection between the human interactions within the school social structure and culture, and the academic advancement and the existing school abandonment that Latin American immigrant students experience. The primary research questions that guided this study were as follow:

1. What does it mean to be a Latin American, immigrant student in the existing school culture in Long Island, New York?
2. How do the social and cultural experiences in the new school affect the academic advancement and overall development of Latin American, immigrant students?

In addition, the secondary questions to be explored in this research were as follow:

- a. How did participants feel that their designation as ELLs defined them in relation to the rest of the school community?

- b. What school initiatives promote a full integration and active engagement of ELLs in extracurricular activities and academic programs?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher generally introduced the study topic and provided an overview of the study, and identified the relationship between the multicultural education theoretical framework and the targeted students' academic advancement. In this chapter, through a review of the related literature, the researcher has addressed the phenomenon of immigration and the implications it represents for local schools, the response from school authorities through reforms to the phenomenon and the role of the school culture and/or social structure with academic advancement and overall development of the Latin American immigrant student.

Understanding the Immigration Phenomenon Experienced by Schools

The immigration phenomenon has been defined as the transfer of human habitation that has cultural, social, economic, and political implications (Fakhrl et al., 2017). On the topic of bilingual education, Nieto (2009) recognized that schools in the United States have historically received immigrant students from all over the world in large numbers. Although the influx of immigrants has been a constant in the United States, the countries from which these immigrants come, their cultural traits and life experience have shifted depending on the era. Although the shift is recognizable by national statistical reports, the approach adopted to educate these new immigrants has remained the same. Nieto affirmed that academic programs and services continue to depart from and revolve around the new language acquisition needs.

At the state and local level, and the Nation, the rates at which students immigrate to the United States and their country of origin have varied throughout eras. In particular, NYSDE reported that the student subgroups of districts classified as targeted support and improvement schools identified the Long Island region as the second highest rate of ELLs in their schools (NYSED, 2018). This trend is important to consider because the rate of ELLs comprises a diversity of students, including immigrant students from Latin American countries. As the phenomenon of immigration is examined further to highlight the unique characteristics, the diversity among the Latin American immigrant students must also be disseminated to understand efficiently the specific nuances of the culture from each country represented, and the differences in life experiences and migration journeys.

National data bases provide a breakdown of the most current immigration groups according to nationality. In particular, this data identifies that a large influx of Central and South American immigrant students has entered the public school system since the early 1980s. The countries from which these students emigrate tend to change, depending on the social and economic issues that the native country experiences at a particular time. For example in the early- and mid-1980s, the largest group of Latin American immigrant students entering the school system in the State of New York emigrated from Guatemala and El Salvador. The main reason for the massive migration from these two countries was the civil wars in Central America that opened a wave of violence, emotional insecurity, and higher levels of poverty than had been experienced historically. Gradually, other groups have followed in large numbers; currently, the largest number of Latin American immigrants is coming from Honduras, and this particular migration has

occurred because of the extreme violence experienced in that nation (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).

These particular characteristics of the Latin American immigrant student differ from those of the general population; therefore, a demand arises for school communities to create, adjust, or develop programs and services that address the vast diversity of emotional needs that the detachment from their familiar environments and academic proficiency levels generate.

The Implications of the Phenomenon of Immigration

It has been recognized that the phenomenon of immigration is a constant in the United States and its educational system. So also is the diversity among the students' schools from era to era. Thus, it is also crucial for school authorities and staff to recognize the challenges that this constant represents to the existing pedagogical framework and school culture. To evolve and align the current services and programs to the current demands in the mission of offering the best opportunities to their immigrant student population, school agents must be opened to exploring the implications through the analysis of experiences, idiosyncrasies, academic proficiency levels, personal aspirations, and evolving cultural and personality traits among these students. Furthermore, as educational agents explore the implications of the immigration phenomenon, it is equally important to identify the compulsory factors such as escaping violence or prosecution, natural disasters, and extreme poverty (Fakhrl et al., 2017).

According to other research, schools have consistently experienced an influx of Central and South American immigrant students since the 1980s. School administrators continue to expect that these students will assimilate into the school environment and

culture, failing to recognize the vast diversity in cultures, skills, life experiences, learning styles, and academic proficiency that newcomers represent (Nieto, 2009). Efforts have been made to offer these immigrant students the opportunity to experience success academically and in their personal lives; however, it is important to take into consideration that, to achieve this goal, educators must adjust the academic landscape to allow these students to transition emotionally and academically to the new school community. In respect to the English language acquisition as a fundamental skill for immigrant students to master, Banks' (2006) aligned the multicultural education theory with Gardner (1983) concepts. Gardner (1983) also identified the school and social environment as a crucial ingredient in the success of ELLs in the language acquisition process. In the socio educational model theoretical framework, Gardner concluded that the success or failure in acquiring a second language was dependent on two variables; ability and motivation, and that these two variables are fundamentally dependent on the social milieu in which immigrant students learn. In concluding, Gardner amalgamates the intrinsic elements of intelligence, language aptitude, and motivation with a dependence on the external factors of the social structure in which the learning takes place.

The role of motivation within the school environment in relationship to immigrant students was also the focus of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD; 2018) focus. From an analysis following the PISA assessment results and qualitative surveys from 2009–2012, OECD concluded that secondary school age immigrant students, although genuinely motivated to succeed academically in the new host school, lacked familiarity within the school community, which had a negative impact on their academic performance. Similar to Banks (2006) multicultural education

framework, OECD (2018) asserted that it is pivotal for these students to be exposed to curriculum and instruction that integrates elements of the ethnic and cultural identity represented in their immigrant student population.

Aspirations and Challenges

! Colorín Colorado! (2019) described, the current influx of Latin American students arrives to their new community with life experiences that include traveling to the United States unaccompanied, risking their lives, experiencing family separation, and many more challenges. Thus, the researcher assumes that it is imperative that school agents understand that the motivation of these students through a caring and embracing school culture is critical if they are to reach academic and personal success. In a previous study, the researchers identified the challenges that incoming immigrant students face. McIntyre and Barowsky (2011) asserted that the transition into a new academic setting creates multiple cognitive, social, and psychological challenges for these students. However, according to Orozco-Suarez et al. (2008), many Latin American immigrant students expressed clear aspirations as their reason to migrate to the new land. The main pursuit of these students is an opportunity to obtain quality education that will prepare them for college and better life opportunities. Orozco-Suarez et al. found that 80% of the participants in their study expressed a clear desire to go to college.

Nieto and Bode (2011) identified immigration as a phenomenon and a social issue of the past, but also a very predominant issue within the current social political context of American society. This conclusion is important for school agents to consider as they prepare a landscape for student success that is inclusive of students who arrive from a different geographical regions than those whom immigrated in the 1800s. In particular, as

this present study zooms in on the exploration of the experiences of new entrants from South and Central America, who come with life experiences that are characteristic of refugees, an identification of the present demands in addition to the general challenges should be part of the planning process at local schools, and the creation of state and national reforms. In the specific case of the current Latin American immigration, schools struggle with what Nieto and Bode (2011) identified as a problem of unequal schooling and significant achievement gaps when compared with the general student population. Regarding the topic of the academic gap, D'Amico (2001) identified that both sociocultural and school-related factors are the two major causes for the current difference in student performance. D'Amico further defined the school-related factors as teacher qualifications and expectations. Furthermore, Zurawsky (2004) concluded that, although schools have limited control in changing the socio cultural factors that specifically Latin American immigrant students face, school agents have the ability and capacity to build a social school environment that includes access to rigorous academic programs, and a support network among classroom teachers, peers, and mentors. From these conclusions, one can infer that the training and knowledge construction that Banks (2006) described regarding the phenomenon of immigration and its implications is the best point of departure for effective planning and creation within school communities.

Previous and Current Responses to the Phenomenon

State and federal education authorities have not been indifferent throughout the years to the need to improve educational programs and academic results among immigrant students. In the form of policies and mandates, federal and state agents have demonstrated an interest in building pathways to lead these students to reach academic

success. From the Bilingual Act (1968), a reform established to accelerate the process of linguistic assimilation (Nieto, 2009) to the Revised CR 300 Part 154 implemented in 2015, federal and state efforts have been made to make funds and resources available to schools to enrich the academic programs available to immigrant students. The continuous increase in the number of immigrant students entering the country has generated a need for legislative responses from federal and state agencies that align with the constant increase and diversity shifts among this group.

According to Nieto (2009), the Bilingual Act (1968) was a social desire to lead ELLs among the immigrant population to assimilate the English language. Although an assumption of this effort was that overcoming the language barrier would result in higher academic grades and lower dropout rates, the results reported did not align. In 1974, the Bilingual Act (1968) was revised to include goal setting and feedback from the educational institution of the progress made by the students enrolled in the program (Nieto, 2009). Harklau (2016) noted the lagging high school graduation rate among native and heritage Latin American immigrant youth throughout the last couple of decades, and concluded that mandates and reforms had failed to correct a problem of systematic discrepancies and that these students access to resources and social capita was unequal.

The State of New York has been identified as one of the regions in the United States in which immigrants settle the most. More specifically, the State of New York has one of the largest groups of Latin American immigrants. According to the demographic data that the NYSED (2018) provided, the Latin American immigrant students, counted as 64.8% of the ELLs that the state serves, represent the largest subgroup (NYSED,

2018). In response to the rate and diversity of the immigration phenomenon represented and past issues encountered in the education of these students, the NYSED (through its Department of English as a New Language and Bilingual Education Department) implemented in 2015 an educational reform that targets this population specifically with the goal of making a general improvement in all schools. The most current efforts that the NYSED made were the revisions to CR 300 Part 154 (Infante-Green & D'Agati, 2019). The original law that was implemented in 1981 had the goal of laying out a blueprint for school leaders to provide ELLs with the necessary services to advance both linguistically and academically (Tankard Carnock, 2016). During the 80s and 90s this initiative encountered issues such as a lack of certified teachers and a lack of effective material (Tankard Carnock, 2016).

The vision of providing ELLs continued to move forward, regardless of previously encountered obstacles and lagging results in the academic achievement among ELLs. Under newly appointed leadership in 2014, the revised Part 154 was officially approved and introduced to school districts (Tankard Carnock, 2016). The innovative initiatives included in the new blueprint were (a) pathways to efficient student registration process, (b) assessment of linguistic and academic proficiency for the purpose of academic placement, and (c) a language program that has the purpose to enhance the communication between families and school agents. Stakeholders could consider all of these initiatives commendable. Among the positive results reported, the provisions and framework that CR 300 Part 154 created have made a positive impact in the high school graduation rate among ELLs. NYSED (2019b) reported that high school

graduation among ELLs improved by 2.4% in 2017, 3 years from the implementation of the revised law.

As the data is disseminated, the progress in the graduation rate among immigrant ELLs in 2019 was reported to be at a 39%. The percentage of these students graduating with an Advanced Regents Diploma was 1%, and the dropout rate was at a 27% (NYSED, 2018). Upon assessment of the data collected over the last 6 years, one could conclude that the academic performance among ELLs continues to fluctuate at a deficient level. The Latino Family Literacy Project (2019) reported a total enrollment of 237,499 ELLs in the State of New York, of which 61% were from a Latin American background. The Latin American immigrant student represents the largest group of ELLs and is the most affected by the failure of educational reforms.

This analysis of the history of the educational reforms and the results derived from them leads to the understanding that identifying the needs of an ever-evolving immigrant group of students might be a great first step. However, it also leads to considering that further exploration must take place to identify additional elements such as the implementation and rollout at the local school level of the goals and expectations embedded within these policies.

The Demand for a Reform towards Multicultural Education

In relation to the reasons for the deficient academic advancement among ELLs, Filindra, Blanding, and Coll (2011) identified “context” as one of the main predicators for the success or failure of political policies and educational reforms. Nieto and Bode (2011) presented a challenge to academic organizations that serve students from minority groups, including the immigrant student population to consider a reform of the

sociopolitical environment. In their research of the Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education, Nieto and Bode (2011) interviewed secondary students from cultures and languages that differed from the dominant group of the student body to discuss their feelings and social experiences. Nieto and Bode discovered the validity to their thesis, for they found that students from other cultures did not feel that their teachers and other school staff understood them. The interviews allowed Nieto and Bode to gain an insight on intimate feelings perceptions of these students who expressed that their differences were viewed as deficiencies.

The theoretical framework described in this study, and in the research that Nieto and Bode conducted as educators, the authors recognized that the phenomenon of immigration demands that schools move from tolerance and acceptance towards a transformation into multiculturalism. Nieto and Bode (2011) further defined a multicultural pedagogical system as one that is constant, ongoing, and always open to evolving to align with the cultural and linguistic pluralism presented in school communities in the 21st century. The Department of Bilingual Education of the State of New York has recognized the concept of embracing multiculturalism and linguistic pluralism in the State of New York schools. From the time of implementation, this agency has been consistent in enhancing the legislation CR 300 Part 154 to enhancing the need for shift in philosophy and practice within the school community. For example, the department has implemented a system of accountability through the legislation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) which mandates for schools to monitor the academic growth of ELLs through data analysis and reports. Although state policies and reforms were made to attempt to offer an opportunity for academic advancement of ELLs, it is

important to understand that individual school districts controlled the interpretation and transfer of these policies.

Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education

Generally, positive interactions and meaningful relationships among educators and students are found at the top level of importance when addressing student academic success. These ingredients are elevated to an essential level among students whose origins are from unfamiliar cultures, and different languages and life experiences. However, the goal to build a school culture and environment in which immigrant Latin American students feel embraced, motivated, and valued will not take place unless school agents and authorities understand the particular nuances of the immigrant experience. The NYSED has taken into consideration the cultural diversity that the immigrant student population represents as they further revisions to CR300 Part 154. In 2019, the Department of Bilingual and ENL education launched the Culturally Responsive Sustaining (CR-S) Education Framework for all schools in the State of New York to implement and build a landscape in which cultural and linguistic diversity might move to the center of the academic organization (NYSED, 2019b).

This framework lays out four principles for academic institutions to create a school environment in which all students will be empowered and valued, departing from their cultural backgrounds and primary languages (NYSED, 2019b). The principles illustrated in this section were intended to create a school culture in which learning and human development could be achieved through multiple expressions of diversity and life experiences (NYSED, 2019b). Recognized as important principles of the education of immigrant students are (a) welcoming and affirming environment, (b) inclusive

curriculum and assessment, (c) high expectations and rigorous instruction, and (d) ongoing professional learning and support. Although CR-S is fairly new and its results are yet to be measured, from the interpretation of these principles, one might conclude that NYSED has reached a level of recognition that, to reach success among this student subgroup, it is important to create a reformed educational program in New York State schools that examines the whole immigrant student by amalgamating the academic and human elements of the immigrant student experience.

Conclusion

The authors in the literature have demonstrated that school agents at the federal and state levels have consistently implemented various pathways to enhance the academic performance among immigrant students. In Chapter 3 of this study, the researcher described the methodology that was used to collect data from Latin American, immigrant, former graduates and nongraduates to explore the impact of the most recent reform of the local school culture and structure.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As demonstrated in the review of the literature, previous researchers have aligned themselves with the need to explore the experiences of the immigrant student to determine the possible influence that the school culture and social environment have on the academic advancement and development of these students. As the NYSED (2019a) confirmed in its recently implemented initiative, the increasing influx of a diverse, immigrant student population into the education system has created a demand and opportunity for schools to move toward a reform of the school culture and an integration of multiculturalism and the multilingual assets that these students represent. In this study, the researcher intended to learn, through a phenomenological research design, from the voices of Latin American immigrant students about their experiences in the current state of the school culture.

Research Design

The study of the current academic results among Latin American immigrant students was analyzed through the study of the phenomenon of immigration. The researcher intended to learn how the experiences within the current school culture influence the academic performance of these students. Qualitative data was collected following a research methodology that Van Manen (2015) described as a project of someone in the context of a particular individual, social, and historical life who has the goal of making sense of a certain aspect of the human experience. Assuming that the everyday interactions and cultural and social context play a crucial role in the success or

failure of educational reforms, the researcher adopted this research design to gain an insight.

Although quantitative data offers a valuable measure of the impact of educational programs, and state and federal policies and reforms for the academic advancement of Latin American immigrant students, the social and emotional components cannot be measured by this approach. As the researcher pursued an understanding from the phenomenon of immigration, the data were collected directly from representatives of this student subgroup. The intent was to identify the role that social and emotional elements play within the academic experience of Latin American immigrant students in the new school community. To accomplish this goal, a phenomenological design was identified as the most appropriate methodology.

Data Collection Methods

Immigration was the phenomenon that the researcher explored in this study and, more specifically, how the experiences of Latin Americans as immigrant students influence their academic performance; therefore, the sampling included individuals from the immigrant background who had experienced a high school education in the United States. The data was collected primarily from the individual interviews that were guided with a research tool that included a series of precreated questions that were directed to explore feelings, beliefs, convictions, and perceptions. Following the recommendations that Creswell (2017) made, the information obtained from a face-to-face conversation in which the potential participant was asked questions and the responses that the researcher recorded using a recording device. However, the participants were provided with the option to answer the questions in writing for their convenience. The interview included

questions that related to prearrival and postarrival experiences. The research tool included questions that were divided into sections of emphasis (e.g., prearrival experiences, social experiences, academic experiences, and recommendations or suggestions for the host school). In addition, the areas of emphasis that were addressed in these questions aligned with the Multicultural Education Framework, for the responses were projected to identify the level of readiness of the represented schools to integrate immigrant students into the new school culture.

The prearrival questions were intended to help the researcher to understand the students' motivation level, their perceptions, and their academic goals prior to entering the new social structure and academic environment. Again, it is imperative to understand the journey and the reasons that brought these students to the new school community, which is an essential part of the phenomenon of immigration. The postarrival questions were intended to help the research to explore the identity dilemma related to the process of adjustment and acclimation to the new community.

The data for this study were extracted from the phenomenological interviews of former students who had recently completed their high school experiences with or without a high school diploma. The responses from the participants were expected to vary, depending on each person's experience, personality, and the level of memory of each experienced. In addition, although each participant was informed of the specific period allotted for the interview, the time varied for each participant, depending on the freedom that they were provided to avoid questions, which depended on their level of comfort in addressing or sharing certain experiences or whether their experiences were not applicable to their own unique high school journey. During the interviews, the

researcher took notes, setting aside “prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). This process enabled bracketing, which Moustakas (1994) defined as the ability to maintain the world out of action to allow the phenomenon to be analyzed through a “purified” perspective.

Interview Protocol

In this study, acquaintances within the education field and the local community recommended participants for the participant selection. As the contact was made with the first participant through electronic messaging or telephonic text messaging, a snowball sampling approach was followed from the contact with the first participant, for recommendations or referrals were requested on voluntary basis (Creswell, 2017). One-to-one interviews were conducted with participants via telephone, videoconference, or electronic messaging for those who choose to answer in writing. The type of interview varied, depending on the level of comfortability or preference of the participants.

The tool of data collection selected were used to create a level of comfortability necessary for the participant to share sensitive information. Creswell (2017) recommended that one-on-one interviews would be useful because they would allow the participants to be comfortable to make comments that might move beyond the original questions. The intent was to gain an in-depth insight on the students’ experiences preimmigration and postimmigration, which was communicated to the participants during the introductory phase of the recruitment process. The participants were informed of the research questions that would drive this study and the important role that their experiences would play in reaching the goal of this study, which was to raise awareness among school agents and authorities of the impact that the interpersonal interactions and

social experiences had on their academic journey as immigrant students in the school system.

As Creswell (2017) recommended, the participants were advised of the researcher's intent to protect their identity by applying anonymity. Projecting that the participants would be eager to provide lengthy descriptions or detailed information of their experiences, they were provided with the option to respond to the survey in writing. As an alternative to this scenario, in case the participant might be unwilling or uncomfortable to respond to any questions, they were provided with the option to skip questions as they would decide. Finally, each participant was informed that they would be provided with an opportunity to review the transcripts of the completed interview and would be asked to communicate via email or telephone regarding their approval.

Research Questions

Two primary research questions were used to drive this study and two secondary questions were used to explore the influence of the lived experiences of Latin American immigrant high school students and their academic success. The two primary research questions were as follow:

1. What does it mean to be a Latin American, immigrant student in the existing school culture in Long Island, New York?
2. How do the social and cultural experiences in the new school affect the academic advancement and overall development of these students?

The secondary questions to be explored in this research were as follow:

- a. How did students feel that their designation as ELLs defined them in relation to the rest of the school community?

- b. What school initiatives promote a full integration and active engagement of ELLs in extracurricular activities and academic programs?

Table 2 illustrates the questions that guided the data collection through the interviews.

Table 2

Interview Questions That Guided the Data Collection

Category	Questions
Screening phase Background and profile	1. What is your nationality and age? 2. When did you arrive to the United States? 3. When did you complete your high school experience?
Prerarrival experiences	4. What are the reasons that made you or your parents leave your native country? 5. How would you describe your experience in your school in (country)? 6. What did you valued the most from that academic experience?
Introductory and registration experience at the new school	7. How soon after arriving in the United States did your parents or guardians registered you at the new school? 8. How would you describe the registration process at your new school? 9. What type of documentation and information were you or your parents were asked to provide during the registration process?
Access to resources and social assets	10. What role did you or your parents play in the creation of your school schedule? 11. What resources or key people were you provided with at the new school as part of the preparation for your high school journey?
Assessment of the school culture and social network	12. Describe your general opinion of the physical environment and any familiar items or elements that remind you of your previous school in your native country? 13. What are some of the challenges you encountered during your journey at the new school and how did you overcome those challenges? 14. How would you describe the social interactions with the rest of the school community (peers, teachers, administrators, aides, and security guards)

Category	Questions
	15. How would you describe the interactions of the school leaders and faculty with immigrant students in general in comparison to the larger student population?
	16. Were you a member of any clubs, sports team, or any other extracurricular activities, why or why not?
Academic support	17. How would you describe the level of difficulty of the class content, and what support, human or academic, did you receive to help you with your classes?
	18. How supportive were your peers in helping you to reach your academic goals?
Overall perception	19. Did your academic or personal goals changed during the time you were in high school, and what do you think influenced the change or persistence of your goals?
	20. How would you describe your high school experience as a Latin American immigrant student?

Participants

As Creswell (2017) recommended, the participants for this study were strategically selected, following a homogenous sampling method, only from places that represent the phenomenon to be explored in this study. To align with the current trends of immigration in the United States and the targeted population in this study, the individuals were former students who had completed their high school journey within the last 2 years and represented the first cohort since the implementation of CR300 Part 154. The sample also had to be from three school districts that had been identified in the most recent report from the New York State Department of Education School Report Card (NYSED, 2018) as having a student population that included 25% or more students from Latin American regions. The inquiry was open to including participants from Latin American regions

such as Central America, South America, and Mexico, and from countries in which Spanish is the primary language.

A screeningr interview was conducted via email or telephone message, which included questions that were related to nationality and ethnic background, place of birth, age, and grade level. This helped the researcher to identify whether the participant met the criteria for the study. The projected number of participants was 10–12 former students who were recruited following snowball sampling Creswell (2017) described. The snowball sampling that Creswell outlined was used to develop an in-depth contextualized exploration of a central phenomenon. Departing from demographical data, the social networks that represented the group of interest for this study guided the search for the participants. The interviews were conducted using the previously mentioned virtual tools of communication. an hour per interview was allotted.

Procedures

Following the guidelines of a research study protocol, after the St. John’s University’s Institutional Review Board approved the study, the participants that meet the criteria previously described were approached, and the researcher extended an invitation to them to participate in this study. The process of collecting the qualitative data that were needed for this research was initiated after the informed written consent was obtained from the participants. The participants were provided with an option to email the signed consent or to send it via image in a text message. The consent forms were collected and kept secured.

After completing each interview, the recording was reviewed to create a written transcript of the interview. The transcript and audio recording were reviewed several

times to identify key words, comments, or statements. The notes that the researcher took were also reviewed to discover meaning through the nonverbal reactions of the participants to specific experiences recorded in the notes.

Themes render control and order in qualitative research and writing (Van Manen, 2015). The analysis of the data that were collected from the interviews included a search from the notes and responses that the interviewees provided for themes as Van Manen (2015) recommended. Although remaining unbiased, the researcher looked for significant statements, phrases, or words that would align with the dimensions of the Multicultural Education Framework. These steps were taken to determine the level of embracement and the value that Latin American students experienced in the school environment from all members of the academic community. In addition, the analysis was intended to identify how these experiences affected intrinsic elements (e.g., motivation, and engagement or disengagement) within the new social structure. Ultimately, the researcher moved towards the identification of the relationship among the phenomenon of immigration, and the way in which this phenomenon affected the opportunities that the host school community offered for academic advancement and personal fulfillment.

Limitations

According to Creswell (2017), qualitative inquires must demonstrate that their studies are credible. Qualitative researchers generally employ the procedures of member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer review, and external audits (Guba, 1994). Validity in this study was built through adopting the recommended procedures of triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Triangulation

Triangulation took place as the researcher gathered evidence from a variety of sources. In the present study, the researcher used verbal responses and took unofficial notes during the interviews to find common themes or categories (Creswell, 2017). In addition, the researcher asked the participants to provide on voluntary basis any school records including and not limited to class schedules, report cards, copies of diplomas, certificates of recognition, classwork, and textbooks.

Member Checking

Member checking is a validity procedure that shifts from the researcher to the participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, the results of the analyzed data were presented to the participants for reaction, approval, or confirmation. Member checking as the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (Guba, 1994). Therefore, the transcripts, narratives, and themes that were identified were presented to the participants to ensure that the findings and themes made sense in alignment with their responses (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Researcher Reflexivity

The final validity procedure that was adopted in this study was researcher reflexivity, which requires for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The role of the researcher, which included a description of the researcher's personal beliefs and assumptions about the topic, are provided in detail in a separate section to demonstrate the absence of bias during the research process.

Conclusion

In conclusion the present phenomenological study provided participants with a platform to voice their experiences within the current school culture and structure. These participants were selected according to common traits and characteristics as established earlier in this study (Creswell, 2017).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

In this study, the researcher analyzed how the lived experiences of Latin American immigrant students in the current school culture and social environment influence their academic advancement and overall personal development in Long Island, New York, schools. The authors of other qualitative studies cited in the literature review section of this study have measured the impact of teacher and student interactions on the academic performance of these students, including the reasons for school abandonment. It is equally important to analyze the role that the school culture and social structure into which these students arrive and to understand how the new beliefs, perceptions, and everyday practices provide or block access for these students to enjoy fully the academic and social opportunities that would enable them to achieve the goals that moved them to migrate from their native land.

Again, a phenomenological data collection approach was adopted to provide the students who were representative of the targeted population to describe their experiences themselves. Through these interviews, the approach also provided these students the opportunity to reflect and assess their experiences. Finally, the approach provided the researcher with the opportunity to learn from the described experiences the extent of the impact that these experiences had in the final academic outcome that these former, high school, Latin American immigrant students achieved. To achieve this understanding, the research framework was developed through two primary research questions:

1. What does it mean to be a Latin American, immigrant student in the existing school culture in Long Island, New York?
2. How do the social and cultural experiences in the new school affect the academic advancement and overall development of these students?

In addition, the participant's experiences were explored guided by the following secondary research questions embedded in the primary questions:

- a. How did participants feel that their designation as English Language Learners defined them in relation to the rest of the school community?
- b. What school initiatives promote a full integration and active engagement of English Language Learners in extracurricular activities and academic programs?

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings that emerged from the phenomenological interviews that were conducted with a total of eight participants who represented three different school districts from Suffolk and Nassau counties, Long Island, New York.

Results and Findings

The current research strategically involved video and telephone interviews with 8 participants ranging from 18 to 22 years of age, who had completed their high school journey within the last 3 years. The participants represented countries from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean Ocean regions. Two participants were from Honduras, one was from Guatemala, one was from El Salvador, three were from Dominican Republic and one was from Colombia. All spoke Spanish fluently, two participants in particular demonstrated difficulty maintaining control of the English

language during the conversation. In relations to their academic achievement in the United States, the participants represented a diverse range of academic achievement. One participant graduated with a Regents Diploma, six participants graduated with an Advanced Regents Diploma, and one participant ended his high school journey without obtaining a diploma. Four of the eight participants provided artifacts (e.g., copies of a Merit Certificate), and three participants had high school diplomas. In addition, one participant provided a copy of his SIFE Science booklet, allowing triangulation of the data. The study sample included an equal percentage of women and men. All of the participants met the criteria set for this study, all were former students from school districts that had a significant rate of native and heritage Latin American students in attendance (see Table 3).

Table 3

Participant Descriptor Data

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	High school diploma	Type of high school diploma	Academic high school program
1 Jonathan	Male	20	El Salvador	Yes	Regents	SIFE
2 Raffi	Male	19	Colombia	Yes	Regents Advanced	ENL
3 Josue	Male	20	Honduras	Yes	Regents Advanced	SIFE
4 Jessica	Female	18	Guatemala	Yes	Regents Advanced	ENL
5 Juan Jose	Male	22	Honduras	No	NA	SIFE
6 Alay	Female	18	Dominican Republic	Yes	Regents Advanced	ENL
7 Yenny	Female	20	Dominican Republic	Yes	Regents Advanced	ENL
8 Madelyn	Female	20	Dominican Republic	Yes	Regents Advanced	ENL

This qualitative study allowed the researcher the opportunity to research the phenomenon of immigration through the students' experiences during their high school years in the new host school community. The research tool developed for this study was a series of open-ended questions that were derived from the main research questions. These questions served as a roadmap during the conversations, most of the participants answered all of the questions with the exception of one. Each interview culminated with an invitation for each participant to provide any additional information that the research tool did not cover. Most of the participants were very generous in providing the details of their experiences and were eager to participate because of the possibility that their experiences might help other immigrant students. The following summaries of each participant and their responses offered a valuable representation of their voices and perspectives.

Participant 1, chose to be referred under the pseudonym of Jonathan. He was a native of El Salvador, was 20 years old, and had graduated with a regents diploma 2 years ago from one of the top three largest high schools on Long Island . He was currently enrolled in a community college and his aspirations included a degree in nursing. However, he shared that he had spent his first year of college taking remedial courses for mathematics and English as a New Language. During the opening of our conversation, Jonathan shared that unfortunately he was “not yet eligible to enter the academic program of interest” because of academic deficiencies identified through the college placement assessment. During his interview, Jonathan, guided by the questions, described the reasons why he and his father came to the decision to leave their native country to come to the United States. Jonathan explained that their main reason was to pursue the

opportunity to graduate from high school and to have a chance to live under better social conditions.

In his experience in the United States, he found his bilingual classroom teachers to be kind and willing to go out of their way to help him to understand the content when he was confused. However, Jonathan also clarified that not everyone in his new school was willing to help him. During the interview, Jonathan, described “feeling uncomfortable” during the registration process because of a lack of willingness to communicate with him and his father in their native language. He also reported that the help he received during his first day and week at the new school was minimal. He reported feeling so lost and overwhelmed that he said, “At one point, I felt like walking out and never return.”

Jonathan also described the physical environment as unfamiliar without any symbols that represented his cultural background, nor were there any signs in his native language that could help him navigate the building. He described his interactions with administrators as minimal and as lacking in intention to create opportunities for him or other students like him so that they could socialize with the rest of the school. Jonathan expressed that he felt “discouraged to go to college” towards the end of his high school journey because he did not have anyone in the school who was willing to guide him in how to apply for college, how to select an academic program or degree, and how to apply for financial assistance. Jonathan concluded his interview by making a recommendation for schools like the one he attended. He expressed that in his opinion, “schools need to be friendlier to students from other countries.” Furthermore, he stated that schools need to consider to provide immigrant students with guidance throughout their high school years.

Participant 2, wanted to be called Raffi. This participant was an 18-year-old student who graduated with an Advanced Regents Diploma from one of the three largest school districts in the Suffolk County area. He was a native of Colombia and was currently completing his first year of college. He reported that the reason that his parents migrated was to search for better living conditions. Raffi shared, “I felt to be in a place of advantage from the moment I arrived to the new school because I spoke English already.” He stated that, in his native country, he had the opportunity to attend a bilingual school where he learned to speak English. He was registered in his new school in the United States only 2 weeks after his arrival in the country. He described the registration process as a regular experience. Raffi found that the new school was very different from his old school. He was impressed by the variety of course offerings, especially the World Language Program.

Raffi shared during his interview, “My Spanish language teachers were a source of motivation during my high school experience.” According to Raffi, one of his language teachers created a club called Student Alliance in which participated. He recalled being motivated to attend the club because it gave him the opportunity to be with other students who were from his cultural background. He was in this club with students who were born in the United States from immigrant parents and students who were immigrants as he was. In particular, he shared feeling happy to have the opportunity to help other immigrant students who felt lost in the new school. Raffi shared, “I noticed that other immigrant students had multiple study halls in their schedules and they did not realize how harmful this would be at the end.” He reported that he took the role of

advisor with the goal of helping these students; he would tell them what to do to correct the situation.

Raffi also shared that he enjoyed helping his peers with homework assignments and projects; he said helping others succeed inspired him to pursue his goals. His academic preparation in high school included the opportunity to participate in Advance Placement courses, which elevated his motivation to pursue higher education. Raffi is currently in college, playing soccer with his college team and is studying to become an accountant.

Participant 3, expressed that he wanted to called Josue. He was 20 years of age, had completed his high school journey in 2019, and had graduated with a regents diploma and a Seal of Biliteracy, a recognition recently implemented by New York State Department of Bilingual Education. This seal is a certification of bilingual or multilingual abilities that the student demonstrated during their high school years (NYSED, 2019c). This participant also graduated from one of the top three largest schools in Suffolk County, Long Island. Josue is a native from Honduras, Central America. He shared that his main reason for migrating from his native country was his aspiration to study and be able to build a better life for himself and his family. Josue described, “I was was inspired by movies I watched in my country.” According to Josue, the movies showed that the schools in the United States were very different from his school in Honduras which was very limited in resources. He said he saw in the movies that the school buildings in the United States were “comfortable and nice,” so he imagined that, if the schools were nice, the teachers would also be nice and willing to help all students.

Josue was registered in school 2 weeks upon arrival to the United States. When asked to describe his experience, he stated, “If I had to rate my first experience with the new school from a 1 to 10 it would be a 5.” He described the people at the registration office as “rude and unwilling to speak Spanish,” although they appeared to be Hispanics and when they wanted to, they sounded fluent in the language. as prior participants, Josue described that the school did not provide him with any assistance to help him navigate the building, the benefits offered to students (e.g., clubs or extracurricular activities), or even where to go or who to reach out to for help with his academic struggles. He reported that, throughout his experience, he felt that some people had rejected him; he clarified, “They would look at me strange just because I was speaking to my friends in Spanish.” However, Josue also added that his bilingual classroom teachers were very supportive of him and showed him respect and appreciation. He also shared that his principal was pleasant and would stop to say hello and would make an effort to speak to them in Spanish, and that earned him the “love and appreciation of all the students.”

Although at the beginning of his journey, Josue felt out of place, he managed to participate in programs and clubs of his interest that also afforded him the opportunity to socialize with other bilingual students from other classes. He was a member of the Christian United Club, a religious club. He also participated as a counselor in a club named Semicolon, a program in which he served as a counselor and support for students that suffered from depression and were considering suicide. One of his roles that made him the most proud was his participation as a writer of the newsletter called Enterate. This newsletter served as a platform through which the writers shared information about events for Spanish speakers. Josue shared that being a Latin American immigrant student

in his school meant feeling discouraged many times, but he shared that this discouragement turned into inspiration eventually. During his last year of high school, Josue decided to pursue a college education with the goal of becoming a teacher. He described feeling frustrated and discouraged by the lack of support towards him and his peers, but found that this lack of interest in the success of the immigrant student motivated him to become someday a teacher with the goal of helping others. His recommendation for schools in Long Island was that schools need to make an effort to improve the communication between the school, parents, and students. He further stated that schools also need to reform the manner in which they treat students like him, he specifically mentioned a memory as a form of illustration. Josue recalled, "It seemed that all immigrant Spanish speakers were automatically placed in SIFE classes," and those classes would go to a computer lab in which they were shown how to write papers and complete tests. Josue further shared,

I remember that our teacher would take us to one computer lab that was specifically for us. This computer lab had antiquated computers and, although there were other labs with MAC computers, we were told that we were not allowed to use those labs because the school was afraid we would break the computers.

Josue shared this because he stated that this alone illustrated how the school viewed him and his peers, and how they were treated for the most part.

Participant 4, wanted to be called Jessica. She was 18 years of age and had recently graduated under very different national conditions because of the national pandemic known as COVID-19. Jessica, unlike the previous participants attended and

graduated from a high school in the western region of Nassau County, Long Island.

Jessica was a native of Guatemala, Central America, she graduated from high school with an Advanced Regents Diploma and had plans to attend college to major in business administration. Jessica shared that her mom and she came to this country with the goal to seek opportunities for a better life. She described that, at her school in Guatemala, she always felt motivated to do well. Although she described that her teachers were not always the best in explaining the content, she always felt motivated to get good grades.

Jessica was registered at the new school in Long Island, New York, 1 month upon arrival. She recalled feeling “nervous” during registration. She stated that there was no one to speak Spanish to her and her mom, until someone called a student to served as a interpreter. She also remembered that a student helped her during her first week of school with getting from one class to another, but there was no other help afterward. Although her school celebrated her culture and language through special events, she found it interesting that only students from the ENL program would attend. She expressed, “It would have been nice to see these events attended by the whole school.” Jessica also noted, “School announcements, both verbally and in writing, were always provided in English,” which she felt limited many of her classmates from participating in sports, clubs, or community service activities, which are needed for the college application process.

This participant described the social interactions with students other than her classmates as “minimal.” She shared, specifically in relationship with the social interactions experienced in her school, “The treatment received by other students from school administrators and faculty was very different [than] the treatment I and my

classmates received.” She clarified that the staff would hold conversations with the other students, but would not try to speak to her or her classmates. According to Jessica, the only person who would speak to them and would try to communicate in Spanish was her counselor. She described her guidance counselor as supportive and as the one person that helped her choose her classes every year. Although it was difficult because of the lack of communication from the school to the ELLs in her school, Jessica shared that she participated in the ENL club and played on the school’s soccer team. She explained that she owes her mother the opportunity to be able to participate in these activities. Jessica very proudly expressed that her mother was determined to have her involved in activities beyond the academics, thus her “mom” went to school one day to get all the information she could get, and had a friend help her to translate the information. Jessica emphasized, “I am fortunate to have this type of mom,” but also stated, “But I know that not all of my classmates are that fortunate, and I feel sad to know that many students are not given that opportunity.”

From her description of her experiences during high school, Jessica appears to be a great example of resilience and determination. She shared that, at the beginning of her journey, she considered her classes to be pretty easy; however, the content gradually became more complex and difficult to understand. She shared that there was no academic support system, but she would reach out to her teachers to help her because she was determined to excel. Jessica eventually made it to the honors list and also reported very proudly that she was student of the month. She generally considered her high school experience as fun, but also difficult. She recalled feeling out of place and left out when it came to extracurricular activities because no one ever offered the information needed to

participate. At the end of her interview, Jessica wanted to add that schools should consider helping the immigrant students by providing them with information about all school activities. She explained that she firmly believes that school activities help immigrant students to practice the English language, for they get to converse with students from the general student population. She said playing soccer in high school opened up a great opportunity to make friends with students who were born here and did not speak Spanish and for her benefit knew how the school system works. Jessica added that being an immigrant student in the United States was sometimes discouraging, but her eagerness to become a business woman (owner of a restaurant) to provide her mother with a better life kept her focused. She finally expressed that making her family in Guatemala proud was what helped her to continue to move forward.

Participant 5 wanted to be identified as Juan Jose. Juan Jose shared many characteristics with the rest of the participants, but differed in one main aspect: he never graduated from high school. Juan Jose attended another of the top three largest high schools in Suffolk County, Long Island. He was a native of Honduras, Central America, and his mother decided to migrate to the United States to offer her children a better future. Juan Jose shared that he felt happy when he thought of his school experience in Honduras; although his teachers were not efficient in teaching he remembered that his friends and staff were very nice to one another and to him. He was registered in the new school here in the United States 2 months after his arrival. He described the registration process as “not the best” because, although he provided them with transcripts from his old school they placed him in the SIFE program because of a few questions.

Juan Jose described his beginning at the new school as being thrown in a place and expected to survive. He reported, "I had to navigate the building on my own." He further shared that he never received any type of mentoring or support outside of some of his classroom teachers and his classmates. However, Juan Jose admired his principal, and described him as someone who went out of his way to make all students feel comfortable. Juan Jose shared that he did not have a very pleasant experience in some of his classes. He reported that a couple of teachers would make him feel intimidated at the beginning and that this feeling gradually became "anger." He shared, "In a particular classroom dynamic, the teacher would scream at students and would get on their faces calling them names and would dare them to complain saying the administrator will never believe students over the teachers." He said that this dynamic eventually discouraged him chronically, up to the point that he started to cut classes in an effort to avoid this type of treatment.

Juan Jose shared that he tried to make an effort and pushed himself to go to every class, even joining the soccer team to try to make his school experience a positive experience, but was not successful. Unfortunately, Juan Jose expressed that constant diminishing and humiliating episodes with teachers, the lack of resources offered by the school, and the lack of support from his father caused him to disengage and fall behind in the graduation requirements. He is currently 22 years of age, and left his high school prior to turning 21 when he realized he did not meet the requirements to graduate.

Currently, Juan Jose shared that he works in construction, but he wants to go back to school someday to get his GED and go to college. When asked what does it mean to be a Latin American immigrant student in Long Island? he expressed,

It means a great challenge because we have to survive a population that expects us to become them, we have to become what they want us to be, it is the condition we have to meet to fit in and be accepted.

Juan Jose closed his interview by sharing that he did not regret going to high school in the United States; sometimes, he wishes he could go back in time in the hope that he could do things differently. He would ignore the negative aspects of the school and stay determined to make his experience better.

Participant 6 wanted to be referred to as Alay. She was 18 years of age and graduated 1 year ago from one of the largest high schools in Suffolk County, Long Island. She graduated with an Advanced Regents Diploma. As a native from the Dominican Republic, Alay shared that her parents left her native country because of the many opportunities that are available in the United States. Although she very fondly remembers her school experience in the Dominican Republic as advanced and very well structured in comparison to the United States, Alay shared that her parents considered the opportunities of advancement in the United States are endless and this motivated them to migrate from the home country.

Alay was registered at the new school the same month she arrived. Her parents and her siblings found the registration process challenging because of the language barrier. She reported that they were asked to supply birth certificates, physicals, proof of residency, and a passport. She was placed in an ENL class, and was assisted by school counselors any time she needed guidance with academic questions. She described that her school physical environment and social events were not really relevant to her cultural or linguistic background. The only place in which Spanish was spoken was in the Spanish as

a second language course. The lack of means to communicate with the general student population made the beginning of her high school journey difficult, she described the environment at the new school as “not very welcoming.”

Alay described her social interactions with peers and school staff as “basically minimal” during the early stages of her journey. She added about staff members specifically, “They don’t really care about your needs, they don’t really listen to what you have to say, and they prioritize the education of those who are native to the English language.” Specifically about the administrators, she further mentioned, “They didn’t really check up on us and they rarely paid attention to our needs in comparison to the larger student population.” In relations to receiving support, Alay reported that she only received support from those students who experienced similar struggles; they helped each other to the best of their abilities. She recognized that her academic goals had changed during her high school years. She stated that, although in the Dominican Republic she always stayed on top of her work, in her new school her performance decreased because her coursework became repetitive at some point, and she lost interest in putting in extra effort.

As an assessment of her general experience as an immigrant student, Alay shared that it meant feeling left out because of an inequality in the level of academic success. She shared that what inspired her to study harder was the fact that she wanted to be considered just as smart as those who had the advantage of being born in the United States, and she wanted to feel just as equal. What discouraged her was seeing other immigrants being treated the same way that she was treated; they were not prioritized and their academic needs were not met.

Participant 7, wanted to be called Yenny. She was a graduate from a large high school in Suffolk County, Long Island. A native from the Dominican Republic, she is currently 20 years of age, and is currently attending college in pursuit of a medical degree. Her parents brought her to this country in search of opportunities of growth and a high caliber education. Yenny shared that, very early in life, she was taught in school in her native country the value of education, and more specifically, the value of a “high caliber education.” Her parents and she imagined that the level of education in the United States would surpass the education she received in the Dominican Republic. However, very early in her journey at the new school, Yenny shared that she found out that, to have access to this level of education, she would have to take control of her own academic planning. She described herself as someone who has always been determined and not intimidated to ask for help when she needed it.

In relation to the school physical and social environment, Yenny described her new school as unresponsive to the diversity that the students who attended the school represented. She reported this aspect as a difference between her prior school in the Dominican Republic and the new school community. Yenny shared that, in the Dominican Republic, she was taught to be proud of her country’s history and culture so that not having anything that represented those essential elements of her cultural background was “disappointing.” Yenny shared that she did not receive any help during the first days or weeks at the new school, she had to learn how to get to classes on her own and people did not speak to her in Spanish, and she did not speak English at all. This language barrier generated a difficulty in understanding the class material, tasks, and assignments. Academically, she shared that she experienced a lack of support, and she

further added that she was not the only one, her classmates also felt ignored and disconnected from the rest of the school. However, as someone with a very strong personality, Yenny clarified that she never gave up and, after learning how to navigate the new school system she became determined to help others who were going through the same struggles that she experienced.

As a Latin American immigrant student, she described her high school experience as a rollercoaster. She expressed that she had “ups and downs,” but she did not let the problems discourage her. There were times when she thought things would not get better, but nothing is forever, but she was grateful for everything she had been through because it allowed her to become more independent and mature academically so that she no longer would have to depend on someone else to do things for her.

The last participant interviewed for this study wanted to be identified as Madelyn. She was a 20 years old native from the Dominican Republic and was a former classmate of Participant 8. She graduated with an Advanced Regents Diploma and, as the rest of the participants repeatedly expressed, Madelyn’s parents decided to migrate to the United States in search of a better education and, in her case specifically, they were seeking financial opportunities that would help them build a better life for their family. She described herself as someone who did well in a structured academic environment in which things were done a certain way with the purpose of helping students do better. She recalled, “I imagined, as I headed to the United States, that the schools here would be the same as the school I was leaving behind.”

Madelyn was placed in an ENL program upon registration, she defined the program as a place where other students who are learning English are place to do

everything together. She described her opinion of the academic environment as “unfamiliar and irrelevant” to her culture or linguistic background, she expressed that it was an environment that she “did not liked.” However, later on in her journey, she made friends with other Hispanics with whom she was able to connect because they spoke the same language and shared a lot of values and traditions. She also was able to build meaningful relationships with some teachers who showed a genuine interest in helping her with her struggles and guiding her by providing information about opportunities and programs from which she could benefit.

Socially, Madelyn was able to build a network with students who were from outside of her program through her participation in a cooking club and the volleyball team. She described her general experiences in high school as “positive and productive.” She felt that her friends and teachers supported her. The support that she received motivated her to continue moving towards reaching her goals. Once she was provided with information about the opportunities that the school offered she became inspired to get better grades, and she consistently wanted to learn more. Madelyn identified the language barrier as the reason that she felt uncomfortable at the beginning of her journey.

Themes

A meaningful analysis was performed of the data collected from the interviews with the purpose of identifying patterns and themes. As a first step in the analysis, as Moustakas (1994) suggested, the researcher engaged in a phase of mapping statements and creating a preliminary grouping of expressions that were relevant to the experiences that the participants shared. The grouping of expressions were aligned with the research questions that drove this study. The transcripts created of each interview were read

several times to begin the coding process, which was defined as a primarily an interpretative act of the statements made with the purpose of capturing salient words or phrases that relate to the primary topic of the research (Saldana, 2016). As Saldana (2016) recommended, a descriptive coding method was adopted during the mapping of the information provided by the participants during the interviews. For example, comments such as “playing soccer helped to make friends outside of my classmates” were identified under the code of social network, which was related to the primary research questions. Adapting this method allowed the researcher to organize the data and to look at the data with an specific purpose and goal.

The analysis conducted following the recommendations allowed the researcher to consider clustering in different ways to promote revisiting and reexamining the comments to allow the comments to show naturally the relationships among the codes and eventually the themes important to the study. The frequency and significance of the codes were clustered through a qualitative analysis system to maintain a high level of integrity of the experiences that the participants described. The analytical process helped to identify 70 excerpts that were significant to the current study. The original, mapped statements that were aligned with the research questions were organized under code clusters, two parent codes, and five child codes. The research question, “How do the social and cultural experiences in the new school affect the academic advancement and overall development of Latin American immigrant students?” was analyzed under the parent code; the role of the high school experiences played in their academic success. The parent code included two child codes: peer support and registration process. These codes aligned with the secondary research question, “What school initiatives promote a full

integration and active engagement of English Language Learners in extracurricular activities and academic programs?”

The analysis continued with an organization of the data that drove the research question, “What does it mean to be an immigrant Latin American high school student in the existing school culture in Long Island, New York?” A second parent code was generated and used to organize the participant’s statements, school culture assessment, and their identity. Three child codes: school multicultural readiness, social network, and their relationship to the rest of the school community aligned with the secondary research question, “How did participants feel that their designation as ELLs defined them in relation to the rest of the school community?”

Themes and Research Questions

The code frequency analysis is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Code Frequency Analysis

Media	Codes							Totals
	Role the high school experience	Peer Support	Registration Process	School Culture Assessment and	School Multicultural	Social Network	Their relationship to the	
participant 8	3	1	2	4	1	1	1	13
participant 7	1	2	1	1	2	1	3	11
participant 6	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	9
participant 5	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	10
Participant 3	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	10
Participant 2	2	1	1	2	3	1	1	11
participant 1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	10
participant 4	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	12
Totals	14	13	11	15	13	9	11	

Code Frequency

The review of the transcripts, the mapping process of the information, and the analysis performed through the two primary or parent codes and five child or secondary codes led the researcher to identify two emerging themes: (a) Theme 1, the value of an intentional school effort to affirm the diversity that the incoming immigrant student represented, and (b) Theme 2, the value of an intentional alignment of systems and resources with the needs of immigrant students.

The statements that the participants made in this study placed a high level of significance on the value of an intentional school effort to affirm the diversity that the incoming immigrant student represented. This Theme 1 is related to the experiences with the physical environment, which lacked familiarity and representation of their ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and the absence of a set system that is ready to provide all newcomers with the academic opportunities that align with their diverse ethnic and academic proficiency. Through their statements, the participants provided a description of systems or the absence of them that have an impact on the manner in which they achieve their academic goals and provide answers for the research question, “What does it mean to be a Latin American, immigrant high school student in the existing school culture?” In addition, the secondary research question embedded in the main question, “How did the participants feel that their classification as ELLs defined them in relations to the rest of the school community.”

Theme 2 that surfaced in this study was, as the participants answered questions aligned with the main research questions perceptions, the value of an intentional alignment of systems and resources to create access to both academic and social

opportunities for these students to enjoy a meaningful high school experience. It is important to clarify that this theme was used to explore their experiences from the time of arrival through the completion of their high school journey to understand how the decision-making process of the academic organization might affect the academic advancement of these students.

Theme 1: The Value of an Intentional School Effort to Affirm the Diversity

All of the participants offered an insight on the current school culture and the efforts that had been made to build a welcoming environment for immigrant students, starting with the registration phase and including an efficient academic placement, recognizing their academic proficiency diversity. The process of educating individuals from a variety of microcultural groups requires an effort to create educational environments in which equality and equity are a priority (Banks, 2006). Unfortunately, none of the participants described feeling a part of the rest of the student population. They described a school environment and culture that lacked inclusiveness, which created an inequality in the access to the same academic programs and social network that the general student population enjoyed and that were both crucial in their desire to obtain a better education than the ones they received in their native countries.

In addition, most of participants described the school environment as unfamiliar without the signs or symbols that represented their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds or life experiences. Furthermore, none of the participants found a relevancy of their cultural identities in their course content beyond the world languages courses for those who were able to participate in these courses. Jonathan described his very first experience with the new school community as an uncomfortable experience in which he

found that people lacked the willingness to communicate with him or his family. He further described his first week in the school building as overwhelming to the point of feeling like walking out of the building never to return. Jonathan clarified that he was left alone to navigate a building that was unfamiliar and lacking signs in his native language. From his experiences, this participant identified a need for schools to become “friendlier” to students from other countries. Josue said that the main reason for making the difficult decision to migrate to the United States was having the opportunity to attend the “comfortable” and “advanced schools” that he had seen on television back in his country. However, when describing his first encounter with the new school, he echoed the description that Jonathan shared. Josue described the staff as “disrespectful and unwilling” to speak to them in their native language, although they appeared to be from Hispanic backgrounds. He also reported an absence of support to help them navigate the building; however, different from Jonathan, Josue emphasized experiencing a lack of support and guidance in navigating the educational system. Beyond his bilingual teachers, Josue shared that the only person who made him and his classmates feel welcomed was their principal whenever they saw him in the hallways or when he stopped to visit their classroom. For Josue, being supported and feeling welcomed are essential elements for students like him who came to this country in pursuit of a good education and a better life.

Jessica’s narrative of her experiences also provided a valuable insight of the value for schools to make an intentional effort to create a responsive school culture. In addition, the participant cited previously that she also shared not feeling welcomed during her first encounter with the new school community. Jessica explained that this assessment of the

first interaction was because of an obvious unwillingness to help and a lack of the use of proper staff to help her and her mother with translations during their verbal interactions. In addition, she shared that she experienced an unwillingness to provide proper guidance about the school system. For this participant, it is essential to receive information about benefits such as extracurricular activities, clubs, and graduation requirements, for students such as she is come from a very different academic system and experience. As an example, she shared that, although she was able eventually to play in the soccer team, and to participate in other activities, she only had access to these social opportunities because of her mother's determination and insistency in helping her integrate to the new school. Although Jessica recalled that her school offered cultural events in which her culture and history were celebrated, she pointed out that "it would have been nice to see people from other classes other than her ENL classes attend these events."

Alay described her social interactions with other students, specifically with those outside of her ENL classes as "basically minimal." Alay recalled receiving help from other students within ENL classes that experienced the same struggles with the academic content or the new school in general. Alay shared during the interview that the alienation made her feel discouraged and she explained that she was not the only student who felt that way, but that other ENL students also felt the same in relations to the rest of the school community. Jenny also shared these feelings, and reported not receiving any support from students who were more familiar with the school or, as she refers to them, those who were native speakers of the English language. Jenny described feeling "separated and disconnected" from the rest of the school, and she said that she was not

the only one who felt that way, for Jenny asserted that her classmates Alay also felt this way.

Juan Jose, the only participant in this study who was unable to graduate with a high school diploma, shared his experiences and feelings about what it meant to be an immigrant student and his perception of his role with the rest of the new school community. During our conversation, it was interesting to observe the change in the tone of voice from when he described his school experiences in his country, which was upbeat and generous because he was willing to share in details how happy he was in his school. Although, Juan Jose described his previous school as “poor and limited” he expressed feeling happy and supported. Although his goal was to do well in the new school, he shared that his high school experience from the very beginning was not one that was conducive to reach success.

Juan Jose expressed feeling confused by the fact that, because of a few questions, he was placed in a SIFE program in which he found the classes to be very easy and boring. He shared that he was in that program for 6 months and was moved to a bilingual program afterward. When asked about his first experiences in the school building, Juan Jose described it “like being thrown in a prison in which you are expected to survived.” He described his interactions with teachers and most adults as very unpleasant and even humiliating. In his own words, Juan Jose shared that his teachers treated him and the other students “as if we were beneath them and they were doing us a favor.” Juan Jose shared that, although his life outside of school was very difficult, the environment in the school did not help, and he eventually walked away without a diploma.

Raffi, with his description of what kept him motivated, might serve as a great example of the value of creating a school culture that recognizes what Banks (2006) called cultural pluralism (p. 41), which had the purpose of creating an equity pedagogy in which teachers intentionally would modify the curriculum and instruction with the goal of empowering and facilitating the academic achievement of students from diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic backgrounds, and life experiences. Raffi shared that something that he noticed right away was the vast selection of courses that the new school offered. He shared feeling in a place of advantage in comparison to his classmates because he already spoke English, which he was able to learn in Colombia. He stated that being able to speak English opened the opportunity for him to enroll in the world language courses in which he study iconic writers and historical figures from his native country. Raffi identified the course content as an essential ingredient for student motivation. However, Raffi lamented that other students were not provided with the same opportunities to have access to these courses in which they could identify and feel culturally valued.

Generally, it is recognized that peers play an important role in the life of adolescents; the experiences that the participants shared illustrated how crucial this ingredient is, specifically for students who come from other countries and have left everything that is familiar behind, including the ability to communicate with others because the new country speaks a different language. Additional participants in this study used terms such alienated, separated, and disconnected to describe their relationship with the rest of the school community. These descriptions of what for them meant to be an immigrant student lead to consider that reforming the school culture into one that promotes multicultural education and cultural responsiveness will provide these students

with meaningful access to create supportive social networks with peers and school agents.

The difference that students who experienced positive social experiences and those who did not traced, offered a confirmation that the way in which this targeted student population was treated and the manner in which opportunities were made available had an impact on their perception of who they were considered to be and their role within the new school community. Although not all participants felt that the manner in which they were perceived or treated was always negative, they all found that at some point students that were from immigrant backgrounds did not always have the same access to the academic opportunities needed to reach success. The theme derived from the statements made to answer both the Research Question 1, “What does it mean to be an immigrant Latin American, high school student in the existing school culture in Long Island, New York?” and Research Question 2, “How did participants feel that their designation as ELLs defined them in relation to the rest of the school community?” revealed that their perception was not always positive, neither was their academic experience.

Most students expressed that their schools were not the motivating factor that pushed them to pursue their goal to graduate with a high school diploma or in most of cases, a college education. For example, in the case of Jessica, the chance of providing her mother with a better future and the opportunity to bring honor to her family in Guatemala is what she described as the center of her resilience and motivation. Yenny also shared feeling ignored and perceived by her school as not important, but she explained that her determination to make her family proud helped her to survive and to

experience what she described as a “roller coaster with many ups and downs.” Likewise, Alay described the general school experience as “feeling left out” because of an inequality in academic opportunities. She said that her motivating factor was a desire to be considered “as smart as the other kids that had the advantaged to have been born here.”

Theme 2: The Value of an Intentional Alignment of Systems and Resources With the Needs of Immigrant Students

According to Banks (2006), an empowering school culture provides students from diverse racial, ethnic and gender groups with the ability to experience equality throughout the entire educational organization (p. 16). To reach this level of equality, school communities set systems in place and resources that foster equity with the goal of creating the equality that will lead to academic opportunities of success for the immigrant students. From the registration process through an ongoing peer or mentoring system that recognizes the specific implications of the phenomenon of immigration, schools must intentionally align systems and resources to serve this targeted subgroup efficiently.

The absence of a system for peer support and mentoring and a deficient registration process were common items that were exposed in this study. When asked about the support received or the systems in place that provided them with assistance or guidance with academic content or support with how to navigate the school system, the participants shared that there was no set system or ongoing help in their schools. Juan Jose, one of the participants of this study is a former high school student who differed from the other participants and was unable to graduate or obtain a high school diploma. Juan Jose described feeling overwhelmed from the time he arrived in the new school. He

was placed automatically in a SIFE program where he found the academic content easy at the beginning, but experienced difficulty progressively in his journey. Among the many challenges experienced, Juan Jose shared that, between the language barrier and the lack of meaningful friendships, he felt that he had been thrown in a place where he was expected to survive on his own. He further shared that he had not received any help with the exception of a couple of students from his classes who had helped him on some occasions. This participant identified that, looking back at his experience, he found that mentoring or a peer support system that would be ongoing throughout the high school journey would be very important to students that do not speak the language and are too timid to take the initiative to try to make friends or reach out to teachers for help.

Although he made every effort to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., serving as a writer for the Spanish newspaper or a counselor in a support program for students considering suicide), Josue shared that he experienced discouragement and frustration because of the lack of interest that the school demonstrated regarding supporting him or his classmates with their academic struggles. Josue described that most people around his school would look at him and his classmates as if they were “strange,” making him feel out of place. He specifically recalled a fact that he interpreted as related to the fact that he and his classmates were viewed differently. Josue shared that, although the school had several computer labs, his class was only allowed to use one computer lab that was equipped with “antiquated computers,” while the other students from the larger groups had access to the rest of the computer labs that were equipped with sophisticated “Apple computers.” He recalled asking his teacher one day why they never used those

labs, and his teacher responded that the school did not want them (her bilingual students) to break the better computers.

During the interview, Alay identified peer support as an important ingredient in the integration process of an immigrant student, but a benefit that did not exist in her high school. Regarding the registration process, Alay described it as challenging because of a language barrier and the documentation the school requested. According to this participant, considering the need to learn the English language, she was placed in an ENL class and the only guidance that she received for academic planning was from her guidance counselor who would tell her what courses were needed to graduate. She further shared that although she was given a choice of courses to take during high school, she was not able to take the classes that she had selected, but was given no explanation. During her high school experience, she found that her ENL teachers and her counselor were the only resources available to her. Similar to Alay, Yenny also shared the experience of difficulty during the registration process, which only included a request for paperwork (e.g., birth certificate, proof of address, immunizations, and interestingly enough, a passport). This participant shared feeling during her high school years a pressure to work “twice as hard,” having to study more than usual because she had to learn things on her own. As with Alay, Yenny shared that she did not receive any assistance from teachers or peers outside her ENL classes.

As an example of the positive impact that peer support and mentoring could have in the high school journey of an immigrant student was found in the experiences that Madelyn shared. This participant (who described herself as someone determined to succeed and reach her goals) shared that, from the time of arrival, she was determined to

create relationships and establish communication with other students who came from Hispanic backgrounds. She was unwilling to limit herself to her immediate social circle of classmates, instead she expanded her social network beyond, and she found that the most help she received was from those students outside of her classes. These students helped her “tremendously” in taking advantage of many opportunities that her school offered. She said her new friends provided her with information about sports, clubs, and other programs from which she benefited and that they helped her with her college application process. From this experience, Madelyn was able to appreciate the value of a social network, and she decided to become unofficially a mentor to other immigrant students who struggled with the same limitations she had experienced at the beginning of her journey. As with Madelyn, Raffi also reported observing his classmates feeling lost without any academic support, thus both eventually decided to adapt the role of mentor to some of his classmates. Specifically, Raffi reported feeling concerned, so he decided to help students who were enrolled in two or three study halls, not realizing the negative impact this would have down the line and how this would hinder their chances to graduate on time.

Both Madelyn and Raffi found in their particular schools that guidance on graduation requirements or the difference between the ENL academic program and the general education program was not provided during the registration process. When asked what role the participants or their parents played in the creation of their first schedule at the time of entry, none of the participants reported or described any type of protocol in which this type of conversation was held. Both expressed that schools should recognize that immigrant students are not aware of what the regents’ exams are, what they

represent, and how important they are to graduate. Raffi further shared that many immigrant students receive their schedules and follow the schedules without questioning because culturally they are taught that school authorities will do what is best for them. However, many times these students sit in two or three study halls not knowing that these courses are a waste of time and detrimental for their academic goals, and it takes another student or someone advocating for them to challenge the school to correct what should have been explained as an error.

As was established earlier in this study as a problem statement, an academic gap continues to exist among this subgroup, despite of a series of educational reforms, including the most recent revision of CR 300 Part 154. Although these governmental efforts showed that the manner in which immigrants are included in the classification of English language learners continues to be in need of improvement, from the testimonies that these participants provided, one can conclude that schools continue to provide the minimum that the state guidelines or mandates require. Therefore, the results in academic advancement and development continue to align with the local school efforts. From the experiences shared in this study and the analysis of the data, one can conclude that the essential ingredients needed to help Latin American, immigrant, high school students to excel both academically and personally are not yet available in schools. The data reflect a lack of effort in transforming schools into welcoming environments in which the additional and unique needs of immigrant students are taken into consideration. In addition, the willingness to create and align systems, including resources using the implications of the phenomenon of immigration, is lacking.

The research questions analyzed through the surging themes in this study afforded the researcher with the opportunity to gain a valuable insight into intrinsic aspects of the education of Latin American high school immigrant students in the current school culture. Theme 1, the value of an intentional school effort to affirm the diversity, which the incoming immigrant student represents, was directly related to the school culture as expressed in their physical environment and systems of communication. As the participants described their experiences from the phenomenon of immigration, the assessment showed that schools are not ready at a meaningful level to welcome students from other ethnic backgrounds or linguistic experiences. Most of the participants, with the exception of one, described the first experience with the new school using words such as difficult, unwilling, uncomfortable, frustrating, and confusing. Most of the participants expressed feeling welcomed and comfortable in multicultural events or multicultural academic content that demonstrated appreciation of their culture. However, as one of the participants pointed out, only immigrant students and families attend these events or courses, and not the school community at large. The participants also expressed feeling comfortable in classes in which their teachers not only spoke to them in their native language, but also most importantly, showed an interest and a desire to help them by providing valuable information about activities and programs. As individuals who did not speak the local language, they found the physical environment unfriendly to newcomers, lacking signs or symbols to help them navigate the building, causing them stress from the very beginning.

Theme 2, the value of an intentional alignment of systems and resources with the needs of immigrant students, afforded an insight and response to the main and secondary

research questions that addressed how their experiences affected their academic advancement and what initiatives that the new school community created would promote a full integration and active engagement of these students. From the data collected, the researcher found that important systems (e.g., the registration process and an alignment of resources) that would provide ongoing guidance for immigrant students were still not in place. From the experiences that Josue, Juan Jose, Alay, and Yenny shared, schools obviously continue to function on compliance mode, leaving out the unique needs of an immigrant student and family who are not able to communicate because of the language barrier and are not familiar with the education system they have entered. In Alay's and Yenny's experiences, the researcher found that the school district had asked for their passports to be included in the documentation required, yet in their Bill of Rights CR 300 Part 154 prohibits a request for any documentation that could reveal their immigration status (NYSED, 2019c). In relation to systems of academic support or mentoring, the data reflect an absence of internal protocols or systems that would allow students from a diverse academic level of proficiency to be identified and supported throughout their high school journey. In addition, the data also demonstrate that the need exists to create platforms in which students from immigrant backgrounds can obtain support from their peers or serve peers mentors to other immigrant students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the findings of this phenomenological study, which had the purpose of learning how the lived experiences of Latin American, high school, immigrant students affect their academic advancement and overall development. In this chapter, the researcher provided in detail the research steps taken to

analyze the data, including the organization and the identification of the main themes from a frequency analysis of the statements that the participants offered through each of their interviews. A description of the participants, including demographics, was also provided to confirm their eligibility to participate in this study. Finally, a description of the findings and their alignment with the research questions and themes were described. These findings serve as the foundation for the recommendations and suggestions that the researcher will make in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study and research was conducted with the purpose of exploring the effect and impact of the lived experiences of Latin American immigrants in their academic advancement in the current academic and cultural context in the host community of the Long Island, New York, schools. The exploration conducted, through the phenomenon of immigration, of the experiences lived of these students provided an insight into the evolution process of their perception regarding their academic and personal success. In this chapter, the researcher presents the conclusions and implications that were derived from the research that was guided by the primary and secondary research questions. Additionally, the findings and limitations of the study are presented along with recommendations for further research and practice. Lastly, I describe my experiences during the research process and my reflection on the facts that the data revealed.

Implications of Findings

This study intentionally included Latin American, immigrant, young individuals who attended high school in the United States during the last 5–6 years, and who completed their journey within the last 2–3 years. The stories gathered from the research that was conducted helped the researcher to gain an insight on the important elements in the education of immigrant students (e.g., the readiness of the school culture). Although the stories that the participants shared vary regarding their experiences in the host school community, they all shared the same desire and goal as they arrived in the United States. All of the participants came to the United States in pursuit of a better education, and for

the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families. The researcher found through the data that the main factor in the academic success experienced by most of the participants of this study was their resilience and love for their families.

Two primary research questions and two secondary research questions led the study, and enabled the researcher to explore what it means to be an immigrant, Latin American student in today's school culture in the suburbs of Long Island. The researcher also asked, "How do the social and cultural experiences in the new school affect the academic advancement and overall development of these students?" It is evident from the data that today's school culture is not yet ready to integrate these students as part of their school community and to affirm their diversity with the purpose of building a multicultural school environment. The experiences shared by the participants in this study depicted a clear deficiency in the decision making process that fails to take into consideration the implications of the immigration phenomenon to create systems that would attend to the unique needs of these students. In relations to the classification or designation as ELLs, schools continue to place these students in a culture of alienation by which they are disengaged both physically and socially from the rest of the school community. Although in the land of opportunity, these students continue to look from a distance at the possibilities and they are forced to make an extra effort to cross the border that separates them from the dream that brought them to this new land.

Connections With the Theoretical Framework

The data collected in this research were analyzed under a theoretical framework that promotes a whole school reform that derives from multicultural education or instruction. Contrary to the traditional approach of addressing the lack of academic

advancement among some subgroups of the immigrant student population, the theoretical framework chosen for this study as a foundation challenges school communities to move from segmented educational reforms to a whole-school reformation and transformation to multiculturalism. The insight obtained from the conversations with the participants affirms that the school administrators must consider the following implications regarding culture as defined in this study.

As a first implication, as academic institutions seek to obtain improved academic results among subgroups such as the immigrant population, they must consider a core transformation towards multiculturalism (Banks, 2006). As the participants in this study described, they experienced feeling (in their words) “separated” from the rest of the school. These feelings translated into discouragement, frustration, discomfort, and ultimately abandonment, as one participant in a particular school stated. To reach the goal of fully engaging students from immigrant backgrounds, and diverse ethnic and life experiences, school communities must move from antiquated patterns of acceptance, tolerance, or embracement towards practices and attitudes that affirm the diversity that this subgroup of students represents (Nieto & Bode, 2011). A reform of the total school environment demands that the schools implement a reform that is systematic to be effective (Banks, 2006). All major variables of a school community must be subjected to changes to reach a total transformation or total school reforms. The variables include (a) school staff perceptions, beliefs, and actions; (b) community participation and input, (c) the language and dialects of the school; (d) school policy and politics; and (e) the counseling program among others (Banks, 2006).

A second implication found in this study is the absence of the host school communities' commitment to creating systems, policies, and protocols that enhance the academic opportunities of students of immigrant backgrounds from the very moment of arrival. The data that the participants in this study provided exposes that schools continue to process academic placement according to minimal assessment and general assumptions that are generated from the identified linguistic need. The former students in this research consistently described a registration process that placed them in a place of disadvantage because of the unwillingness of the staff to accommodate them with translation services or effective assessment of their academic proficiency level.

Regardless of the sector of the host school community or the type of service and rank of the staff members, schools must adopt a social justice approach in all their practices and interactions. In this study, the researcher found that a crucial element such as school initiatives creates a bridge towards unity with the rest of the student population and access to academic support, which are almost nonexistent, other than the traditional and seldom after school extra help sessions with teachers. A whole school reform towards multicultural education challenges school agents to create an empowering school culture and social structure through the examination of grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, and interactions among staff and students (Banks, 2006). These sectors were examined in this study through the experiences of the participants and were found to lack the intentional effort of involving students from immigrant backgrounds.

Relationship to Prior Research

A clear alignment exists between the literature reviewed in this study and the data and the results of the analysis. Previous research provides a description of the current

immigrant groups, which is confirmed in this study through the data that the participants provided. To serve effectively the immigrant student population that is currently in the school system, it is important to understand that today's immigrants differ from prior groups in that they resist the local's cultural demand for cultural assimilation (Nieto, 2009). This unique characteristic that Nieto (2009) exposed was confirmed in the assessment of the school culture that Juan Jose provided. In his words, when asked what it means to be a Latin American, immigrant student, Juan Jose stated, "It means having to survive a society that wants you to be them to fit in." The lack of interest in the culture that the immigrant students represented was also shared by other participants such as Jessica who observed that, although her school coordinated cultural events, these events were only offered to students such as herself and her parents. Jessica further expressed that the events would have more of a value if they included the entire school community.

Other researchers have also identified the importance in schools taking an interest in creating a learning environment in which students who are native or heritage immigrants are valued and understood (Nieto & Bode, 2011). In all of the assessments of their social interactions with the school community at large, the participants described a minimal or almost nonexistent communication with school agents beyond their classroom teachers. Most of the participants interpreted this lack of interest from school staff and agents as a dismissal of their presence in the school. Although intentional social interactions, greetings, conversations, and inclusiveness of all students in school events and programs could be perceived as harmless aspects of a coexistence of groups from different cultures and life experiences, it might also be an expression of a rejection of the

foreigners entering the school community. This rejection translates into what other students reported as unequal schooling in other research (Nieto & Bode, 2011).

The literature and the experiences that the participants narrated in this study revealed a significant deficiency among schools in the level of knowledge of the phenomenon of immigration and its implications. The limited services and programs offered to students from immigrant backgrounds have verified this deficiency. Although, state reforms and mandates have provided schools agents and authorities with a blueprint to create opportunities of academic and social success, the literature and narratives of the participants revealed that schools continue to have a difficulty in meeting the bare minimum requirements (see Table 4).

Table 4

Program Literature and Research Findings

Literature	Findings
<p>History of Bilingual Education. Current immigrant groups differ from prior immigrant groups (Nieto, 2009)</p> <p>(Understanding the Phenomenon)</p>	<p>The participants expressed a rejection to forced assimilation. They are proud of their cultural roots.</p>
<p>Affirming Diversity. Immigrant students flourish in familiar and multicultural learning environments (Nieto & Bode 2011)</p> <p>(Implications of the Phenomenon)</p>	<p>The participants described their school buildings as unfamiliar and unfriendly to students that did not speak English. The academic content was found culturally irrelevant except for World Language courses.</p>
<p>Motivating Immigrant Students. Secondary school age immigrant students are genuinely motivated to succeed in their new school, however, the new, however, the lack of familiarity is found to have a negative impact (OECD, 2018).</p>	<p>Some participants reported feeling comfortable and motivated in academic and social settings in which their cultural backgrounds were celebrated or recognized.</p>

Limitations of the Study

The time was constrained; therefore, two areas presented limitations to this study. Limitation 1 was the number of the actual participants in this study. To obtain the meaning of the phenomenon, this study was originally set to include from 10–12 participants. Although a snowball effect was followed to find participants who were qualified under the criteria that the researcher had set, the researcher was only able to recruit eight participants. Nevertheless, these participants were fully qualified as valuable sources for this study, for they all had Latin American immigrant experiences and backgrounds, and they all attended a high school in the Long Island region. All of these former students were able to share their experiences from the moment of arrival to the new school through the end of their high school journey. They also shared their original aspirations and goals and the reasons that brought them to this country. Although, the quantity of the participants varied from the original planned number, the final number of participants did not alter the purpose or aim of this study. As the researcher had established through the methodology or philosophy in this study, the main purpose in this study was to make sense of a certain aspect of human experience (Van Manen, 1997). In this particular research, the aim of learning from the experiences of Latin American, immigrant, high school students to gain meaning and to make sense of how these experiences affected their academic advancement and overall development was achieved as projected.

Although triangulation was attempted through the collection of school records or any documentation that could support the narratives that the participants provided, not all of the participants were able to supply artifacts because of their status of former students.

For a variety of personal reasons, most of the participants were unable to provide school records or documentation that could serve as record and could support their described experiences. Nevertheless, this limitation did not hinder the validity of the results that were presented in this research. According to Van Manen (1997), “Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (p. 36). Therefore, the descriptions that the participants provided of their experiences moved from mere superficial answers to questions posted. Instead, these former high school students from immigrant experiences provided statements that revealed how they felt in the cultural and social context of the new school, and how these feelings affected them in their journey towards reaching their academic and personal goals.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The personal stories of the participants of this study provided the researcher with an insight on (a) their experiences, and (b) the emotional and academic impact that these experiences had on their high school journey and beyond. Departing from a phenomenological approach, the findings of this research provide academic organizations with suggestions for future practices directly from students who can assess the effectiveness of the current school culture from firsthand experience. Although the research tool allotted an opportunity to hold meaningful conversations with each participant using open-ended questions, the strategic selection of the sampling intentionally ensured a representation of the different regions of Long Island. This strategy allowed a strong basis from which to issue recommendations according to the findings that would be applicable to any school district that serves immigrant student groups in general.

As all of the participants in this study expressed, each of them came to this country under the expectation that a new school would provide them with a better education or better opportunities of academic success than their old school had offered in their native countries. Although none of the participants reported being dissatisfied emotionally or socially in their home schools, they recognized that the limitation of resources and financial support precluded them from obtaining a high-caliber education that would allow them to have a better life in the future. However, as Orozco-Suarez et al. (2008) presented, the school environment and culture had a significant influence on the engagement and performance of these students. Although Latin American, immigrant students are found to arrive to the new school community with a desire to succeed, for academic institutions and students to translate their desire into reality, school communities must make a commitment and intentional effort to reform the current school culture into one that affirms the diversity that the incoming immigrant student represented.

This intentional effort includes reforming all sectors of the school organization, starting with the planning and decision-making process. To closed academic gaps, schools must include the needs of immigrant students in their list or priorities. Including them in a place of importance with the rest of the student population will lead to reforming the school environment into one that is fully inclusive. School agents must be intentional in the creation of structural pathways that bring all students into a physical and intellectual unity. For example, as school agents create their school's master schedule and classroom school assignments, they must consider reforming the current allocation that the participants of this study described, for they report that they were limited to a

cohort of students and a scheduled that forced them to follow each other the entire day without access to meaningful interactions with students outside their cohort. In addition, providing some of the participants with the opportunity to obtain crucial information allowed them to participate in sports, clubs, and school initiatives, which in the end helped them to become active members of the new school community.

If given the opportunity, students from different cultures and life experiences might represent an asset to the school community as they prepare to compete in a global society. School practitioners must examine the current curriculum and instruction with the purpose to assess the level of cultural responsiveness of the content. As the participants it expressed about their experiences of motivation and enthusiasm in the courses that they took in high school, they described the courses as courses including content and cultural elements of their home countries. In the content integration of the student's cultural background, the language and aspirations were described as essential elements in the success of immigrant students (Banks, 2006). Therefore, school agents must (a) evaluate the curriculum, and (b) offer courses that include cultural comparison tasks and assignments across content areas or discipline. This practice will create a platform in which students from all walks of life have the opportunity to move from spectators to contributors and leaders among their peers.

Traditionally, school districts follow the guidelines that state mandates and regulations impose when allocating services and resources for students who are classified as ELLs, which includes those from immigrant backgrounds. From the insight that the participants provided, some districts are content with meeting the minimum requirements and neglect the unique needs of these students. Therefore, considering the challenges that

the participants faced, school agents must consider the value of an intentional and efficient alignment of systems and resources with the needs of immigrant students that move beyond a mere interest in meeting a state mandate. The first system and resource that could be considered is expanding the registration process of newcomers to include a full academic assessment, which should include learning computer literacy skills. This system of assessment would affirm the academic diversity among the newcomers. The current academic placement assumes that all immigrant students are at the same level of academic proficiency and places them in the same courses in which the main goal is to acquire the English language at the same level and through the same academic content.

Second, state authorities must consider the creation of an academic credit system that grants immigrant students credit towards graduation requirements for courses that align with the skills and knowledge that the state assessments demand (e.g., the regents exams). This practice currently exists at the college level to provide students from other countries or states an opportunity to replace equivalent courses.

Third, in recognition of the differences between the academic programs of their native countries and those of the new host school community, school agents must create pathways of consistent and effective academic support by creating and implementing an ongoing, peer-mentoring system that intentionally pairs newcomers with second or third generation heritage students. This practice would help administrators to reach the goal of building a multicultural school environment that would not only tolerate, but would also embrace and affirm the diversity that these students represent.

Fourth, local school agents should consider a monitoring system that measures how the intentions of state and federal academic reforms translate into the school's local

decision-making process, practices, and interpersonal social interactions within the school community.

Recommendations for Future Research

As the authors in the literature have demonstrated, through previous educational reforms, state and federal agencies have intended to improve the academic performance among the immigrant student subgroup. The most current effort that the NYSD (2019) presented through the introduction of the Revised CR300, Part 154 demonstrated a recognition that, although immigration is not a new social experience in this state, the immigrants arriving into the public school system have changed demographically and emotionally. In response to this evolution, the educational reform has moved beyond the traditional effort to service a linguistic need and has included a Cultural Sustaining Responsive Pedagogy Framework that is intended to respond not only to issues of identity, but also to the socioemotional needs of these students.

The implementation of this reform and the stagnant academic performance, specifically among students of Latin American background, as reported in quantitative studies and reports have played a crucial influence on this research. In an effort to gain a direct insight from the main stakeholders, this research was intentionally designed to provide immigrant students, specifically those from Latin American backgrounds, with an opportunity to share through their own voices their experiences. Thus, this researcher exposed deficiencies within the current school system that generate the following recommendations for further research:

Among the themes that emerged from this study was a lack of support and even interactions between students who are classified as ELLs and are allocated to ENL or

bilingual programs. Therefore, Recommendation 1 is to conduct studies specifically on the level of cultural capacity among school building and district level leaders. School principals and district administrators are key school agents because of their decision-making role and process in school districts. Future researchers must examine (a) school agents' perceptions of immigrant students; (b) the elements that influence their decision making when creating academic programs, class schedules, and classroom assignments; and (c) the alignment of instructional staff with the specific needs of students, among many other logistical decisions that the participants of this study have said play a role in their experiences of inequality.

Recommendation 2 is that further inquiry should be conducted on the level of multiculturalism embedded in the curriculum and instruction across content and discipline. Currently, as the participants in this study shared, it appears that the academic content that integrates cultural representation, through which students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds can be identified, is found only in courses offered to these students. The theoretical framework presented in this research raises a question about the effectiveness of a content integration approach in which all students in the school community are exposed to a multicultural content conducive to building multicultural capacity among students and the teachers teaching the content. In addition, through the revisions of CR 300 Part 154, the creation of a Culturally Responsive Sustaining Framework (CR-S) was launched to promote the integration of students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and life experiences into the academic content and the instruction so that they will be identified as valuable members of the new school community through the curriculum (NYSED, 2019b). From their brief descriptions of their experiences with the

academic content, the participants drew an image of what could be perceived as a pedagogical alienation. The former students described being able to learn more about their own cultures only in their bilingual or world language courses which shows a restricted access to multicultural academic content to only specific content areas, giving them the impression that their cultural identity belongs only in a sector of the school community. For example, adapting CR-S has a goal of creating a student-centered learning environment in which all students and their teachers create a partnership in which they play the role of cocreators of the curriculum, leading them to a multicultural environment in which all students can build meaningful relationships through a pedagogical unity.

Recommendation 3 for further research is the level of efforts and the planning systems that exist in schools to ensure that all aspects of educational reforms and state initiatives are implemented in manner that brings the most benefit to students. From the experiences that the participants shared, it appears that schools have not been able to implement efficiently all of the aspects of the blueprint that CR300 Part 154 offered. Starting with the language access, these former students reported experiencing difficulty and frustration at the time of registration because of the language barrier. However, according to CR 300 Part 154, parents or guardians have the right to translation services, which involves (for schools) ensuring that staff and resources that enable accurate and clear communication are available for parents or guardians in any circumstance that they are needed (NYSED, 2019c). Beyond the language access, CR 300 Part 154 aligns (among many other innovated features) rigorous academic standards for the bilingual and ENL programs. It delineates pathways to ensure that social and ethical dilemmas can be

resolved through their Culturally Sustaining Responsive Framework. However, from the findings, no evidence exists that these valuable aspects of the law have been integrated in the infrastructure of the school community.

Conclusion

The results of this study have presented a concerning and deficient reality for the Latin American immigrant student in today's school culture. When aligned with the literature and previous research, the experiences explored reveal that not much has changed. Although state educational reforms and mandates have evolved to align with the demands that have been generated from the change of demographics and unique needs characteristics of the immigrant groups who enter the schools in Long Island, New York, their development and academic results continue to be stagnant. As Orozco-Suarez et al. (2008) described, schools continue to fail to draw these students out of immigration shock and are unable to elicit or nourish their engagement with the rest of the school community (p. 228).

Although most of the participants were able to culminate their high school journey with a high school diploma and in a couple of cases additional state recognition, these results were not attributed to their schools, the environment, the infrastructure, or the culture. The results, according to the participants, were the result of an inner motivation that existed prior to their arrival to the country. Their resilience and desire to build the dream, for many of them and their families, seems like the impossible has been found to be essential elements that brought them success. One hopes that, through this study, the researcher has revealed to school agents, state authorities, and community leaders that the Latin American, immigrant, high school students do not arrive with the

intention of abusing the system, of taking short cuts, or even of receiving charity. On the contrary, the literature and the voices of the participants in this research have described themselves as individuals who have arrived in the United States with a clear goal and a high aspiration of attaining a quality education.

Culturally, Latin Americans perceive academic education and opportunities as very decisive factors that determine their future. Thus, they arrive in the United States willing to invest all their energy, to reach that star that will illuminate the rest of the pathway to a personal and communal success. However, the infrastructure in their new school communities remains in a past foundation that continues to refuse to include immigrant students in the priority list with the rest of the school student population. The school system continues to see them as a subgroup with a linguistic deficiency, instead of a group with additional assets. The administrators of the current school system must understand that, if the school culture continues to isolate these students and to alienate them, the academic results cannot be blamed on the students themselves, but instead with the school administrators' efforts or lack thereof.

EPILOGUE

In this study, the researcher presented through the experiences of the participants that the mission of educating immigrant students continues to be a complex task for schools in the suburbs of Long Island. This study provided the researcher with an opportunity to compare the researcher's own experiences to those of Latin American immigrant students in today's school culture. From the described experiences, the researcher concluded that, although some attitudes and behaviors that the participants encountered have not changed from those that the researcher experienced in the 1980s, the effort and support found at the state level has significantly improved.

As with any other reform, CR 300 Part 154 introduced revisions with the traditional goal to support the academic advancement of ELLs including the Latin American immigrant student. However, this reform is different from others in that it is open to evolve, depending on the ever-evolving needs of the student population. Progressively, the state authorities have moved to address a series of important needs (e.g., pedagogical unity) through the creation of academic standards that align with those that the general population follows. Among other commendable initiatives, CR 300 Part 154 supports the parents of ELLs through the Parent Bill of Rights, which among many other accommodations, provides language access through the right to have all communication be conducted in the parent's language of preference. By the end of this study, the researcher concluded that these characteristics of the reform were evidence of real progress. Although evidence still shows juxtaposition between mandates and practices, through their constant supervision and evolution of the educational services,

the CR 300 Part 154 reform is moving schools to transform the manner in which they service this ever-growing Latin American immigrant student population.

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