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**THE PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS ON
THEIR LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS TO COMPLETE COLLEGE
COURSES TAUGHT IN ENGLISH: AN INTERPRETATIVE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS DRAWING UPON CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY**

John Blicharz

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PREPAREDNESS TO COMPLETE COLLEGE COURSES TAUGHT IN ENGLISH:
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS DRAWING UPON
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS ON THEIR LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS TO COMPLETE COLLEGE COURSES TAUGHT IN ENGLISH: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS DRAWING UPON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

John J. Blicharz

As the English language learner (ELL) population in the United States continues to grow and the number of non-native speakers entering institutes of higher education increases, there is a growing need to shift the paradigm on how universities serve ELLs. While there is a body of literature to support K-12 literacy, there is little to support college ELLs. As if the lack of research was not enough, ELLs are suffering on standardized tests, college placement tests are waning, and ELLs are not receiving proper advisement, thus suffering in standard English composition courses and failing out. Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), this study explored ELLs' perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. Secondary research questions explored the factors that ELLs perceive as the non-academic and academic influences on their academic performance. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) laid the methodological framework for the data collection and analysis of six participants, who were college level ELLs at a four-year public university and recruited through snowball sampling. Data analysis found the following themes which helped to answer the primary and secondary research questions: *preparedness*, *belonging*, *perseverance*, *relationships*, and *resources*. The study built upon the extant CRP research

to help educators better understand ELLs and develop curriculum and classroom strategies that are inclusive and facilitate motivation and acquisition of literacy skills. In addition, institutes of higher education may draw upon the findings to develop student support services for ELLs.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my students. You have helped me to understand your cultures, beliefs, and lived experiences. You have helped me to better understand myself.

This is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Embarking on my academic journey was not without fear; the fear of a first-generation non-traditional student entering college after years in the workforce. What was my goal? Was I prepared? Can I endure? Like my students with families, jobs, and a multitude of responsibilities, I persevered. I was not alone. Many people joined me along the way: family, friends, and scholars—writers and thinkers whose texts have resonated within me—students who I will never forget. Your stories touched me. They helped me to better understand the world and myself. The emotions and experiences that you shared transformed me. I am a culturally responsive educator because of you. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

As the English language learner (ELL) population in the United States continues to grow and the number of non-native speakers entering institutes of higher education increases, including international “satellite” students, there is a growing need to shift the paradigm on how universities service ELLs. Research on the relationships between socioeconomic status and literacy skills for students in K-12 suggests that ELLs are at a great disadvantage; however, there is little research on the effects of socioeconomic status and literacy skills for college English Learners. Similarly, there is a body of research on the non-academic factors that hinder children’s literacy skills, but little exists on college ELLs. Moreover, there is a growing body of literature to support K-12 literacy pedagogy, but there is little to support college instruction of ELLs. As if the lack of research was not enough, ELLs are suffering on standardized tests, college placements tests are waning, and it appears that ELLs are not receiving proper advisement and erroneously suffering in standard English composition courses and failing out.

Drawing upon Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), the current study posits that ELLs in institutes of higher education have a negative perception of their ability to complete college courses taught in English and that there are multiple factors that contribute to their literacy skills. It is imperative that educators have a better understanding of ELLs’ perceptions on competing courses taught in English and the factors that influence their literacy skills. Furthermore, by operationalizing the six constructs of culturally responsive pedagogy developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002),

educators will 1) understand that their students are individuals with unique cultural experiences, 2) recognize that students bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the classroom and that an affirming attitude is paramount to the success of students of diverse backgrounds, 3) view themselves as agents of change by identifying inequitable practices, 4) embrace a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, 5) build relationships and learn about their students, and 6) draw upon the funds of knowledge to support learning. Thus, by bracketing biases, educators will not only develop strategies to assist students within the classroom but be better prepared to assist students outside the classroom, further developing their sense of belonging and confidence as they build English language literacy skills.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology (Smith et al., 2012) lays the foundation of the current qualitative study, as it offers a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Thus, the analysis is a dual examination of the participants' lived experience in which the researcher analyzes how the participant is thinking. For example, in the current study, the researcher is making sense of the English language learner's (participant's) interpretation of their lived experience, who in turn is making sense of their interpretation of their ability to complete college courses taught in English, and the factors that influence their literacy skills.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to explore English language learners' perceptions on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. In addition, the study explored the factors that influence ELLs academic performance.

The terms “academic” and “non-academic” have been selected to operationalize participants’ interpretations associated within the classroom/university and within the community, home, and greater context of their lived experiences. The examples provided as “academic” and “non-academic” are not exhaustive, as I understand that emergent themes may arise. Since this is likely, I am prepared to expand my understanding as themes surface by conducting additional research and revisiting previous writings and preconceptions. Emergent themes, findings, revelations, etcetera will be documented and essayed in a reflective journal prior to inclusion in the dissertation document.

Academic influences are operationalized as students’ interpretation of their academic performance on the following: instructor, course content and materials, academic language, formal and informal assessments, existing schemata and ability to make connections, stigmatization of prior ESL pull-out instruction, level of English (L2), positioning within the classroom, effects of instructional strategies, and testing anxiety.

Non-academic influences are operationalized as the students’ interpretation of their academic performance on the following: socioeconomic status, culture, transportation, housing, nutrition, finances, employment, age, child and family care, and healthcare.

As a subset of non-academic influences, students’ interpretation of the level of English language skills on their academic performance includes sociocultural pragmatics, fossilization, age, motivation to acquire English, social languages, and other SLA concepts.

I note that while the influences on students’ academic performance have been parsed as academic and non-academic, the nature of IPA is to explore participants’

perceptions. In doing so, I must be prepared for the unknown. Moreover, I must be prepared to build upon the designated categories, which suggest additional research and reflection. The categories include the factors in the affective domain, specifically how English language learners perceive their literacy skills as they enter college. These factors include preparedness, belonging, and persistence. Additionally, the academic influences include the following themes: relationships with professors, engagement in tutoring services and peers, course content, reliance on translations, and modeling English speakers; whereas, the non-academic influences include themes of family, community, employment, leisure, practicing English, and the revelation that EFL education is not the same as ESL education. Knowledge from the current study, drawing upon Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, will contribute to how up-and-coming and current educators perceive, interact, and develop curriculum and classroom activities for ELLs. It will also help to develop wrap-around academic and student support services to ensure that ELLs have the support needed to build confidence and a sense of belonging in order to develop English literacy skills and expand their lived experiences.

Justification

There is a growing need for non-academic and academic interventions to assist ELLs enrolled in institutes of higher education. I have seen this at the university where I am the Director of Centralized Tutoring and Academic Support Programming. While there is a large body of extant research on child and adolescent literacy, there is little research on college ELLs' perceptions regarding completing college courses taught in English along with the factors that contribute to their literacy skills.

The university where this study will be conducted is a Hispanic-serving institute and member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU); however, English language learners enrolled at the institute speak a variety of languages and have a range of needs regarding second language acquisition and literacy skills. In addition, the international student population, mostly from China, is growing every year.

The Office of English Language Acquisition (n.d.) reported that the English Learner population in the United States grew 28.1% between the 2000-2001 and 2016-2017 school years. This increase in English Learners represents an increase in states ranging from 2.7% in New York to 756.1% in South Carolina. National Clearinghouse for English Language Learners (n.d.) found that states that were not associated with large ELL populations saw an increase of over 400% from 1993 to 2004. While the U.S. K-12 education system has seen a return of systematic attention to vocabulary instruction, which includes meaning, form, and use, as noted by Brown and Lee (2015), there is a void in the research to support the influx of adult ELLs and their acquisition of literacy skills, particularly academic and non-academic languages.

While research has shown a relationship between socioeconomic status and the acquisition of vocabulary (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017), many college-bound ELLs entering U.S. institutes of higher education suffer pragmatic failure, which negatively impacts their ability to function in and out of the classroom. According to Gee (2014), learning a social language, i.e., the language of an academic domain, “is a process of learning new social conventions (learning new ways to pattern together one’s grammatical resources for certain social purposes” (p. 14). I have noted that ELLs and students who perform poorly during their first year 1) do not have adequate contextual foundations to acquire

vocabularies and literacies of various academic domains and 2) endure non-academic difficulties such as working multiple jobs, transportation, family and childcare, poor study environment, healthcare, etcetera. As a result, ELLs find themselves on academic probation. Thus, non-academic and academic interventions are needed. Here lies the problem.

Research shows that pedagogy that employs context that draws from students' cultures, experiences, and languages enhances learning (Davis et al., 2013), however, the growing diversity of the ELL population in the U.S. education system is creating challenges for educators in institutes of higher education, as instructors may be struggling to learn about their students' cultures, languages, and academic and non-academic difficulties.

Since culturally responsive pedagogy extends funds of knowledge (McIntyre, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b), which operationalizes information gathered from the family unit (González, 1995; González et al., 2005; Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018; Moll et al., 1992), the current study will draw upon the framework of CRP, which is an advantageous fit for the current study. CRP gathers and operationalizes data on students' cultures, beliefs, and experiences in and out of the classroom. Moreover, CRP will expand educators' knowledge of ELLs, as they learn about their students' individual, social, and cultural experiences, build upon preexisting knowledge that ELLs bring to the classroom, seek to act as socio-culturally responsive change agents, embrace constructivist views, and support the development of ELs through building upon their interests and strengths without assuming a deficit stance.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While research shows that pedagogy that employs context that draws from students' cultures, experiences, and languages enhances learning (Davis et al., 2013), it is important to consider that the growing population and diversity of the ELL population in United States' education system may create challenges for educators who are struggling to learn about their students' cultures, languages, and academic and non-academic influences.

Similar to the growing diversity among kindergarten through twelfth grade, the population of students in institutions of higher education is growing at a rapid rate. By the end of the 2016-17 school year, the English learner population in the United States grew by one million students, totaling 4,858,377. In addition, Livingston (2007) found that the number of school-age children who exhibited difficulties speaking English increased from 1.3 million, which was 3% of all five to seven-year-olds, to 2.9 million, an increase to 6%, between 1979 and 2000. Since the current study is being conducted during a census year (2020), it can be assumed that not only has the ELL population grown, but many of the students who were included in the previous census are entering institutions of higher education.

If the purpose of academia is to provide the holistic academic, social well-being, and enhancement of students (Ovando & Combs, 2018), it is imperative that educators recognize the importance of ELLs in the educational system and society (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). Moreover, Gallego and Cole (1998) assert that the United States is not comprised of one grand culture, reinforcing the compounding challenges higher education instructors face in this country. In addition, internationalism and

misclassification of students in western universities continue to widen the disparity between literacy practices of students entering college and those required for academic and professional wellbeing (Daddow, 2016; Northedge, 2003; Rai & Lillis, 2013). In a recent review of peer-reviewed literature on funds of knowledge spanning from 1992 to 2011, totaling sixty-four articles, Rodriguez (2013) noted that most of the literature focused on the K-12 educational context with a few articles on the education of teachers; however, little research was found on funds of knowledge and students in institutes of higher education. Thus, an implication of the current study postulates, how are instructors to accommodate the literacy needs of English learners as the ELL population becomes increasingly diverse? Moreover, how can educators in institutes of higher education acquire the funds of knowledge required to operationalize culturally responsive pedagogy as defined by Villegas and Lucas (2002) in strand five: learning about students and their communities? In order to build bridges and create learning spaces that are diverse and equitable, educators may not only understand and reflect on their own biases, but also build upon the beliefs, cultures, experiences, and pre-existing knowledge that students bring to the classroom.

It is important that instructors value ELLs' prior experiences, for example, educational, social, and family experiences and cultural characteristics, such as religion, food, and roles of family members (Ovando et al., 2012; Peregoy & Boyle, 2017; Saville-Troike, 1978). To do so, the current study draws upon culturally responsive pedagogy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b), which extends funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

While it may be difficult for instructors to develop strong relationships with English Learners, as classroom instruction may occur as little as once a week, whether face-to-face or remotely, and students in urban institutes are often commuters with a multitude of responsibilities, which may include multiple jobs and family responsibilities, it is the relationship between ELLs and instructor that helps connect students to their studies, the university, and the world. This includes ELLs' connection to literacy, particularly the ability to acquire English as a second language and employ its form, meaning, and use.

Significance and Context

College instructors and administrators must not overlook the abundance of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic elements found in the community, as “the ability to build a strong partnership is intimately connected to the picture that educators have of the local community” (Ovando & Combs, 2018, p. 383). However, college educators do not have the ability to enter college students' homes to gather funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), as it is not appropriate and would violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws. Since educators may not be aware of the social factors outside the classroom, these funds of knowledge, which are critical to CRP, must be leveraged from the students. Villegas and Lucas (2002) point out that many educators are not prepared to address equity and diversity in the classroom, which is why strand five (learning about students and their communities) of CRP is critical. Thus, educators must build bridges between English Language Learners' cultures, beliefs, and experiences in order to foster engagement and a sense of belonging within the classroom. This strengthens the resolve of the current study, which posits that college level English

language learners are at a great disadvantage due to the lack of research on their cultures, beliefs, interests, and experiences while attending institutes of higher education.

In a content analysis of nine peer-reviewed literacy journals, Parsons et al. (2016) found that the frequency of topics such as Adult Readers (101), Bilingual/ELLs (237), Comprehension (246), Struggling Readers (162), and Writing (164) were among the leading foci in the field. I find this both troubling and exciting. Troubling as it shows that there is a growing emphasis in these areas, with the greatest frequencies in ELLs and reading comprehension. It should come as no surprise that there is an overlap in these areas. To address the latter, I find this exciting as a growing body of literature is available to support the needs of ELLs with reading comprehension and that this field of inquiry is active and engaged in discourse and advocacy; however, little of the research focuses on college-level ELLs, specifically the non-academic and academic influences. As this is the case, how are college instructors and administrators adequately assisting English language learners? The ELL population is clearly suffering a great disadvantage in the U.S. higher education system.

Positionality

During my tenure as an administrator for academic support, a researcher of Literacy with a concentration in ELLs, and an instructor who has taught and developed curriculum to assist incoming freshmen in acquiring foundational reading and writing skills, particularly English language learners, I have transformed. Working with at-risk, underserved students has exposed me to the challenges that many of our students face.

I have witnessed the effects of the disparity between students who enter the university from affluent high schools and those from poor communities where reading

materials are sparse and the teacher turn-over is high. Through my university's academic probation support program, I have learned that students on academic probation perform poorly due to outside factors. These factors include food insecurities, financial and housing instability, healthcare, family needs, and transportation. While working with at-risk students, I have witnessed that *No Child Left Behind* has had a negative effect on students' foundational reading, writing, and mathematics skills.

My experiences with English learners have led to the notion that not only are there academic influences that hinder ELLs' performance, but that English learners may live in low socioeconomic status (SES) communities and have attended underfunded school systems. Thus, English learners may lack opportunities to 1) engage educators in conversations about their identities and realities, 2) engage in curricula that focus on their lives through caring pedagogy, 3) experience respectful relationships among family members, communities, and educators, and 4) connect with teachers who believe they matter (Nieto, 2017).

Muter et al. (2004) found that students who are fluent readers and exhibit strong decoding skills may lack reading comprehension skills due to limited experiences or underdeveloped vocabulary. I have experienced the effects of limited experience and underdeveloped vocabulary. As an anecdote to the limited interactions between ELLs and educators, an ESL student from a class that I taught some time ago, who lives in a low SES community, submitted a poorly written reflection in which he stated that he had been resistant and defensive in class since his home was a "war zone." He added that he was always on the defense at home and that the "streets" were no different. His schema, based on past experiences, influenced his interactions and hindered learning as he refused to

engage in peer groups and within the classroom. Once comfortable with the instructor, he opened up and became a classroom leader. While he used the terms *war zone*, *the streets*, *keeping it low*, and *defense* during the beginning of the semester, once the instructor learned what these words referred to in his community and home—I am drawing upon *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992) which has been operationalized through the strands of CRP (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b)—it was realized that the student often heard gunshots in his community, which lead him to keep away from windows and outside walls, that he traveled “light” so he can run when needed, and that his family was often on edge and defensive, causing a great deal of stress in the home which permeated his being and negatively impacted his literacy skills. The student also expressed that previous teachers had ignored his needs, so he gave up, which draws upon strand one of CRP: gaining sociocultural consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In this case, the student’s lived experiences were not considered and the student’s sense of belonging and classroom engagement diminished.

I have found that English learners are at a great disadvantage when entering institutions of higher education. While some may have English language skills, there is a great disparity among college-level ELLs’ abilities to read, write, and speak English. One challenge that ELLs face is that engagement of language in and out of the classroom may vary, as social languages depend on identities and settings; Gee (2015) stated that written and oral communications in addition to actions, use of symbols, beliefs, and socially recognizable identities are the foundations of interacting with others. Thus, English learners who do not understand the target culture will struggle to become L2 users within the community (Gao, 2013).

As an anecdote to social languages and ELLs, prior to reading “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson (1948) with the class, I hosted a lottery without disclosing the prize. Students expressed excitement as they have learned from popular culture that lotteries result in rewards; however, in the case of Jackson’s text, the reward is death by stoning. This relates to sociocognitive theory as represented in Gee’s (2001) work, as he would state that the students have engaged in perspective-taking, which refers to their experiences and actions in the world. Hence, the “lottery” represents a social language, as it is a classificatory scheme, i.e., the lottery represents a systematic plan for attaining wealth. Therefore, the students consider this meaning and become excited to participate. Following Gee’s Discourse with a capital “D,” language of people who play the lottery, such as *I hit!* and *Momma needs a new pair of shoes!* “enact a specific identity and engage in specific activities associated with that identity” (Gee, 2001, p. 721).

I believe that every child has the right to an education and that developing a strong foundation from kindergarten through twelfth grade is paramount to their success in college. I have heard the notion that students require “remediation,” but how is this possible when they have not been taught adequately? Often, I hear that a student “should attend community college” and “admissions has lowered the bar.” I find these statements disappointing, and I refuse to subscribe to the notion that a student does not belong or requires remediation, which supports a deficit ideology that CRP repudiates (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

I advocate for supporting the needs of every student. I advocate for students who require foundational literacy skills and support programming. I vow to ensure that every

child, adolescent, and adult is able to acquire reading skills and succeed in college and beyond.

My voice does not wane at the university gate. I participate in conferences. I am among the many voices who engage online via the websites of the International Literacy Association, National College Reading and Learning Association, National College Learning Center Association, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, etc. While I engage in these areas and platforms, I realize that I am one voice among many and that it is important to advocate in areas that are multidisciplinary and cross-divisional.

In 1990, there were approximately 2 million public school students who spoke limited or no English (Goldenberg, 2011). Two decades later, it should come as no surprise that enrollment in college ELL Comp I & II courses is increasing; however, here lies the conundrum: why have university administrators, department chairs, and curriculum developers not considered the apparent paradigm shift? As ELLs are forecasted to become the majority in urban universities, new methodologies and pedagogies are needed, specifically holistic approaches that encompass student services and academic support services with an emphasis on faculty training that supports the growing needs of our fragile, at-risk students who come from underserved, low SES communities.

With continued research, growing experiences, and a wealth of knowledge at my disposal, I join my colleagues to support underserved and marginalized students' acquisition of literacy skills. I am an agent of change as defined within the strands of

CRP (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). Specifically, this study emphasizes the need for research on adult ELLs enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education.

While my resolve to advocate for the ELL population is strong, I am cognizant of my experiences, preconceptions, and “sharing some ground with the person being interviewed” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 23). As an IPA researcher, I understand that my aim is not to claim what I believe is true, but my role as a researcher is to conduct a systematic and detailed analysis of the participant. In addition, I hope to inspire other researchers not only with my findings but to employ the IPA methodology as well.

Research Questions

Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, the purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

The current study seeks to answer the following question:

RQ: Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, what are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English?

The following secondary research questions seek to refine the primary research question:

SRQ1: What do college-level English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?

SRQ2: What do college-level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?

Theory

Drawing upon sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), learning and achievement are products of the interaction between the students and their environment (Lee & Ball, 2005; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978); however, “funds of knowledge” (FOK) extends sociocultural theory, as instructors who have an understanding of their students’ cultures and utilize this knowledge to enhance pedagogy are more likely to connect with students and develop an environment conducive to learning (Moll et al., 1992). CRP as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002) offers a comprehensive structure that bridges sociocultural theory and funds of knowledge, not only seeking to understand students' home environments, but also to understand students' lived experiences. Moreover, CRP supports advocacy for marginalized populations and educators’ self-reflection on preconceptions of student performance and engagement and teacher bias.

The funds of knowledge element of CRP has inspired the operationalization of the study's theoretical framework. FOK has evolved over time and provides the groundwork for the present study; moreover, it is a core construct of CRP, which is why the foundations of FOK must be addressed.

A meta-analysis on funds of knowledge by Llopart and Esteban-Guitart (2018), which included a review of articles between 2011 and 2015, noted two categories: conceptual works and educational applications. Perhaps most notable is the dialogue with other theoretical approaches. Llopart and Esteban-Guitart (2018) found that in the past decade, FOK expanded (i.e., hybridized) with other theories. Theories that were joined with funds of knowledge include the capital approach theory, third space theory, practice

theory, participatory learning theories, and the *family literacy ecology of communities framework* (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018).

In another recent study, Razfar and Nasir (2019) joined the FOK and positioning theories to develop a “more dynamic and hybrid form of teaching and learning” (p. 226), as FOK has moved away from the household to include geographic space. Whereas Razfar and Nasir (2019) joined positioning theory with FOK, Cun et al. (2019) hybridized FOK with literacy as social practice in an ethnographic study that explored how adult ESL students helped a classmate find ways to deal with everyday challenges.

The literature suggests that FOK has not only become diluted, but that more comprehensive theories have become available. For example, CRP draws upon FOK (McIntyre, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b) by its inclusion in strand five: learning about students and their communities, as teachers utilize funds of knowledge to operationalize students’ interests and concerns for teaching strategies (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

Whereas FOK draws upon information from home visits to develop teaching strategies, CRP operationalizes a wide array of data to develop teaching strategies and teacher training. Furthermore, CRP data can be operationalized to develop student support services to assist not only ELLs but support all students who are struggling or may lack a sense of belonging. The six strands of CRP as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002) will frame the current study. The six strands of CRP include:

- *Strand 1: Gaining sociocultural consciousness*, which is gained through the practice of reflection to understand that students have experienced the world differently and that their worldviews are shaped by their unique social and

cultural experiences. This includes understanding that while educators may have similar experiences, they are not the same as their students, students are unique, and their beliefs and experience should not be generalized.

- *Strand 2: Developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds*, which is gained through recognizing that students enter the classroom with pre-existing knowledge and that educators must have an affirming attitude towards diversity.
- *Strand 3: Developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change*, which is gained through the belief that educators are agents of change, as they are experienced in identifying inequitable practices and challenges that students may face.
- *Strand 4: embracing the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching*, which is gained through the worldview that students develop their knowledge based on their experiences.
- *Strand 5: learning about students and their lives*, which is gained by learning about students' lived experiences and considering how their experiences, beliefs, and knowledge can be operationalized to develop curricula and teaching strategies.
- *Strand 6: cultivating the practice of teaching culturally responsive teaching*, which operationalizes the previous strands to ensure that all students are represented, included, valued, and heard in an inclusive environment that fosters growth.

I have discussed the historical context of FOK and how this knowledge is operationalized within the strands of CRP as developed by Villegas and Lucas; however, it is important to discuss the evolution of CRP as it is comprised of elements of culturally relevant pedagogy as theorized by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and culturally responsive pedagogy conceptualized by Geneva Gay (2001).

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) seeks to help minority students achieve academic success, demonstrate cultural competence, and understand and assess social order. Thus, Ladson-Billings emphasis was on the student, as culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to retain and operationalized students' cultural integrity and succeed academically. Culturally relevant pedagogy is operationalized through holistic teaching which includes the belief in self and others, understanding and engaging in social relations, and applying conceptions of knowledge. In summary, culturally relevant pedagogy helps students to develop cultural consciousness, understand the existing social systems, empower students to act as change agents, and the truthfulness of critical race theory—As I write this dissertation, Ladson-Billings is working to distinguish her definition of culturally relevant pedagogy; her text is scheduled for publication later in 2021. I expect to revisit my research and draw upon Ladson-Billings forthcoming work for my future research.

Geneva Gay's culturally responsive pedagogy (2001) has elements of Ladson-Billings culturally relevant pedagogy; however, Gay's emphasis is in preparing teachers to employ the cultures, experiences, and beliefs of diverse students within the classroom. Similar to Ladson-Billings and Villegas and Lucas, Gay emphasizes the importance of

teachers having cultural competence to design culturally relevant curriculum and create a classroom environment that fosters meaningful learning.

The work of Villegas and Lucas extended the theories of Gay and Ladson-Billings, as they developed five strands to assist with teacher training and the implementation of the funds of knowledge gained from students. I return to funds of knowledge, as *Strand 5: learning about students and their lives* of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, as developed by Villegas and Lucas, lays the foundation for my research. I note that the focus of Gay, Ladson-Billing, and Villegas and Lucas has been on the student in K-12 education systems. The focus of this study is to gain knowledge about ELLs in institutes of higher education—an area that has had little emphasis—and operationalized the findings within classrooms and curricula.

At this point, I note the importance of stating the use of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, which will be discussed in detail in the Method section. IPA is a quantitative methodology which has been developed for research in the field of psychology and recently used in education studies. IPA supports research questions in the affective domain in which the current study resides. This will be addressed in detail in the methodology section. Recent CRP studies listed below have utilized the methodology.

Studies

Vega (2018) conducted an IPA study that examined the college choice and community college transfer decision-making process of high achieving first-generation Latinx transfer students. Emergent themes included inadequate guidance from school personnel, financial concerns, familial factors, community college as an appropriate

match, access to greater opportunities, and support and motivation. The study included 6 participants.

Saddler and Sundin (2020) conducted an IPA study that examined how a group of mature (non-traditional) students who were on track to complete their studies made sense of their decision-making process to enroll in higher education. Emergent themes included motivation and preparedness for university studies, internal struggles and changes, benefiting others, and changes in the social domain. The study included 6 participants.

Helfrick (2019) conducted an IPA study which explored the role of professional development on teachers' experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy. The analysis revealed the following themes: redefining culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated professional development structures, professional development content, time, and building teacher interest and confidence. The study included 6 participants.

Jabbar and Mohammed (2019) conducted a phenomenological study that explored academics' perceptions of their teaching and learning strategies for students from an ethnically diverse background. Emergent themes included culture as a vehicle for learning, adjusting to culture, and student capability and skills. The study included 22 participants with a team of researchers who transcribed over 45 hours of audio, 22 memo documents, and a reflective diary spanning over 50 pages.

While Chen and Yang (2017) did not employ an IPA, they conducted a single subject experiment that exhibited significant results of CRP strategies on ELL participation. Participants included 3 students.

Method

The purpose of the current study is to explore ELLs' perceptions of their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. IPA was selected as a research methodology, as the IPA methodology best suits the data collection and analysis and will result in a detailed, holistic examination of the participants' lived experiences. Moreover, IPA offers a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003), as the participants are making sense of their world while the researcher is making sense of the participants' world (Smith et al., 2012). Smith et al. (2012) also noted that Ricoeur (1970) considered an alternative double hermeneutic, "which distinguishes between two broad interpretative positions, a hermeneutic of empathy, and a hermeneutic of suspicion" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 26). This fits with the context of the current study as well, as I seek to draw out the meaning of the lived experiences of ELLs in order to answer my research questions.

Research questions that guide the study fit within the framework of IPA and include: *Research Question*: Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, what are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English? The following *Secondary Research Questions* seek to refine the primary research question: What do college English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance? And what do college-level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?

Audience/Stakeholders

The current study will provide educators and stakeholders, including instructors and administrators in higher education, with knowledge on ELLs' perceptions of their

level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English and the factors that influence their literacy skills, build upon the CRP research and training materials, help educators to better understand ESL students and develop curriculum and classroom strategies to increase second language acquisition and student motivation, and help institutes of higher education develop student support services to assist with factors that hinder literacy skills and academic performance, specifically for students who are English language learners. It is my hope that this interpretative phenomenological analysis study will add to the limited extant CRP literature and inform practices that will support ELLs enrolled in institutes of higher education.

Conclusion/Forward

College-level ELLs are at a great disadvantage due to the lack of research on their experiences while attending institutes of higher education. Thus, the current study seeks to explore the perceptions of ELLs on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. CRP lays the foundation for the study and an IPA was selected as a research methodology, as the IPA methodology best suits the data collection and analysis. It is my hope that the findings will assist college instructors and administrators in developing curriculum and programming to support ELLs. In the following chapters, the literature will be reviewed and methodology will be discussed in detail, but first, it is important to review terminology that will be used throughout the remainder of the chapters.

Definition of Terms

Preface: The terms “academic” and “non-academic” have been selected to operationalize participants’ interpretations associated within the classroom/university and

within the community, home, and greater context of their lived experiences. The examples provided as “academic” and “non-academic” are not exhaustive, as I understand that emergent themes may arise. Since this is likely, I am prepared to expand my understanding as themes surface by conducting additional research and revisiting previous writings and preconceptions. Emergent themes, findings, revelations, etcetera will be documented and essayed in a reflective journal prior to inclusion in the dissertation document.

Academic influences are operationalized as students’ interpretation of the following on their academic performance: instructor, course content and materials, academic language, formal and informal assessments, existing schemata and ability to make connections, stigmatization of prior ESL pull-out instruction, level of English (L2), positioning within the classroom, effects of instructional strategies, and testing anxiety.

Non-academic influences are operationalized as the students’ interpretation of the following on their academic performance: socioeconomic status, culture, transportation, housing, nutrition, finances, employment, age, child and family care, and healthcare. Subset of *non-academic influences*: students’ interpretation of their level of English language skills on their academic performance, which includes sociocultural pragmatics, fossilization, age, motivation to acquire English, social languages, and other SLA concepts.

Academic support services: tutoring and academic coaching services available to students at the university where the current study will take place. The author chose to define *academic support services* as it is a construct in the current research and measured as the number of engagements in tutoring sessions and academic coaching sessions.

EL: English learner. A non-native speaker learning English.

ELL: English language learner. A non-native speaker learning English. This term is interchangeable with EL and is noted as both EL and ELL may be referenced, particularly in direct quotations.

English User: a non-native English speaker who resides in an English speaking location and relies primarily on the use of the English language.

ESL: English as a Second Language: course/s in which non-native English speakers study the use of the English language.

L1: first language or mother tongue. Used to differentiate between a speaker's native language (L1) and second language (L2).

L2: second language. Used to differentiate from a speaker's native language (L1).

Literacy: While language subsystems such as phonology, morphology, and syntax, which help to create meaning, are the foundations of literacy, the overarching definition of literacy has varied, particularly in domain-specific conversations, such as, technical literacy, financial literacy, academic literacies, etcetera. This suggests that the term literacy is not limited to reading, writing, and L2 language acquisition but is ubiquitous in nature. The current study defines literacy as the use of language subsystems while drawing upon one's senses and cognitive abilities to construct, convey, and acquire meaning, which includes a multitude of domains, for example, multiliteracies, social discourses and identities, academic writing and communications, technical literacy, etcetera.

SLA: Second Language Acquisition. The study of how one acquires a second language. Research in the field of SLA contributes to the understanding of language acquisition for multiple languages and the teaching of the English language.

Sociocultural Theory: this theory posits that social interaction is essential cognitive development. It includes sociocultural context, scaffolding, language, and discourse which establish opportunities for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ELLs in U.S. Schools

There is a growing need for non-academic and academic support services to assist ELLs in four-year universities. This is particularly due to the growing population of non-native English speakers (Ovando & Combs, 2018; Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Learners (n.d.), non-native speaker enrollment during the 2000-01 school year was 3,793,764, which was 8.1% of the total enrollment; whereas, by the 2016-17 school year, the English learner population grew by one million students, totaling 4,858,377, which represented 9.6% of the total enrollment. In addition, the National Clearinghouse for English Language Learners (n.d.) found that 43 states within the United States had an increase in their ELL populations with a national increase of 28.1% between the 2000-01 and 2016-17 school years; among the largest was South Carolina with a 765.1% increase.

As a result of the increase in the English learner population, schools have seen what Garcia and Jensen (2009) call a dynamic population change, also known as a *demographic imperative*, which is an influx of non-native English speaking students. This underlies the persisting achievement gap between English speakers and English learners, who, as Padolsky (2005) noted, are comprised of more than 10% of the K-12 student population in U.S. public schools. In addition, Kindler (2002) found that only 18.7% of students who were English learners met state standards for reading English.

ELL in Higher Education

Today, many English learners in the U.S. public school system are immigrants, refugees, or non-native speakers born in the United States who speak the family's primary language in the home; however, some ELLs attending public school receive little language assistance at all (Nieto, 2017). This lack of English language education hinders performance. Moreover, it creates a sense of distrust between ELLs and educators and solidifies the notion that the school has little interest in supporting ELLs. This stigmatizes young ELLs and often results in a decrease of motivation, which contributes to the attrition rate and hinders their college aspirations. This drop is particularly worrisome as many colleges are moving away from placement tests, specifically for English as a Second Language (ESL) placement, and relying on standardized testing such as the SAT. Furthermore, given the focus on standardized testing in the past three decades and the effects of standardized testing on the emerging ELL community, there should be no surprise that—I reiterate—many English learners have become stigmatized and have a perception that their experiences have not been validated (Nieto, 2017).

At the university where the current study will be conducted, it has been found that many ESL students, those who are freshmen and those who have transferred from community colleges, continue to exhibit English language difficulties. In addition, I have met with students who have expressed that they would have benefitted from ESL instruction at the universities they attend; however, they stated they were either not aware of ESL course availability, were stigmatized by pull-out ESL instruction in the public school system, or that high school ESL instruction provided little language acquisition. Hence, it can be deduced that students enrolling in universities may neither have English

language proficiency needed to perform in an academic setting nor be aware that ESL courses are available.

Educators who drew upon sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) have found that use of dialogue is an effective means of student development (Beach & Meyers, 2001; Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Rosebery et al., 1992); however, students often face non-academic challenges that include working multiple jobs, transportation, family and child care, healthcare, financial insecurity, food insecurity, and cultural and linguistic difficulties while attending college courses, where they often struggle with learning English and domain-specific languages (Gee, 2014a, 2014b).

As English learners in higher education struggle with academic language, it is important to consider points made by Ovando and Combs (2018) who noted that students may be monolingual in English or monolingual in a native language or may have varying degrees of bilingualism, adding that “it is crucial that educators, researchers, and policy makers find ways to hear the inner voice of language minority students, who may be prisoners of silence in English dominant classrooms” (p. 3).

While it is unquestionable that students learn best through strategies that employ context that integrates their cultures, experiences, and languages (Davis et al., 2013; Hollins, 2015; Minami & Ovando, 2004; Tharp et al., 2000; Villegas & Lucas, 2002b) and that the purpose of academia is to provide the holistic enhancement of students’ academic and social well-being (Ovando & Combs, 2018), many students, particularly English learners, are faced with difficulties due to the deeply rooted educator perception, which gravitates toward the identity of the classic university classroom pedagogy of the past. It is imperative that educators recognize the importance of English learners in our

educational system and society (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017). It is important to value the students' prior experiences, for example, prior school experiences and cultures such as their home environment, religion, language, food, and roles and responsibilities of members within the home (Ovando et al., 2012; Peregoy & Boyle, 2017; Saville-Troike, 1978), which draws upon culturally responsive pedagogy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

It may be difficult for university instructors to develop strong relationships with English learners, given that classroom time may only occur once or twice a week and students in urban institutes are often commuters with various responsibilities such as multiple jobs and family responsibilities; however, it is these relationships between educators and students that help to connect students to their studies, the university, and the world (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). Therefore, the instructor bridges the learners' home and academic worlds and helps the learner to draw upon classroom context when dealing with the world (Nieto, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). However, English learners entering four-year universities may have difficulties as they may not have had proper English language instruction.

Explicit instruction is another area in which instruction for college ELLs is a disservice. There is evidence that young ELLs require explicit instruction similar to their peers (Geva & Zadeh, 2006; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003); however, English courses where instructors employ strategies that emphasize drills on decontextualized language has shown to hinder literacy development (Fitzgerald, 1995; Guitiérrez, 2001; Neufeld & Fitzgerald, 2001). Hence, meaning-rich explicit instruction that embraces ELLs' cultures and linguistic resources help to provide meaningful interactions (Fitzgerald, 1993; Lenters, 2004; Moll & González, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). Moreover, as

discourse plays an essential role in cognitive development (Heneda & Wells, 2006), it is imperative to create a learning environment that is collaborative and facilitates dialogue inquiry. Here lies the problem: instruction in many college classrooms, particularly non-ESL courses, is laden with lecture and decontextualized language.

Today, particularly for educators in urban institutions of higher education that service varying socioeconomic communities with rising, emergent English language populations, it is becoming increasingly difficult to service students of diverse language backgrounds. Furthermore, there is a growing need to develop a body of literature on the acquisition of literacy skills for ELLs in four-year universities, ELLs' perceptions of their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English, and the factors that contribute to literacy skills. It should come as no surprise that the state of English learners entering institutions of higher education is bleak. I have pointed out the overwhelming increase in ELL populations, the negative effects of standardized testing and pull-out instruction, strategies that emphasize decontextualized literacy skills, and the lack of pedagogy that draws upon CRP, which the current study will draw upon. Now, attention will be drawn to the non-academic influences on literacy skills

Influences on Literacy Skills

There is little information that explicitly states the non-academic influences on literacy skills of ELLs in four-year universities; however, there is a body of research on the challenges that ELLs face in their effort to acquire L2 literacy skills. While these challenges are transferable to college ELLs' acquisition of literacy skills, it must be emphasized that there is limited research on the non-academic influences of ELLs enrolled in higher education.

First, we must address the cultural differences among English learners from varying language backgrounds, as cultural differences often lead to pragmatic differences (Hilliard, 2017; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993). Thus, pragmatic competence may be difficult for ELLs to develop (Röver, 2005). For example, linguistic pragmatics such as implicature and locutionary and illocutionary acts are difficult for ELLs to grasp as English learners often focus on the literal understanding of language, which is different than language in use which includes additional components such as facial and body expressions, inflections, and tone. In addition, varying cultures, languages, settings, and identities compound the difficulties that ELLs face while acquiring L2 literacy skills.

Second, social languages and Discourse with a big “D,” as developed by Gee (2015), play a role in the acquisition of L2 literacy skills. Gee (2015) stated that written and oral communications, in addition to actions, use of symbols, beliefs, and socially recognizable identities, are the foundations of interacting with others. Thus, “Learners who lack sufficient knowledge about the target culture can hardly become active and appropriate language users in their target language” (Gao, 2013, p. 1429). In addition, without sufficient understanding of the English language, ELLs may become resistant to communicate outside their community and resort to translanguaging or codeswitching while venturing outside the community’s borders, which can result in negative transfer and fossilization of literacy and L2 skills.

Building upon the act of remaining within one’s community, isolation must be addressed, as this negatively impacts ELLs’ literacy skills, particularly those entering college. Nawyn et al. (2012) found “the lack of dominant language skills can leave

immigrants isolated from their communities and create intergenerational tensions in their families” (p. 258). During my tenure as an administrator in higher education, I have met with students and found that there is a growing rift between some ELLs and their family members, often due to the isolation within their family and cultural and language communities. Nawyn et al. (2012) also found that immigrant groups with limited linguistic resources become laden with communicative barriers which may position them as “subalterns” (p. 259), the authors included the postulation of Nyers (2006) “entities incapable of speech and thus animal-like” (p. 259). When English learners isolate themselves within their L2 community, their lack of literacy skills inhibits their ability to communicate in the dominant English language. Thus, it can be assumed that their ability to acquire literacy skills in a college setting is greatly reduced as they navigate social, cultural, and language challenges simultaneously.

I have touched upon linguistics, social languages, identity, and isolation; however, it is important to reiterate the additional factors that hinder the acquisition of ELLs’ literacy skills such as working multiple jobs, transportation, family and childcare, healthcare, financial insecurity, food insecurity, and cultural and linguistic difficulties while attending college courses. Academic influences will be addressed next.

The university where this study will be conducted is a Hispanic-serving institute and member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU); however, students speak a variety of languages and have a range of needs regarding the acquisition of English vocabulary and literacy skills. There are academic resources such as tutoring and academic coaching and student support services such as the food pantry, counseling, and other student services; however, many ELLs do not utilize these services. Perhaps

ELLs are ashamed to approach instructors, peers, tutors, or administrators for assistance. Perhaps ELLs do not engage due to a poor self-perception of their ability to communicate in English, which may be an indication of poor literacy skills.

While there is a body of research on the relationship between socioeconomic status and the acquisition of vocabulary (see Peregoy & Boyle, 2017), many college-level ELLs entering U.S. institutes of higher education suffer pragmatic failure, which negatively impacts their ability to function in and out of the classroom. According to Gee (2014b), learning a social language, i.e., the language of a social domain, “is a process of learning new social conventions (learning new ways to pattern together one’s grammatical resources for certain social purposes, like learning what clothes go with what other clothes for a given event or situation)” (p. 14). It has been noted that English learners and students who perform poorly during their first year of college 1) do not have adequate contextual foundations to acquire vocabularies and literacies of various academic domains and 2) often endure non-academic difficulties, such as, working multiple jobs, transportation, family and childcare, poor study environment, healthcare, etcetera. As a result, ELLs find themselves on academic probation. Thus, non-academic interventions are needed to support the development of literacy skills for ELLs. If instructors and academic support administrators operationalized CRP, they would be better prepared to work with ELLs.

There is a growing body of literature on the effects of peer tutoring on the acquisition of literacy (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2016; King et al., 1998; Utley & Mortweet, 1997). Much of the literature, including peer tutoring, that focuses on academic influences on literacy draws upon the theory and methodologies of Vygotsky’s

(1978) sociocultural theory, for example, Grice's Cooperative Principles (Grice, 1989), social languages and discourse with a big "D" (Gee, 2014a, 2014b), engagement in rich conceptual, cultural, and linguistic resources, and conversations (Cummins, 2011; Lau, 2012; Martin-Beltran et al., 2017; van Wyk, 2016); however, there is little mention of the importance of CRP on tutor training.

Let us begin with Grice's Cooperative Principles and the principles related to sociocultural theory and CRP. The Cooperative Principles state that conversation is similar to a contract, as the speaker and the receiver agree to engage in conversation while adhering to a set of rules: that the language used is to be understandable and both the speaker and receiver must commit to do what is needed so the communication is understood (Grice, 1989). Following these rules, it can be postulated that the speaker engages the receiver in a conversation on a matter in which he or she is familiar or has an interest in learning; however, it is understood that the speaker has previous history on the subject matter or may be seeking guidance from a more capable peer, which draws upon sociocultural theory and more specifically, the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which is emphasized in CRP (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

Considering the receiver's role in this communication, the receiver understands the speaker as the language and content are similar; however, if the receiver does not understand the speaker, the receiver will alert the speaker, and the speaker must reconsider language and context. Thus, the conversation continues in a cycle. Like the speaker, the receiver draws upon previous experiences with the world and language. It must be noted, also, that both the speaker and receiver engage in a conversation that revolves around their schemata, exercising their zone of proximal development, i.e., they

collect information from each other, employ this knowledge, and increase their understanding through discourse, which is to say, problem-solving.

Grice's Cooperative Principles are applicable to college ELLs' acquisition of literacy skills, as they facilitate accessible communications. Both the speaker and receiver employ schemata, which situate the conversation within their zone of proximal development. Expanding on one's zone of proximal development, Chenail and Chenail (2011) would add there are times when it makes sense to flout the rules, for example, using non-explicit language, such as the maxim *you hit it out of the park!* to state *a job well done*. Here an ELL may be confused; however, this communication will enhance their understanding of the phrase and increase their use of the English language. It is also likely that there will be a transfer between their L1 and L2, which will also help to develop literacy skills. Thus, Grice's theory is crucial to developing literacy skills of ELLs, particularly in the classroom, tutoring center, and community. There is little literature that explores Grice's theory and its relationship to the development of college English learners' literacy skills; however, culturally responsive pedagogy should be employed here.

Similar to Grice's Cooperative Principles, Gee's social languages and discourse with a big "D" (2001, 2014a, 2014b) draw upon sociocultural theory and can lead to the development of ELLs' literacy skills. Gee's theory on social languages states that an individual acquires different social languages which are used for different social purposes. Gee (2014a, 2014b) writes, it is "a cultural process that goes well beyond the support human biology [he is alluding to Chomsky's (1986; 1995) biological endowment of the grammatical apparatus] gives us for the basic grammatical apparatus (the 'core

grammar') of our native language" (p. 14). For example, our social languages are learned within our social spheres, i.e., the groups in which we communicate such as our family, our classmates, and friends of various niches, which may include friends we play sports with, friends we meet for dinner, friends from school, etcetera. Each of these social groups have a language. For example, one might not employ maxims used in sports communications when sitting in an English class. Likewise, one would not use dense academic writing when writing a birthday card to a family member. Identity and how it shapes language will be discussed next.

In addition to social languages, Gee (2001, 2014a, 2015) developed the theory of discourse with a capital "D." This theory proposes that learning is not a matter of learning English but of learning social languages and the identities that go along with those social languages, i.e., the norms, values, and social practices that encompass one's identity within a specific domain. For example, a professor may wear a particular blazer, oxford shirt, and shoes and speak in academic English when at the university engaging with colleagues and students; however, at home, a professor may wear sweatpants and rubber boots and engage in conversations on gardening techniques with neighbors. Note that the style of clothing and languages are different and depend on the domain.

It is important to consider social languages and Discourse within the classroom, as each student enters the classroom with various languages and social identities. While Gee (2014b) states that learning is difficult for those whose identities conflict with other's socially situated identities, educators should help bridge these identities. While it is evident that Gee is drawing upon sociocultural theory, it raises the question of how educators can help to build bridges among multiple identities. The answer is culturally

responsive pedagogy. By learning and paying close attention to the social languages and Discourses within the classroom, i.e., cultures, languages, varying social domains, etcetera, educators—instructors and academic support staff—can develop classroom strategies that bridge identities and develop literacy skills, while developing trusting relationships. While Gee mentions that social language and Discourse can be used with ELLs, there is little to no research on social language and Discourse and ELLs; however, the use of CRP allows educators to learn about English learners.

Another academic influence on ELLs' literacy skills stems from the growing body of research on strategies that facilitate engagement rich in context, culture, language, and dialogue (Cummins, 2011; Lau, 2012; Martin-Beltran et al., 2017; van Wyk, 2016). These strategies include access to print-rich environments, contextualized language, classroom discourse, socially situated contexts, and critical literacy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b); however, Lau (2012) points out that critical literacy is rarely used with ELLs, as “teachers assume that students’ limitations in English will preclude academic engagement with complex social and moral issues” (p. 325), which is disconcerting as it neglects to consider the students’ prior knowledge and experiences and how they transfer to U.S. social and moral issues, which is supported by Villegas & Lucas (2002b).

First, it is critical that ELLs have access to print-rich environments containing academic language as it helps to facilitate opportunities for engagement with peers through discussion and encouragement and helps emerging readers to further develop their literacy skills (Cummins, 2011). In contrast to native English speakers, ELLs and students from marginalized populations are often defined by what they lack and labeled ‘deficient’ (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b); however, emerging ELLs, particularly college-age

ELLs, enter the classrooms with a wealth of knowledge and experiences. Thus, it is imperative that educators utilize their *funds of knowledge* as described by Villegas & Lucas (2002b) when working with ELLs and that ELLs receive the same opportunities as their native-speaking peers; however, I do not suggest that ELLs engage in strategies that employ decontextualized language, i.e., learning that does not offer a foundation for understanding, which leads us to Gee's theory on decontextualized language.

Gee's (2014b) theory on decontextualized language is beneficial for ELLs but is rarely included in L2 acquisition research. Gee states that all language is decontextualized language, however, contextualized until one learns the social language, which is the content language or the language of the Discourse (Gee, 2014b). He adds that children from some minority groups and children living in poverty, including students whose native language is not English, do poorly in school when compared with white, middle-class children; this is primarily due to decontextualized language. On one hand, we have native English speakers—referring to college students—who enter the classroom with prior knowledge and experiences in U.S. culture, history, etcetera; on the other hand, many ELLs entering college have little experience with U.S. culture, history, etcetera and suffer greatly with decontextualized language that does not lay a solid foundation for the development of literacy skills, which is also supported by Villegas & Lucas (2002b). Similarly, the use of *funds of knowledge* as operationalized by CRP is critical to pedagogy that employs decontextualized language. Villegas & Lucas (2002b) note that there are times when decontextualized exercises, specifically memorization, is unavoidable, e.g., learning multiplication tables.

Building upon the importance of contextualized language to develop English learners' literacy skills, research shows that classroom discourse that draws upon ELLs' cultural and linguistic resources enhances learning, and that peers offer a zone of relevance when sharing similar experiences (Martin-Beltran et al., 2017). However, limited classroom discourse is a result of "the dearth of understanding of what multilingual youth bring to these conversations during interactive literacy" (p. 52). Thus, when educators do not employ pedagogy that draws upon existing schemata, opportunities for meaningful conversations among emergent English language users that facilitate literacy development are missed.

The shortage of socially situated contexts within the classroom is similar to the lack of engagement in classroom discourse. This is experienced particularly in the college lecture hall, as instructors engage students in lengthy lectures and assignments laden with academic language. Van Wyk (2016) found that "literacy is best facilitated through activity-based experimental learning where activities are purposefully constructed to provide students with ample opportunity for application of the skill" (p. 266). This extends Gee's (1990) statement on required levels of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) needed for accessibility of classroom content. Thus, if classroom content is rich in socially situated content, ELLs will have increased ability to access the material, which is supported by culturally responsive pedagogy. In contrast, if educators draw upon their funds of knowledge, they would be in a better position to engage students with socially situated contexts (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

Noting the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy on academic influences such as print-rich environments, contextualized language, classroom discourse, socially

situated contexts, and critical literacy, it is important to note that each draws upon sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and is better employed with the knowledge gained through FOK (Moll et al., 1992) and operationalized through CRP (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

I have noted that ELLs are often placed in standard English classes, perform poorly, and drop out. Moreover, many universities are moving away from placement tests and relying on standardized tests, i.e., the SAT, but what about ELLs who may not have attended school within the United States? What about ELLs who may have performed poorly on the SAT or not tested at all? Some universities have discontinued the basic ESL test given to students on the first day, which causes them to scurry to the advisement center and swap classes. Thus, ELLs start their first day of college at a great disadvantage.

In contrast to their native English peers, who are aware of and engage in academic support services such as tutoring, workshops, counseling, etcetera, many ELLs are regularly not utilizing academic support services. Are they simply unaware? Are they ashamed? Is there a language barrier since campus communications are distributed in English and not their native language? Are there other factors or a combination of factors that have not been documented that hinder ELLs' literacy skills? What is their perception of their level of preparedness to complete courses taught in English? Has this hindered their motivation to engage?

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The current research draws upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy. CRP is an advantageous fit for the current study, as it operationalizes data on

students' cultures, beliefs, and experiences in and out of the classroom through a comprehensive structure of 'strands' that include 1) gaining sociocultural consciousness, 2) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, 3) developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change, 4) embracing the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching, 5) learning about students and their lives, and 6) cultivating the practice of culturally responsive teaching.

While CRP lays the foundation of the study, sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) should be addressed. Both theories have been discussed as they offer approaches to developing awareness and student support services and lay a foundation for CRP. For example, sociocognitive theory (Vygotsky, 1978) states that learners enter the classroom with previous knowledge and experiences and that learning is a social process that includes interaction and cognitive acquisition:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) narrows the broad scope of sociocultural theory as it states that learners have a limit or "zone" as to how much they learn and that this requires scaffolding by an educator or competent peer.

The core of funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) states that ethnographic visits to students' homes by educators help to build a body of experiences and cultural resources that can be drawn upon to transform educational practices. Thus, educators should not overlook the abundance of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic elements found in the community (Ovando & Combs, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). "With adequate training on issues of cultural sensitivity, teachers are very capable of collecting a wealth of data on community knowledge and skills and personal and working histories" (Ovando & Combs, 2018, p. 398). In addition, the diversity of language and prior knowledge that students bring to the classroom enrich lessons. Utilizing Moll et al.'s (1992) ethnographic surveys, data on community knowledge such as skills and personal/work experiences help teachers to better understand students and "explore theoretical issues of culture and community" (p. 399).

I note that the data collection made possible through funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) is not pragmatic for college instructors but problematic, as instructors who engage with families, friends, and community members of adult college students risk violating FERPA. Therefore, funds of knowledge resources via CRP are operationalized through fostering trust among students and educators. Through environments that foster a sense of belonging, students and educators can engage in conversations on beliefs, cultures, and lived experiences.

There is little research to gain insight on ELLs' perceptions of their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. Moreover, instructors and academic support staff are often not aware of the social factors outside the classroom that hinder literacy skills. Learning about the challenges that students face will help build the much-

needed relationships among educators and ELLs and assist in the development of programming to support this growing body of students. These additional services may include academic coaching for ELLs, learning assistance in the classrooms, emergency textbook grants, and specialized tutoring for ELLs. Moreover, the influence of these services and relationships within the college may 1) help students become aware of the diversity within the community, 2) assist with acclimating to their new environment, 3) help families and students feel welcomed and valued, 4) build trust, and 5) help position ELLs for graduate school or career positions upon graduation.

Synthesis of Findings with the Extant Literature

As the population of English language learners in U.S. institutes of higher education continue to grow and become more diverse, there is a growing need to shift the paradigm on how instructors develop curriculum and engage English language learners. Moreover, there is the responsibility of institutes of higher education to provide the much needed academic, social, and emotional support to increase incoming English language learners' sense of belonging.

Amber shared an experience that hindered her from applying to a four-year college, as her guidance counselor deflated her sense of being and perceived level of preparedness: "Oh no, you should go to a community college because of your language." Amber's frustration during her reflection was palpable. It had not only delayed her a year but also affected her perception on her level of preparedness, which became deeply rooted. Similarly, as Michael began his college career, he was placed into classes taught in English with no assistance from an ESL course. He struggled the first year as he received poor grades. He revealed, "I tried to read the book, and I read it so many times,

but at the same time, I failed the first test. I was hesitant. Should I continue or not?” Had Michael been placed into an ESL course and introduced to tutoring services and academic coaching, his sense of belonging and perception of his level of preparedness would have increased. Like the themes of preparedness and belonging found in my analysis, Vega’s (2018) research on college choice and community college transfer decision-making of high achieving first-generation Latinx transfer students found themes of inadequate guidance from school personnel, access to greater opportunities, and support and motivation. This lends evidence to the growing need to train educational staff and instructors on CRP.

Research shows that pedagogy that employs context that draws from students’ cultures, experiences, and languages enhances learning (Cummins, 2011; Davis et al., 2013; Gay, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lau, 2012; Martin-Beltran et al., 2017; Van Wyk, 2016); however, the growing diversity of the English language learner population in the U.S. education system created challenges for educators in institutes of higher education. Thus, instructors are struggling to learn about their students’ cultures, languages, and academic and non-academic difficulties. Jack, a participant in the current research, confirmed, “I would [engage more], that would be my comfort zone.” Similarly, Debra shared, “I don’t find it interesting, and I have a harder time.” It is imperative to note that if course content drew upon the interests of the participants, their level of engagement would have increased. Themes of course content, professors, students, preparedness, and belonging influenced the interactions within the classroom. Similar themes were found in the extant literature, including support and motivation (Vega, 2018), motivation and preparedness for university studies, internal struggles and changes,

changes in the social domain (Saddler & Sundin, 2019), and student capabilities and skills (Jabbar & Mirza, 2019).

Cultural differences among English language learners from diverse backgrounds also influence communications (Gay, 2001; Gee, 2001, 2014a, 2014b; Hillard, 2017; Murphy & Neu, 1996; Nawyn et al., 2012; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993). Röver (2015) found that linguistic competence may be difficult for English learners to develop. Debra, a participant in the current research, shared, “I’m still afraid that some people might think, ‘Oh my god, her responses are dumb’ or ‘Her English is not that good’ or ‘She has this accent.’” Other participants were reluctant to engage in the classroom and with students as a result of their perceived inability to communicate effectively in English. However, as shown in the current findings, opportunities provided by professors, students, tutoring, family, work, community, and leisure facilitated natural use of English where the students were able to practice the developing English literacy skills. Similar themes were found in the extant literature: family factors, support and motivation (Vega, 2018); motivation and preparedness for university studies, internal struggles and changes, and changes in the social domain (Saddler & Sundin, 2020); and culture as a vehicle for learning, adjusting to culture, and student capability and skills (Jabbar & Mirza, 2019).

Instructors often believe that students who sit in the back or do not engage are not interested; however, instructors who reach out to these students develop meaningful relationships (Nieto, 2017) that enhance belonging, perceptions on preparedness, literacy skills, and academic performance. Debra, a participant in the current study, shared, “I was so blessed to have these teachers who called on me a lot. They knew I had trouble with my language.” Other participants had similar experiences. Elizabeth added, “My

professor used to call me for extra hours, just to proofread...She really uplifted me.” Moreover, the findings of the current study found that it was the developing relationship between professors, tutors, and students that strengthened the participants’ resolve to persevere, helped to develop a sense of belonging, increased the participants’ perceptions on their level of preparedness, and connected participants’ English to student services. Similar themes were found in the extant literature: family factors, access to greater opportunities, and support and motivation (Vega, 2018); motivation and preparedness for university studies, internal struggles and changes, changes in the social domain (Saddler & Sundin, 2020); culture as a vehicle for learning, adjusting to culture, and student capability and skills (Jabbar & Mirza, 2019).

Drawing upon culturally responsive pedagogy, the current study found that English language learners’ perceptions on their ability to complete college level courses are low in the beginning. While they lacked a sense of belonging in the beginning, they persevered and over time developed a sense of belonging and increase their perceptions on their abilities to complete college courses taught in English. Supporting themes in the data included: *preparedness, belonging, perseverance, relationships, and resources*. Subthemes included identity, professors, students, course materials, family, community, tutoring, translating, leisure, and work. Themes will be discussed in detail in the Findings chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of the current study was to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as a research methodology, as the IPA methodology best suited the data collection and analysis and resulted in a detailed, holistic examination of the participants' lived experiences. Moreover, IPA offered a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003), as the participants are making sense of their world while the researcher is making sense of the participants' world (Smith et al., 2012). Smith et al. (2012) also note that Ricoeur (1970) considered an alternative double hermeneutic, "which distinguishes between two broad interpretative positions, a hermeneutics of empathy, and a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 26). This fit the context of the current study as well, as I sought to draw out the meaning of the participants' experiences during analysis. Research questions that guided the study fit within the framework of IPA and included:

Research Question: Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, what are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English?

Secondary Research Questions that sought to refine the primary research question:

What do college-level English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?

What do college-level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?

Participants included six ($n = 6$) English language learners in a public, urban four-year university. Six participants were selected as this sample adhered to the maximum number of suggested participants of the IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2012).

Research Paradigm

An IPA methodology was selected, as the study sought to interpret ELLs' interpretations of their perceptions on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. IPA is an approach that encompasses qualitative, experiential, and psychological research. It is through IPA that funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) were gathered from ELLs and operationalized through culturally responsive pedagogy (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b).

There are three key areas within the IPA methodology, which include phenomenology (the study of a phenomena), hermeneutics (theory of interpretation), and idiography (the concern with the particular). Smith et al. (2012) state that the necessity of IPA is to provide a detailed interpretation of one's lived experience: "It [IPA] aims to conduct this [lived] examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems" (p. 32). Through a meticulous dual hermeneutic cycle focusing on one's personal experience, the researcher can provide a detailed analysis of each participant, then theme and particulars of the group of participants.

It is imperative that the historic foundations of IPA are discussed. While I noted that the methodology is grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, it is

important to discuss the contributions of the following philosophers, who Smith et al. (2012) have drawn upon to lay the foundation of IPA: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre for their focus on the lived experience and one's perception of that experience (phenomenology), and Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer for their emphasis on interpretation (hermeneutics). Paired with the meticulous attention to the particular (idiography), IPA provides a rich foundation for data collection, analysis, and representation. More on IPA and its instances in the literature will be discussed in the next section.

Research Method

Since the aim of the current study was to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their levels of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as a research methodology. IPA is comprised of a descriptive phenomenological component and an interpretative component in *hermeneutic turn* (Smith et al., 2012). Thus, a hermeneutic cycle “thickens our understanding of the research process” (p. 29) and allows for dynamic descriptions of a phenomena which “connects to our everyday experience” (p. 32). In a recent IPA study, Saddler (2020) built upon the stance of Smith and Osborn (2003), stating that the “sense making process” (p. 3) is a double hermeneutic as participants are making sense of their world while the researcher is making sense of the participants' world:

The analytic process here begins with the detailed examination of each case-study, but then cautiously moves to an examination of similarities and differences across

the cases, to produce fine-grained accounts of patterns of meaning for participants reflecting upon a shared experience. (Smith et al., 2012, p. 38)

In another recent study, which examined factors that enabled or constrained participants who participated in a community practices workshop, Guldberg and Mackness (2009) noted that as a methodology, IPA aligned well with the data and analytical needs of the study, as it was grounded in interpretations of the participants' stories through "open ended and flexible enquiry" (p. 530), adding to Creanor et al.'s (2006) argument that the methodology not only offers the participants' detailed narrative by interpreting their perspectives for themselves but the researcher, as well (Guldberg & Mackness, 2009). Thus, as the participants gain insight through their own interpretations, the researcher gains insight—funds of knowledge—on the students' perspective. Hence, the employment of IPA provides rich data and critical analysis that effectively assists with funds of knowledge that can inform pedagogy and protocol to assist English language learners.

Population and Recruitment

The participants totaled six ($n = 6$), as this is the effective total number of participants prescribed for the interpretative phenomenological analysis (Guldberg & Mackness, 2009; Saddler, 2020; Smith et al., 2012). There were three recent IPA studies with six participants. Saddler and Sundin (2020) conducted an IPA with six participants that examined how nontraditional students nearing completion made sense of their decision-making process to attend higher education. The researchers stated that the data from six participants "indicated that we had obtained enough information to allow rich analysis" (p. 335). In another IPA, Helfrick (2019) explored the role of professional

development on teachers' experiences with CRP. The researcher referenced Smith (2004), as IPA employs "small, purposeful samples for whom the research question will be meaningful" (Helfrick, 2019, p. 94). In a third IPA study, Vega (2018) examined the college choice and community college transfer decision-making processes of high achieving, first-generation Latinx transfer students.

Returning to the study of Guldberg and Mackness (2009), in which the researchers employed an IPA methodology with a quantitative component, it is important to note that while the participants totaled 26, only 11 participants were interviewed, whereas the quantitative analyses included 26 participants. Similarly, Jabbar and Mirza (2019) conducted a phenomenological study that interviewed 22 participants. Smith et al. (2012) advocated for six participants as optimal.

Snowball sampling was used to target participants who Smith et al. (2012) noted as "information-rich cases that promise to add in-depth understanding" (Sanders, 2020, p. 5). Targeted outreach to students enrolled in ESL courses and conversations with ESL instructors and students who have taken an ESL course commenced once Institutional Review Board approval is received.

Participants completed a *Consent Form*, which was completed electronically and stored in a secured cabinet in a secured space. Vetting of potential participants entailed a checklist that included: 1) the participant was enrolled in an ESL course or completed an ESL course during his/her/their college career, 2) the potential participant was not at risk of losing their financial aid/if necessary, has submitted a Satisfactory Academic Performance (SAP) appeal, and 3) the potential participant did not intend to transfer or leave the institute (foreseen military, travel, family commitments).

Sampling Strategies and Criteria

The participants totaled six ($n = 6$) as this is the effective total number of participants prescribed for the IPA (Guldberg & Mackness, 2009; Saddler, 2020; Smith et al., 2012). Snowball sampling was employed to target participants who Smith et al. (2012) noted as “information-rich cases that promise to add in-depth understanding” (Sanders, 2020, p. 5). To clarify, students who agreed to participate in the study were either enrolled in an ESL course or completed an ESL course during their college career. In addition, they expressed an interest in engaging in their studies and completing the semester in comparison to students who may be attending college based on parental/familial instruction and may not have bought into their education. Thus, snowballing helped to ensure that participants were likely to complete the study. All participants were students at a four-year university.

Data Collection

The current IPA design included interviews with six participants. One-on-one participant interviews via Zoom lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes (Smith et al., 2009); however, recent interviews in phenomenological studies ranged from as little as 39 minutes to 150 minutes (Jabbar & Mizra, 2019; Normann, 2017; Saddler & Sundin, 2020; Vega, 2018). It was imperative that the researcher built rapport with the participants and considered unknowns (Smith et al., 2009), including the actions and inactions of the participants (Alase, 2017). I noted that building rapport and empathy and becoming a “naïve and curious listener” (Smith et al., 2009) may take time; however, participants were open and responsive to inquiries. In addition, I considered that

participants may have technological issues, for example, a weak internet connection, that may result in rescheduled interviews; however, there were no technology issues.

I realized that follow-up interviews with participants to confirm meaning and/or expand on responses may be necessary. Strategies for follow up included, 1) stating that a follow-up meeting may be requested on the consent form and 2) asking during the interview if I may contact the participant via email to schedule a brief Zoom meeting to confirm meaning and/or expand on their answers. Once the relationship between the participant and researcher developed, participants showed a willingness to meet as needed.

Drawing upon the framework of CRP, the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

The current study sought to answer the following **research question**:

RQ: Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, what are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English?

The following **secondary research questions** sought to refine the primary research question:

SRQ1: What do college-level English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?

SRQ2: What do college level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?

Interview questions, which adhered to the guidelines of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2012) were as follows:

Interview Questions 1:

- Tell me how you feel about your level of preparedness to complete college-level courses taught in English.
- Tell me about your transition to becoming a college student.
- How did you position yourself within the classroom? With the teachers? With the students? With the course materials?
- Tell me about your sense of belonging within the classroom. With the teachers? With the students? With the course content?
- Describe your use of English language in the classroom. With the material? With your reading? With your writing?

Possible prompts: Why? Can you tell me more about ____? How do you think ____ contributes to your literacy skill?

Interview Questions 2:

- Tell me about the linguistic (language) influences on your literacy skills.
- Describe times when you applied words or phrases from your native language to help you understand English. Were you successful?
- Tell me about language habits that you have. Do you switch from your native language to English? Why do you do this? Do you keep making the same speech errors in English and know the correct way to say it in English? Why do you do this?

- How do you perceive yourself as an English speaker? Does this affect your desire to venture outside your community? Does this affect your ability to communicate outside your community?

Possible prompts: Why? Can you tell me more about ____? How do you think ____ contributes to your literacy skill?

Interview Questions 3:

- Tell me about the academic (in-the-classroom and university) influences on your literacy skills.
- Tell me about your level of engagement in the classroom. With peers? With instructors? With administrators and staff outside the classroom?
- Tell me about the support services that you engaged in while on-campus. What was your level of engagement?
- How did you spend your time while on campus? Who did you spend it with? Tell me whether you attended or participated in university events and about your experiences at these events?

Possible prompts: Why? Tell me more about ____? How do you think ____ contributes to your literacy skill?

Interview Questions 4:

- Tell me about the non-academic (outside the classroom and university) influences on your literacy skills.
- Tell me about your responsibilities within your family. How do these responsibilities affect your studies? What language/s are used in the home?

- Tell me about your employment or obligations outside the home. How do these responsibilities affect your studies? What language/s are used in these spaces?
- How do you spend your leisure time? Can you tell me about your favorite activities/interests? What language/s are used during these activities/interests?
- Tell me about your level of engagement when course materials draw upon your favorite activities or interests?

Possible prompts: Why? Can you tell me more about ____? How do you think ____ contributes to your literacy skill?

While I was aware that *interview questions 2*, which sought to understand the linguistic influences on literacy skills of the interviewee, could be categorized under the non-academic influences of *interview questions 4*, I believe it was important to explore the linguistic influences, as participants may have been struggling with linguistic influences such as negative transfer and fossilization, which may have impacted their confidence and sense of belonging. Smith et al. (2012) noted that “the interview is a complex phenomenon” (p. 67), adding that the interviewer typically repeats questions and seeks more detail to further clarify what was just said. Smith et al. called this “going deeper” (p. 68). Furthermore, the interview questions lent to a conceptual framework that entails “balancing good phenomenological description with insightful analysis” (Guldberg & Mackness, 2009, p. 530) that related to the theories of the study, including funds of knowledge, moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy.

The study was conducted remotely with interviews via Zoom, a video communication software/service. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by Zoom; however, the accuracy Zoom transcripts were poor and unusable. The researcher transcribes each video line-by-line. Participants' names were not transcribed, as they were assigned pseudonyms, as follows: Amber, Debra, Michael, Jack, Elizabeth, and Donna. Participants had the ability to review their transcript of the interview for clarity and accuracy. Consent forms were stored securely in a locked unit and space. I understood the importance of confidentiality and adhered strictly to FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99), which protects the privacy of student education records.

All communications adhered to social distancing guidelines of the state and university. All communications were conducted through email or remotely through Zoom. All interviews were scheduled primarily through Zoom—there were neither in-person meetings nor did I or a participant request an in-person meetings. However, was prepared to conduct in-person interviews if requested by the participant and allowed by social distancing mandates. I noted that this may be necessary as some students may not have stable internet connection or the technical acumen required for successful communications; however, participants that lacked technology and technical acumen may have been vetted during the recruitment stage. This was not the case. Qualitative interviews commenced once IRB approval was received and participants consent forms were returned.

- **Qualitative Data Collection:**
 - Participant interviews
 - Follow-up interviews as needed

- Confirmation of interview clarity and accuracy
- **Responsibility of Data Collection:**
 - Interviews conducted remotely via Zoom
 - Interviews recorded via Zoom
 - Interviews transcribed by the researcher
 - Interviews stored in a locked cabinet in a secured room

Data Coding

Zoom video interviews totaling nearly nine hours were transcribed by listening to the video and transcribing line-by-line by hand, as the auto-generated transcripts by Zoom were inaccurate. During this stage, all identifiers were removed. For example, the names of the participants were changed to pseudonyms. In addition, proper names of institutions, students, or professors were removed to ensure reverse identifying was not possible. Once transcribed, the videos were meticulously viewed for inflection and body language, as IPA not only examines the participants' lived experiences through transcriptions but also the affective characteristics of how the participant engages in the examination of their experiences. After the transcriptions were completed and checked for accuracy and the participants also reviewed them for accuracy and clarity, deeper analyses were conducted.

There were seven steps in the IPA analysis. First, reading and re-reading included repetitious reading of the transcript while taking notes in a notebook to collect initial thoughts and reduce noise, insuring my initial impressions were captured. Next, *initial noting* included a close analysis of transcripts to identify how the participants examined their experiences, specifically key words and phrases, language use, conceptual

annotations, and de-contextualizing for deeper focus. Initial noting was completed by hand in the third column of Table 1. Next, developing emergent themes were noted in the first column of Table 1. Emergent themes were drawn from words and phrases expressed by the participants as they shared their experiences. It was in this stage that I began the hermeneutic cycle, in which the participant examined his or her experience and the *part* is interpreted to the *whole* and the *whole* is interpreted in relation to the *part*.

Table 1

Initial Comments: Data Analysis Steps 1 and 2

| Initial comments from <u>One</u> participant | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Emergent Themes | Original Transcript | Exploratory Comments |
| (themes here) | (original transcript here) | (notes here) |

Once emergent themes were noted, abstractions leading to the development of a super-ordinate themes occurred (see Table 2). Abstraction identified patterns between emergent themes and helped to develop super-ordinate themes. This process was repeated until all similar themes were placed under super-ordinate themes.

Table 2

Abstraction: Data Analysis Step 3

| Abstraction Leading to the Development of a Super-Ordinate Theme from <u>One</u> Participant |
|--|
| (super-ordinate theme) |
| (similar themes that can be placed under the super-ordinate theme) |

Once abstractions for each participant were completed, subsumption leading to the development of a super-ordinate theme began (see Table 3). This stage was helpful as it refined the analysis of the previous stage by developing super-ordinate themes as themes emerged (Table 3).

Table 3

Subsumption: Data Analysis Step 4

Subsumption Leading to the Development of a Super-Ordinate Theme from One Participant

(refine super-ordinate theme)

(refine similar themes that can be placed under the super-ordinate theme)

Next, super-ordinate themes and themes from one participant were placed in a table (see Table 4). This included themes, page and line numbers, and key words. This was the final step before compiling all the participants’ data in one table. It was important to review all the participants’ data to ensure similar themes were labeled properly.

Table 4

Table of Super-Ordinate Themes from One Participant: Data Analysis Step 5

Table of Super-Ordinate Themes from One Participant

(refine super-ordinate theme)

(refine similar themes that can be placed under the super-ordinate theme)

Once the themes for each participant were refined, a master list of themes for all participants was developed (see Table 5). This was the first time that participants’ data was placed in one document. Extracts from previous tables were placed under each

theme. Thus, extracts from each participant were placed under their respective super-ordinate theme.

Table 5

Master Table of Themes for the Group: Data Analysis Step 6

| Master Table of Themes for the <u>Group</u> |
|---|
| (Focus on [theme]) |
| (extraction for each participant with the page and line number) |

The final step in the data analysis included further analysis of each extract and the development of the *Identifying Recurrent Themes Table* (Table 6). In the former, I looked for particularly resonant passages while paying attention to language, i.e., similes, metaphors, and symbolisms. Similar to the analysis of previous stages, I was attentive to my interpretations and how the localized text related to the whole. In the latter, recurrent themes were listed. Per IPA, a recurrent theme must be present in at least one-third or half of the participant interviews. The completed version of Table 6 was included in my results.

Table 6

Identifying Recurrent Themes: Data Analysis Step 7

| Step 7: Identifying Recurrent Themes | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------------------------|
| Super-ordinate themes | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 | Present in over half sample? |
| (Theme 1) | Y/N |
| (Theme 2) | Y/N |

Limitations

It was imperative that I extracted suitable evidence of the themes. The study produced a considerable amount of interview text and that ample time was required to analyze the transcripts, particularly since the Zoom transcript was unusable and transcription was done manually. In addition, I noted that the nature of qualitative research involves transparency, a meticulous attention to detail, and potential for researcher bias. I have paid close attention to my transcriptions and my interpretations of the data to ensure that my preexisting knowledge did not affect my analysis and that my interpretations were grounded in the data. While I noted the known limitations, I was vigilant in my efforts as additional limitations could have been exposed.

Reciprocity

Smith et al. (1992) wrote, “Qualitative research has a different subject, and tends to focus on meaning, sense-making, and communicative action” (p. 45) and IPA research must be prepared for a “certain amount of unpredictability” (p. 55). Thus, I understood that during the study, particularly during the interview process, participants may reflect and those reflections may be therapeutic or result in the need for student support services, (e.g., counseling services, a food bank, textbooks and/or transportation funds, academic coaching, or tutoring, etc.). I was aware of university and departmental protocols where the study is being conducted and ensured that participants were aware of these services and referred immediately. It was my hope that participants found the engagement of sharing their experiences and perceptions rewarding and that they felt that they were making valuable contributions that would help enhance ELLs’ experiences in institutes of higher education.

Trustworthiness

During my tenure as an administrator for academic support in an urban, four-year university, I have worked with a diverse population of students, many from low SES communities. Working with at-risk students, particularly ELLs, has exposed me to the challenges that many college students face. While my perception of others has been related to my beliefs, experiences, and perspectives, I was cautious as I interpret the lived experiences of the participants in my study. IPA allowed for some subjectivity, as the researcher should have an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. This allows the researcher to build rapport with the participants so they become comfortable. However, Smith et al. (2009) noted that the empathetic researcher cannot share experiences that belong to the participant. Likewise, Villegas and Lucas (2002b) wrote that the empathetic teacher who draws upon CRP cannot share experiences that belong to the students. Thus, while I am empathetic, the experiences of each participant are individual and unique.

I wrote in a reflective journal in which internal dialogues on perceptions and beliefs were essayed to clarity. A notebook was kept for additional research on CRP, IPA, and related themes that arose during the research project. I was aware that interpretations of others' interpretations (double hermeneutic) called for meticulous transcriptions and understanding of an array of themes, all of which were detailed in the discussion chapter.

Interviews were transcribed by me. Initial comments were made on the transcripts of each participant's interview (see Table 1). Then, developing emergent themes were noted (Table 2). Once the emergent themes were fleshed, super-ordinate themes for each

participant were extracted (Table 3), and a master list of themes for all participants were completed (Table 4). Once a master list of themes was developed, themes of the participants were synthesized (Table 5).

In addition, Smith et al. (2012) draw upon Yardley (2000) for principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research, such as 1) organization, sensitivity, and empathy, 2) commitment and rigor, and 3) transparency and coherence. I approached the study with organization, sensitivity, and empathy, as interviewing participants were affected by the rapport of the interviewee and researcher. Smith et al. (2012) wrote, “showing empathy, putting the participants at ease, recognizing interactional difficulties, and negotiating the intricate power-play” is paramount to obtaining good data.

I exhibited principles of commitment and rigor, as the interview and analysis stages took a considerable amount of attention. I was aware that I must “keep the balance between closeness and separateness.” In addition, I understood that participants may believe that I am in a position of authority at the university where the research will be conducted and that I must “bracket” (Smith et al., 2012) my pre-existing perceptions, as I am aware of the extant literature and have witnessed influences on ELLs’ literacy skills.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study complied with social distancing guidelines set forth by the state and the university where the research was conducted. Participant interviews and recruitment inquiries were conducted via Zoom video communication software/service. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed manually by the researcher. I noted that Zoom is FERPA compliant (see Appendix C for Zoom’s FERPA statement). Participants’ names were not transcribed. Pseudonyms were used. To clarify, identifying data was removed.

In addition, I understood the importance of confidentiality and adhered strictly to the FERPA (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99), which protects the privacy of student education records.

As noted above, I reiterate that anonymity was paramount. As Smith et al. (2012) noted, confidentiality is not possible as the study is a representation of the participants' experiences. Thus, I stated that participants have the right to withdraw at any time. If a participant was to withdraw, the data will not be used and deleted. As noted in the student participant consent form (see Appendix A), the participants' decisions on whether to participate, not participate, or withdraw will not affect their relationship with professors or the researcher: *You will NOT receive a grade for participating and this will NOT affect your grade in any course.* In addition, I was aware that participants may believe that I am in a position of authority at the university where the research was conducted, and I stated that their withdrawal from the study will not affect or influence any interactions with professors, administrators, staff, or students.

Data Storage

IRB consent forms were completed electronically and stored securely in a locked unit and space or on an encrypted data file stored in my office or home. This ensured that participants' names and identities were not linked to any information provided during the interview. Video interviews were stored on a secure, password protected storage drive/computer which only I have access to. During the transcription phase, all participants' identities and any identifiers to institutes, locations, programs, and people were removed. Once transcriptions have been completed, the Zoom videos were deleted.

The consent forms remained encrypted on a hard drive securely locked in a file cabinet in a locked room.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction to Results

Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as a research methodology, as it is comprised of descriptive phenomenological and interpretative components in hermeneutic turn (Smith et al., 2012). The Hermeneutic cycle produces a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Moreover, it is idiographic as it examines the particular at two levels, in the details and from the perspective of a specific people (Smith et al., 2021).

Recent Educational research that operationalized IPA includes the following: Vega (2018) examined the college choice and community college transfer decision-making process of high achieving first-generation Latinx transfer students. Saddler and Sundin (2020) examined how a group of non-traditional students who were on track to complete their studies made sense of their decision-making process to enroll in higher education. Helfrick (2019) explored the role of professional development on teachers' experiences with culturally responsive pedagogy. Jabbar and Mirza (2019) explored academics' perceptions of their teaching and learning strategies for students from an ethnically diverse background. While not IPA, Chen and Yang (2017) conducted a phenomenological study to examine the effects of culturally responsive teaching strategies on English language learners.

The current study draws upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as the framework provided by Villegas and Lucas (2002b) helped to develop the research and interview questions and operationalized the results. Specifically, the findings will help educators to better understand the lived experiences of English language learners who may feel unprepared to enter classrooms of institutes of higher education, which may result in a lack of confidence and sense of belonging. In addition, the findings may help higher education administrators to develop support services with extended hours for English language learners who may struggle with scheduling difficulties due to family, employment, etcetera. Providing university communications in various languages so announcements and marketing materials are accessible to ELLs may also help with awareness of support services. Furthermore, the findings will help educators to understand themselves and that English language learners enter the classroom with experiences, beliefs, and cultures that while may be similar to those of educators, they are unique. Thus, by operationalizing the six strands developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002), educators 1) gain social consciousness, 2) develop an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, 3) develop as agents of change, 4) embrace a constructivist foundation for culturally responsive teaching, 5) learn about their students lived experiences, and 6) cultivate the practice of educating others on culturally responsive teaching.

The current study sought to answer the primary research question: *Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, what are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English?* Secondary research questions included: *What do college English language*

learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance, and what do college level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?

Following IPA guidelines, six participants were recruited through snowball sampling and interviewed. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews averaged about one and a half hours. There were a series of eighteen questions (see Data Collection) with follow up questions such as *Why... Can you tell me more about...* and *How do you think ___ contributed to your literacy skills?* All questions were tested for validity with colleagues prior to the study. During the development stage, mock interviews were conducted with colleagues followed by a group meeting to discuss the efficacy of each question and its ability to evoke responses from the participants that answer the research questions.

The data analysis stage included entries in a reflective journal, totaling 31 pages. Interview videos totaling about nine hours were transcribed by listening to the video line-by-line, as the auto-generated transcripts by Zoom were inaccurate. Transcripts totaled 247 pages. Data analysis of the transcripts totaled 375 pages. Framed by IPA (Smith et al., 2012), this included the following for each participant: 1) extracting exploratory comments of one participant, 2) developing emergent themes of one participant, 3) abstraction leading to the development of super-ordinate themes of one participant, 4) subsumption leading to the development of super-ordinate themes of one participant, and 5) developing a table of super-ordinate themes. The data of each participant was compiled for the remainder of the analysis: 1) developing a table of super-ordinate themes and 2) identifying recurrent themes.

The study found the following themes as they relate to the primary research question, *what are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English*, include: preparedness, belonging, and persistence. Themes that relate to SRQ1, *what do college English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance*, include: family, work, community, and leisure. Themes that relate to SRQ2, *what do college level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance*, include: translating, professors, tutoring, students, and course content. While themes may overlap research questions, they were placed due to the extractions from the participants' transcripts and their proximity to the research questions.

Results of the study are discussed as they relate to the primary and secondary questions followed by a summary of the results.

Participants Profiles

Amber is an English Language Learner enrolled in a four-year public university and has completed ESL courses. She attended high school in the United States where she experienced pull-out ESL instruction. She attended one semester of community college then transferred into a four-year university. While she has taken ESL courses at the university, she continues to develop her English language skills. Amber speaks Spanish and considered herself an intermediate beginner at the beginning of her college career.

Debra is an English Language Learner enrolled in a four-year public university and has completed ESL courses. She attended high school in the United States where she experienced pull-out ESL instruction. She enrolled in a four-year public university after

completing high school. While she has taken ESL courses at the university, she continues to develop her English language skills. Debra speaks Spanish and considered herself an intermediate beginner at the beginning of her college career.

Michael is an English language learner enrolled in a four-year public university and has completed ESL courses. He attended high school in his native country. After a gap of ten years, of which he worked to provide for his family, he enrolled as a non-traditional student in a public four-year university. He had little to no formal English language instruction. Michael speaks Spanish and considered himself a beginner at the beginning of his college career. He continues to develop his English language skills today.

Jack is an English language learner enrolled in a four-year public university and has complete ESL courses. He had English as a foreign language instruction in his native country; however, he stated that the courses focused on British English which made his transition to courses taught in English in the U.S. challenging. Jack is enrolled as an international student and speaks a dialect of Hindi. He continues to develop his English language skills today.

Elizabeth is an English language learner in a four-year public university and has completed ESL courses. She had English as a foreign language instruction in her native country; however, like Jack, she stated the courses taught British English which made her transition to courses taught in English in the U.S. challenging. Elizabeth is enrolled as an international student and speaks a dialect of Hindi. She continues to develop her English language skills today.

Donna is an English language learner in a four-year public university and has completed ESL courses. She attended high school in her native country and after starting a family immigrated to the U.S. and enrolled as a non-traditional student in a four-year public university. Her family followed as she secured employment and settled in her studies. Donna speaks Spanish and received no English instruction in her native country. She considered herself a beginner as she began her college career and continues to develop her English language skills today.

Perceptions of ELLs

Through a detailed analysis of the data, themes of preparedness, persistence, and belonging were found among all participants. These themes answer the primary and secondary research questions: *What are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English? What do college level English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?* and *What do college level English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?* The following interpretative phenomenological analysis, which includes quotes from each participant, is presented by theme. The rich data provided also helped to elucidate a linear trajectory in which the participants noted that they felt unprepared entering entered college level classrooms with instruction in English. At this time, their sense of belonging decreased as they were unable to quickly communicate in class due to their limited English language skills. For example, Debra shared, “I was afraid and shy”; Michael expressed, “I still have that fear in me of insecurity”; Jack exclaimed, “It was a big problem—I wasn’t able to adapt!”; Elizabeth felt deflated, “It was very depressing for me in the initial stage”;

Donna in a short breath, exasperated, “It was hard.”; and Amber, who was frustrated by an experience during her transition from high school to an institute of higher education, shared, “I cried a lot because I heard everybody speaking English.” however, through perseverance, their sense of belonging began to increase, and they were able to successfully complete college courses instructed in English.

It is with Amber that I begin, as her experience during her transition to higher education affected her perception on her level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Super-ordinate Theme: Preparedness

Amber is an English language learner in higher education who completed English as a Second Language courses and subject courses taught in English. While she is a successful college student, an experience during her transition from high school to college continues to frustrate her:

When I was a senior in high school, my goal was, and my dream was to go right to [a specific four-year university], but my guidance counselor told me, ‘Oh no, you should go to a community college because of your language. You won’t be able to go right away to a four-year university or college.’ So that was, I would say, the hardest thing in my life, because you don’t expect that. And, because [acceptance at a specific four-year university] was my dream.

Amber’s frustration was palpable as she shared this experience. Amber enrolled in courses in a community college, where she felt that she was wasting her time. After a semester, she enrolled in the four-year university of her choice. When she discussed her enrollment at the university, her demeanor shifted to that of a proud student who had

been accepted to the institution that was her first-choice; however, her demeanor was in flux between proud and deflated:

When I got into college, I don't want to say that I was prepared by that time, because my English wasn't that good at all. I really wasn't prepared. I told myself, *oh, you won't be able to do this*. I cried a lot because I heard everybody speaking English.

Amber's interaction with her high school guidance counselor affected her dream of applying to a four-year university. She exhibited frustration while sharing this experience, lending evidence to its deep roots. While Amber was excited to enter a four-year university, she cried because of her inability to communicate in English in the classroom.

Debra is an English language learner in higher education who completed English as a Second Language courses and subject courses taught in English. Prior to entering a four-year university in the U.S., she completed English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses in her native country. While discussing her transition, her demeanor shifted from proud to deflated. She was confident in her English skills due to enrollment in EFL courses; however, once enrolled in courses taught in English on U.S. soil, her paradigm had altered:

I feel like I need more practice with my English, because it was not an easy thing to learn. I came from [my country] to here, and the language was completely different. I was in an EFL class from sixth grade and then middle school and then high school, and the last two years of high school, I went to regular classes, but it

didn't help me. I felt like I didn't learn anything throughout my middle school to high school years.

This acute altered state left Debra confused. She struggled with the notion that EFL instruction in her native education system had failed her. This resulted in an uncomfortable experience once she entered classrooms in the U.S. Poor grades further salted the wound, as she exclaimed, "It was horrible! It was horrible! My transition was not good because of my English. I thought I knew how to write a proper essay. I didn't know anything in my English class, when I got my first F." Debra continued to discuss how she had been an 'A' student who values her grades and is perceived as a good student by instructors and peers, which indicates that she valued her **identity** of being a good student.

Michael is an English language learner in higher education who completed English as a Second Language courses and subject courses taught in English. During Michael's first semester at a four-year institution, he struggled in subject courses taught in English. This resulted in a stressful experience, as he was immersed in classes taught in English without the aid of English language instruction. His demeanor while discussing this experience was that of frustration and confusion:

When I got in [to the university], one of the first [I was accepted to]! I guess it was a big mistake on my behalf and also on behalf of the school to make me take a [major] course, and that's why I got a C- on the first test. Because I grab a little bit of the theories of understanding, but most of the questions were so difficult to me that I barely understood it. So, especially I tried to read the book, and I read it so many times, but at the same time, I failed the first test. I was hesitant. Should I

continue or not? So that was a big effort for me to try to understand, and also, I realized that I had a bit of a problem since when I came to this country, I didn't know any English. I didn't even know what 'do' means—an auxiliary! Like, I didn't even know that! I was very confused.

As Michael entered a four-year university, he felt unprepared as he was immersed in subject courses taught in English. He did not enter an ESL course until his second semester. He struggled as he acquired vocabulary on his own. Similar to Debra, Michael received poor grades; however, it is his ability to acquire vocabulary that he emphasized: “I always felt hesitant due to the vocabulary. I always thought that I was missing vocabulary.” Shaking his head in frustration, “I was limited.”

Jack is an English language learner in higher education who completed English as a Second Language courses and subject courses taught in English. Similar to Debra, Jack experienced difficulties when he realized that the EFL instruction in his native school system did not prepared him for coursework taught in English at a four-year university in the U.S. His demeanor while discussing his transition exhibited frustration and concern:

I was shy. I wasn't comfortable talking with professors or being part of the discussion in the classroom because I wasn't able to explain everything to the professor, or I wasn't able to comm—present myself that comfortably because I was taught, I was taught in the British English, English, so some of the words were, I wasn't able to explain it to the people over here. There was a big problem, and I wasn't able to adopt some of the words or wasn't able to explain myself with some of the words that [the professor] used to use.

Jack expressed that vocabulary was an issue, which was also shared by Michael; however, his concern was palpable as he felt confident in his English skills acquired through EFL instruction in his native country. Once he realized that he had been taught British English, he became dispirited. His ability to communicate in the classroom diminished. Similar to Amber, Debra, and Michael, he exasperated, “It wasn’t that easy for me.”

Elizabeth is an English language learner in higher education who completed English as a Second Language courses and subject courses taught in English. She had a similar experience to Debra and Jack as she discussed difficulties transitioning to the level of English required by the professor. Elizabeth had also learned English in EFL classes in her native school system; however, she learned that it was not the same English used in classroom in the U.S. While she was energetic throughout the interview, her demeanor shifted when discussing her challenging transition:

When I was given my first English class, I really had a hard time to pass it, because the type of English that my professor used was expecting from me to know was really different. So, initially, used to get bad grades like B+ and C, because I’m like a student who gets As. So that was very depressing for me in the initial stages, but when I asked my professor on how I can be better at my language [she responded] English is something which you should really know for your career, for your professional development, and so on. So, I had a hard time with her as well.

Elizabeth reflected her relationship to her professor. She not only exhibited frustration as she felt the instructor did not offer additional help but lent evidence to the absence of a

relationship between student and instructor. This combined with the differences between her EFL instruction and the English used in U.S. instruction deflated her confidence:

So that confidence [from my previous school] wasn't coming to me. There was no one to teach me or help me with something like that. And the first day I went to class, I was judged based—the professor asked me to introduce myself and the way I introduced my language and everything. I was looked upon in a different way. Also, I wouldn't have to like say, but my professor used to think that I am an average student or something like that. She didn't use to see me like equal! Just like every other student she used to see. So, If I would say, 'I don't get this idea. Can I view this paraphrase for the class?' She would say, 'Oh yeah, you can do it by yourself at home, but not here.' So, you know, that confidence left me from the very first day, because of this bad language barrier.

In this passage, Elizabeth struggled to remain energetic and became frustrated, lending evidence to the value she places on her **identity** as a good student and the experiences of feeling unprepared to communicate in English and alone in a U.S. institute of higher education. While Elizabeth concluded in a passive tone, “this bad language barrier,” it was evident that she composed herself to ensure that she respected the instructor. Then she added on the class, “I had a hard time passing it.”

Donna is an English language learner in higher education who completed English as a Second Language courses and subject courses taught in English. Her experience differed from Amber, Debra, Michael, Jack, and Elizabeth. However, Donna's also experienced a revelation. While registering for classes, she took a placement test. The test revealed that she should be placed in a third-level ESL course. This excited her at first as

she would save money, but her excitement was short-lived. Donna quickly realized that she was underprepared for her ESL-III course and that she required basic skills such as pronunciation:

I took a test, and they put me in the third level. I went to the third level, and I said, 'Now I was going to save money because I'm not paying for the first or second level,' but that was a mistake! Because in the first or second level, they teach you how to put your tongue for pronunciation.

In addition, Donna shared that she did well in her ESL courses; however, she struggled with subject courses taught in English. Her demeanor suggested that she did whatever was necessary to succeed, but "It was hard" as she was not only enrolled in subject courses taught in English but also extra ESL courses:

I was having good grades in ESL, but it is another world, because in college, there are fewer students, and the teachers are on top of you. You have to care about your classes, and you don't have anybody telling you to do this or that. But for me, to do the papers, I was asking for help. They were sending me to classes for one credit. I used to have two classes extra.

Like the others, Donna struggled with college-level courses taught in English. During the interview, she disclosed that she is a non-traditional student, which contributed to her demeanor during the interview: "Do whatever you have to do."

Close analyses of the English language learners' transcripts exhibited that they were **unprepared to engage in college courses taught in English**. Moreover, participants were affected by English language experiences in the classroom and leading up to their college career. The **subtheme of identity** was also noted as Debra and

Elizabeth were affected by how others perceived them, as they had self-identified as good student. Good student is conceptualized as a student who attends, engages, and received good grades, particularly (A)s, in class. Next, I will address the theme of belonging.

Super-ordinate Theme: Belonging

In the previous section, I have found that the participants did not feel prepared to complete college courses taught in English. While preparedness is one theme in the data, which resides in the affective domain, the study found that the theme of belonging existed among all participants. Moreover, the data showed a trajectory from a lack of belonging to the development of belonging.

Lack of Belonging

Amber lacked a sense of belonging in most of her classes. This was due to her inability to communicate effectively in English during class. She expressed, “I just kept quiet.” Moreover, the time and energy that it took her to understand course materials was exhausting. The only class where she felt a sense of belonging was her math class. Amber was shaking her head as she discussed her sense of belonging:

To be honest, the only course that I really felt that I belonged to were the math courses. The rest, I was like, ‘This is not for me.’ I thought it was hard to know all the words to understand something. It was a lot of time. It took me a lot of time...sometimes to read, to know that I had to read the chapter of the section two or three times to understand it. So, that made me feel that I didn’t belong to those courses.

As Amber continued to struggle in the classroom during her first year, she felt alone: “I didn’t have friends by that time.” This also affected her sense of belonging, which further

decreased her perception on her level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Debra lacked a sense of belonging in her classes in the beginning of her academic career. Like Amber, her lack of a sense of belonging hindered her engagement in the classroom. Moreover, she shared that she compared what she would have said to the answers of other students, which suggests the importance of her **identity** as a good student and developing English speaker. Debra's tone while discussing this was of embarrassment and frustration, as she wanted to speak in class; however, her accent and level of English hindered her sense of belonging:

Sometimes if I don't speak or if I don't participate in the class, even though I'm paying attention, sometimes I feel like I don't belong in that class. Because I don't participate. I've been in classes where my classmates, they participate a lot! And, sometimes, I'm about to participate, and what they are saying, I feel that it is a better response than what I was about to say. Sometimes, I feel like I don't really belong to that class, even though I'm paying attention, and I'm doing all of my assignments, but I feel because I'm still afraid that some people might think, "Oh my God, her responses are dumb" or "Her English is not that good" or "She has this accent," so probably, I'm feeling a little bit afraid or it still, and sometimes, I feel like I don't belong. Just because I'm afraid to participate!

Debra was afraid to participate because she felt that she did not belong in the class. Her inability to communicate in English quickly and effectively during class affected her participation. She exclaimed, "It blocks me to socialize!" Furthermore, she felt that students would think poorly of her, as she self-identified as a good student. Her inner

voice ridiculed her: “Oh my gosh, I shouldn’t have said that. I should have stayed quiet and not say a word!” This affected her sense of belonging, which further decreased her perception on her level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Michael lacked a sense of belonging in the beginning of his college career. After a poor first semester, he began to consider the notion that he may not be ready for college, that time was running out: “If I don’t do this right, this is my second semester, I would have to leave [the university] because this is too much for me.” Similar to Amber and Debra, Michael felt that the other students were better prepared. He was frustrated as he shared his inability to not only read quickly but also comprehend the passage:

The fact that they’re [students] faster and something that always hurt me, is like you see people that they can read a paragraph in maybe ten seconds, five seconds. They can read pretty quick, and in my case, that I have to take only five minutes to read a simple paragraph and try to understand it and assimilate. That was always that fear that I always hated!

Michael’s fear of reading was deeply rooted. He compared his English language abilities to others who were both English language learners and native English speakers. He struggled with writing as well, comparing his writing skills to that of a high school student: “I was like, I’m writing like, probably, a junior high school kid. This is very bad! And then, the ‘C-’ is when I touched bottom.” Michael’s inability to read and comprehend texts in the classroom hindered his engagement. His writing skills weakened his resolve. It was the poor grade that further diminished his sense of belonging, which further decreased his perception on his level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Jack lacked a sense of belonging during the beginning of his college career; however, he shared that his sense of belonging wavers as he is conscious of his accent. His demeanor while sharing the following passage suggested that his identity as a good student also contributes to his lack of engagement:

I do know the answers, but I still don't do it [participate] because it won't look good among the class and it would create a different impression or there is always worry about... that people might laugh at you. But, because they don't—you have a different accent, and yeah—and I do go through some of those stuff as well. Some of the times, people do make fun of your accent, some of the time when I'm okay with it. So, some of the times, like I don't speak just because people might make fun of me.

Jack has a good understanding of course materials, though his accent prohibits him from contributing during class. He is focused on what others think of him, as others have made fun of his accent in the past. As Debra and Elizabeth expressed, Jack's **identity** as a good student affected his interactions. He expanded, "I feel that if I'm not comfortable, then I wouldn't be able to explain—[they] won't be able to understand [me]!" Jack's emphasis on this accent and what others may think of him diminished his sense of belonging, which further decreased his perception on his level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Elizabeth was excited, however, frustrated as she shared that she was judged from the first day of class. It was at this moment that she felt different: "The first day I went to class, I was judged based—the professor asked me to introduce myself and the way I introduced my language and everything—I was looked upon in a different way."

She felt like an outsider on the first day of class because of her accent and English skills. Her sense of belonging quickly drained, as she exclaimed, “It wasn’t there from the first day!” This also affected her engagement on campus: “Back then, I didn’t use much.” Elizabeth’s experience on the first day of classes diminished her sense of belonging, which further decreased her perception on her level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Donna continued to exhibit a “do whatever you have to do” demeanor while discussing her sense of belonging. Similar to Elizabeth, Donna felt like an outsider, not only because of her inability to communicate in English but also because she was a non-traditional student: “First of all, I was the oldest person in the class.” This added to her frustration to engage in English in the classroom: “Sometimes you feel intimidated to express.” Donna was comfortable with the course material; however, it was her inability to communicate in English that hindered her classroom participation: “If I have all the ideas in Spanish, but it’s hard for me to express in English.” Donna’s age and inability to communicate effectively in English during class diminished her sense of belonging, which further decreased her perception on her level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Through close examination of the data, the study found that **all participants exhibited a lack of belonging in the beginning of their college career**. This negatively impacted their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. Next, I examined the participants’ developed sense of belonging.

Developed Belonging: The data showed that all participants lacked a sense of belonging in the beginning; however, participants began to develop a sense of belonging.

This increase in a sense of belonging is also due to themes related to the study's secondary questions on the non-academic and academic factors that influence the development of second language literacy skills. These themes will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections. It is important to discuss how the participants reflected upon their transition from a lack of belonging to a developed sense of belonging, as their transition affected their perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Amber's demeanor began to shift with a sigh of relief as she shared the moment that she began to develop a sense of belonging. She was several semesters into her studies, and she did not have friends on campus. Often, she studied alone in the library. It was not until a professor approached Amber and offered to assist her with acquiring English language skills that she began to develop a sense of belonging:

I would say first, Professor ___ made me feel comfortable. She was the first one to work [with me] as a tutor. And, because it was just me at the library every single time, every semester! So, I didn't actually have friends by that time.

Amber happily added, "I believe that it is also the professor that turn me to enjoy the class," concluding, "She was amazing." It was Amber's connection to the professor that helped her to develop a sense of belonging, which had a positive effect on her level of perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Debra was concerned about her identity as a good student. She expressed that students and teachers would look upon her poorly; however, in the following passage, Debra reflected upon her experience and revealed that she had not been looked upon poorly by students and instructors, quickly adding that if she was looked at confusingly, she quickly realized that she used the wrong English words. While she seemed

ambivalent, she considered the significance of her revelation, particularly how the professor helped her to notice her language mistakes:

I feel dumb, and I feel so embarrassed. In my head, I feel like, ‘Oh my gosh, I shouldn’t have said that! I shouldn’t have said that! I should have stayed quiet and not say a word!’ I feel embarrassed now, because people start looking at you and the teachers. Thankfully, I haven’t had that case—probably, I had that case, but I realized myself that I’m saying it wrong, but the teachers might have said, ‘Oh, but what do you think about this, and if you are seeing it this way...’ She changes completely my sentences or anything, but until this day, I have never had this case where my teacher says, ‘Oh, what you’re saying is wrong.’

Debra’s sense of belonging increased when the professor assisted with second language acquisition strategies, such as repeating. Debra was able to identify her language mistakes and self-correct, which increased her confidence. Moreover, through the second language acquisition strategies of the professor, Debra developed a sense of belonging, which had a positive effect on her level of perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Michael offered a sigh of relief while discussing his increased sense of belonging. He shared that over a period, “little by little,” he started to understand English, adding, “Once you read more of the words, you feel that you have that flexible way of thinking in terms of vocabulary and everything that comes to you—it changes you!” As Michael’s sense of belonging increased as he developed vocabulary, likewise, his participation increased with time, though he still fears how others may perceive him:

Some of the fear went away. It faded, because I’m like okay if I can go through this, and these guys [students] are much better than me, I can do it! So, that is one

fear that I think if messed up that I sometimes—I feel was my position towards these other students, and the other thing is when you don't know if you really belong to that class, because of what you want to study. It took me a while to realize what I wanted to do.

It is revealing that Michael concluded, “It took me a while to realize what I wanted to do,” as this indicated that he struggled with his ability to continue with his studies. As he began to acquire vocabulary and reposition himself among his peers, his sense of belonging increased: “You feel you are a part of the culture!” Thus, it is through a growing vocabulary and how he positioned himself in the classroom, that Michael developed a sense of belonging, which had a positive effect on his level of perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Jack expressed that it was the required classroom participation that helped to develop his sense of belonging. He was thankful to the professor for ensuring that everyone in the class participated during discussions. As a result, Jack's confidence increased, which over time, increased his sense of belonging:

He [the professor] wants everyone to contribute what you feel...and that helped me communicate with classmates as well as professors, and that four months was really good, and then I had a confidence talking in other—all other classes as well. So, even if the professor doesn't ask each and everyone one [a question], but I, because I has a con—I started building confidence, and I wanted to be part of the class, as well, I was enjoying communicating with everyone. I started being a participant in other classes, as well, and also at my workplace. It was much more

comfortable for me to work and communicate with everyone. Yeah, I would say that time played a role.

Similar to Michael, Jack was relieved to discuss his increased sense of belonging, suggesting it has taken some time for him to feel comfortable. He added, “If you are being—if you feel you’re part of the class, you’re talking!” Through continued use of English language in the classroom, Jack developed a sense of belonging, which had a positive effect on his level of perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Elizabeth was matter-of-fact in her response. While discussing her developing sense of belonging, her tone shifted to that of a mentor sharing an experience with an incoming student: “So, the sense of belonging came with time, I would say.” She added that the experience is dependent on the student and the professor, that the interaction between student and professor is what facilitates a sense of belonging:

The professor had made a move, and I showed a little bit on my end that I wanted to learn this particular language, so because of the two-way thing, the sense of belonging came with time, and I would say that, that belonging was very essential as well, because hadn’t it come, then I wouldn’t have learned this language or learn that particular course so well.

It was the two-way interaction between the professor and Elizabeth that was essential to her sense of belonging. Moreover, she emphasized that if it was not for this interaction, she would not have developed her English language skills, adding, “Sense of belonging came with time,” She concluded, “It really helped me to open myself.” Over a period of time and continued interactions with the professor, Elizabeth developed a sense of

belonging, which had a positive effect on her level of perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Donna, similar to Elizabeth, reflected as if she was mentoring a first-year student. Donna revealed that over a period of time, she felt that she didn't have to prove that she was a model student, that she had been accepted to a four-year university and was there to learn and acquire English language skills. She reflected as if comparing herself to other students: "Maybe it is personality—that you have to be perfect. I believe it [developing a sense of belonging] was a process." She added, "I have all the ideas in Spanish," and, "I have good grades," which helped her to maintain a level of confidence. Donna emphasized that "developing English language skills was a process" and concluded, "Yes, sometimes I know that it is a mistake [when I write or speak]." Thus, within time and by maintaining a level of confidence, Donna developed a sense of belonging, which had a positive effect on her level of perception to complete college courses taught in English.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **all participants expressed a developed sense of belonging over time**. This was a result of a professor's assistance, a broadening vocabulary, and how the participants positioned themselves within the classroom. Their developing sense of belonging positively impacted their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. In the next section, I examined persistence as a theme.

Super-ordinate Theme: Persistence

The data showed that all participants 1) felt unprepared, 2) lacked a sense of belonging in the beginning, and 3) developed a sense of belonging over a period of time.

Perseverance was another common theme among participants, as all participants were determined to acquire English language skills and succeed in a four-year university.

Amber was determined to develop English language skills. Although she exhibited frustration that stemmed from her experience with a high school guidance counselor who told her, “You should go to a community college because of your language,” her emphasis was on proving to herself that she can learn English and succeed in college, which lends evidence to the lasting memory seeded during the conversation with her high school guidance counselor:

So, I just decided to keep reading and do my best and keep practicing. I just kept the words [my frustrations] for myself and said, ‘You know what, I’m going to prove, not [to] the person that told me that [I should not apply to a four-year university because of my language skills], but myself that I actually am able to do this.

Amber’s perseverance drove her to succeed. She added, “My goal reminded me that I didn’t have to give up.” Furthermore, she expressed that she followed her inner-voice: “You know what, I’m going to do this. I don’t know how, but I’m going to do this,” adding, “This is your job now. This is your job!” Amber’s level of perseverance was palpable. She concluded sternly, “I had to learn the language.” It was Amber’s experience with her guidance counselor, internalized as a personal goal, that fueled her resolve to learn English and persevere, which helped to further develop her sense of belonging and perception on her ability to complete college courses taught in English.

Debra exhibited excitement as she reflected on her acceptance to the university. Her demeanor was that of someone realizing that they just won the lottery. She shared that she had difficulties with language, but she had no choice but to persevere:

I felt that it [class taught in English] was hard. Um...I didn't have any other option then to work hard as well, and to overcome that challenge. Um...I felt like I was so glad to have the opportunity to be in college. Like not every student has that opportunity! So, I was like, 'I got to do it! I need to learn English!'

Similar to Amber, Debra shared in stern tone, "You gotta do whatever you gotta do."

While reflecting on her acceptance, she became overjoyed and had to pause for a moment. It was Debra's acceptance to a four-year university that fueled her resolve to learn English and persevere, which helped to further develop her sense of belonging and perception on her ability to complete college courses taught in English.

Michael shared that he felt misunderstood, that he struggled to overcome his fear of acquiring English language skills. His demeanor was of someone who was struggling with his inner voice. He referred to his fear as a "ghost" that had attached itself to his psyche:

I'm trying to get an A. I don't want to pass with a bad grade. Now, this is the part that people misunderstood, or it can be misunderstood, the fact that I'm trying to get ahead or trying to push myself to do the best is because I developed, probably, a little bit of fear since I'm an immigrant and that my English was always limited. So, I'm trying to overcome that, that ghost inside of me...saying like, 'No. You're not going to fail.'

Michael shook his head as he shared that students didn't like that he was asking to clarify questions in class: "Some students, they don't like it. They even said, 'Who do you think you are saying those things?'" This irritated him as he felt misunderstood. He did not have the English vocabulary to explain himself; however, he persevered and was stern with his ghost, "I am a student, and I'm here to learn." Michael added, "I have to accomplish something," which suggested that he had not done much to advance his education or career during the gap between high school and college. His tone shifted to that of a mentor speaking to an incoming freshman. He concluded, "If you are not positive or if you don't have perseverance, there is no way you can go on." It was Michael's inner voice and his resolve to acquire English skills and succeed as a college student that fueled his perseverance, which helped to further develop his sense of belonging and perception on his ability to complete college courses taught in English.

Jack was matter-of-fact as he shared how he persevered to acquire English language skills. His demeanor suggested that this was a responsibility of his career as a student. He repeated, "I kept trying—kept trying to push myself." He realized that he was shy; however, he did not allow this to deter his ability to learn English:

I was trying by pushing myself to learn and try to improve my language by reading the books or by watching the movies and by trying...pushing myself. I was a shy guy, but I just started pushing myself to communicate with people.

Jack persisted with attempts of communication in and out of the classroom. He shook his head as he shared, "It takes much time," adding that he "kept practicing." While it was exhausting, Jack sought conversations in English. In addition, though he had acquired English language skills and had been a successful student, he was still developing English

language skills. He concluded, “I keep pushing.” It was Jack’s perseverance to engage in conversations with English speakers that helped to develop his English language skills, which helped to develop his sense of belonging and perception on his ability to complete college courses taught in English.

Elizabeth expressed that it was her determination as a student to persevere in acquiring English language skills and become a successful college student. She was proud as she shared, similar to that of a mentor speaking to an incoming freshman, “You first have to be self-determined.” She emphasized that her determination was paramount to her perseverance. Moreover, she was grateful that she was “selected to come here to study.” Thus, she felt that she had to succeed, as there was no choice but to persevere:

Determination is the first thing for me that is very important to learn or to be anywhere. If you want to reach to a particular goal, you first have to be self-determined, and then, you can tell others to help you with particular things you need. Because I’m a determined person, I was very determined that, okay, I have come here from [my native country] just to study, and if I am struggling with a basic language which is English—the language which I have to learn throughout all these years for the courses that have been selected to come here and study, and if I’m struggling with the basic speaking and writing skills, then, it would be a matter of problem for me all these years! So, I was ready in the mind that I have to learn this...and not just for the course, not just to pass the class, but for me!

Elizabeth was determined to succeed. She was “ready in the mind,” which fueled her resolve to persevere. As if reflecting to students during a new student orientation session, she offered, “If I be quiet in a corner and not communicate with anyone, I would have not

learned.” It was Elizabeth’s determination to learn English paired with the honor of being selected to come to the U.S. and study that fueled her perseverance, which helped to further develop her sense of belonging and perception on her ability to complete college courses taught in English.

Donna reflected as if she were a mentor speaking to incoming freshmen. At times, her examination seemed instructional. For example, she said, “Don’t think about it” when discussing the difficulties of learning English, adding, “Do whatever you have to do.” Evident in her tone was the proud voice of an English learner who had succeeded and was glad to offer advice:

I tried looking for someone to help me. You see when they [instructors] are able to talk to you and want to talk to you after class—their time to talk to you [one-on-one]. I ask for help. That’s another thing for students, don’t be embarrassed and ask for help! My life was more easy, and I was more confident, because I knew that I was going to the one-credit [writing] class that I have to pay. With that, I was sure that my paper was going to be okay.

Donna was focused on acquiring English language skills and succeeding as a college student. However, her perseverance was fueled not only by her determination to succeed but also by her family’s survival. Her perseverance was palpable as she stated, “I am a worker, working full-time and part-time. I had to feed my four kids and my parents.” Thus, it was Donna’s responsibility to her family that strengthened her perseverance, which helped to further develop her sense of belonging and perception on her ability to complete college courses taught in English.

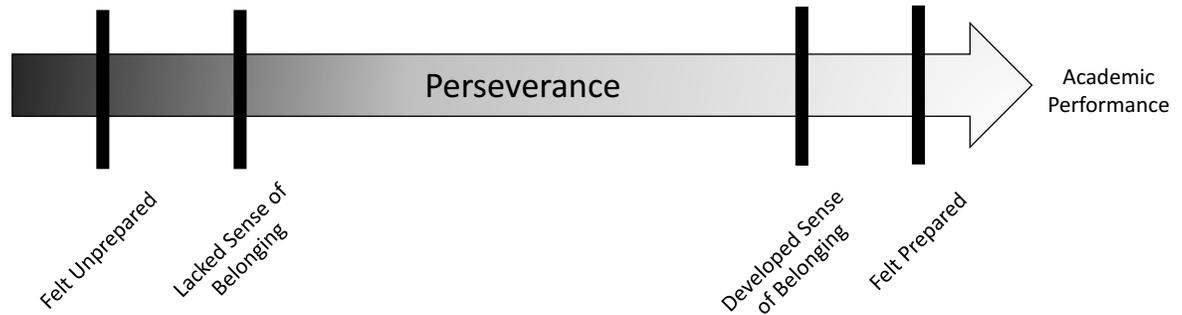
Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **all participants exhibited perseverance** as they struggled to acquire English literacy skills and succeed in classes taught in English. Moreover, their perseverance impacted their sense of belonging and perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. Next, I will provide a summary of the results regarding the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

Summary of Perception of ELLs

Through a detailed analysis of the data, themes of **preparedness, belonging, and persistence** were found among all participants. In addition, a **subtheme of Identity**, which falls under the super-ordinate theme of belonging, was found among Debra, Elizabeth, and Jack, as their identity of being a *good student* affected their interactions within the classroom. These themes answered the primary and secondary research questions. Furthermore, the data helped to elucidate a linear trajectory in which the participants felt unprepared once they entered college level courses taught in English. As a result, their sense of belonging decreased; however, through perseverance, their sense of belonging increased, and they felt better prepared to successfully complete college courses taught in English. *Figure 1.* depicts the linear trajectory from 1) feeling unprepared, 2) lack of belonging, 3) persistence, 4) developed a sense of belonging to 5) felt prepared to complete college courses taught in English.

Figure 1

ELLs' perception on their ability to complete college courses taught in English



While themes of preparedness, belonging, and persistence helped to answer the primary research question, secondary research questions sought to examine the influences on the participants' academic performance. Two super-ordinate themes were found: relationship and resources. First, I will discuss the theme of relationships.

Super-ordinate Theme: Relationships

Two secondary research questions build upon the foundation of the primary research questions. In this section, I examine themes found in the data that answer both research questions: *What do college English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?* and *What do college English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?* I noted that these findings built upon the super-ordinate themes of preparedness, belonging, and persistence. Thus, there is overlap and the findings are discussed as a whole.

Upon examination of the data, the super-ordinate theme **relationships** was found among each participant. The theme of relationships is contextualized within the study as

the relationships that had an influence on the participants' academic performance. For example, the relationships between 1) participant and professors, 2) participant and students, 3) participant and family, and 4) participant and community. In addition, course materials was grouped under relationships as the participant's relationship to courses materials, i.e., course material that is meaningful to the participant, is comparable to a person to person relationship, thus the relationship between participant and course materials has been personified.

Subtheme: Professors

The subtheme of *professors*, under the super-ordinate theme of relationships, was found during the analysis of the participants, as all participants stated that professors influenced the development of their English language literacy skills. Furthermore, the theme of professors is built upon the themes of preparedness, belonging, and persistence. For example, it was the developing relationships between the participants and the professors that increased the participants' sense of belonging and fueled their persistence. Additionally, professors introduced resources and strategies that helped to develop the participants' English literacy skills.

Amber became excited when she realized that she had an opportunity to discuss a professor that she had made a connection with. She discussed the wealth of materials and how the class engaged in reading and writing assignments. Amber's excitement was palpable as she shared, "I actually am able to do this!" She continued:

In my ESL classes, I remember Professor _____. She had a lot of books for us, not just for me, for all the students in her class, we read together. We actually

discussed the lesson, and just reading the discussions, that is what helped me a lot.

And writing too! Because there were a lot of essays for that class.

It was the professor's willingness to connect with every student that not only facilitated Amber's engagement within the classroom but increased her sense of belonging. As a result, she was comfortable entering the classroom. Moreover, Amber's demeanor suggested that she was proud to share that her English language skills were developing.

The professor had made a difference:

Yeah, she was amazing! She was also the best and that's why I am today with my English, because we started with just one sentence, and then from there, you do a paragraph with eight sentences, and then from there, I was able to do a whole essay or five pages for my other classes. So, she helped me a lot. That was the only class that I really talked to other people and felt related, because there were also bilingual students too.

Amber attributes her English language skills to a professor who reached out to connect during the early stages of Amber's college career. This was a critical revelation, as prior to meeting this professor, Amber felt unprepared and lacked a sense of belonging. While she persevered, it was the relationship with the professor that fueled her resolve. Thus, the professor had a positive influence on Amber's English literacy skills.

Debra, similar to Amber, became excited to share her positive experiences with teachers who showed an interest in her success. These professors created a safe environment that allowed her to engage in English. She was thankful during her reflection:

I was so blessed to have these teachers who called on me a lot. They knew I had trouble with my language. So, they came up to me and they even said, “Look I have these hours available. If you have any questions, you could come around and ask me for help.”

The professors offered opportunities for Debra to practice language in a risk-free environment. In addition, they offered to meet with her outside of class: “Teachers started offering me some tips that might help me for my writing or to be social with other people and not be afraid to speak.” Debra added that during this period she increased her English literacy skills: “I feel like I gained so much knowledge.”

Focusing on one instance, she paused and felt badly that the name of the teacher who most influenced her had slipped from her memory:

I had this problem with English. So, I remember this English teacher. I don’t even remember his name. Can you believe that! Like, I don’t remember his name! He was so wonderful. He told me, ‘You should go to an English tutor,’ and that’s what I did. That helped me so much. You don’t have an idea how much that helped me.

She had stopped several times to remember his name. Her demeanor had shifted to embarrassment and frustration that she had forgotten his name, suggesting that he had made an impact on not only her English language skills but also her academic success. This teacher had connected with Debra and ensured that she was aware of tutoring resources on campus. She concluded on a high note, “That helped me so much. You don’t have an idea how much that helped me!” Like Amber, Debra’s professor had a positive influence on her English literacy skills.

Michael had the look of relief on his face when he shared that a professor made him feel comfortable by stating that he appreciated Michael's classroom participation:

The professor told me—he was like, I know how you communicate, and you make the—you actually make the class go very dynamic. You have a very good dynamic in the class, and I like the way you do things.

By validating Michael as a valuable member of the class, the professor helped to increase Michael's sense of belonging and fostered a comfortable environment to practice English. Michael was pleasantly surprised:

He told me he was very open. I never expected him to say what he told me that day. He told me, 'Don't worry about that B. Just try to improve yourself. Do your thing.' I kind of found a way to—to like making—of getting that character of being a professor to being a human. So, then I can get in touch with him. I approached him more.

Michael also revealed that he positioned the professor as someone who is unapproachable. Through this interaction, he humanized the professor, which had a positive effect on his developing literacy skills.

Michael's demeanor shifted to frustration and disbelief when he shared that he had been fired from a job because the employer was not happy that he was taking off work for classes and focusing on his studies. He reflected, "So my job for me was an excuse." The job had hindered his academic performance, making it difficult to continue. It was the professor who consulted Michael on the matter:

'Hey, don't worry about it. Maybe there is a new beginning.' Even I was told by one of my professors, 'Maybe there is a new beginning. See it that way.' So, that

is what opened my perspective and helped my confidence to say, *okay, let's fight for this one.*

Michael was thankful to the professor. He expressed that his finances worked out, and he was able to focus on his college education. This strengthened his resolve to succeed as an English language speaker and student. Similar to Amber and Debra, Michael's professors had a positive influence on his English literacy skills and academic career.

Jack offered a sigh of relief as he began to discuss the impact of the teachers on his literacy skills and overall academic engagement. He offered, "Some of the professors were really good." However, he would not engage in conversation on the not-so-good professors—his humility and professionalism were noted as I inquired. Jack continued by recalling his experiences with the good professors:

They wanted every, every member of the class to commit, to be part of the discussion. They wanted everyone to talk even a little bit. They started questions—asking questions to each and every member in the class by going individually, and they were just, you can say whatever you feel, it doesn't matter.

Jack was relieved to learn that the professor wanted to hear from all the students and that the student's responses were respected. Similar to the reflections of Amber, Debra, and Michael, Jack's professors facilitated a comfortable use of language within the classroom, which helped Jack to develop a sense of belonging. Jack concluded cheerfully, "That helped me communicate with classmates as well as the professor, and I started building confidence." Thus, Jack's professor had a positive influence on his English literacy skills and his confidence, which increased his sense of belonging.

Elizabeth spoke of her relationship with her professors as a collaboration.

Elizabeth showed a willingness to learn while the professor was willing to help:

“Understanding was coming from the professor, not the students.” She began with a hint of frustration toward students but quickly refocused to the professor. She expressed gratitude for the professor’s interest, as the professor would meet with her outside of class; however, Elizabeth was hard on herself when she reviewed her marked-up paper:

My professor used to call me for extra hours, just to proofread, and she used to write different comments on my paper with a red pen, and I used to think, *Am I so dumb? Why am I so dumb?* But she really uplifted me. She was like, ‘Okay, but I want you to really succeed in this class, not just this class, but also, because I want you to succeed in all of your classes.’

Elizabeth not only struggled with writing papers in English but also with feedback on her writing. I have used the analogy that regardless of what color pen the paper is marked up with, it always looks like blood on the page. I was reminded of this as Elizabeth shared how the red marks made her feel. She sounded deflated; however, she shifted to an uplifting tone as she concluded, “Feedback [from professors] really helped me for my personal development.”

Elizabeth positioned herself and her professors in a collaborative relationship, i.e., If I show an interest in learning from you and you show an interest in teaching me, we can engage productively. As if engaging in a business deal, Elizabeth and the professor engaged in a mutual contract to develop her English literacy skills, which also increased her sense of belonging.

Donna was matter-of-fact as she spoke about her engagement with her professors. Her tone was that of a mentor student speaking to a first-year ESL student. She offered, “It’s like you have to find a teacher,” adding, “I found a teacher in the second semester, a teacher who gave me a list of resources.” She was adamant about making a connection with a professor but also revealed that she was not aware about academic support services for ESL students. She did not know that tutoring was available. Her tone shifted to relief as she expressed that tutoring had an impact on her English literacy skills: “That helped me, because if you are failing or doing bad in grammar or composition, you have help.” She reiterated, “I didn’t know that they had tutoring. I didn’t know.” While Donna was thankful to the professor who had helped, she appeared concerned that others in need of assistance may be delayed due to a lack of awareness for tutorial services. In what alluded to a public service announcement, she said, “Don’t be embarrassed and ask for help,” concluding, “You see when they [professors] are able to talk to you and want to talk to you after class—their time to talk to you. I asked for help.”

While Donna struggled in the beginning, it was the professor who she sought for help in-class and during office hours. In addition, the professor introduced Donna to the tutoring services on campus. Thus, the professor had a positive influence on her English literacy skills.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that the participants’ **relationships with professors had a positive influence on participants’ academic performance and English literacy skills.** The professors facilitated environments where students were comfortable engaging in English, developed relationships with the participants that were conducive to learning, and connected students to tutoring services.

I noted that these themes also affected the participants' sense of belonging, perseverance, and preparedness. Next, I will discuss the influence of the relationship of participants and students on the participants' academic performance.

Subtheme: Students

Similar to the subtheme of professors, close analysis of the data showed that the subtheme of *students*, which falls under relationships, was common among participants. Moreover, relationships with students further developed participants' English literary skills, increased their sense of belonging, and influence their academic performance. However, participants revealed that relationships were developed over time once they had positioned themselves as good students who prioritized their studies (Identity was discussed under the theme *belonging*).

Debra reflected internally before sharing her experience in high school with students of the same ethnicity. As she began, her tone and expressions suggested that she was relieved that her students in college were not like those in high school:

In college, you meet a lot of people. When I was in high school, I was around Hispanic people who speak Spanish. If they didn't understand what I was saying, they would come up to me and speak in Spanish. So, it didn't help me a lot. In college, I didn't have any other option. In college—I didn't know that if it's the age or I don't know, but I feel more comfortable speaking with people [students] in college than I did in high school.

Debra's peers in high school often relied on Spanish when they didn't understand what Debra was saying. This not only hindered Debra's literacy skills but also made her feel that she was not progressing with her English. She felt as if she had no choice but to

she speak her native language; however, this changed when she entered college. She was pleased to be around like-minded students who were willing to help:

They didn't make fun of my English or my accent. They helped me like if I pronounce a word wrong, they come up to me and say, 'Oh look, this is the proper way you're supposed to pronounce it. Oh, you know, your writing doesn't sound clear.' So, I don't know, I feel like I learned so much in college.

Debra was frustrated by the way students treated her in high school. It was not until she entered college that she felt comfortable engaging with students with her developing English. While her interactions with students in the beginning had a negative influence on her English skills, it was the positive interactions with college students that helped Debra to further develop her English literacy skills.

Michael happily shared that students played important roles in his literacy skills and sense of belonging. He made a commitment to being forthcoming about his developing skills and making friends with students who prioritized their education. He began, "I tend to be open and that was also a tremendous help, because once you hung out with the good students that are getting As, your grade improves tremendously." He reiterated that classmates and friends help, specifically as his reliance on his native language waned: "I learned [improved my English] through hanging out with good friends, people in class and studying helped me more and more to turn it [reliance on L1] off."

Michael reflected on a time when his group was presenting to the class. He expressed that he was ashamed of his developing literacy skills. Michael was hard on

himself when he noticed that his use of English hindered his communications; however, the students in the group were empathetic and supported his developing skills:

At the end of a presentation—I don't know why I was feeling ashamed, and then I told the students [in my group], 'Look, I am sorry. I know you're my classmates. I'm sorry if my word [choice] was getting stuck.' There was another word also that I couldn't pronounce, I'm sorry. English is my second language, and I was trying to—and thank God, they were very understanding, like 'Don't worry about it. It's okay. You did it okay. It's fine.' That is a difficult thing, but I think it built my confidence. It's like, *Don't worry about it. You'll be fine. You're trying and that's what's important.*

Michael's interactions strengthened his resolve to connect with students who prioritized their studies. In a tone of a successful student speaking to first-year student, Michael offered advice on connecting with like-minded students in the classroom:

I always try to get along with students that I saw that were committed, or they were trying to be good students. In other words, if I have to sit in the back, that's fine. I sit in the back, but if I see that there's a group that understand the subject better than me, that they are ahead of the game, and I see them, that they are very accurate in their answers and what they are doing, then, well, that's the group that I want to hang out with. So, I would go and just open myself to them. I would be asking them questions like, 'Hey, would you like to meet?'

Michael's reflection on his interactions with students offer insight to how he transitioned from the quiet student with bad grades to a communicative student who was developing his English skills. Moreover, his interactions positioned him as a scholar among his

fellow students. Thus, Michael's positive interactions with students helped to develop his English literacy skills and sense of belonging.

Jack was grateful as he reflected on his interactions with students in the United States. He shared that he found people here in the States to be helpful, which he added was a result of the diversity in the university and metropolitan area:

I used to be more comfortable being part of the—the people who know my language, but now I am part of a couple of [student] research teams, and those are all American people [English speakers]. The biggest and the best thing I would say is over in the United States is everyone is from a different part of the world, and everyone has their different accent, but everyone is respectful, and everyone is trying to accept you.

Jack reiterated that students were nice and that that they did not mind if you took your time formulating questions in English or asking twice: “There is no problem in asking one more time, so over a year—it’s everyone [referring to students] trying to make each other comfortable. That’s what I feel. It’s really great about here.” Jack’s experience with students had a positive impact on his literacy skills and increased his sense of belonging.

Elizabeth paused as she formulated her reflection—I was reminded of Debra as she reflected internally. Similar to Debra, Elizabeth shared a negative experience with students:

[In the beginning,] understanding was coming from the professor, not the students. So, when it came to being in group, no one was ready to be with me, because I had this different sort of English, which was not completely different, but yes, when it came to writing a paper, and especially the research paper for

which we were particularly being there in groups, no one wanted to be there because you have to put in extra efforts to educate a particular group member and then do the research part.

However, Elizabeth's negative experiences waned over time as she positioned herself as a good student and developed friendships:

With months and weeks passing by, I made friends, and I was very open to learning. I was very open to asking questions whenever they were needed and they [students] were also feeling, that 'Okay, so she is making the extra effort on her [part] to learn something, which she wants to really learn.' I was being very friendly with everyone as well. So, the class was actually very happy with me.

Similar to Debra, Michael, and Jack, Elizabeth was open to communicating with students and ensured that she was looked upon as a student who prioritized her studies. She revealed that this increased her standing within the classroom, which had an impact on her interactions with peers. Her tone was that of a dedicated student who had just reached a milestone. Elizabeth was proud of herself and the notion that the students were happy with her performance. These interactions with students had a positive influence on her literacy skills and increased her sense of belonging.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that the **relationships with students had a positive influence on participants' academic performance and English literacy skills**. This was found in four of the six participants—The IPA methodology states that themes must be present in at least half of the participants' transcripts. Similar to professors and tutors, students facilitated environments where the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves in English. In addition, participants

noted that they had to position themselves as good students in order for their peers to interact on assignment and presentations. In time, the participants developed relationships with students that influenced their English literacy skills, sense of belonging, and academic performance. Next, I will discuss the influence of course materials on the participants' literacy skills and academic performance.

Subtheme: Course Materials

Similar to the subthemes *professors* and *students*, a close analysis of the data showed that the subtheme of *course materials* was common among participants. Moreover, when course content drew upon the interests of the participants, i.e., was relatable, their interactions increased, which further developed their English literary skills, increased their sense of belonging, and enhanced their academic performance.

Amber gladly offered that when course materials reflected her interests her engagement within the classroom would increase: "When I can relate to the course material, yeah, somehow, yes, I ask more questions and I actually give my own opinion." She not only asked more questions but also contributed to classroom conversations. She felt comfortable and practiced her English naturally. Amber was conscious of her identity as a good student, adding, "So, I would say that it's not that I actually didn't ask questions when I'm not familiar with a topic, but it [being familiar with the topic] contributes to my literacy." Her statement reiterated that when course materials drew upon her interests, her engagement increased. Thus, course materials had a positive influence on her developing English skills.

Debra began by affirming her identity as a good student, offering that while she does not participate much in class that she prioritizes the material and her education:

“Okay, so with the material, I position myself like to be a really good student. I don’t usually participate much until this day. But with the material in class, yes, I’m like 100% there!” Her tone shifted as she exclaimed, “Oh my God, yeah! My engagement is so good when I love the class.” While this seemed to contradict her previous statement on her lack of engagement, her excitement confirmed that her engagement is dependent on the course material, particularly with classes within her major.

Debra continued by juxtaposing a class that she had little interest in with classes that she liked: “I have these social classes that I had to take. I don’t like social [studies] classes, and I never have liked social [studies] classes. The teacher is not the problem. It is just the subject.” Debra not only revealed that she does not enjoy civics classes but also confirmed that regardless of the teacher’s pedagogy, she could not muster an interest. In contrast, she added, “When I like something, I engage better and even in fact, if it has a hard vocabulary words, I just go to Google and search it up, and I don’t have any problem. But, when it comes to a class that is not my interest, it is too much reading, and I don’t find it interesting, and I have a harder time.” Debra remained excited while she reflected on the importance of course materials on her engagement. She acknowledged that she gladly reviewed and enhanced her vocabulary, completed the readings, and engaged in class when the courses interested her. Similar to Amber, Debra’s reflection showed that course materials had a positive influence on her developing English skills. She concluded, “It does contribute a lot.”

Michael was animated while reflecting on his level of engagement in the classroom when course materials matched his interests. He leaned back in his seat and opened his arms while exclaiming, “Wow! When course materials draw from my favorite

activity—Oh my God, that’s the best!” He quickly offered his opinion on all university requirements (AUR) classes as if talking to curriculum advisors:

Because this is why I don’t agree with all the electives that the university pushes students to take, because I think they [students] can get discouraged if they get a bad grade on a course that is not their interest. When it is a course material that is in your interest, it motivates you more to keep going and then also learning the terminology and the language and perhaps not losing interest.

By speaking in a tone of a change-agent, he revealed that he would have received better grades in some of the required classes had they connected with his interests. Similar to Debra, Michael was motivated to enhance his vocabulary when the course material matched his interests. Thus, Michael’s reflection revealed that course materials had an influence on his developing English skills.

Jack spoke in a calm tone while sharing that he entered his comfort zone when course materials reflected his interests. He offered that it was not difficult for him to engage and that he would not be concerned about what others thought of his answer, specifically his developing use of English:

I would, that would be my comfort zone, and then I—that, that, that would be the point. I don’t have to push myself because I’m enjoying the time so I’ll be much more involved, and I’ll be much more engaging, and at that point, I wouldn’t be worried about if people will be able to understand me or not, because at that time, I’ll be much more comfortable, and I’ll be—because I’m enjoying my time, so I won’t care about the people [students] around me and about the impression that I’m creating among the people [students], so I’ll be more engaged.

Jack affirmed that when he connected with the course materials, he felt comfortable: “I’m trying to be what I am, because that’s the point—I’m enjoying!” As a result, Jack was able to practice English naturally. While examining his experiences, he noted that he acquired English skills quicker when he was engaging in class where course materials reflected his interests:

That’s the time I learned the faster because that’s the time you are more—using English. You’re trying to speak more, you’re expressing more, so that’s, that’s the time, that’s the time you learn. I would say, that’s the time you practice the language.

Similar to Amber, Debra, and Michael, Jack revealed that course material that matched his interests had a positive effect on his English literacy skills.

Elizabeth alluded to winning the lottery as she reflected on instances when course materials drew upon her interests. Her excitement was palpable as she spoke from the heart:

If there is a particular course that includes my hobbies or my particular interests, so that’s very fortunate. If I get to learn or do something that I am already doing of that I already want to do, then that interest on that level of engagement comes from the heart itself. You know, because you already know that you like this and you belong to this and you are getting to do a particular thing, then that level of engagement, that level of perfection of doing that particular thing or task with the very best of our interest comes from within.

While she began with alluding to a *win* when course materials reflected her interests, her reflection exposed that when a passion comes from deep within, she connects with course

materials. In an affirming tone, she added, “That engagement at that level of giving you hundred percent just comes from your within.” Similarly, I noted that the topic of course materials excited Elizabeth as she launched into a food analogy as an example:

Let me give you an example. So, suppose if I went to a particular restaurant, and I ordered my favorites and you came along and said, “Okay, we are going to order this and this.” So, suppose if I’m eating my favorite dish that is on the right-hand side, and there is one other dish that you order that is on the left-hand side, then I’m going to eat both of them. But the way I’m going to eat my favorite dish is going to be very different than the way I eat the dish that you ordered for me. Not just because I don’t like it. But it doesn’t mean that I’m not going to eat it or I’m not going to like to eat it the same way or in the same proportion. I’m going to eat both of them equally, but the way I’m going to eat this and enjoy it, and I may taste every bit of it and the way I’m going to get satisfied when I eat the particular dish, that satisfaction that interest of eating that particular dish is going to be very different [savored].

In this analogy, Elizabeth likened a beloved, tasty dish to her positioning of a course when the materials drew upon her interests. She savored the experience, enjoying every moment. While her analogy suggested she engaged in those courses that did not match her interests, it was the courses where she connected that she savored. She practiced her English literacy skills naturally and positioned herself positively among the students and professors. She concluded in excitement, as if she just realized that the course materials were relatable: “I’m going to learn a particular thing that I’m trying that I love!”

Similar to Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack, Elizabeth's examination showed that course material that matched her interests had a positive on her English literacy skills and overall course engagement.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **relationships with course materials had a positive influence on participants' academic performance and English literacy skills**. This was found in five of the six participants. Course materials that drew upon the participants' interests increased engagement in the classroom, facilitated natural use of English, further developed their sense of belonging, and enhanced academic performance. Next, I will discuss the influence of family on the participants' academic performance.

Subtheme: Family

The subtheme *family* was found during the analysis of the participants, as all participants reflected that their relationships with family influenced the development of their English language literacy skills and academic performance. Furthermore, family as a theme built upon the previous super-ordinate themes. For example, it was the role of family that strengthened their resolve to persevere with students and acquire English language skills.

Amber was grateful as she reflected on her family's role in the development of her English literacy skills and academic performance. This was no easy feat, as she began, "My family, all of them spoke Spanish," confirming that none of her family members spoke English. She added that her sister spoke a little English, but this was because she was also learning English at the time: "Just my sister. She was learning, but we didn't speak English [in the beginning] as we do nowadays."

Amber proudly spoke of her father as he sat with Amber and her sister night after night while they did their homework:

My father [who didn't speak English] helped a lot to understand vocabulary. He had this big dictionary, and he was there on the table with us, because my sister came to same year with me and he was there, and all of us learned vocabulary because of our homework. He was there every single night. Sitting with us, with my sister and myself, trying to help us to understand what the homework was, especially for the history classes.

It was her father's determination and perseverance that laid the foundation for Amber's academic excellence. Amber and her sister were introduced to new vocabulary daily. The love among the family was palpable as Amber continued to reflect on her experience:

He bought us a computer! That was our first computer, and he was there every single night after work. He was there! All of us were! My sister, him, and I sitting at the table looking at the homework that we had, and he was with the dictionary and saying, 'Okay, so let's find what this word means.' He was like, 'Okay, this is kind of what you need to do.' And if he didn't understand something, he was like, 'Okay, you need to ask your teacher tomorrow.'

Amber's reflection was that of a supportive family that prioritized education. Her responsibilities were that of a student: "You're going to study. That's gonna be your job." She concluded in a thankful tone, "that gave me a lot of time to learn, [and] a little bit more [vocabulary] every single day." Thus, Amber's family influences her academic performance. Moreover, it helped Amber to further develop her English literacy skills.

Debra reflected on how she helped her mother and daughter to acquire English language skills. She was proud as she spoke of her responsibilities to her mother, as her mother did not speak English.

I feel responsible to help my mom. When she needs to fill out something in the computer—she doesn't know how to use the computer—I tried to teach her.

Sometimes, when a letter comes in the mail that is in English, I have to translate it for her. Sometimes, I try to teach her, 'Look Mom, this word you have heard a lot of times.' Sometimes, I tried to teach her.

As Debra helped her mother with the computer and verbal and written translations of letters, she increased her English literacy skills. Often, she engaged her mother in the role of a tutor. This role as educator extended to Debra's daughter, too:

I have a daughter. I feel like I have so much responsibility to teach her both languages, Spanish and English! I don't want her to go through what I went through. I feel responsible to speak to my daughter in English and Spanish.

While she was proud to share that she was teaching her daughter, she stated that her daughter was also learning English during school. This allowed Debra to shift focus and emphasize the importance of her mother and father developing English language skills. In the tone of a provider seeking the best for her family, she stressed:

I have more responsibility with my mother and father because they work, and they won't have the chance to go to school [to learn English]. With my daughter, I know that she will learn English. She is in the daycare, and she will go to pre-K and so on.

The second that Debra completed the final sentence above, she paused. Her face became flushed. She was overjoyed and began to cry as she shared, “It’s amazing, don’t you think!” She continued after drying her eyes:

That I was helping my mother and daughter without knowing it! Yeah, I gained knowledge as well, I gained so much knowledge! It has helped me a lot when I help my mother and translate. I even tried to teach her what I have learned. I even said to her, ‘Don’t translate Spanish words to English into a sentence, because that’s not going to work.’ I feel the pressure of saying the words and how they are supposed to be said, so they [my parents] can learn the right way. I tried to define the words to my mom so that she can have a better understanding.

Debra’s reflection had revealed that she was not only a loving family member but also a teacher who had drawn upon the literacy skills and teaching strategies that she had experienced in school, which had an influence on her academic progress as well. This revelation had a profound impact as she began to cry in amazement and joy. She slowly concluded as if to savor the moment: “I turned into a teacher without knowing it! Can you believe that!”

Michael was proud as he reflected that he had fulfilled his obligations to his family and was able to enter college. Although this resulted in a delay of ten years between high school in his native home and college in the U.S., it was a supportive family environment that had laid the foundation to his academic success:

The way it [my responsibilities with my family] affected me is that it delayed me for many years. When I came here [to the U.S.], it took a while for my legality in this country. That was one problem. The second problem is that my dad died

when I was nine years old. I promised him that I was going to help my mom and my brother and sister as much as I can. I dedicated and committed to them for ten years. In ten years, I kept helping them, getting out of debts and helping my brother graduate. I wanted to be a good role model for my brother. Thank God, it happened! So, those ten years delayed my education a lot.

Michael's tone was that of a proud older brother who had made a commitment to his family. This was also confirmed in his promise to his beloved late father. Michael not only helped by providing income for the family and assisting with daily chores, but also it was his focus on academics that strengthened his resolve to help his brother graduate. Michael exhaled as he reflected, "When I became a citizen is when I said, *Now, it's my time to go to college.*"

It was unfortunate that Michael's employer and coworkers did not share the same sentiments as Michael regarding his education. Often, he found himself in trouble for reading or studying during downtime in work:

I was studying and being a little bit rebellious at work, because of the attitude towards me [as a student trying to improve myself]. Later on, they fired me. Then I went and dedicated 100% of my time to studying.

While Michael endured financial difficulties, it was the notion that he could not be both a student and an employee that discouraged him. In an unmistakable volta he affirmed, "Seeing my mother and grandmother working, and me, trying to feed my little sister and brother, but I never gave up on my dream and goal." His mother confirmed, and Michael devoted the next ten years for his education: "My mom told me, 'It's okay. Do it. Go for it!' I said, I think my English has improved. I am becoming a citizen. For these next ten

years, I have to go as far as I can.” Michael was determined to culminate his academic career with a Ph.D.

While Michael endured challenges that delayed his enrollment in a U.S. university, it was his dedication to his family and education that had a positive influence on his academic performance and English literacy skills.

Jack was thankful of his family as he discussed how they had done everything possible to ensure that he fulfilled his dreams of attending a U.S. university. He shared that his family relieved some of his financial burdens and that his role in the family was that of a student:

It’s really helpful that they are—they have made my dream their dream. So, they are helping me any way I need help. So, in every way they can. So, they are paying my bills and everything, so financially, they are helping me so much, and there is not much responsibility for me. My part, my responsibility right now from my family’s perspective is to study. I would say get my education done.

Jack added that his family does not speak much English; however, they have been communicating in English more with him, further evidence to their loving support: “Now they also became a little bit comfortable with English.”

While Jack’s role as a student and the waxing conversations in English with his family influenced his academic performance, Jack revealed that his obligation to his extended family of international students, whom he engaged with daily, helped to further develop his literacy skills:

The recent international students, they do expect help from me education-wise. They do need help in some of the classes, and they do look for me, many of the times in the classes, in their group projects, or in homework or some of the stuff. Within this extended family, Jack serves as an elder and tutor. He not only self-identifies as a wise peer mentor who experienced the challenges of an international student but also assumes the role of tutor who assists with reading, writing, and speaking skills. He playfully added, “Yeah, Yeah, I help them with English language as well.” While he was their senior, he offered in a modest tone, “Once the communication between us starts in English, we also correct each other, and we also practice and learn. So, it does help.” Jack proudly concluded, “I have improved my English.”

Similar to Amber, Debra, and Michael, Jack’s role within his family was that of a student. In addition, Jack assumed the role of peer mentor and tutor for incoming international students. Both of these roles within his family and extended family influenced his academic performance and further developed his English literacy skills.

Elizabeth, similar to Jack, reflected on her extended family, who she attended class and lived with throughout her college career. While she was sure to distinguish between family and friends, she assigned the closeness of family to her peers: “The family that I made here are just my friends, but we live as a family.” Like a proud older sister and peer mentor, she affirmed her role within her extended family:

Because I’m more, that I am a senior to the people that I have around me, I am just more responsible about their safety and their concerns if they are trying to face any sort of academic crisis. If they are trying to write a paper and they need my help, then I can definitely help them with that.

Like Debra, Michael, and Jack, Elizabeth helped others to develop English language skills and become successful students. She was aware of academic support services and was able to triage students as needed. Furthermore, her English and content knowledge was more advanced than her peers which naturally placed her in the role of tutor. Thus, service as peer mentor and tutor had a positive influence on her academic performance. Elizabeth proudly concluded, “These responsibilities, they contribute to my English skills—I think significantly!”

Donna was determined to learn English. She came to the U.S. to secure a career and build a home for her children. She reflected on the challenges that she faced, reiterating, “I had no time.” She was working, attending school, seeking tutoring for English, and raising a family. Her reflection was that of a proud and protective mother who had proven to herself that she can do anything. In a matter-of-fact tone, she offered, “I was determined to learn English. My kids, they came [to the U.S.] when they were five. My son was ten. My older son was 14. That means that they speak English between themselves.” It was imperative for Donna to learn English, not only for work but also so she can communicate with her children who were learning English in grade school. She noted the distinction between second language acquisition for children and adults as she stated that her children learned English young so she had to develop English language skills to communicate with her children: “When I talked to them, not now that they are older, but when they were younger, they used to look at me, my face, and my mouth because they didn’t understand what I was saying.” This strengthened her resolve to learn English.

While Donna's experience with her family was different than that of Amber, Debra, Michael, Jack, and Elizabeth, the impact of family on her academic performance and literacy skills are similar. Thus, Donna's family had a positive influence on her academic performance and English literacy skills.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **relationships with family had a positive influence on participants' academic performance and English literacy skills**. Participants' families contributed by creating an environment that was supportive of learning, offering opportunities for the participants to engage in English and tutor/teach family members, providing finances and the understanding that being a student is the participants' job, and affirming that learning English is a necessity for the success. Next, I will discuss the subtheme of community on the participants' academic performance.

Subtheme: Community

The subtheme of *community* was found during the analysis of the participants, as four out of six participants reflected that their relationships with community influenced their academic performance. Amber and Debra reflected that community had a negative influence on their academic performance as they did not have an opportunity to practice English, while Michael and Jack shared that community had a positive influence on their English literacy skills, which impacted their academic performance. The theme of community built upon the previous themes. For example, it was the participants' ability or inability to practice English within their community that influenced their academic performance. As found in Debra's transcript, it was her struggle with feeling ostracized by her community that could have had a negative impact on her academic performance.

Amber shook her head side to side as she shared that she had few, if any, opportunities to practice English within her community of Spanish speakers: “Because of my area [community], everybody speaks Spanish. It was hard for me to actually speak English, so I could understand a little bit.” While she was happy to express that her teacher was helpful, Amber realized that she needed to practice English throughout the day. Thus, her only opportunity to develop her English-speaking skills was in school:

My ESL teacher helped me a lot with writing, vocabulary, and reading, but speaking wasn't the same because my friends only spoke Spanish. So, that wasn't the same as practicing speaking English. I just learned that in college.

Amber was rigid in her tone as she discussed her daily routine in the early stages of her academic career: “In the beginning, I didn't speak English outside the campus. It was not that good. I just went straight from home to the college and from the college to home.” She lifted and dropped her right hand into her left, speaking in rhythm she stressed, “That was my life: *home, library, campus, and then home!*”

Amber's opportunities to practice English diminished when she left campus. She was conscious of this and focused on her English language skills while on campus. While engagements within her community had a negative impact on her developing English skills, it was Amber's resilience and dedication to her studies that strengthened her resolve as she stressed her routine: home, library, campus, repeat. Thus, community influenced Amber's academic performance.

Debra's tone shifted as she reflected on her experiences with community. Like Amber, Debra's opportunities to practice English diminished as she left campus and returned to her community: “I was surrounded by Spanish people who speak Spanish. If

they didn't understand what I was saying, they would come up to me and speak Spanish. So, it didn't help me a lot." She became animated and in disbelief as she shared that she was bullied because she sought to develop English language skills.

I was around people who only speak Spanish, or they speak English and Spanish, but I feel like they didn't help me to improve my English. Instead, they bullied me. I don't know if this sounds right, but my own people didn't help me to improve my English.

Debra continued to shake her head and frown. She was ostracized by her community and these experiences had changed the way she felt about her community:

Yeah, and that's how I feel. My own Hispanic people, they don't improve themselves, because they don't see themselves learning English. They don't see themselves going to college. It is because everyone makes fun of each other. If I come around someone, and I start speaking in English, they will say 'Oh my God, look, because she's living in the United States, now she thinks she's a *gringa* [a derogatory term referring to a female foreigner]'.

Her tone changed to determination and pride as she defended her identity as a college student. She concluded, "You know, these comments affect who's learning, and yeah, this is really sad." Her tone and body language suggested that these interactions had left a scar; however, the scar seemed to be a reminder of the past. Though Debra's interactions with community became lasting memories, these interactions strengthened her resolve to further develop her English literacy skills and succeed as a student.

Michael was proud to reflect on his experience within his community. Early on, he recognized that he needed to be immersed in the English language. He shared that he

ventured outside of his community, so he was surrounded by English. He was concerned that if he did not venture out, he may not later on: “When I came here [referring to his current hometown], I guess going out and trying to communicate in English helped me a little bit, because I didn’t block myself right away.”

Michael began to speak as if he was mentoring an English learner. He reflected on becoming part of the U.S. culture and not feeling overwhelmed by his use of English and lack of understanding of the culture:

It [venturing outside your community] contributes because this is something that I advise the students who are out there trying to be bilingual, too, that you have to be part of the culture whether there are good things or bad things [referring to characteristics of the cultures that one enjoys or dislikes], either in their culture and the American culture, you still have to learn it, and you have to go through it and understand it.

Michael was focused on acquiring English language skills from the start. While he struggled to communicate as he explored U.S. cultures and the English language outside the Hispanic community, he was determined. He exclaimed, “Yes! That practice helped me with my studies and English.” Michael offered advice to English learners: “Don’t feel clustered and trapped in the Hispanic world. Go out there! Be more open to understand other cultures.”

It was clear that Michael was proud of his accomplishment and wanted to help his fellow English learners. He affirmed that he was well aware of his Hispanic culture, so he wanted to expand his culture and understanding. He spent much of his time with English speakers:

That really helped me because I went little by little, I was getting away from the Hispanic culture. I realized that I've seen my culture and Spanish for a lot of years, so what's the point of continuing to look at that if I already know it. So, little time was spent on that, and most of my time focused on going and hanging out with close friends, going out with their families that only spoke English.

Michael was concerned that his English skills would not improve unless he ventured outside the Hispanic community. He focused on adapting U.S. cultures and developing English language skills by immersing himself in the surrounding communities. These interactions further developed his English literacy skills and influenced his academic performance. Michael concluded, "This helped and improved my literacy skills tremendously."

Jack was thankful for the opportunity to study in the U.S. He reflected that it was his dream to study abroad, learn new cultures, and meet people:

I always had a dream of coming abroad, and I wanted to learn about the different people, and I wanted to share my community, as well, and I wanted to be part of different kinds of people and learn something different and learn new stuff. The U.S. was the best place to come. So, as I came here—and I really enjoyed it, and everyone was so accepting of me.

As Jack reflected, he shared that he was aware of his developing English; however, members of the community were accepting. As a result, Jack was able to practice his English skills:

I know my language wasn't that good, but everyone made me so comfortable. They do want me to be a part of their community—they do want to be a part of

me, and they want me to explore [expand] myself, as well, and they do want to know more about my community as well.

Jack's positive interactions with members of the community increased his sense of belonging and supported his developing English literacy skills. He joyfully reiterated, "They [the community] did make an effort to explain the same stuff again, because they are accepting me. This helped with my studies." Thus, similar to Michael, community had a positive influence on Jack's academic performance.

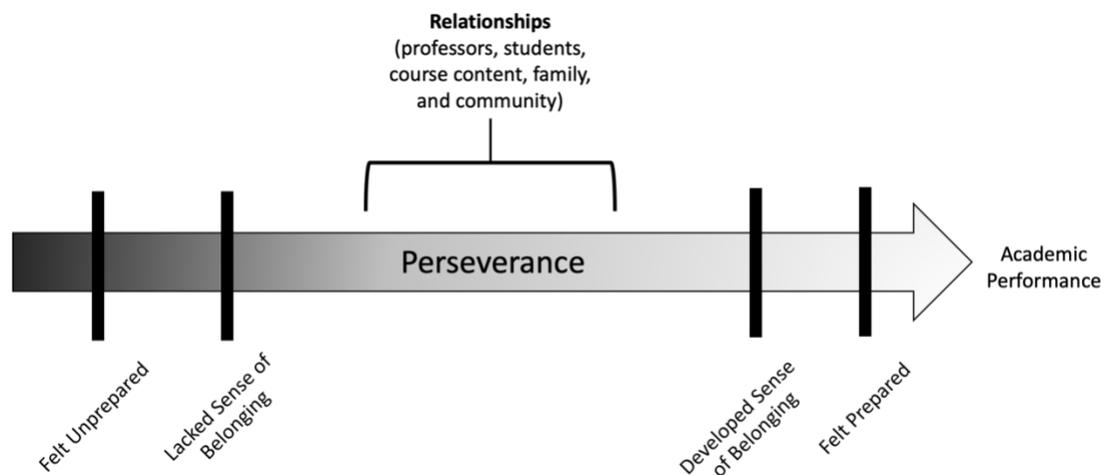
Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **relationships with community had an influence on participants' academic performance and English literacy skills**. The theme of community was found in four of the six participants. While Amber and Debra shared that they were not able to practice English within their community, this strengthened their resolve to seek other means to further develop their English literacy skills. On the other hand, Michael and Jack had ample opportunities to practice English as they engaged conversations and U.S. cultures. Thus, four of the participants revealed that community influenced their academic performance.

Through a detailed analysis of the data, the super-ordinate theme *relationships* was found and comprised of the following subthemes: *professors*, *students*, *course materials*, *family*, and *community*, as they were common among participants. These themes helped to answer the secondary research questions: *What do college English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?* *What do college English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?* However, these findings overlap with super-ordinate themes *preparedness*, *belonging*, and *persistence*. In addition, the subthemes professors,

students, course materials, family, and community add to the trajectory in which the participants felt unprepared once they entered college level courses taught in English; however, through perseverance and the relationships between 1) participants and professors, 2) participants and students, 3) participants and course materials, 4) participants and family, and 5) participants and community, the participants' sense of belonging increased, and they were better prepared to complete college courses taught in English. *Figure 2.* depicts the addition of the super-ordinate theme relationships its subthemes that influenced the participants' academic performance.

Figure 2

ELLs' perception on their ability to complete college courses taught in English with super-ordinate theme Relationships added



Themes of preparedness, belonging, persistence, and relationships helped to answer both primary and secondary research questions. Thus, there is overlap. The super-ordinate theme *resources* will be discussed next.

Super-ordinate Theme: Resources

Upon examination of the data, the super-ordinate theme **resources** was found among each participant. The theme of resources was contextualized within the study as the place where and activities that English language learners practiced the English language and further developed their language skills, which also influenced their academic performance. For example, 1) practicing and developing English skills during tutoring, 2) enhancing their understanding of the English language through translating, 3) practicing English at work, and 4) practicing English during leisure activities. There was overlap among the super-ordinate themes of preparedness, belonging, perseverance, relationships, and resources, as they contributed holistically to the participants' perceptions on their ability to complete college courses taught in English and also their academic performance.

Subtheme: Tutoring

A close analysis of the data showed that *tutoring* was common among all participants. Moreover, tutoring further developed the participants' English literary skills, increased their sense of belonging, and enhanced their academic performance. Amber and Debra shared that tutoring helped a lot and that they gained from the social and tutorial interactions. Michael, Elizabeth, and Donna reflected that tutoring helped them to better understand the English language, adding that their writing improved. Jack stated that the tutors were patient, allowing him the time to formulate responses in English. A detailed analysis of the participants follows:

Amber was excited as she shared that she went to the tutoring center regularly. She reflected on the first semester that she used the service. The center had just opened

for the semester, and she was concerned about an assignment that represented a large percentage of her grade:

I remember when the tutoring center opened for the semester. I just went there for one of my big assignments, and I went there like two or three times to get help with the same tutor. Yeah, that helped me a lot, too, especially with my essays.

Her engagement began with understanding the assignment and progressed to the writing process. She also received tutoring for reading, discussing passages with the tutor. She added, “I actually learned a little bit more to speak English.” She noted that tutoring helped to develop her English language literacy skills:

I noticed that it was actually good for me to keep on getting tutoring and especially for essays and writing. It made me have a better understanding on how to write or the correct way to write an essay or fix my sentences.

Amber’s English skills improved as she continued to engage in tutoring services. She not only learned how to write an essay, but her speech improved as well: “Especially, talking to people, interacting with people.” The opportunities to practice reading, writing, and speaking English at the tutoring center were an influence on her literacy skills.

Debra was excited to reveal that she attended tutoring sessions and that she became a regular in the tutoring center. She knew someone who worked there and would often hangout in the tutoring center:

My friend worked for the tutoring center, and somehow, I got along with her friends—her coworkers. And, just seeing them and how mature they are and hearing them speaking at this level of matureness. My social skills got better with them.

Debra was thankful of the opportunity to be around like-minded students. She felt comfortable using English in the tutoring center and noted that the people in the tutoring center prioritized their academic development and skills, particularly those seeking help with English:

There were tutors that I felt so comfortable speaking with—that I felt so comfortable with making errors, and they would come up to me and say, ‘You know, this is the right way to say it.’ I felt so comfortable with them.

As Debra reflected on the center, she paused and said enthusiastically, “It was so different, like being around people at the tutoring center who were so mature and respectful. I feel like I gained so much knowledge.” She concluded, “It [tutoring] helped me so much to improve my skills in English.”

Similar to Amber, Debra’s English skills improved as she continued to engage in tutoring services. The staff at the tutoring center created an environment that supported her developing English skills. Moreover, Debra found a location on campus where she surrounded herself with like-minded students.

Michael reflected as if he were talking to a first-year student. He paused, folded his arms, and pointed to me: “Find another type of resource, the library [referring to tutoring center located in the library] or another type of help.” Previously, he discussed the importance of professors. Now, he instructed that it was imperative to seek additional help. He continued:

Where I really got help doing my essays and understanding how it [English] worked was through tutoring. Tutoring is the number one thing that people should

get when they're writing and hanging out with these good students, who know what they are doing, it is almost like getting tutored.

Similar to Debra's statement on her desire to surround herself with people who prioritize their studies, specifically English literacy skills, Michael declared that it was critical to his development, as it was like being tutored all the time. He reiterated, "The service that I used a lot was tutoring." Thus, Michael's engagement in the tutoring center and with students influenced his English literacy skills which increased his sense of belonging.

Jack reflected on the students who helped him to practice English. At first, he sought the help of other students who prioritized their studies:

If you have people around you who are willing to understand you, or they are giving their time to understand you, or something like that, then it's much more easy and make—makes your—it makes the process much more easy.

Jack's engagement was dependent on finding students who were willing to take a moment to discuss course content and assist with his developing English language. While he stated that finding helpful students made it much easier, his tone shifted to that of someone speaking of a best friend when discussing the tutoring center. He exclaimed: "We do talk English most of the time! I would say, tutoring center looks to me to—to be—to be more expressive. I would say. If I need to explain the—the problem or whatever, I can." Jack felt comfortable in the tutoring center. He was able to take his time and communicate in English, explaining himself and course materials. He concluded, "[tutoring] was really good."

Jack's reflection on tutoring was similar to Amber, Debra, and Michael. He found the tutoring center to be comfortable as the tutors created a safe space for Jack to practice

English. Thus, tutoring influenced his English literacy skills and increased his sense of belonging.

Elizabeth was enthusiastic as she began, “The more resources you have, the more better you are.” Her tone was that of a mentor speaking to a first-year student. She reflected on the process of making friends and becoming familiar with support services on campus, adding that in the beginning, she didn’t use much:

With time, when you make friends and get familiarized with the resources that you have around you, you feel that it’s very easy for you to learn anything—because there are a lot of resources. Right now, I have the library. I can go to the tutoring center. I have a huge computer. Back then, I didn’t use so much.

Elizabeth’s face seemed to light up when she expressed the importance of the tutoring center on her English writing skills:

When I came to know that there is a tutoring center, which has English tutors who can help me with writing and at least they can proofread my papers for me, but not help with that [referring to editing], but at least proofread them.

She emphasized the importance of proofreading. With pursed lips and furrowed brows, she stated that her papers in the beginning required multiple drafts:

It helped me to give a better draft to the professor than like 20% of the paper that was just rubbish, because I didn’t know much, and I really accepted that, because I was a very bad writer back then.

Elizabeth’s regular appointments at the tutoring center helped to improve her English literacy skills. Similar to Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack, Elizabeth was thankful of the tutoring staff and enthusiastic to reflect on her engagement at the center.

Donna was matter-of-fact in her reflection. While her experience was similar to that of Amber, Debra, Michael, Jack, and Elizabeth, Donna simply stated her routine: “Going to tutoring, to the library. Library and tutoring, that’s it!” She expressed, “I had no time.” She had a limited amount of time while on campus due to family obligations. She confirmed that tutoring helped as the tutors reviewed the papers and instructed her on next steps: “Tutors were very helpful, because sometimes when I did the papers, they helped me with looking through the book or writing my grammar and spelling.”

Donna attended tutoring appointments regularly, focusing on reading and writing. While her time on campus was limited, she had positive experiences in the tutoring center. Similar to the other participants, Donna’s engagements with tutors helped to develop her English literacy skills.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **tutoring had a positive influence on the participants’ literacy skills and academic performance.** Tutoring facilitated environments where the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves in English. Moreover, tutors assisted with reading, writing, and speaking, which helped to develop participants’ English literacy skills. Next, I will discuss the influence of other translating.

Subtheme: Translating

A close analysis of the data showed that *translating* was common among all participants. Moreover, the use of translating further developed the participants’ understanding of the English language and the nuances between their native (L1) and English. Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack shared that translations of a single word was more effective than translating whole sentences and phrases. Michael’s imperative

statement sums the consensus on the efficacy of translating, “Translating one word or maybe two words just to get the idea but trying to translate everything does not work.” However, Donna and Elizabeth had a different experience with translating, as they were able to switch between their native and English languages, which suggests an advanced understanding of the language structures.

Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack found that translations of a word were more effective, as translating whole sentences resulted in confusion, frustration, and awkward moments. Elizabeth found translating effective; however, noted that her reliance on translation is “very rare now because I am very confident and now that I have knowledge of both languages equally.” Whereas, Donna found translating effective, as she was able to translate from English to her native language and back to English, which suggests an elevated understanding of form, meaning, and use in both English and native languages. A detailed analysis of the participants follows:

Amber found that translating was effective; however, she expressed that translating words were more effective than translating whole sentences: “I just need to translate a word, and let’s look what is the meaning of that word instead of translating everything.” She added that when she translated sentences, she often found that the meaning changed:

So, let’s say that I translate a sentence or something, then when the professor explains, it’s another thing. So, that’s when I realized that *no, this is not a good idea!* If I had to translate something, I just need to translate a word, and let’s look what is the meaning of that word instead of translating everything.

Amber noticed early in her academic career that translating sentences was ineffective, but she still relied on translations for meaning. She added, “Just maybe one word, just to see the meaning, not the whole sentence. Yes, so it helped just a little bit.” While reflecting on her experiences, she expressed that translations often resulted in awkward moments, “When you translate something but it actually means another thing, it’s weird.” She concluded, “It [translating] didn’t mean what I wanted it to do.” Amber’s reliance on translation in the beginning often placed her in uncomfortable language situations; however, she noticed that translating a word helped her to construct the meaning of the sentence, which influenced her literacy skills.

Debra, similar to Amber, described her use of translation as a means to understand sentence structures and pronunciations in English: “It [translating] helped me to kind of learn more on how a sentence works in English, or how the proper way to pronounce this word.” She heavily relied on translation in the beginning: “I would translate everything in my head before speaking English,” adding, “I would write in Spanish, and then translate in English.” Her tone shifted to that of a mentor speaking to a first-year student as she began to reflect on the efficacy of translations and her increasing confidence and sense of belonging:

So, sometimes when you translate [L1] things [words] to English, they work, but when you put all those words into a sentence, sometimes they don’t match to each other, and when you put those words into a sentence and you say it aloud, that sentence is terrible and confusing. Because most of the time, that’s not the right way to do it.

Similar to Amber, Debra's reliance on translations for whole sentences often resulted in confusion. She exclaimed, "It doesn't work!" She realized that translating a word within a sentence worked as she was able to construct the meaning of the sentence. Debra concluded, "In English, it sounds perfect, but when I translated into [native language], it sounds horrible!" Debra's reliance on translation of whole sentences resulted in confusion; however, she noticed that translating a word helped her to construct the meaning of the sentence, which influenced her literacy skills.

Michael shook his head in frustration while discussing his experience with translations during the beginning of his college career. He was heavily reliant on translations: "Every time I saw a word, I had to check it in English." He exclaimed, "Sometimes, the words don't match!" He became irritated as he reflected on his challenges with translations: "Some of the essays [that I submitted] must have been not as good as I thought they were because I was just inserting words." He exasperated, "That was a struggle."

Michael's tone shifted to that of a mentor speaking to first-year ESL students. As if recording a public service announcement, he shared, "Don't try to translate or try to see word-by-word what it means in [your native language]." Like Amber and Debra, Michael found that translating a word to construct the meaning of a sentence or phrase was more effective than translating an entire sentence: "Translating one word or maybe two words just to get the idea but trying to translate everything does not work." He concluded, "I think it helps not to translate." Michael's reliance on translation in the beginning resulted in frustration; however, he noticed that translating a word helped him to construct the meaning of the sentence, which influenced his literacy skills.

Jack was matter-of-fact as he reflected upon his dependence on translation during the beginning of his college career. He was reliant on Google Translate; however, as his vocabulary increased, his use of Google decreased:

I do use it [translations] some of the times, because some of the words I don't understand. Now it's much more easy for me, but in my initial year over in the United States, it was difficult. I had to use the Google much more because some of the—even some of the words in our business terms were really hard for me to understand, and it [English] was really new for me, so I used to use it [translations] was more then.

Similar to Amber, Debra, and Michael, Jack realized that translation of sentences and phrases often resulted in confusion and frustration: “[translating] would not give me a full explanation about the—what we are talking about.” He shared as if speaking to first-year ESL students during new student orientation:

I would say translating a word was much more easier than translating a whole phrase or a whole sentence because some of the times, if I tried to translate the whole sentence into my [language], it was changing the purpose or the meaning of a sentence.

Jack's use of translations in the beginning helped with single words, however, resulted in confusion. Similar to Amber, Debra, and Michael, Jack noticed that translating a single word helped him to construct the meaning of a sentence, which influenced his literacy skills. He concluded, “It [translating] doesn't help.”

Elizabeth appeared proud as she reflected on her ability to translate newly acquired words and phrases in English to her native language. She relied heavily on

translation, reflecting that her native language is central to her communications in a second language: “I first formulated that answer in my native language, because when you talk to yourself, you talk in your native language.” She expressed that translating and word choice is important; however, as I confirmed post interview, she was referring to the importance of choosing the correct word while using synonyms: “I feel it’s [translating is] very important. The kind of words you choose are also very important,” adding, “It’s just helping me to pick the right word.”

Unlike Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack, Elizabeth did not struggle with translations from English to her native language. While she stated, “[I] was never able to switch my language,” referring to switching from English to her native language midsentence, she was able to translate the meaning of the sentence in her native language and successfully construct sentences in English. Today, she does not rely on translations. She proudly expressed, “It’s [her reliance on translation is] very rare now because I am very confident and now that I have knowledge of both languages equally.” In a tone suggestive of a message to first-year ESL students she concluded, “If you have to transcribe your language or change languages from time to time, that is completely okay.”

While Elizabeth relied on translations, her experience was different than that of Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack. Elizabeth successfully managed translating from English to her native language and developing English language skills to the point where she no longer relied on translations. Thus, translations influenced her literacy skills.

Donna, similar to Elizabeth, proudly reflected on her use of translations as an everyday routine. She wrote in her native language while listening to lectures in English:

“I used to do my notes in [my native language]. [My] notes were more easier and quick.” As she wrote in her native language, she exclaimed, “I was thinking in English. I was listening in English. I was putting it [the words] in English.” Similar to Elizabeth, Donna’s ability to quickly translate suggests a commendable language feat as the word order in her native language is different than that of English. When I sought clarification, she simply responded, “I used to put words into Spanish instead of putting the whole sentence in English.”

While Donna relied heavily on translations, her reflection suggests an elevated level of comprehension for both languages, the latter she developed through her translations. Her experience was different than those of Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack; however, similar to Elizabeth. Donna successfully managed to translate and developed an understanding of form, meaning, and use of the English language. Thus, translations influenced her literacy skills.

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that all **participants utilized translations** while developing English language literacy skills. Amber, Debra, Michael, and Jack found that translations of a word were more effective, as translating whole sentences resulted in confusion, frustration, and awkward moments. Whereas Elizabeth and Donna were able to translate English into their native languages and back into English, which suggests an elevated understanding of form, meaning, and use in both English and native languages. While the experiences of the participants vary, there is a commonality among them: translation influenced the English language literacy skills of all participants. Next, I will discuss the influence of work.

Subtheme: Work

The theme of *work* was found during the analysis of the participants, as all participants reflected that work influenced their academic performance; moreover, the use of English in their work environments influenced the development of their English language literacy skills. Furthermore, the theme of work built upon the previous themes. For example, it was the use of English during work that helped to strengthen their resolve to acquire English language skills, which enhance their academic performance.

Amber, who worked as a teacher, proudly offered that she had used English with her grade school students. She began, “Speaking English at work helped. It was actually good, because I was teaching elementary school students.” She was modest in tone as she stated that at times her students corrected her mispronunciations, which helped her developing English skills:

They also have vocabulary, because I just taught mathematics, but just relating and speaking with the children, that helped me a lot, too. Because even then, sometimes they [the students] told me, ‘Oh, no, this is not the way you say this. This is how you need to say it, or do you mean this word?’ So that helped me a lot, too, especially with my speaking.

While Amber switched to Spanish to assist struggling students, she was cognizant that her emphasis was on their developing English skills. Thus, it was important to prioritize English literacy skills.

I needed to speak in English. Whenever they didn’t understand something, I would say it in Spanish because they are from this area. Everybody spoke

Spanish, but English was my main goal and to be aware of that means that I needed to understand and speak for students to understand me.”

As Amber practiced her English literacy skills as a teacher and revealed that she learned pronunciations from the students, too, she was modest in providing insight to her identity as a life-long learner of English. In addition, she was comfortable asking coworkers for assistance with her English:

I did speak in Spanish when I didn't understand or I didn't know how to say a word, or I asked my coworkers, 'How do you say this?' and I was aware that I shouldn't be speaking Spanish the whole time. So, I was aware of that, too.

Amber's career as a teacher, specifically the communications with students and coworkers, helped to further develop her English literacy skills which had an influence on her academic performance. She concluded proudly, “Speaking with children at work helped me a lot as a student.”

Debra shared that she worked in the HVAC industry. Her role was invoicing, customer service, and other office duties. She spoke in Spanish and English while at work; however, much of her work required her to translate job-site summaries written in Spanish to English for invoicing:

At work, I need to write invoices in English. So, the employees that do the work and go outside and fix everything, they come to me with the invoices in Spanish. So, I have to translate them in English.

These translations required Debra to not only improve her English literacy skills but also to learn the vocabulary and mechanics of the field. She quickly realized, as previously

stated, that translations do not work. She added that watching videos focusing on the HVAC field helped to improve her English skills:

Translating on Google is not good. I try to translate it in my head. I watch videos online in English about how to fix stuff that we service. I watch those videos and that is something I have been doing since I've been working with this company, and it has helped me a lot.

Debra's determination to translate in her head and apply newly acquired vocabulary, seemingly, on-the-spot are commendable. Her voice rose as she added, "My boss speaks, writes, and reads in English. The guys speak a little bit of English, but they do not write in English. They write in Spanish." Debra was proud of her accomplishment. Her examination resulted in a revelation of accomplishment and self-worth. She was nodding her head in agreement as she concluded, "I feel like I gain knowledge [English literacy skills], and it helps me with my studies." Thus, Debra's use of English and translation skills at work influenced her academic performance.

Michael worked as a tutor while attending college courses. He was thankful for the opportunity to practice English while in the tutoring center. Moreover, he was able to complete writing assignments and receive writing tutoring when he did not have appointments. He began, "At work we only speak in English. So, everything is only in English." While he continued to discuss his use of English in the tutoring center, he referenced a previous job and his developing second language:

Well, the truth is, I might have some developing English skills and language through the time I was working at one company; however, when I went to the

tutoring center and I became a tutor, that is the moment that I can say I became proficient practicing with these younger tutors. They corrected me and my essays. Michael shared that he was aware of the opportunity to practice English while assisting students in the tutoring center, but it was his interactions with tutors and the resources in the center that helped to increase his vocabulary and knowledge in various subjects:

I took advantage of my work like this: practicing with tutors and students, learning their skills. What is better than the tutoring center to put together all the best skills, science, business, English, etc. You learn from them. If you listen and pay attention and sit with them and talk, you learn.

In addition, Michael was proud that he had learned how to apply different approaches to tutoring, for example, explaining assignments and equations and applying student engagement strategies. He shared as if speaking to a newly hired tutor, “You have to find the proper way of speaking and approaching a student.”

Michael, similar to Amber, expressed that he had used translations to assist struggling English language learners, but he ensured that over time, they became less reliant on their native language:

There were students that I saw that they were struggling. They reminded me about where I started. Sometimes I will insert Spanish but less each time I meet with the student until it's all English.

Michael employed some of ESL strategies that he used as an ESL student. His role as a tutor and proximity to English tutors and resources such as textbooks presented an opportunity for him to further his English skills, thus, influencing his academic performance.

Jack also worked as a tutor. Similar to Amber and Michael, Jack found that his employment offered an opportunity to practice his English language. He also noted that he switched between his native language and English during tutoring sessions:

We had a couple of students seeking help that spoke my language. They had the same problem, English problem, and I had to ask my supervisor if I can explain and use my language, ‘Would it be appropriate or not?’

He offered that he was able to engage students in his native language and, similar to Michael, decrease the students’ reliance on English:

For now, the priority is the student and then I was able to explain the stuff to the student, much more better and much more faster. She was a beginner, I would say, of learning English language.

Jack’s face was bright as he shared how tutoring helped to further develop his English literacy skills, as tutoring pushed him to use concise language and develop various engagement strategies:

It does help me a lot [with my English literacy skills]. I would say, because, uh, you won’t have students all that time that are going to be speaking your language. So, it’s going to push you to speak English language, communicate, and I would say that helped me a lot as a tutor. I had to push myself to express myself very simple and very, very well because that’s part of my job, and I can explain problems very easily.

Jack was thankful of the opportunity to develop his English skills while working as a tutor. Like Amber, Debra, and Michael, Jack’s use of English at work influenced this

literacy skills, which had a positive impact on his academic performance. He concluded by affirming, “It helped me use English in a better way.”

Elizabeth worked in higher education as a student assistant and graduate assistant. She used both her native language and English with students; however, reports and internal communications were always in English, which offered her ample opportunities to practice her English literacy skills:

So, the way you work in terms of the way you write certain reports, the way you paraphrase some summary, and the way you communicate with your peers and your mentors, it definitely adds to your literacy skills, especially English, because that’s the only language that I speak. I used to have a bad ear [for English] back then, so the use of English [at work] definitely helped me with my literacy skills.

Elizabeth was proud to reflect on her growing literacy skills, contrasting her abilities now to that of the past when she struggled with spoken English. Like Amber, Michael, and Jack, Elizabeth reflected on the use of her native language when addressing students:

My first approach to students will be in English, but if the person is not trying to understand a particular thing, I would definitely use my native language, just to make them understand a little bit in what I’m saying.

Elizabeth paused to compose herself. The revelation of her English language accomplishments seemed to affect her. She proudly concluded, “It [work] definitely helped me with my literacy skills.”

Donna looked straight into the camera, nodded her head, and in an affirming tone said, “Now, my English is natural.” I paused, waiting to hear more. Donna worked in the social services field. She not only struggled to acquire the necessary skills to complete

college courses, but she was also concerned about the high-stakes certification test she had to pass to remain in the field: “I have to take a test for the certification, the license [for my career]. The meaning of the questions changes because I made mistakes because I couldn’t understand the question.” While she expressed that it took time to prepare and pass the test, she confirmed that it was not the content that troubled her. It was her English language skills, as she would often mistranslate a word and change the meaning of the question.

Donna also enjoyed volunteering. She found it rewarding on multiple levels, specifically because she was able to help people who were also struggling with English. She offered: “I am also a volunteer for many years. I tried to help people that don’t speak English. It is very helpful to your own English skills when you help others to work on their English.” While she found joy in helping others, she noted that her use of Spanish and English further developed her English literacy skills. Moreover, the use of English helped with her continuing education requirements.

When I asked how speaking English at work had influenced her academic performance, she proudly but simply replied, “I was speaking English at work and that helped.” She continued with a nod of her head—her satisfaction with her accomplishment was palpable:

Now I am a worker and I have to write reports. As for my supervisor of the case supervisor of the manager, I have good reports. If you read my reports about my investigations, you do not have to ask questions, because I do everything that is required. I don’t miss anything. I see the picture.

Donna's use of English at work and while volunteering influenced her academic performance. Moreover, she had overcome her struggles with English and passed a high-stakes certification test, securing her career. She concluded as she began, "Now, my English is natural."

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **work had a positive influence on the participants' academic performance**. All the participants spoke English at work and had opportunities to utilize their native languages to assist others. This offered ample opportunities to practice English and note the similarities and differences between English and their native languages. Furthermore, it helped the participants to build their vocabulary. Next, I will discuss Leisure.

Subtheme: Leisure

The theme of *leisure* was found during the analysis of participants, as all participants reflected that leisure influenced their academic performance. Amber reflected that she used her leisure time to relax and often watched soccer in Spanish. Debra shared that leisure time is spent working on future assignments. Michael, Jack, Elizabeth, and Donna stated that leisure time was often spent watching programs and movies in English. While Amber's leisure was a break from her studies, the other participants used the time to further develop their English literacy skills, which had an influence on their academic performance.

Amber reflected on the importance of watching soccer in Spanish. Her examination suggested that watching soccer in Spanish reminded her of times with her family, i.e., the atmosphere, engagements, and excitement. This also provided a necessary break from focusing on her English literacy skills. Moreover, she enjoyed watching

Spanish because of the vocabulary, indicating that she had not acquired enough English sports idioms to fully enjoy watching soccer in English. Thus, there are several factors as to why she watched soccer in Spanish:

Everything was in Spanish. Even when I watched Soccer on the TV, it was in Spanish for me. Because it was exciting than watching it in English—it was okay [in English], but I didn't like it—okay, just let me get my Spanish version. I feel that I'm in the stadium watching players. It's also vocabulary related. That's it, it's vocabulary! It's just how the vocabulary words are used on TV. I can relate to the meaning quicker in Spanish. It was a break too.

Amber's focus was on learning English throughout the week and at school. Leisure time was spent watching soccer, which was a cultural tradition she engaged in growing up. In addition, she was unfamiliar with vocabulary and idioms used in English commentaries. Furthermore, her expressions and way that she worked through her examination, specifically how she justified watching soccer in Spanish, suggested that she needed a break from practicing English. While Amber did not practice English during this time, the break reenergized her, which had an influence on her academic performance.

Debra began by shaking her head as she offered, "I don't have any time." She was either studying, working, or with her daughter, which did not allow her much time. Her leisure time was often spent working on current or future assignments:

Whenever I have free time, I just work on my assignments. Even if I don't have assignments due this week, I try to work on the assignments that is due next week or next month. I always take advantage if I have free time.

She was cognizant of her time and the notion that any emergency would derail her ability to absorb the course materials and submit assignments on time.

While Debra had little time during the academic year, she enjoyed running outside with her family during the summer: “When it comes to summertime, I love to run. I go out with my sister and daughter—she’s in a jogging stroller. This probably my only activity that I do.”

She added that running helped with stress management and that while outside she did engage with people in English:

I feel like going out to exercise and run just a little bit to release my stress if I have some. It helps me whenever I need to do an assignment, I don’t stress that much, and I just do it. When I socialize with someone, I learned to be patient, and I learned to just gain knowledge for my skills when I am speaking with someone.

Debra’s use of jogging to relax and destress played an important role in her academic performance. She also engaged in English with people during her leisure time which helped her to further develop her English language skills.

Michael was adamant about the importance of fully immersing oneself in English. He was determined to develop his English language and understanding of American cultures. He began, “I watched movies in English,” paused for a moment, and added that he didn’t like reading subtitles. He affirmed that it helped with his ability to understand the English language in use:

I didn’t like the dub—is that a word? ... Yes, subtitles in English. I didn’t like it. So, sometimes I watched and tried to understand. It helped when I was outside

listening to people. Eventually, it was easier for me to understand. My ears were getting much, much better.

As he spoke of fully immersing himself in English, he revealed that a balance of English and Spanish was important to him, particularly since his wife was learning English:

It's [use of English and Spanish during leisure time] divided between reading or watching soccer whenever I can and walking my dog. Whenever I can share some English and some sentence with my wife [who is learning English] here and there.

While the balance helped with Michael's mental wellbeing as it offered a break from English, it was his focus on helping his wife to acquire English literacy skills which also influenced his understanding of English:

It has helped me to improve [my English skills]. I don't have to translate from one [language] to another. It has helped me to expand my vocabulary and my literacy. It helped me to understand subcultures because there are some slangs and expressions that are not in the books in academics.

Michael reflected on several ways that engaging in English during his leisure time helped to improve his literacy skills. Moreover, it was his constant practicing of English that not only improved his vocabulary and English literacy skills but also influenced his academic performance.

Jack, like Michael, spent much of his free time immersed in English on social media and watching television. He was matter-of-fact in his reflection; however, he became animated as he began to discuss sports. He enjoyed the commentaries in English, which improved his understanding of American and British sports idioms:

In my free time, I personally watch games on YouTube or something on TV or anything like that, and these are mostly in English. So, that helps me build the listening, I would say. I love watching football games, soccer games, basketball. I also watch cricket and all the commentaries, and everything is done in English. So that helps me listen better—I would say soccer, mostly in Europe, so they use different [English] language. But that still helps you grow your English language skills.

Like Michael, Jack focused on his listening skills, familiarizing himself with the sounds and pragmatics of the English language. In addition to sports, he shared that he and his friends, who were also English learners, watch subscription services: “We started watching Netflix and Amazon Prime, and all this stuff and all those English movies and TV series, so yeah, it builds your listening power.” He emphasized that it helped to improve his English literacy skills which influenced his academic performance.

Elizabeth focused on reading, watching television, and practicing English during her leisure time. Like Michael and Jack, she immersed herself in English. She paused then reflected: “I think the linguistics, the influence I got was from books, initially from books, and the second thing, I used to watch a lot of American shows and communicate with American friends.”

Elizabeth noted that these resources were non-academic; however, revealed that they were easily accessible and provided a supplement to her studies. Furthermore, these resources facilitated a natural use of language where she can take risks with English grammar, e.g., meaning, form, and usage:

American TV shows and American movies were the first non-academic resources that helped me. I didn't know what Netflix was before I came here. When I came here, I started watching American TV shows and communicating with a lot of people from here and around. They were the two main important non-academic resources that I had, and they were also very easily accessible. This helped with my English and studies.

Like Michael and Jack, Elizabeth surrounded herself with English. She read, watched television and subscription services, and communicated with friends. She revealed that these are non-academic factors; however, they influenced her developing English literacy skills and academic performance.

Donna was determined to learn English. She had to succeed in the U.S. for her family, which strengthened her resolve as she sought ways to practice English during her leisure time. Like Michael, Jack, and Elizabeth, Donna watched television in English; however, unlike the others, she focused on reading the newspapers. She read the Spanish paper, then the English paper, then compared her understanding of the articles, focusing on grammar and vocabulary:

I was watching TV in English. I was buying the newspaper in Spanish and in English. And when I see that they have the same news, I was reading the news in Spanish and then in English.

Donna was proud of the time and energy that she had spent on acquiring English during her leisure time. Her comparisons between the articles writing in English and Spanish had helped to develop her English literacy skills. She nodded, looked at me, and concluded as

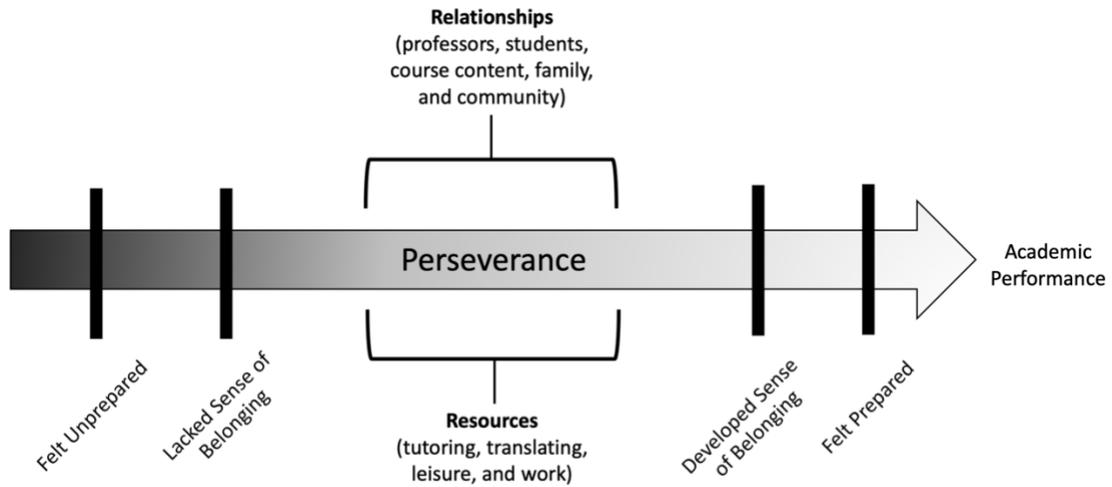
if speaking through her eyes, “I was determined to learn English. This helped with my English and my assignments.”

Through a close examination of the data, the study found that **leisure had an influence on the participants’ academic performance**. While one participant used her leisure time to break from studies, this reinvigorated her as she returned. The other participants continued to focus on their developing English literacy skills as they watched television and subscription services, read books and newspapers, and communicated with friends in English. These factors offered ample opportunities for the participants to practice English; furthermore, they helped the participants to develop vocabulary and usage in a natural environment which influenced their academic performance.

Through a detailed analysis of the data, the theme **resources**, which included subthemes *tutoring*, *translating*, *work*, and *leisure*, was found among participants. These themes helped to answer the primary and secondary research questions. Furthermore, the theme *resources* adds to the trajectory in which the participants felt unprepared once they entered college level courses taught in English; however, as they engage in resources, such as, tutoring, translating, work, and leisure, where they were able to practice and further develop their English language skills, they were better prepared to complete college courses taught in English, which enhanced their academic performance. *Figure 3.* shows the addition of the super-ordinate theme *resources* to the linear trajectory of ELLs’ perception on their ability to complete college courses taught in English.

Figure 3

ELLs' perception on their ability to complete college courses taught in English with super-ordinate theme Resources added



Themes of *preparedness*, *belonging*, *persistence*, *relationships*, and *resources* answered the primary and secondary research questions. The super-ordinate theme *relationships* consisted of subthemes professors, students, course materials, family, and community. The super-ordinate theme *resources* consisted of subthemes tutoring, translating, work, and leisure. A summary of the results will be discussed next.

Summary of Results

In this chapter, I provided evidence of five themes found through close analysis of the data. Following the guidelines of the IPA methodology, the themes provided rich data that answered the primary and secondary research questions. As I previously noted, themes overlapped as the interview questions and level of comfort of the participants provided rich data that supported the double hermeneutic of IPA. Moreover, the

examinations provided an organic narrative that helped me to understand the lived experiences of college English language learners.

The primary and secondary research questions were as follows:

- PRQ: *What are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English?*
- SRQ1: *What do college English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?*
- SRQ2: *What do college English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?*

The study found that themes of **preparedness, belonging, persistence, relationships, and resources** 1) affected the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English (PRQ) and 2) influenced the academic performance of English language learners (SRQ1 and SRQ2).

The data showed that some participants had negative experiences with language prior to enrolling in college, which affected their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses; moreover, the data showed that their perception on their level of preparedness quickly dropped as they entered the college classrooms due to their diminishing confidence to communicate with English speakers. As the participants' perception on their level of preparedness dropped, their sense of belonging also decreased as they felt like outsiders due to their perceived inability to communicate effectively in English, i.e., their pronunciation and lack of English vocabulary and overall understanding of English grammar. In addition, three participants showed that their identity as a 'good student' affected their interaction in the course, for example, as they

struggled to engage in English within the classroom and received grades below an (A), they believed that they were no longer perceived as a 'good student.' However, the participants' perception of their levels of preparedness and sense of belonging increased over time, as they persevered.

The participants exhibited persistence by immersing themselves in the English language through engagements with professors, students, family, coworkers, community, leisure, course content, and a waning reliance on translations. The participants noted that as they further developed their English literacy skills, their sense of belonging in the classroom and as English speakers increased. Thus, increasing their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English; however, this transition occurred throughout their academic career as they were acquiring vocabulary and further developing their understanding of the English language in use.

The data found that relationships and resources influenced the participants' academic performance and increased their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. The participants revealed that family played a supportive role in the developing literacy skills, whether assisting with homework and vocabulary or providing emotional and financial support. Often participants assisted family members with their developing English skills, thus, assuming the role of tutors.

Similar to family, the participants' work environments were conducive to their developing English literacy skills, as the participants' work environments relied on English. As a result, they had ample opportunities to speak and write in English.

While community could have had a negative impact on two participants, as they felt ostracized by community members, they persisted, focusing on achieving their language

and academic goals. The other participants stressed the importance of immersing themselves in U.S. cultures and the English language, which helped them to further develop their English language skills.

Leisure also had an impact on the participants developing English; however, one participant did not engage much in English during her leisure time. She revealed that this was her time to unwind and watch soccer. While she expressed that she enjoyed watching soccer in her native language, this is indicative of a family tradition with its excitement and comradery; furthermore, it also revealed that she is still developing her vocabulary, specifically American sports idioms. The other participants shared that they watch American television, subscription services, sports, and read—they are immersed in the English language. Thus, family, work, community, and leisure influenced the participants' academic performance and also increased their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

A close examination of the data found that translating, professors, tutoring, students, and course content also lent evidence to the participants' transition from feeling unprepared to developing a sense of belonging and feeling better prepared to complete courses taught in English. The participants noted that often translations do not work and that it is better to translate single words and not phrases or sentences, as this usually resulted in confusion and embarrassment. Thus, the participants' reliance on translations decreased over time.

Participants were thankful of professors who showed an interest in their developing English skills and understanding of course content. Professors were supportive during class and offered to meet after class. Additionally, professors introduced participants to

tutoring services. Participants were also thankful of tutors as they facilitated a welcoming environment and a natural use of English, which helped to further develop their English literacy skills. During the early stages of the participants' college careers, they felt that classmates perceived them as outsiders; however, over time they found that students were supportive, which increased their engagement within the classroom and ability to practice English. Course content also influenced the participant's level of engagement within the classroom, as their shared experience revealed that they engage more when course material and content is relatable. Thus, translating, professor, tutoring, students, and course content influenced the participants' academic performance, and also increased their perception on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English.

A close analysis of the data showed that themes of preparedness, belonging, persistence, relationships and resources affected the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English (see Table 7). These themes were also perceived as influences on the participants' academic performance.

Table 7*Recurrent Themes*

| Recurrent Themes | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|---------|------|-----------|-------|-------------------------------------|
| Themes | Amber | Debra | Michael | Jack | Elizabeth | Donna | Present in over half of the sample? |
| Preparedness | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Belonging | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Identity | N | Y | N | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Persistence | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Relationships | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Professors | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Students | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Course Content | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Family | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Community | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | N | Y |
| Resources | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Tutoring | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Translating | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Work | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Leisure | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |

In the final chapter, I operationalize the findings within the framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the themes found during the data analysis stage, operationalize the themes within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Luca (2002b), review the limitations, and offer recommendations for practice.

Overview of Findings

Drawing upon the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, themes preparedness, belonging, perseverance, relationships, and resources helped to answer the primary and secondary research questions: (PRQ) *What are the perceptions of English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English?* (SRQ1) *What do college English language learners perceive as the academic influences on their academic performance?* and (SRQ2) *What do college English language learners perceive as the non-academic influences on their academic performance?* Subthemes of *relationships* included professors, students, course materials, family, and community. Subthemes of *resources* included tutoring, translating, leisure, and work. Identity was a subtheme of *belonging*.

Themes

Close analysis of the data provided evidence to five themes. Each theme not only affected the perceptions of participants on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English but also influenced their academic performance. Thus, the themes are organic as they helped to understand the perceptions of ELLs attending institutes of higher education. Each of the themes, including subthemes will be discussed

followed by how they can be operationalized within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b).

Preparedness

Six of the six participants revealed that they were unprepared to engage in college courses taught in English. Two participants shared experiences in grade school that affected their perceptions on their ability to succeed in college, which affected their engagement in the beginning of their college careers. Amber revealed, “My guidance counselor told me, ‘Oh no, you should go to a community college because of your language.’” Amber added, “I told myself, *oh, you won’t be able to do this.*” Debra shared, “I felt like I didn’t learn anything throughout my middle school to high school years”, referring to her English language skills. One participant was not enrolled in an ESL course during the first year of college, which resulted in a decrease in perception on his ability to complete his classes. Michael shared that he was not aware of ESL instruction as he reflected, “I guess it was a big part on my behalf and also on behalf of the school to make me take a [major] course, and that’s why I got a C- on the first test.” He was frustrated as he concluded, “I was limited.” Another participant struggled in an advanced ESL course; whereas she stated that a beginner course would have helped with her pronunciation, which she still struggles with today. Donna shared that she was enrolled in an advanced ESL course; however, “that was a mistake! Because in the first or second level, they teach you how to put your tongue for pronunciation.” The remaining two participants felt that they were prepared for college courses taught in English since they succeeded in English as a foreign language classes in their native countries; however, their confidence dissipated once the college courses in the U.S. began; they reflected that

the English they learned in EFL classes was very different than the English used in the United States. Elizabeth revealed, “The type of English that my professor used, was expecting for me to know was really different.” Jack expressed, “I wasn’t able to comm[unicate]—present myself that comfortably because I was taught, I was taught British English.” All participants revealed that they were not prepared for college courses taught in English; however, this changed over time as a result of the following themes.

Belonging

Six of the six participants revealed that they lacked a sense of belonging during the beginning of their academic career. All shared that their lack of English literacy skills, accents, and feeling like outsiders affected their engagement within the classroom. Amber reflected, “I had to read the chapter or the section two or three times to understand it. So, that made me feel that I didn’t belong to those courses.” Debra’s reflection built upon Amber’s, “Sometimes if I don’t speak or if I don’t participate in the class, even if I’m paying attention, sometimes I feel like I don’t belong in that class.” Michael took much longer than his classmate to read a paragraph. He expressed, “That was always that fear that I hated!” he concluded, “I was like, I’m writing like, probably, a junior high school kid. This is very bad!” Jack focused on his identity as a good student, “I do know the answers, but I still don’t do it [participate] because I won’t look good among the class and it would create a different impression or there is always worry about ...that people might laugh at you.” Elizabeth reflected, “The first day I went to class, I was judged—the professor asked me to introduce myself, and the way I introduced my language and everything—I was looked upon in a different way.” Three participants expressed the

importance of their **identity** as a ‘good student’, which influenced their engagement in the classroom. While they understood the questions and followed the discussions, their inability to quickly formulate responses in English negatively impacted their sense of belonging. In addition, they believed that poor grades deflated their identity as a ‘good student.’ All participants revealed that as a result of professors, peers, and their developing English literacy skills, their sense of belonging increased. However, this increase in their sense of belonging took time, and like the shift in their perceptions on their level of preparedness, the increase in belonging overlapped with other themes.

Persistence

Six of the six participants exhibited persistence as they struggled internally with the perception that they were not prepared and did not belong. All participants revealed that the only option was to develop their English skills. Amber reflected on her experience with her guidance counselor who said that she should not apply to a four-year college because of her English language skills, “You know what, I’m going to prove, not [to] the person that told me that [I should not apply to a four-year university], but myself that I actually am able to do this.” Debra stated, “I didn’t have any other option then to work hard, as well, and overcome that challenge” She exclaimed, “I got to do it! I need to learn English!” Michael revealed, “I developed, probably, a little bit of fear since I’m an immigrant and that my English was always limited. So I’m trying to overcome that, that ghost inside of me...saying like, ‘No, you’re not going to fail.’” Similarly, Jack expressed, I was trying to push myself to learn and try to improve my language”, adding, “I just started pushing myself to communicate with people.” Elizabeth’s response was similar, “I was ready in the mind that I have to learn this...and not just for the course, not

just to pass the class, but for me!” Donna reflected by offering advice to other ELLs, “Don’t be embarrassed and ask for help!” The participants sought help from instructors, peers, and the tutoring center. In addition, they immersed themselves in English by reading and engaging in conversations and leisure activities. Moreover, their perseverance had a positive impact on their perceptions on their level of preparedness and sense of belonging. However, there is overlap among the themes.

Relationships

The theme of relationships is comprised professors, students, course materials, family, and community. These subthemes helped to describe how ELLs relationships helped with their perception on their ability to complete college courses taught in English and helped to enhance their academic performance.

Professors

Six of the six participants revealed that professors had affected their English literacy skills and academic performance. All shared that it was their developing relationships with the professors that increased their engagement within the classroom and with course content, as the professors showed an interest in their developing English literacy skills and introduced them to academic support resources and second language acquisition strategies. As a result, professors had a positive influence on the participants’ perceptions on their English language abilities and sense of belonging, which strengthened their resolve to succeed. Amber shared, “She [her professor] was amazing! She was also the best and that’s why I am today with my English.” Debra added, “I was so blessed to have these teachers who called on me a lot. They knew I had trouble with my English.” Michael revealed that his relationship with the professor had transformed

him, “That is what opened my perspective and helped my confidence to say, *Okay, let’s fight for this one.*” Similarly, Jack appreciated his engagement with his professors, “They wanted every, every member of the class to commit, to be part of the discussion... They were just, you can say whatever you feel, it doesn’t matter.” Elizabeth’s professor uplifted her spirits, “She [the professor] was like, ‘Okay, but I want you to really succeed in this class, not just this class, but also, because I want you to succeed in all of your classes.’” Likewise, Donna was appreciative that her professors had connected with her, “You see, when they [professors] are able to talk to you and want to talk to you after class—their time to talk to *you*. I asked for help.”

Students

Four of the six participants reflected that students influenced their English literacy skills and academic performance. Debra reflected, “They [students] helped me like I pronounce a word wrong... I feel like I learned so much in college.” Michael added to the conversation, “It [support from students] built my confidence. It’s like, *Don’t worry about it. You’ll be fine. You’re trying and that’s what is important.*” Jack built upon Michael’s experience, “Everyone [in the class] is from a different part of the world, and everyone has their different accents, but everyone is respectful, and everyone is trying to accept you.” Elizabeth added, “with months and weeks passing by, I made friends, and I was very open to learning... So, the class was actually very happy with me.” Elizabeth and Jack often focus on how others perceive them, suggesting that as they continue to engage students, the support they receive validates them as ‘good students’. As participants developed relationships with their peers, these relationships facilitated environments where the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves naturally in

English. Participants shared that they had positioned themselves as good students, which helped them to build relationships with likeminded students and resulted in an increase in peer engagements. Over time, the participants developed relationships with these students, which helped to further develop the participants' English literacy skills and increase their perceptions on their English language abilities and sense of belonging.

Course Materials

Five of the six participants shared that course materials influenced their English literacy skills and academic performance. Amber shared, "when I can relate to the course materials, yeah, somehow, yes, I ask more questions and I actually give my own opinion." Debra added, "When I like something, I engage better." Michael built upon Amber and Debra, "When it is a course material that is in your interest, it motivates you." Jack revealed, "I don't have to push myself because, I'm enjoying the [my] time so I'll be much more involved...much more comfortable." Elizabeth offered a metaphor of two tasty dishes, "I'm going to eat both of them equally, but the way I'm going to eat this [one] and enjoy it...is going to be very different," savored. Course materials that drew upon the participants' interests increased engagement in the classroom and with assignments. Moreover, the participants' level of comfort with the material facilitated discussions and the natural use of English. Similar to professors, students, and tutoring, the participants' relationship to course materials that were familiar helped to further develop their English literacy skills and increase their perceptions on their English language abilities and sense of belonging.

Family

Six of the six participants reflected on the influence of family on their English literacy skills and academic performance. One participant shared instances with her father, who did not speak English, and her younger sister, who was learning English, as they sat at the kitchen table with a dictionary and introduced new vocabulary words to each other: “He was there every single night. Sitting with us, with my sister and myself, trying to help us understand what the homework was.” Another participant began to tear up when she realized that she had become a teacher while helping her mother and daughter to develop their English skills: “I was helping my mother and daughter without knowing it! ...I gained so much knowledge!” Similarly, all the participants revealed that family created supportive environments where they can practice English. Moreover, family had an affirming attitude toward learning English and engaging English-speaking communities. Two participants shared that their role in the family was that of a student, as the family provided financial support so the participants could focus on their academics. Michael revealed his support of the family and that he received from his mother: “I dedicated my commitment to them [my family] for ten years” Then, “My mom told me, ‘It’s okay. Do it. Go for it!’” Jack shared, “My part, my responsibility right now from my family’s perspective is to study.” Elizabeth was a senior to the younger international students, who she considered family away from home. Thus, she helped them to develop their English language skills. Donna’s younger family members spoke English, which strengthened her resolve to develop her English skills. Thus, family helped to further develop the participants’ English literacy skills and supported their academic performance.

Community

Four of the six participants reflected on the influence of community on their English literacy skills and academic performance. Two participants shared that their communities had no impact on their academic performance as they did not have opportunities to practice English within the community: Amber began, “Everybody speaks Spanish. It was hard for me to actually speak English.” Furthermore, one of the two participants revealed that she was ostracized by her community for her developing English language skills: Debra stated, “They bullied me. I don’t know if this sounds right, but my own people didn’t help me to improve my English.” This strengthened her resolve to learn English and focus on her developing community of English speakers. The remaining two participants revealed that they had immersed themselves within the English-speaking community, which offered ample opportunities to practice English. Michael revealed, “Yes! That practice [within the community] helped me with my studies and English... Don’t feel clustered and trapped in the Hispanic world. Go out there! Be more open to understand other cultures.” Similarly, Jack shared, “I want to share my community, as well, and I wanted to learn new stuff.” While community was a recurring theme among the participants, the influence of community on the participants’ English literacy skills, perceptions on their English language abilities, and sense of belonging varied. However, it was the participants’ immersion within the English-speaking community that helped to further develop their English literacy skills and increase their perceptions on their English language abilities and sense of belonging.

Resources

The theme of resources included subthemes of tutoring, translating, work, and leisure. These subthemes helped to describe how the resources utilized by ELLs helped with their perception of their ability to complete college courses taught in English and helped to enhance their academic performance.

Tutoring

Six of the six participants reflected that they had engaged in tutoring services. Similar to their developing relationships with the professors, tutors facilitated an environment within the tutoring center where the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves naturally in English. Moreover, tutors assisted with reading, writing, and speaking, which further developed the participants' English literacy skills and had a positive influence on the participants' perceptions of their English language abilities and sense of belonging. Amber shared, "I noticed that it was actually good for me for me to keep on getting tutoring...It made me have a better understanding on how to write or the correct way to write an essay or fix my sentences." Debra added, "There were tutors that I felt so comfortable speaking with...I felt so comfortable with making errors, and they would come up to me and say, 'you know, this is the right way to say it.'" Michael had a similar experience, "Where I really got help doing my essays and understanding how [English] worked was through tutoring," He added, "Tutoring is the number one thing that people should get." Jack had a similar experience as tutoring, "makes the process [of learning English] much more easy." Elizabeth shared, that she was excited to learn of the tutoring center and that her writing improved: "It helped to give [submit] a better draft."

Likewise, Donna offered that tutoring “helped me with looking through the book or writing grammar and spelling.”

Translating

Six of the six participants relied on translations in the beginning of their college career. Four of the participants found that translating individual words were more effective, as translating whole sentences resulted in confusion, frustration, and awkward situations. Amber reflected on her revelation that translating did not work: “When you translate something but it actually means another thing, it’s weird.” Debra offered, “Sometimes when you translate [L1] things [words] to English, they work, but when you put all those words into a sentence, sometimes they don’t match...that sentence is terrible and confusing.” Michael added to the conversation, “don’t try to translate or try to see word-by-word what it means in [your native language].” Jack shared, “translating a word was much more easier than translating a whole phrase or sentence...it was changing the purpose or the meaning of a sentence.” Two participants expressed that they were able to successfully translate between L1 and L2, which helped them to better understand the structures of the languages. This also suggested an elevated understanding of form, meaning, and use in both languages. Elizabeth shared, “I first formulate that answer in my native language...I feel it’s [translating is] very important.” Donna stated that she wrote her notes in Spanish; however, “I was thinking in English, I was listening in English. I was putting it [the words] in English.” While the experiences of the participants varied, the use of translations had an impact on their English literacy skills and academic performance.

Work

Six of the six participants revealed that work had a positive influence on their English literacy skills and academic performance. All the participants spoke English at work, which provided opportunities for them to practice it. Moreover, all participants had the ability to engage in their native languages at work to assist developing English learners. This helped them to further understand the structures of their native and English languages. Amber began, “I need to speak English [at work]” adding, just relating and speaking with the children, that helped me a lot too.” Debra shared that she translated from Spanish to English at work: “They come to me with invoices in Spanish. So, I have to translate them in English. Michael built upon Amber’s and Debra’s reflections, “I took advantage of my work...practicing with tutors and students...you learn from them...sometimes I will insert Spanish but less each time.” Jack added, “I had to push myself to express myself very simple and very, very well because that’s part of my job, and I can explain problems very easily [in English].” Likewise, Elizabeth added speaking English at work “definitely adds to your literacy skills.” Donna concluded, “Now, English is natural...It is very helpful to you own English when you help others to work on their English.” The participants expressed that the use of English at work helped to further develop their English literacy skills and increase their perceptions on their English language abilities and sense of belonging.

Leisure

Six of the six participants reflected that leisure influenced their English literacy skills and academic performance. One participant shared that she used her leisure time to break from her studies and the use of English; however, this break reinvigorated her as

she returned to her studies and focused on her developing English skills. Amber started, “Everything was in Spanish ...Just let me get my Spanish version [of soccer] ...I can relate to the meaning quicker in Spanish. It was a break too.” Another participant shared that she read newspapers in her native language and English to understand the structures of the language and develop her literacy skills. Donna revealed, “I was buying newspapers in Spanish and English.” The remaining four participants continued to focus on their developing English skills as they watched television and subscription services, read books, and communicated with friends in English. Amber took advantage of free time to “work on assignments.” Whereas, Michael, Jack, and Elizabeth enjoyed watching movies. Thus, Leisure helped to further develop the participants’ English literacy skills and increase their perceptions on their English language abilities and sense of belonging.

Operationalizing the Strands of CRP

Employing culturally responsive pedagogy to train current and future instructors in higher education as well as educators in k-12 education systems will ensure that the needs of English language learners are not only met but exceeded. Below, I operationalize the findings of the current study within the framework of CRP as developed by Villegas and Luca (2002b).

Gaining Sociocultural Consciousness

The first strand of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b) acknowledges that the lived experiences of the students greatly differ from those of educators and that it is imperative for educators to recognize and reflect upon their experiences and biases and ensure that they, as well as up-and-coming teachers, become socioculturally conscious. For example, in this study six participants have

examined their experiences on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English. In addition, they have reflected on the influences that affected their academic performance—I have operationalized the influences as academic and non-academic, i.e. on-campus and off-campus. While each participant revealed themes that were common among the group, their experiences were unique and affected their interactions within the classroom, with the materials, and with their development of English literacy skills. Furthermore, instructors and future teachers may have similar experiences; however, they must gain sociocultural consciousness by understanding that their experiences, while similar to those of their students, are not the same as each student's. Thus, the examinations of the six participants represent a microcosm of the diversity found within the urban classroom for which instructors and teachers can enhance their sociocultural awareness.

To operationalize the strand of *Gaining Social Consciousness*, I suggest the development of workshops and open discussions/reflections on cultures, beliefs, and identities with an emphasis on diversity and how individuals are affected by social systems in place.

Developing an Affirming Attitude Toward Diversity

The second strand of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b) emphasizes the importance of an affirming attitude toward the growing diverse population of students. This includes students from not only different backgrounds but also varying sociocultural and economic locations and cultures and the differences in their education systems. Moreover, it shifts from the notion that students are deficient in the necessary skills to succeed in college. As an example, one participant

stated that her high school guidance counselor said, “You won’t be able to go” to a four-year university because of her English skills. She was frustrated as she reflected on her ability to excel in community college; whereas she felt her guidance counselor was not supportive and delayed her enrollment in the university that she dreamed about attending. Thus, it is imperative that instructors and future teachers support students’ academic needs and wellbeing, as an affirming attitude will not only foster meaningful relationships between instructors and students but also help students to develop a sense of belonging as they develop the English language skills required for their studies and off-campus experiences.

To operationalize the strand of *developing an affirmative attitude toward diversity*, I suggest the development of workshops and open discussions/reflections that focus on how the themes found in this study can support students wellbeing and academic performance.

Developing the Commitment to Educational Change

The third strand of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b) seeks the moral imperative that instructors and future teachers are change agents. This builds upon the first two strands which focus on sociocultural consciousness and an affirming attitude, as instructors must first acknowledge the differences among the cultures and lived experiences of students and develop a can-do attitude before taking a stance to support change within education systems and greater societies. As an example, one participant revealed that he had been fired because he was reading to improve his English and studying course content during downtime at work. His employer did not support his efforts; however, his instructor offered support, “Hey, don’t worry about it.

Maybe there is a new beginning.” This helped to build his relationship with the professor, and the continued support and guidance of the instructors supported his mental wellbeing as he questioned whether he should remain in college. While this is one aspect of an instructor committing to change, it is crucial that instructors and future teachers ensure that there is support programming available for struggling students. This includes student advocacy for counseling services, food and financial securities, and academic support services, including tutoring, supplemental instruction, embedded tutoring, academic coaching, etc. Thus, developing the commitment to educational change is a moral obligation, as instructors in higher education have the ability to shape the cultures of universities through teacher preparation curricula and k-12 education systems.

To operationalize the strand of *commitment to educational change*, I suggest the development of workshops and open discussions/reflections that support awareness of our students’ lived experiences, development of assessments that draw upon and synthesize the finding in this research, use of language that engenders change, and further insight on the systems in place.

Embracing the Constructivist Approach for Learning

The fourth strand of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b) embraces pedagogy that fosters learning by acknowledging that 1) learning is not neutral, 2) students enter the classroom with lived experiences, 3) social interactions influence understanding, and 4) student engagement is self-driven when content is of interest. Thus, the constructivist approach to learning facilitates intrinsic motivation for learning. For example, participants were not only motivated as they developed relationships with instructors, tutors, and students but also when course

content was relatable and drew upon their personal interests. One participant confirmed, “It does contribute a lot.” Moreover, the constructivist approach to learning is student centric, as it draws upon the students’ experiences and beliefs that have developed throughout their lives; therefore, the learning experience is deep, broad, and transformative. As instructors and up-and-coming educators employ the constructivist approach to learning, they draw up their social cultural consciousness, affirming attitude toward diversity, and act as agents of change while ensuring instruction is meaningful and transformative.

To operationalize the strand of *Embracing the Constructivist Approach for Learning*, I suggest the development of instructor training workshops and curriculum that draw upon the themes found in this study: preparedness, belonging, perseverance, relationships, and resources.

Learning about Student’s Lived Experiences

The fifth strand of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b) lays the foundation for the current study, as it seeks to gain insight on English language learners’ lived experiences during their college career, specifically their level of preparedness to complete courses taught in English and the influences on their academic performance. The funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) obtained through close examination of the participants’ examinations of their experiences revealed five themes: preparedness, belonging, persistence, relationships, and resources. These themes will illuminate areas of discussion and personal development for instructors who engage English language learners and diverse student populations. For example, discussions with students who are quiet in class may reveal that poor experiences within the classroom in

the past continue to affect the student's engagement, that the student is not confident or able to quickly communicate in English when called upon, or that the student lacks a sense of belonging within the classroom or university due to their accent or self-identity as an outsider. Furthermore, the funds of knowledge gained can be operationalized to advocate for an increase in funding and support programming to assist English language learners. As I have shown in Figure 1, English language learners' perception of their ability to complete courses taught in English diminished as they entered college. Moreover, they lacked a sense of belonging.

To operationalize the strand of *Learning about Student's Lived Experiences*, I suggest workshops and discussions that draw upon the themes found in this study. Moreover, I suggest continued conversations with students to ensure that the strategic goals of institutes of higher education and curriculum and instruction align with the needs of students and that students are supported, as related to this research, particularly that ELLs are supported.

Cultivating the Practice of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The practice of culturally responsive pedagogy ensures that the lived experiences of the students are not only respected but reflected within curriculum and teaching strategies. While there may be shared themes among students regarding their experiences, and these themes may also be shared with instructors, it is imperative that instructors and teachers understand that these lived experiences are unique to the individual. Thus, it is important that instructors bracket preconceptions and biases as they draw and build upon the experiences of their students in environments that facilitate learning and sense of belonging.

As found in the current study, through perseverance and the influences of professors, tutoring, students, course content, family, work, community, leisure, and translating, students developed a sense of belonging and increased their perception on their level of preparedness to complete courses taught in English. In addition, they further developed English literacy skills and elevated their academic performance. Thus, CRP is operationalized to train current college faculty and new faculty to ensure that English language learners receive the support needed to develop English literacy skills and increase their academic performance. Through training and dialogue, CRP and the themes found by the current study will help faculty to gain sociocultural consciousness, develop an affirming attitude toward diversity, develop a commitment toward educational change, and embrace a constructivist approach. The funds of knowledge gained through learning about students' lived experiences, which the current findings can be drawn upon, will help faculty to better understand not only their students but also themselves and how they position themselves to their students. Cultivating the practice of culturally responsive pedagogy can be done at the instructor level as well as departmental levels, such as, tutoring, counseling, advisement, campus life, housing, and advisement.

To operationalize the strand of *Cultivating the Practice of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, I note that instructors (and all personnel) in higher education embrace and operationalize the strands discussed above. Furthermore, it is imperative that students are taught about the systems in place and how to engender change.

Limitations

As an administrator in higher education, I have worked with diverse populations of students, many who are English language learners and/or are from low SES

communities. This has exposed me to the challenges that many college students face. Furthermore, the themes that I have found through close readings and meticulous analysis of the data have helped me to better understand English language learners' lived experiences during their college career. While the IPA methodology allows for some subjectivity and a priori understanding of the of the participants' experiences, I have bracketed my experiences and preconceptions to ensure that the findings are shown, not told, through the participants' examinations in their own words—I am pulling from my experiences with memoir and literary studies as I am showing the reader through the narratives of the participants. Moreover, my aim was not to reach a truth or consensus among the participants but to explore the themes among English language learners on their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English and the influences on their academic performance. While I have found five themes among the participants, it is important to note that the reflections of the participants on their lived experiences are unique and may vary in future research. Though the IPA methodology calls for a maximum of six participants, the depth of the interview, sensitivity of the context, and salience of the themes helps with generalizability.

Throughout my research, I wrote in a journal. My writings included my goals, which I learned early on that daily and weekly goals worked best. While continuing my research on the extant literature on college-level ESL, I furthered my understanding of phenomenological research and the IPA methodology. I understood the nature of the interview, as I needed to ensure that participants were comfortable with sharing sensitive examinations of their lived experiences. I understood that conducting interviews that provided rich data requires skill and awareness. Prior to the interviews and during the

development of the interview questions, I met with a team of higher education faculty and staff to discuss and practice the interview questions. The finalized questions were used for my research. While analyzing the data, I was immersed and disciplined with my attention to detail, ensuring that I researched and revisited my analysis before concluding.

While analyzing the data, I was cognizant of the strands of culturally responsive pedagogy and framework developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b). Thus, I oriented the study within CRP while attending closely to the data. The transcript of each participant was analyzed separately, revisited, and revised as needed before summation of the data, which was the final stage of analysis. Throughout, I was sure to remain unbiased with a balance between closeness and separateness. Though as a researcher, I understand that my experiences and prior knowledge may influence my analysis. However, I was vigilant while engaging in a double hermeneutic of the participants' lived experiences: the participant is interpreting their lived experiences and I am interpreting their interpretation of their lived experiences. As an additional measure of validity, participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts for clarity and accuracy. In addition, participants had the opportunity to review my analysis of their data to ensure their examinations were properly represented. In addition, participants were aware of counseling services if their examination revealed traumatizing events; however, none expressed the need.

I was pleased that participants found the interviews rewarding as they shared that they had not thought about their accomplishments before. Several participants had tears of joy as they completed their examinations on their accomplishments. In my future research, I will include an exit question on the participants' thoughts on their reflections,

as this component would build upon themes of preparedness, perseverance, and belonging.

Recommendations for Practice

College-level English language learners are at a great disadvantage due to the lack of research on their experiences while attending institutes of higher education. The current study provides educators in higher education and k-12 systems with a better understanding of English language learners' perception of their level of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English and the influences on their academic performance. Furthermore, it reveals the lived experiences of college ELLs as they persevere to develop English literacy skills and increase their sense of belonging within the campus and greater communities.

The themes found in the current study, which include preparedness, perseverance, belonging, relationships, and resources, have been operationalized within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy as developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002b). While CRP is often used for training of future teachers, employing training for current college faculty and new faculty will ensure that English language learners receive the support needed to develop English literacy skills and excel in their studies. Training modules would follow the strands of culturally responsive pedagogy as I have laid out above: 1) gaining sociocultural consciousness, 2) developing an affirmative attitude toward diversity, 3) developing the commitment toward educational change, 4) embracing the constructivist approach to learning, 5) learning about students' lived experiences, and 6) cultivating the practice of culturally responsive pedagogy.

In addition, tutoring centers that employ culturally responsive pedagogy would ensure that English language learners are welcome within the center and receive second language acquisition. This includes training on the themes found in this study and the six strands of CRP as well as training on sociopragmatics and other SLA theories and strategies.

Counseling, admissions, university advisement, and other student services centers would also benefit training that draws upon the themes found in in the current study and culturally responsive pedagogy. Training would not only help professional staff to better understand English language learners' lived experiences, but also elucidate the struggles of ELLs on and off campus.

Policy makers would benefit operationalizing the findings of the current study by implementing training guidelines, certifications, and continuing training units to ensure that educators draw upon the framework of CRP and as found in the current study, the influences on college level English language learners' academic performance and their cultures, beliefs, and experiences.

It is my hope that the findings of the current study have 1) built upon the extant literature on college-level English language learners, 2) added to the body of growing research employing interpretative phenomenological analysis, 3) provided context for culturally responsive pedagogy training for faculty, preservice teachers, and professional staff, and 4) increased awareness of the lived experiences of college-level English language learners.

The experiences and knowledge gained while conducting my research were not only transformative but have strengthened my resolve to advocate for underserved and

traditionally marginalized students. I look forward to training educators on culturally responsive pedagogy, continuing my research with English language learners, and utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is my recommendation that future research on culturally relevant pedagogy to support English language learners builds upon the foundation of the current study, as additional evidence is urgently needed to assist with operationalizing CRP to support English language learners. Moreover, with the influx of immigrants entering the U.S., it is imperative that scholars emphasize the need to 1) explore the cultures, beliefs, languages, experiences, and dynamic social structures of the diverse, growing U.S. population, and 2) operationalize the funds of knowledge gained through CRP for curriculum design, instructional strategies, and materials for teacher and faculty training.

Future research on culturally responsive pedagogy to support college level English language learners would benefit integration of additional theories, specifically positioning theory and theories found in second language acquisition (SLA). These additions would help to further develop our understanding of the perceptions and experiences of college English language learners.

APPENDIX A

Participant Consent Form A



Student Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am writing you to invite you to participate in my research project: **The Perceptions of English Language Learners on Their Levels of Preparedness to Complete College Courses Taught in English**. The study is led by John Blicharz, Ph.D. Candidate from the Department of Education Specialties, Literacy at St. John's University, who is also the Director of Centralized Tutoring and Academic Support Programming at New Jersey City University (NJCU).

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their levels of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English and explore the factors that influence academic performance. You were selected to participate because you are either 1) a student enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course or 2) a student who has been enrolled in an English as a Second Language course at some point in your academic career.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- You will participate in an interview that will consist of four questions. The interview will be conducted remotely using Zoom.
- You will have the ability to review your transcript from the interview for accuracy and clarity.

All data generated as a result of this project will be backed up daily to protect from loss of data from hardware failures, fire, theft, etc. Raw data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive which will be kept in a locked drawer or filing cabinet at New Jersey City University. Only the researcher (John Blicharz) will have access to the raw data. **For all participants, pseudonyms (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) will be used in transcriptions, descriptions, and data analysis.** Participant safety and confidentiality is a priority. Upon completion of the research and dissemination of the results, all raw data will be destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary. You do NOT have to participate, and you can stop participating at any time. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with your professors or me. The risks you may experience are minimal. You might feel nervous about giving answers during the interview. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact John Blicharz (jblicharz@njcu.edu or 201-200-2439) or Dr. Aly McDowell (mcdowela@stjohns.edu). To speak with someone from St. John's University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human participants in research please contact Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at digiuser@stjohns.edu or at 718-990-1955.

- Yes, I AGREE to participate in this study and I have read and understand the contents of this consent form.
- No, I do NOT agree to participate in this study

Signature: _____ Date _____

Email: _____

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form B



Student Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am writing you to invite you to participate in my research project: **The Perceptions of English Language Learners on Their Levels of Preparedness to Complete College Courses Taught in English**. The study is led by John Blicharz, Ph.D. Candidate from the Department of Education Specialties, Literacy at St. John's University, who is also the Director of Centralized Tutoring and Academic Support Programming at New Jersey City University (NJCU).

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their levels of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English and explore the factors that influence academic performance. You were selected to participate because you are either 1) a student enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course or 2) a student who has been enrolled in an English as a Second Language course at some point in your academic career.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- You will participate in an interview that will consist of eighteen questions. The interview will be conducted remotely using Zoom and last about 1.5 hours.
- You will have the ability to review your transcript from the interview for accuracy and clarity.

All data generated as a result of this project will be backed up daily to protect from loss of data from hardware failures, fire, theft, etc. Raw data will be stored on an encrypted hard drive which will be kept in a locked drawer or filing cabinet at New Jersey City University. Only the researcher (John Blicharz) will have access to the raw data. For all participants, pseudonyms (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) will be used in transcriptions, descriptions, and data analysis. Participant safety and confidentiality is a priority. Upon completion of the research and dissemination of the results, all raw data will be destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary. You do NOT have to participate, and you can stop participating at any time. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with your professors or me. The risks you may experience are minimal. You might feel nervous about giving answers during the interview. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact John Blicharz (jblicharz@njcu.edu or 201-200-2439) or Dr. Aly McDowell, Dissertation Supervisor (mcdowela@stjohns.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Dr. Ashok Vaseashta, chair of the NJCU IRB, at (201) 200-2453 or avaseashta@njcu.edu.

- Yes, I AGREE to participate in this study and I have read and understand the contents of this consent form.
- No, I do NOT agree to participate in this study

Signature: _____ Date _____

Email: _____

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email Script

Subject: You have been selected to participate in a research project

Dear Student,

I am writing you to invite you to participate in my research project: **The Perceptions of English Language Learners on Their Levels of Preparedness to Complete College Courses Taught in English**. The study is led by John Blicharz, Ph.D. Candidate from the Department of Education Specialties, Literacy at St. John's University, who is also the Director of Centralized Tutoring and Academic Support Programming at New Jersey City University (NJCU).

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of English language learners on their levels of preparedness to complete college courses taught in English and explore the factors that influence academic performance. You were selected to participate because you are either 1) a student enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course or 2) a student who has been enrolled in an English as a Second Language course at some point in your academic career.

If you agree to participate in this study:

- You will participate in an interview that will consist of four questions. The interview will be conducted remotely using Zoom.
- You will have the ability to review the transcript of your interview for accuracy and clarity.

Your participation is voluntary and confidential. You do NOT have to participate, and you can stop participating at any time. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with your professors or me. All of your answers from the interview are strictly confidential. Additional information about confidentiality will be available on the consent form.

Please contact me if you would like to participate or if you have any questions about the study or your participation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

John Blicharz

Director, Office of Centralized Tutoring and Academic Support Programming
New Jersey City University
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Centralized Tutoring and Academic Support Programming

APPENDIX D

Zoom: FERPA Statement



At Zoom, we are committed to protecting the security and privacy of our customers' data. This includes ensuring that our customers in the education sector are compliant with the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Information Security and Privacy are both key components central to FERPA compliance.

How does Zoom protect its customers data?

Zoom's commitment to protecting the security and privacy of our customers' data includes:

- Submitting our privacy practices to independent assessment and certification
- Undergoing an annual SSAE-16 SOC 2 audit by a qualified independent third-party
- Performing regular vulnerability scans and penetration tests to evaluate our security posture and identify new threats

What is FERPA?

FERPA is a U.S federal law that protects the privacy of student educational records. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends school beyond the high school level.

To what institutions does FERPA apply?

FERPA applies to all academic institutions that receive funds under applicable U.S. Department of Education programs.

Feb 2018

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