

Persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

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Carol L. Salva

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# PERSISTENCE AND INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION

Persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Approved August 6, 2021:

*Theresa Campos*

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Dr. Theresa Campos  
Dissertation Chair

*Michael Papadimitriou*

---

Dr. Michael Papadimitriou  
Methodologist

*Brandon Green*

---

Dr. Brandon Green  
Interim Director of EdD Program

*Ana-Lisa Gonzalez*

---

Dr. Ana-Lisa Gonzalez  
Dean of the School of Education and Human Services

## PERSISTENCE AND INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative phenomenological research study used narrative inquiry to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) regarding secondary school support systems. The study aimed to discover factors that support acculturation of SLIFE and impact their persistence through to high school graduation. For the purposes of this study, systems were generally described as family support, faculty support, school program support, and community support. Participants were identified through snowball sampling. Data collection included individual interviews using a semi-structured protocol, and data analysis involved video recording and handwritten and manually transcribing interviews. The interviews and notes were coded and analyzed for emergent themes. The conceptual framework for this study was guided by acculturation theory. The findings from this study revealed supports with respect to programming, scheduling, and utilizing existing resources. Furthermore, this research indicates that schools, communities, and families are able to positively impact the ability of SLIFE to persist by attending to how these learners are made to feel. This was a common theme throughout responses regarding all systems of support. Importantly, the findings of this study support acculturation theory and Berry's research on immigrants' social, psychological, and academic integration to a new culture (Berry & Sabatier, 2010).

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## Chapter I

### Introduction to the Study

The world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reporting that over 79 million people around the world were forcibly displaced at the end of 2019 (UNHCR, 2020). Forty percent of those displaced are children. The American Immigration Council's fact sheet, *An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy* (2020), explains that "Internally Displaced Persons" (IDPs) are people forced to leave their homes due to difficult circumstances but flee to another location within their home country. Some of those displaced flee to another country and are known as "refugees" while those who travel directly to the country in which they seek "safe haven" are referred to as "asylum seekers." Record numbers of immigrants are entering the United States despite the previous government's attempts to stem the flow of immigration (Custodio, 2011; Pierce & Selee, 2017). The United States Census Bureau has estimated that nearly fourteen percent of the total U.S. population are immigrants. They report that approximately 40 million immigrants are currently living in the country (Walters & Trevelyan, 2011). As a result of the increase, demands are placed on societal systems such our educational institutions which are responsible for the education of immigrants of school age (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2017). Increased levels of diversity in American classrooms create a challenge of serving children who are new to the language of instruction (Wheeler, 2020). While some ELs arrive in American classrooms with previous formal schooling, others arrive with limited or interrupted formal education (Browder, 2014). As local and state policy changes continue to affect the lives of immigrant students, their families, and their

communities (Pierce & Selee, 2017), schools are also faced with challenges associated with educating these learners. Some immigrant youth have low levels of literacy, low levels of formal language, and some lack the background to understand how to function in a formal educational setting (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Many immigrants of school age have lived through traumatic circumstances. This creates a level of complexity for educators as they address the social-emotional needs of these students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). This study will examine the perception of factors and conditions that contribute to the perseverance and persistence of students with limited or interrupted formal education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The current system of reporting consistently shows poor educational outcomes for adolescents classified as English Learners (ELs) on standardized tests written only in English (Browder, 2014). The field of study on education of ELs continues to expand and has gradually broadened to include the subject of ELs with limited or interrupted education. One primary issue is the rate at which this demographic is expanding. Current research indicates that the number of under-educated ELs is increasing at a faster rate than that of the general EL population (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010; Freeman et al., 2001; Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000; Short, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education does not require state education agencies to record the number of students with interrupted education or limited formal education (Browder, 2014). Nonetheless, there is growing evidence that SLIFE may account for 10% (Zehr, 2009), 15% (Walsh, 1999), or even 20% (Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000) of all English Learners in the United States. While the U.S. Department of Education does not require states to enumerate

SLIFE, certain states are recording the number of students missing formal education. Estimates from California and Maryland have determined the rate to be 20% (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Although data from every state is not recorded, a considerable number of secondary ELs could be classified as SLIFE. A national study conducted on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education surveyed high school aged ELs and revealed that 20% had missed more than two years of schooling since age six. The researchers also found that 27% were at least two years below grade level for their age, and 38% had very limited first language literacy (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993).

Educators face increasing responsibility, exacerbated by stress of high stakes testing, and the scrutiny associated with increased accountability measures (Browder, 2014). Many students arrive in U.S. classrooms lacking proficiency in the language of instruction, low levels of academic background knowledge, and some with low levels of literacy in their native language (Browder, 2014). The dropout rate in the United States for ELs is significantly higher than that for young adults who speak English at home (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015) and research suggests that English learners who have not learned to read by age nine are more likely to drop out of school (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012).

During the last 10 years, at least 100 million people have been forced to leave their homes, seeking shelter either within or outside their country's borders (UNHCR, 2020). This study addresses the issue of supporting the high number of students who have been displaced or are in transient lifestyles. Specifically, it aims to discover the factors that lead to persistence through high school by students with interrupted formal

education. While research indicates these students may struggle academically, (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015) there are some SLIFE that persist and remain in school despite a challenging home life and the formal school setting. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will focus on students missing two or more years of formal education.

Educators and school officials continue to explore strategies to differentiate instruction to support students with low levels of literacy. The student's affective needs, or their social and emotional state, must also be considered. Students who have limited or interrupted education may also need to learn how to successfully function in a formal education setting that is different from what they are used to (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). There is significant research on practices that support second language learners such as Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, input hypothesis, and free voluntary reading hypothesis. These practices, however, focus on strategies and techniques used in a classroom setting. An effective, self-directed learner is engaged in the learning process in and outside of the classroom, and their social emotional state can have either a positive or negative influence on their learning (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018) This research is being conducted because there is insufficient research on reasons some SLIFE persist in high school beyond the legal dropout age.

### **Background of the Problem**

Success rates of immigrants are influenced by many factors including their experience with literacy and formal education (August & Shanahan, 2006). English learners are required to master grade level content, a new language, and embrace the cultural nuances and norms of their new learning communities (Yzquierdo, 2017). Students who lack formal education or literacy face additional challenges in secondary

classrooms (Browder, 2014). Research suggests that English learners who have not learned to read by age nine are more likely to drop out of school (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012).

Current trends that are promising in educating ELs include culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015) and possessing the mindset that newcomers are assets to the learning community (Echevarría & Nora, 2016; Echevarría et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Miller, 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017; Snyder & Fenner, 2021). In an attempt to focus on assets, the term “EL” is being reconsidered by many who are referring to these students as a larger population. The terms “Multilingual Learners,” “Emergent Bilinguals” and “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse” students are examples (Snyder & Fenner, 2021). ELs bring valuable experiences and knowledge to our learning communities but too often they are evaluated primarily in terms of their limitations in the English language (Echevarría & Nora, 2016). While teaching practices can be improved for this demographic, recent immigrants still face challenges outside of the classroom that have to do with acclimating to their new surroundings (Yzquierdo, 2017). In addition to mastering the language of instruction, and in some instances the added challenge of closing their academic gaps, some ELs are not given the same level of exposure to content as students fluent in English. In some cases, lack of access to content has been attributed to low expectations from educators (Somé-Guiébré 2016) while other instances are the result of not being scheduled into courses with rigorous expectations or content due to their level of English mastery (Echevarría & Nora, 2016).

Low expectations from educators can negatively affect student achievement (Echevarría & Nora, 2016) as can the student’s own perceptions about their academic

abilities (Dweck, 2010). Promising developments for minority students exist in Dweck's growth mindset research. Dweck (2010) defines a growth mindset as a person's conviction that intelligence can be developed by various means rather than believing that intelligence is a static trait. Research indicates that having a growth mindset is especially important for students who are working against a negative stereotype about their abilities. Dweck's research (2010) shows that minority students who are traditionally stereotyped as underperforming, are willing to overcome challenges if they adopt a growth mindset. Her investigations reveal that even if people of color are aware that their race historically underperforms, they demonstrate increased effort, achieve higher grades and higher test scores when they believe that ability is malleable. Possessing a growth mindset showed positive correlations for all groups in Dweck's investigations, but the stereotyped groups were the beneficiaries of the greatest benefits (Dweck, 2010).

Vygotsky's (1980) theories stress the importance of social interaction for learning. He suggests that community plays a fundamental role in making meaning. More research is needed on the correlation of inclusion in mainstream classes in secondary schools. To expect that students should just work harder to close their own language or literacy gaps is not an equitable solution. Education professionals need to create conditions where students with interrupted education are motivated to persevere and persist through school. This study will examine the reflections of students with limited or interrupted education who persisted in school beyond the legal dropout age.

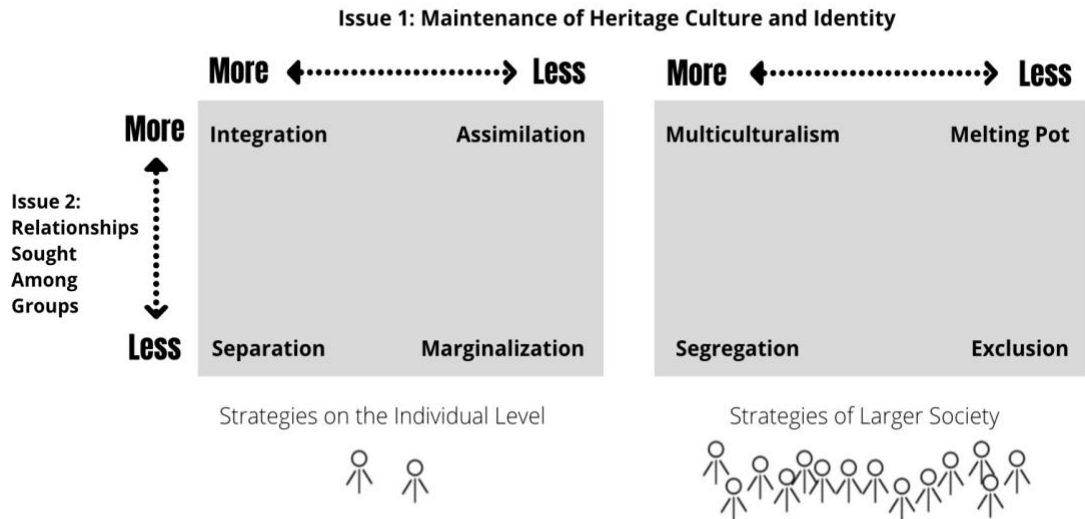
### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for the study is guided by acculturation theory. Acculturation is defined as "the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals



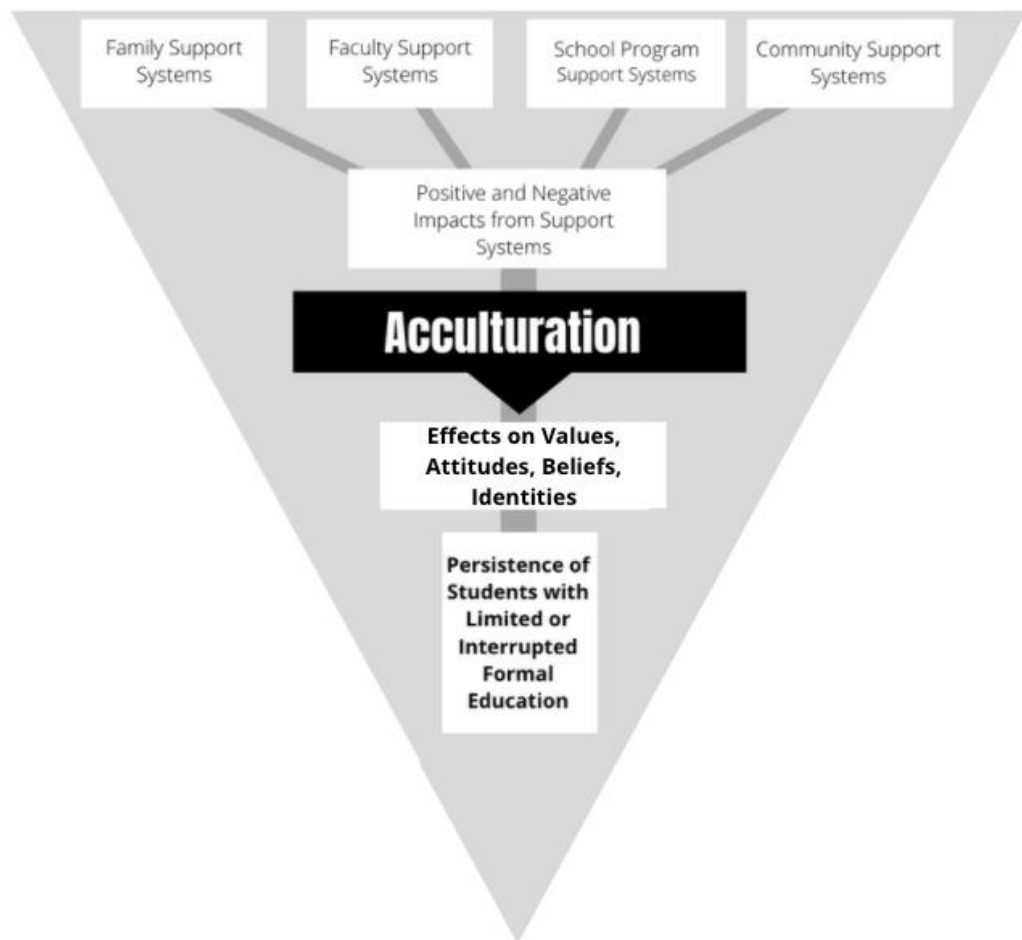
from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, first-hand contact with each other” (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 146). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these effects.

**Figure 1**  
*Acculturation Effects*



*Note:* Adapted from "Comparative studies of acculturative stress." by Berry, J. W., Kim, U., Minde, T., & Mok, D., 1987, *International migration review*, 21(3), 491-511.21(3), 491-511. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/019791838702100303>)

This first-hand contact can result in a change in values, attitudes, beliefs, and identities for individuals. Changes may occur at the group level resulting in social shifts or restructuring of cultural systems (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). Significant forms of the acculturation process are comprised of factors that are in place such as acculturation conditions. Other salient forms include strategies (acculturation orientations), and consequences (acculturation outcomes). This research explores the relationship between a child’s sense of belonging or connectedness and their degree of persistence. Figure 2 outlines the scope of work including the four areas of support systems that were investigated in this study.

**Figure 2***Support System Effects on Persistence***Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate SLIFE regarding secondary school support systems. Systems were generally described as family support, faculty support, school program support, and community support. The research questions for this study focus on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school. The central research question for this study was: What are the factors that support

acculturation of SLIFE and impact their educational success and their persistence through to high school graduation?

The specific research questions addressed the four main elements that make up the Support System Effects on Persistence Framework: *Family Support Systems, Faculty Support Systems, School Program Support Systems and Community Support Systems*.

RQ1 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their family?

RQ2 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to faculty?

RQ3 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to school programs?

RQ4 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their community?

### **Significance of the Study**

While research on supporting English Learners has grown significantly from the early 1980's to the present (Anstrom, et al., 2010), students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), a subgroup of the EL demographic, is underrepresented in the literature. This study is a significant contribution to the field of education in that it will add to existing literature where deficiencies currently exist.

The dropout rate in the United States for ELs is significantly higher than that for native English students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). There is an even higher proportion of dropouts among SLIFE (Capps, et al., 2015) due to a variety of challenges (Capps, et al., 2015). Findings and recommendations from these studies are important as an attempt to better understand SLIFE. ELs are the fastest growing student population in the country (Alford & Niño, 2011; Colón, 2019). With the world experiencing the highest levels of displacement on record (UNHCR, 2020), an increased number of newcomer students are likely to arrive with limited or interrupted formal schooling. Despite challenges, there are SLIFE who overcome obstacles and persist through to graduation. This study aims to discover the factors that supported or hindered their acculturation and ability to succeed. Primarily, through the use of the phenomenological tradition, a robust expression of the phenomenon of the factors affecting the academic success and persistence of SLIFE graduates can be illuminated through the words and perceptions of these individuals. The findings have the potential to support educators, administrators, and other stakeholders as they seek to improve outcomes for students with interrupted or limited formal education.

### **Assumptions**

Creswell & Poth (2018) noted that assumptions are defined as the researcher's expectations for which there is no actual, supportive evidence. Assumptions are an integral part of research as they serve to provide a particular perspective through which a researcher investigates a topic (Foss & Waters, 2016). For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions existed:

1. This research assumes the sample population was representative of the total population of SLIFE graduates from U.S. schools.

2. This research assumes all participants will answer interview questions with honesty and integrity.
3. This research assumes that multiple realities exist and therefore different individuals will experience the phenomenon differently.
4. This research was conducted over video conferencing due to physical distancing guidelines related to the COVID 19 pandemic.
5. This research assumes the idea of multiple realities and an attempt was made to report the lived experiences of each study participant.
6. This study assumes the researcher is able to provide findings addressing the research question by accurately transcribing and coding interview data and successfully identifying patterns, relationships, and themes.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study refer to constraints that are largely beyond the researcher's control but could affect the study outcome (Goes & Simon, 2017). The following limitations applied to this study:

1. The participants of this study were limited to persons that have graduated in the past 4 years and are over the age of 18.
2. The researcher had no control over inherent or undisclosed bias of the study participants regarding the phenomenon.
3. The researcher had no control over the depth, length and quality of experience the study participants had with the phenomenon.
4. The study was limited because states are not required to record or track students with limited or interrupted education as a subpopulation (Inlier Learning, 2021). This increased the difficulty of finding SLIFE graduates.

5. Participants were recruited from across the city of Houston, Texas due to the high dropout rate among SLIFE (Osman, 2020).

### **Delimitations**

The following delimitations define the boundaries of the study, forbidding the findings, while limiting the scope, to be applied across all settings (Goes & Simon, 2017):

1. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding about the experiences and perceptions of SLIFE graduates attending comprehensive schools. While three of the seven participants attended their district's New Arrival Center initially, all subjects completed their education at a comprehensive high school. This study was not intended to address the perceptions of SLIFE attending separate institutions specifically designed to support SLIFE.
2. The researcher limited this research to students who had missed at least 2 years of formal education.
3. The researcher limited this research to students who had graduated within 4 years of their interviews.
4. In addition, although this study could have included a wider range of SLIFE interviews, the decision to choose seven (7) graduates provided a representation with a more focused and efficient process for gaining general perspectives about their supports.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are presented along with operational definitions and are used throughout this study:

- **Accountability Rating System:** the evaluation system used by the state to rate schools and school districts based on student performance (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2020).
- **Accountability Standards:** States must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency (TEA, 2020).
- **Acculturation Theory:** Acculturation is the process of cultural change that occurs when people from various cultural origins come into first-hand contact with each other over a prolonged period of time (Berry & Sabatier, 2010).
- **Accountability Reporting:** States must report standardized test scores for all students (TEA, 2020).
- **Asylee:** individuals who, on their own, travel to a country to escape war or persecution and subsequently apply for or receive a grant of asylum (Salva & Matis, 2017).
- **Comprehensible Input:** any written or spoken messages that a language learner understands because of context (Yzquierdo, 2017).
- **ELD:** English Language Development. ELD classes are designed to develop English language proficiency of English learners (Yzquierdo, 2017).
- **English Learner:** An EL is an individual who is not yet proficient in the English language because of factors such as not being born in the United States or living in a home where a language other than English is the dominant language (USDE, 2016).

- **Language Acquisition:** the process by which humans gain the ability to comprehend language, as well as the ability to produce and use words to communicate (Seidlitz, 2019).
- **Latinx:** a gender-neutral label for a person of Latin heritage (Salinas & Lozano, 2017).
- **Linguistic Accommodations:** the ways to provide access to curriculum and develop target language development (Seidlitz, 2019).
- **Mindset:** an established set of attitudes. A growth mindset (vs. a fixed mindset) is a psychological trait that influences our efforts and outcomes (Salva & Matis, 2017).
- **Multilingual Learner:** students whose parents or guardians report using more than one language at home. They may or may not qualify to receive services for language development (Snyder & Fenner, 2021).
- **Reclassification:** the process by which students are determined to have met criteria to be classified as non-LEP (Seidlitz, 2019).
- **Scaffolding:** support that leads to independence (Seidlitz, 2019).
- **Sheltered Courses:** content classes taught utilizing sheltered instruction strategies. (Yzquierdo, 2017).
- **Standardized Tests:** Standardized tests are normed and administered to students and adults under controlled conditions to assess capabilities, including knowledge, cognitive skills and abilities, and aptitude (TEA, 2020).
- **Student with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE):** students who have had a disruption in education (Salva & Matis, 2017).



- **Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE):** The United States Department of Education defines these as students in grades four through twelve who have experienced disruptions in their educations in their native countries and/or the United States, and/or are unfamiliar with the culture of schooling (Calderón as cited in USDE, 2016).
- **Teacher Self Efficacy:** the degree to which educators see themselves competent (Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020).
- **Texas Education Agency:** The Texas Education Agency is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary public education (TEA, 2020)

### **Summary and Organization of the Study**

This study sought to examine the perception of factors and conditions that contribute to the perseverance and persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). Research has revealed that English Learners may face obstacles with respect to culture, language, and academic background knowledge (Yzquierdo, 2017). SLIFE are English language learners who face additional challenges associated with a disruption in formal schooling due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015).

Five chapters comprise this study. Chapter I introduced the study and briefly presented the background of the problem, the problem statement, the study purpose statement and research questions, the rationale and significance of the study, the assumptions of the study, limitations, and delimitations of the study, and, lastly, the operational definitions.

Chapter II presents the review of literature. The review of literature examines existing research on students with limited or interrupted education, on challenges and needs of immigrant students, and on the effects of expectations on minority populations. To advance the understanding of factors that lead to persistence of SLIFE, a theoretical framework will guide the review of literature.

Chapter III addresses the research method to be used, containing the purpose statement, research questions, research design, population and participants, instrumentation, and data collection.

Chapter IV includes the time frame used to collect the data, detailed data analysis, and reports data and results of the study.

Chapter V summarizes the research. This chapter outlines an understanding about the study in the form of conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future studies.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

This review of literature focuses on Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education and will analyze studies on challenges and needs of immigrant students, and on the effects of expectations on minority populations. While terms such as bilingual learner and multilingual learner are asset-based labels, this study is focused upon students who are classified as English learners and, as such, the term EL or English Learner is used throughout this literature review for clarity.

#### **Characteristics and Needs of SLIFE**

SLIFE, or a Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education, is the term most used to describe recent-arrival adolescent English learner (EL) students who have significant gaps in formal schooling (Browder, 2014). To identify the unique characteristics and needs of SLIFE, it is important to understand the larger demographic representation of English Learners (ELs). In fall 2016, there were about 3.82 million Hispanic EL public-school students in the United States, constituting over three-quarters (77.2%) of EL student enrollment overall (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). Echevarría et al. (2017) assert that these numbers represent only students identified as English Learners do not include all English Learners such as those who may have graduated from a proficiency program but continue to struggle with academic English.

The term ‘super-diversity’ was coined by Vertovec to explain a level of complexity of diversity that was surpassing anything the United States has previously experienced (De Carvalho, 2016). ELs are the fastest growing student population in the

country (Alford & Niño, 2011; Colón, 2019). ELs come from a variety of backgrounds both culturally and academically. An EL is an individual who is not yet proficient in the English language because of factors such as not being born in the United States or living in a home where a language other than English is the dominant language (USDE, 2016).

Another subgroup of ELs is migrant students who may experience interruptions in education and lack proficiency in English due to their parents' frequent migration in search of agricultural jobs (Colón, 2019; Roy-Campbell, 2013; Salva & Matis, 2017). Migrants are individuals who travel to multiple farm locations across the country to follow seasonal harvesting of a variety of crops (Alaniz, 2010). The larger, diverse EL group also contains a subgroup of students who may be immigrants, refugees, asylees or migrants and whose formal schooling has been interrupted, causing them to begin in U.S. schools with many academic challenges (Salva & Matis, 2017). Factors such as war, trauma, cultural beliefs, residing in refugee camps, or being transient can lead to significant gaps in their formal education, ranging from two to 10 years, depending on their age (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Gahungu, Gahungu, & Luseno 2011; Hayes, 2019; Hos, 2016; Salva & Matis, 2017). These gaps in formal schooling are a characteristic of the SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) subcategory of the English Learner population. The United States Department of Education defines SIFE (Student with Interrupted Formal Education) as students in grades four through twelve who have experienced disruptions in formal education in their native countries or the United States, and/or are unfamiliar with the culture of schooling (Calderón as cited in USDE, 2016).

The terms SIFE and SLIFE are used interchangeably in research with the term limited allowing for more descriptive definition inclusive of students whose education was not interrupted but rather was non-existent or very minimal. According to DeCapua and Marshall (2015), Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) are ELs who have had a disruption in formal schooling due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors. These students may have had little to no formal academic learning before entering school in the United States due to circumstances such as lack of resources or lack of quality education opportunities. (DeCapua et al. 2020; Salva & Matis 2017). The criteria for classifying an English Learner as SLIFE varies from state to state. These students with limited or interrupted schooling come with experiences and background, but those skills, literacy experiences, and ways of thinking are not in alignment with what is usually expected or assumed in U.S. secondary classrooms (DeCapua et al. 2020).

In 2002, President George Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act*, which required states to administer standardized tests annually to all students in order to show student and school progress (Song, 2019). Under NCLB, states were also required to identify schools that were underperforming and show plans for achieving yearly progress (Song, 2019). The NCLB Act has increased the level of academic rigor and ELs do not usually have time to become proficient in the academic English required to be successful before studying different subjects in school (Echevarría et al., 2017). The demands of secondary students in America include a variety of higher order thinking tasks including deciphering or comprehending the nuances of textbook jargon, writing persuasively or in an argumentative style, the ability to summarize and document important details in a variety of subject areas (Hayes, 2019). Due to interruptions of

education, SLIFE may have low to no literacy skills in their first language (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993). Background knowledge may be a barrier because they may lack academic learning that has been experienced by their peers (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Due to war, political unrest, and family financial instability, many ELs come to the United States with limited or no formal education (Salva & Matis, 2017). According to Pierce & Selee (2017), the number of immigrants continues to grow in the United States. As that number has grown, SLIFE have emerged as a subgroup.

### **Studies on Challenges of SLIFE**

Significant research findings have contributed to the understanding of the needs of immigrant students in the United States. Different immigrant families face varied challenges depending on their circumstances. According to the UNHCR (2020), asylum seekers are persons who travel directly to the country in which they seek safety and whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Refugees, by contrast, are people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country (UNHCR, 2020). They may be displaced for prolonged periods of time. This may result in longer duration of interrupted formal schooling compared to other migrant students (Koyama & Kasper, 2021). Studies show that the amount of homeland schooling can play a role in educational outcomes for immigrant youth. In 2014, Browder studied 165 high school English learners' survey results and school system data to determine the degree to which their homeland schooling had influenced their academic outcomes in the United States. In this quantitative study, the educational outcomes included English proficiency attainment and gains as well as scores on standardized tests of algebra, biology, and English language arts. The

researcher operationalized limited formal schooling (LFS) with three indicators for students on arrival in the U.S.: (a) gaps in years of schooling relative to grade; (b) low self-reported first language schooling; and (c) beginner-level English proficiency (Browder, 2014). Browder's (2014) findings showed that students with limited or interrupted formal schooling had lower achievement on the standardized tests, but that it was largely due to having lower English proficiency at the time of the test. According to Browder (2014), this limited English proficiency at the time of the test was mainly due to arriving with lower English proficiency and lower first language literacy. Findings from this study suggest that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes appeared to help students acquire English faster. After controlling for differences in English proficiency, students' perceptions of social distance appeared to predict their academic achievement on standardized tests better than their academic self-concept and the other factors (Browder, 2014).

In a qualitative study, Keillor (2018) used narrative inquiry to analyze eight students with limited or interrupted education (SLIFE) women and eight educators. The study was conducted to examine how traumatic experiences and cultural shock affected the educational access, achievement, and future goals of the students. The researcher states that the SLIFE women experienced various forms of trauma, including violence and extreme poverty. According to Keillor, trauma affected their mental health, efforts to settle in the U.S., their educational achievement, and future goals. They also reported grief and loss. The study explained further challenges such as language differences and culture shock, which created more challenges upon entry and settlement in the United States. The researcher further states that the women's educational background from their

homeland was below that of their U.S. peers. The study recommendations included the development of mental health services, mentorships, improvements in teaching preparation programs, and changes in educational programming for women with limited or interrupted formal education.

Ahmed (2019) conducted a study to support American public schools as they attempt to best support the education of a growing population of SLIFE students. The researcher examined the experience of Somali latecomer students with limited or interrupted formal education. The participants were 18- to 30-year-old Somali males and females who were living in the Midwest of the United States. Many of these SLIFE students in this qualitative study experienced interrupted education while fleeing their home country due to instability and conflict. Ahmed (2019) examined and analyzed the academic and non-academic experiences through interviews that compared the education they received in their home country to what they received in the United States. Findings added insight into obstacles SLIFE face as they are adapting to their new home. Among the findings, the study suggests that these students need various academic programs to help with their second language acquisition and master content knowledge. The study suggests that these students benefit from newcomer programs that support their social, mental health and economic situations as they adjust to their new lives.

### **Studies on Immigrant Student Challenges**

In a study designed to contribute to the discussion of psychological distress among immigrants, Claudius (2018) examined the effects of a global sense of social connectedness and belonging to one's community. The study surveyed 89 participants between 18 and 70 years. Among other findings, mainstream social connectedness was



found to moderate the association between exposure to trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) such that for individuals with low levels of social connectedness in mainstream, posttraumatic stress was consistently relatively high regardless of the degree of trauma exposure. Also noted was that all individuals regardless of their sense of mainstream belonging experienced high PTSD when trauma exposure was high. In addition, a lower sense of mainstream belonging augmented the strength of the association between discrimination on depression, whereas a stronger sense of mainstream belonging reduced the strength of this relation (Claudius, 2018).

In an effort to investigate indirect effects of adolescent immigrants' acculturation orientations on school adjustment through school belonging, Schachner et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study of students with an immigrant background in six European countries. The study analyzed data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 student survey for 5,334 students (with the focus in 2012 being on mathematics) in different cultural contexts. The results suggest that multicultural policies may allow immigrant students to draw on their ethnic culture as well as the mainstream culture as an additional resource for school belonging and adjustment (Schachner et al., 2017). Their research suggests that schools can provide valuable opportunities for interethnic relationships with important acculturation outcomes for immigrant youth (Schachner et al., 2017).

The findings from these studies suggest that immigrant students face challenges beyond academic learning such as language differences, culture shock and trauma. Recommendations include special classes, programs, and policies for immigrant students.

These studies support our understanding of the SLIFE subgroup and inform our thinking about their needs.

As record numbers of immigrants continue to enter the United States (Pierce & Selee, 2017), it is important to evaluate research that contributes to the understanding of the challenges of English Learners. These findings are significant as we attempt to understand the difficulties faced by SLIFE, a subpopulation of ELs.

Research has found an increase in criminal and gang activity involvement by immigrant students who are unable to successfully adapt to a new society (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). The researchers conducted a qualitative study, which included a multi-stakeholder group process and the inquiry into the lived experience of gang members. The study analyzed the relationship of gang-involvement and interpersonal challenges in all facets of their lives. A total of 30 respondents, from immigrant families with a history of criminal gang involvement, participated in the study voluntarily. The study served to shine a light on the need for coordinated, comprehensive support for youth from immigrant families.

Fisher (2017) developed a quantitative study to explore the effect of family functioning as perceived by immigrant adolescents on the relationship between felt discrimination and well-being outcomes, through the lens of structural family therapy (SFT). Participants included 1,849 adolescent immigrants to the United States. Baseline data from Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study was utilized followed by t-test, cluster analysis and regression analysis methodologies. The investigation produced significant results with Fisher's (2017) main finding suggesting that while acculturating, family support for adolescents is imperative for their well-being and a healthy adjustment

to their new community. While experiencing acculturation distress negatively impacted all participants, those who reported unclear boundaries suffered more than those who reported clear family boundaries.

In a study focused on evaluating the acculturation experiences of foreign-born students of color, Fries-Britt et al. (2014) conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis based on interviews of 15 immigrant university students who were also racial/ethnic minorities. A theme that arose was cultural adjustment. Race and ethnicity became salient points for study participants who reported that they encountered forms of oppression and marginalization in the U.S. context, which was not something they had experienced in their native countries. Educational adjustment was also a reoccurring phenomenon. Participants reported feeling an obligation to do well academically and to take advantage of the many resources and opportunities available in the United States. Fries-Britt et al. (2014) also found that social adjustment was a common theme among participants. They reported challenges of navigating emotional adjustments as a result of homesickness and isolation from support systems.

In a study of international college students, Hynson (2019) sought to identify factors that aid or hinder academic performance, achievement, expectations, and competence of international students in Florida. The study, which examined the data of 79 international college students, first included correlations with the independent and dependent variables to determine if the factors examined in the study are negatively correlated with the academic outcomes of international students. A series of linear regressions was then conducted to determine if these factors could combine to best predict the academic outcomes of the participants. The findings established a clear

connection between the predictor variables and the outcome variables. This was specifically true among support (university, familial, and social), acculturation, language barriers, motivating factors to study, and self-efficacy.

SLIFE face the same acculturation, social, emotional, and educational obstacles that are faced by the larger EL demographic. Learning English, mastering academic courses, and graduating within the timeframes of American schools can become overwhelming, resulting in a higher proportion of dropouts among English Learners with limited or interrupted education (Capps et al., 2015). Findings and recommendations from these studies are important as attempt to better understand students with limited or interrupted formal education.

### **Programs that Support ELs**

Although programs and program models differ across the United States, all states are required to track the academic progress and language acquisition of ELs (Seidnitz et al., 2016). States and local education agencies follow different policies; however, all English learners enter and exit EL status by way of a classification and reclassification process (Abedi, 2008). The U.S. Department of Education requires that districts evaluate new arrival students who live in a home where a language other than English is spoken (Johnson, 2020). If their results indicate that they are limited in their English abilities, they are classified as ELs and become eligible to receive language services such as designated English language development and sheltered content courses (Johnson, 2020). ELs are then assessed annually until they demonstrate proficiency to reclassify. Programs vary from state to state with program models being a subset of the programs. In Texas, for example, program models are classified as either Bilingual programs or English as a

Second Language (ESL) programs. Bilingual program models approved vary by characteristics such as the amount of first language used during instruction and how many years ELs should be in the program before exiting. ESL program models in Texas vary by characteristics such as where services are delivered, embedded with content in content classrooms or as a separate subject (Seidlitz et al., 2016).

The need for support has been shown to follow these students even after they exit programs and no longer carry the label of language learner. Research on this, however, is scarce. Cigdem (2017) explored the perceptions of former English language learner (ELL) students to better understand how participating in a developmental English program contributed to their increased academic achievement and persistence. Developmental English or English Language Development classes are designed to develop English language proficiency of English learners (Yzquierdo, 2017). The participants were six former EL students who all attended a one-semester language development program at a New York City community college. The researcher found that developmental English programs were important for former EL students as they transition between high school and college.

Support in content classes has been shown to be effective. In an effort to reveal the joint impact of students' science and literacy achievement, Tong et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study of two interdisciplinary interventions: (a) an intervention where science instruction was embedded in English- reading literacy among fifth-grade former and current Hispanic ELs and (b) an intervention where English language/reading literacy instruction was embedded in science instruction from kindergarten to Grade 3. The study included a total of 58 Hispanic English language learners in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade who

were attending school in a south Texas elementary. Overall findings suggested that students receiving the current literacy-embedded science instructional intervention in Grade 5 outperformed those who did not in a variety of achievement measures.

### **Attitudes and Expectations of Educators**

As posited by du Toit-Brits (2019), educator expectations may play a significant role in student achievement. Du Toit-Brits (2019) developed a qualitative study of 12 research participants to determine how an educator's expectations influence student's self-directed learning willingness. Participants were from the Faculty of Education at a South African university, and all were full-time, first year education students. These findings suggest that educator's expectations have a negative or positive impact on the efforts of their learners. Notably, this study suggests that if educators encourage students through their positive beliefs, students' learning efforts will improve.

An ethnographic case study (Linares, 2017) on three Guatemalan students identified as SLIFE examined how linguistic identities and multilingualism shaped participation in classroom activities. These participants were in their first year in U.S. schools. The focus classroom was in a school that utilized only English for instruction in the state of Kentucky. The researcher focused on activities in their social studies classroom that required students to use language(s) through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The research followed the students over an academic school year and also examined ways in which classroom instruction reflected an understanding of students as literate persons while also attending to their academic, social, and personal wellbeing. The researcher concluded that positive outcomes for these students were the result of culturally relevant pedagogy and an ethic of care in the education of students who had

interruptions in education. Linares (2017) also concluded that the three transnational immigrant youths were able to engage meaningfully in literacy practices because of the efforts of their teacher Social Studies teacher to provide accessible instruction possible even in the absence of an ideal bilingual or newcomer program.

As researchers examine the quality of persistence of minority groups, it can be helpful to consider current research on predictors of academic achievement in different subpopulations. In a quantitative study that utilized a multilayered approach, Archibald (2020) examined the impact of motivation, psychological functioning, and perceived teacher support on the academic achievement of middle school students. The participants in this study consisted of 6th through 8th graders of whom 58% were Latinx, 27% Caucasian, 12% African American, and 3% Other with 11% of the students being English Learners. Archibald's (2020) research found that ethnicity, internalizing risk, and perceived teacher support each predicted academic achievement. Among other findings, the study showed that teacher support positively predicted achievement. As the researcher points out, educators who show that they care for their students are positively influencing the academic achievement of those learners. Archibald's (2020) work also supports a focus on caring, supportive teachers as an important facet of teacher preparation programs.

According to Seidlitz et al. (2016), educators have the potential to positively affect the learning, participation, and progress of their English Learners. While academic achievement and language acquisition are measured at the local, state, and federal level, this research shows that students' progress is affected significantly by the attitudes and expectations of their teachers.

### **Classroom Practices for English Learners**

As Thomas (2019) explains, Students with Interruptions in Formal Education (SIFE) are a subgroup of English Learners (EL). The English Learner population is growing quickly with at least one EL in nearly 3 out of 4 American classrooms (Sparks, 2016). In Fall 2016, there were about 3.82 million Hispanic EL public-school students, constituting over three-quarters (77.2%) of EL student enrollment overall (NCES, 2016). Echevarría et al. (2017) assert that these numbers only represent identified ELs and do not include all ELs such as those who may have graduated from a proficiency program but continue to struggle with academic English. As a result of NCLB, an increased level of academic rigor is expected of students attending public school in the United States (Song, 2019). English learners may be expected to learn academic English prior to learning grade level content which can result in ELs under-performing in content area subjects (Echevarría et al., 2017).

It is important to review the scholarship of bilingualism as we consider classroom practices for SLIFE and other language learners. Demanding “English Only” learning spaces is not only disparaging to the student’s culture, but also antiquated pedagogy (Echevarría & Nora, 2016; Echevarría et al., 2017; García, 2020; Snyder & Fenner, 2021). According to García (2020), in the mid-twentieth century, when the study of Spanish and bilingualism migrated to high schools and colleges in the United States, the scholarship was established with only one model in mind: that of Anglos becoming bilingual. The Spanish of the Latinx community in the United States was either neglected or viewed via linguistic and educational norms that tended to devalue, if not outright disparage, the community (García, 2020). While the concepts of named languages, such



as Spanish versus English, have dominated our thinking for over a half century, current research suggests that we consider language acquisition in new ways (García, 2020; Hurley, 2021). The field has evolved to include more promising, asset-based theories such as Translanguaging which supports the idea that students be allowed to use and grow their entire linguistic repertoire (García, 2020; Hurley, 2021). García (2020) suggests that we move away from the traditional classifications that have been imposed on us from the outside to consider what happens when bilinguals interact in society, how people perceive them, how they function, and how they produce language.

Researchers and professional organizations have established that sheltered instruction effectively supports the education of ELs (Echevarría et al., 2017; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019; Seidlitz, 2016; Yzquierdo 2017). Sheltered instruction is an approach first introduced by Krashen (1982) where teachers use techniques that allow ELs to learn content and language simultaneously (Seidlitz, 2019). Specific instructional strategies can help support English Learners to acquire their new language while simultaneously internalizing concepts (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018). The purpose of sheltered instruction is to make grade level content accessible to all learners (Echevarría & Nora, 2016). Some content classes are designated as sheltered classes specifically designed to offer all content instruction using sheltered strategies (Yzquierdo, 2017). Educators using sheltered instruction, or sheltered strategies, are intentionally making themselves understood by offering what Krashen refers to as Comprehensible Input (Yzquierdo, 2017). The term Comprehensible Input is part of Krashen's language acquisition hypothesis and refers to any messages a student understands because of the context (Krashen, 1982). Examples of Comprehensible Input include gestures, visuals,

annotation, repeating, chunking information, and slowing the rate of speech (Yzquierdo, 2017). Research supports the need for sheltered instruction training as ELs experience academic, linguistic, and cultural challenges in the classroom and their teachers also experience difficulties instructing students with limited skills and cultural differences (Wheeler, 2020). As a subgroup of English learners, SLIFE experience the same difficulties associated with language and culture, compounded by challenges associated with gaps in formal schooling (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Many SLIFE have lived through traumatic circumstances which creates a level of complexity for educators as they address the linguistic, academic, and social-emotional needs of these students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). The following studies offer insight as to how some educators are meeting the needs of SLIFE and why some feel ill prepared to support these students.

In a qualitative study looking to analyze how high school teachers of ELs integrated social and academic language skills for SIFE, Colón (2019) showed that learners benefit when their teachers and administrators develop an awareness of these students' unique socioemotional, academic, and acculturation needs. The study was conducted with a mix of interviews and classroom observations in a mid-Atlantic school district and findings support that ELs, even SLIFE, benefit from high expectations with realistic, obtainable goals (Colón, 2019).

Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) assert that teachers of ELs are not adequately trained to effectively support SLIFE. As described by Fulghum Ingram (2017), an estimated 44% of secondary school ELs are immigrants with some arriving to the U.S. with rigorous education and others arriving without any formal education or gaps in their

years of schooling. Aisicovich (2019) found that mainstream teachers feel unequipped to meet the specific needs of the second population, the under-schooled EL. Fulghum Ingram's (2017) conducted a qualitative study focused on SLIFE. The researcher sought to examine the effects of teachers' low expectations of SLIFE and the possibility that subsequent differential treatment of SLIFE may contribute to the lower graduation rates and achievement gap. Through face-to-face interviews of high school teachers in a school district in the southeastern part of the United States, Fulghum Ingram examined teachers' perceptions of and expectations for their students who are classified as SLIFE. The study revealed difficulties faced by the participants but also revealed their strong desire to help all of their students. Researchers found that their participants were educators who expressed a strong desire to be better equipped for their roles (Fulghum Ingram, 2017). A teacher's personal judgement or belief about his or her capabilities to teach is known as Teacher Self-Efficacy (Rya, 2019). Teacher Self-Efficacy has been shown to have a positive effect on learning (Hattie, 2012).

When considering teacher efficacy, it is helpful to also consider the efficacy of educators working in unison on behalf of ELs. Volumes of data exist that explore instructional strategies to support English Learners, but fewer resources exist to support general education teachers and EL specialists in the area of co-teaching and effective collaboration to support ELs (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019). Whether educators are teaching on their own or with a co-teacher, differentiating instruction is essential to meet the needs of SLIFE (Colón, 2019; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Differentiation is modifying or adjusting instruction to meet the unique needs of individual students. There are various ways to differentiate instruction, including adapting materials, providing graphic support,

linguistic and nonlinguistic representations, scaffolding instruction, collaborative work, and comprehensible input (Colón, 2019). An educator must be sufficiently trained to be effective with differentiation and other considerations for SLIFE. Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) suggest that teachers of ELs are not adequately trained to meet the needs of SLIFE especially in high school when foundations of literacy are missing from the student's knowledge base.

Sharpless (2020) conducted a phenomenological case study to explore English as a New Language (ENL) teachers' experiences with secondary SLIFE. The researcher sought to interpret the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers who work closely with these students daily. The study focused on how these educators understand their role in teaching adolescent SLIFE as well as their underlying belief systems regarding their teaching and schooling of SLIFE. This research by Sharpless (2020) suggests that educators perceive SLIFE's schooling context as a hindrance to achievement as well as their psychosocial wellbeing. The study further suggests challenges associated with anti-immigrant sentiment seeping into schools, lack of SLIFE specific supports, and the failure to implement professional development for serving students of refugee or asylee background.

By contrast, research by Sharpless (2020) also showed asset-based thinking from educators who serve SLIFE. Findings from the qualitative study revealed that almost all participants alluded to SLIFE's resiliency and bravery regarding their migration experiences, their lives before their moves and their current challenges.

**Grit and Persistence of Students with Limited English Proficiency**

Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) face a host of personal and academic challenges (Spees et al., 2016). In order to contribute to the discussion of academic achievement of language learners classified as ELs, Banse and Palacios (2018) conducted an investigation to determine whether student perceptions of two classroom characteristics (i.e., care and control) fit with two Latino student characteristics (i.e., EL status and grit) in relation to their academic achievement. The researchers used a sample of fourth- and fifth-grade Latino students from the Measures of Effective Teaching dataset ( $n = 3,272$ ). The study implemented a series of nested regression models with two- and three-way interactions between student characteristics and student perceptions of classroom characteristics. These findings established that grit is most strongly associated with Latino English language learners' English/language arts achievement when students perceived those teachers used high levels of care and control.

In an attempt to explain reasons for educational resilience of English learner (EL) students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), Browder (2014) conducted a quantitative study with school system data and survey results from 165 high school ELs. The data was analyzed to determine the degree to which ELs' homeland schooling had influenced their academic outcomes in the United States. For the purposes of this research, educational outcomes included English proficiency attainment and gains as well as scores on standardized tests of algebra, biology, and English language arts. Limited formal schooling (LFS) was operationalized with three indicators for students on arrival in the U.S.: (a) gaps in years of schooling relative to grade; (b) low self-reported first language schooling; and (c) beginner-level English proficiency. The study concluded

that SLIFE were more at-risk for lower educational outcomes, but Browder (2014) suggests that much of the difficulty was related to English proficiency. SLIFE learned English at a slower rate, especially if they had arrived with low native language literacy and had experienced traumatic events. Taking more classes for English language acquisition appeared to help ELs learn English faster, which was very important for academic achievement. Browder (2014) concluded that students with low English proficiency had lower achievement scores.

When analyzing persistence of English Learners in the United States, it may be important to consider research on persistence among first year college community college language learners. Mardock Uman (2018) developed a study to provide evidence of the personal, institutional, and community resources leveraged by U.S. educated English Learners in their first year of community college. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to provide evidence of the personal, institutional, and community resources leveraged by ELs educated in the United States. The focus was to investigate their matriculation and persistence at community colleges and the study found that, while the U.S. educated ELs were able to draw on resources to support their enrollment and persistence, the ways in which they leveraged available resources were influenced by the institutional policies and practices they experienced. Findings of the investigation assert that a student's experiences can be significantly shaped by an individual institutional agent's perceptions of a student's language and academic ability.

The primary participants of this study were seven U.S. educated ELs attending one Midwest community college and 11 staff members who worked with English Learners at the community college level. The examination utilized data collected through

individual interviews with each student participant as well as interviews with the faculty and professional staff and document review. The researcher noted that the findings were not intended to be generalized for all U.S. educated English Learners or for all community colleges and suggested future additional research in different contexts (Mardock Uman, 2018). Mardock Uman (2018) noted that the participants leveraged the relationship with one sympathetic institutional agent over seeking specific types of support from various specialized institutional resources. Findings of this study suggest that the ways in which community colleges provide language and academic support need to be designed with U.S. educated ELs in mind. Mardock Uman (2018) suggests that the policies and practices of community colleges may be limiting the educational opportunities of U.S. educated English Learners.

### **Effects of Poverty on Academics**

When examining persistence of Students with Interrupted Formal Education it is also important to consider the effects of poverty on academics, as SIFE are a subgroup of English Learners (Thomas, 2019). Students of poverty may be failing to meet routine expectations, and this phenomenon may be due to effect of poverty versus other academic factors (Yzquierdo, 2017). Breiseth (2013) contends that nearly 60% of English Learners nationwide are from low-income families. Additionally, from 2009-2011, refugees were more likely than natives and as likely as non-refugee immigrants to be low-income (Capps et al., 2015).

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty (2020). If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is

considered in poverty. In 2020, there were 37.2 million people living in poverty (Schridder et al., 2021). Research supports the conclusion that poverty may be the strongest predictor of behavioral and academic deficiencies (Green, 2019). Hammond (2015) posits that educators develop an understanding regarding poverty, so they do not underestimate the effects. It is essential that educators realize that poverty is not a culture, coping skills of low socioeconomic families are not norms or beliefs, and that “poor people do not normalize or glorify negative aspects of living in poverty.” (Hammond, 2015, p. 33). Middle-class educators may be unaware of the unique obstacles facing students of poverty. According to Yzquierdo (2017), these challenges are related to both a lack of income but also the day-to-day difficulties they face when a family lacks money for school supplies, health care, a family car and other expenses. Students with low socioeconomic status and the same academic potential as their middle-class counterparts score worse on standardized tests (Gandhara as cited in Yzquierdo, 2017).



### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate students with limited or interrupted formal schooling regarding secondary school support systems across the United States. This chapter describes the research method used containing the following sections: purpose statement, research questions, the research design, population and participants, instrumentation, and data collection.

#### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate students with limited or interrupted formal schooling regarding secondary school support systems. Systems were defined as family support, teacher support, systems support, and community support. The research questions for this study focused on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school. The central research question for this study was: What are the factors that support acculturation of SLIFE and impact their educational success and persistence through high school graduation? The specific research questions were:

- RQ1 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their family?
- RQ2 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to faculty?

RQ3 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to school programs?

RQ4 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their community?

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research is made up of data gathered through interviews, observations, fieldwork and documents related to the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was a phenomenological study aimed at exploring the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a group of people. Phenomenology, as a research tradition, is a methodology that dates back to the work of Husserl, a 20th Century philosopher (Beck, 2020). Methods for conducting human science research were advanced by Moustakas (1994) who's work on phenomenology is heavily cited in the field. According to Polkinghorne (1989), another phenomenologist, phenomenological researchers should interview participants who have experienced a similar phenomenon to be able to find common themes between their lived experiences. This research followed the current suggestions for conducting a phenomenological study. Initially, the researcher ensures that a phenomenological approach is best to examine the issue and clearly describes the phenomenon to be studied. Philosophical assumptions are identified before data collection begins (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A sample of 5-25 participants is recommended according to Polkinghorne (1989). The next step involves the use of

open-ended questions to interview participants who have shared a similar experience. Data analysis follows the interviews whereby the researcher begins by categorizing the data collected. Finally, the researcher analyzes the data collected and categories to be able to generate themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Conducting a phenomenological study offers insight into the lived experience of participants experiencing a phenomenon either individually or as a group (Butcher & Eikenberg, 2019). According to Butcher & Eikenberg (2019), challenges include, but are not limited to, gaining access to research participants, our own bias, conflict of interest and how we describe the experiences of others. Participants were identified through snowball sampling. In snowball sampling, participants are asked to name other individuals who fit a certain criterion and each of those participants are asked to name other potential participants as a means of finding participants who fit the research criteria (Goodman, 1961).

### **Sample**

This study was conducted across the city of Houston. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research so that the researcher can thoughtfully form generalizations about the phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the low number of graduates who are limited in formal schooling, snowball sampling was used to locate the participants. Snowball sampling, also known as chain sampling, identifies cases of interest from people who know other people who have knowledge of information rich cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a snowball sample the researcher asks participants to consider others who may be experiencing the same phenomenon and to suggest them for inclusion in the research (Etikan et al., 2016). This method of locating participants is

“particularly suitable when the population of interest is hard to reach and compiling a list of the population poses difficulties for the researcher” (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 6).

### **Participants**

This dissertation examined the perceptions of high school graduates who are SLIFE. The acronym SLIFE refers to a Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education. SLIFE was operationalized with three indicators: (a) gaps of at least 2 years of schooling relative to grade; (b) low self-reported first language schooling; and (c) beginner-level English proficiency when entering US schools. All participating students had graduated within four years of when data was collected. The seven graduates interviewed were classified as English Learners upon entry into US schools. They each reported that they arrived with little to no command of the English language.

### **Data Collection**

Following approval by the IRB (see Appendix A, B, C), participants were recruited through snowball sampling. This sampling approach was used to identify participants because of the higher dropout rates among SLIFE (Osman, 2020). In order to gain information relating to the questions in this study, individual interviews were used. The data were collected so that responses could be categorized and analyzed by the researcher in an attempt to find common themes. This method of study offers a glimpse into voice and the “why” of a phenomenon and focuses on how the research subjects make sense of an experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through one-on-one interviews, the goal was to record impressions, feelings and beliefs about the supports that were in place during their high school years. Data collection interviews took place using Zoom, an online web conferencing platform, that allowed the researcher to communicate

with audio and video in each interview. Each participant was made aware of possible risks and benefits prior to the start of the interview. They were also informed of the use of pseudonyms and coding methods being used to keep their identity anonymous and were told that they may discontinue the interview at any time.

Interview questions were developed and structured in accordance with guided protocol in the appendix section (see Appendix D). The interview questions for this study were generated with consideration given to the students missing two or more years of formal education. When all was collected and recorded, it was emailed to the participants for their review and feedback regarding accuracy. The interviews were recorded over Zoom and also audio taped with a cellphone recording feature. Extensive handwritten notes were also recorded during the interview to support accurate transcription.

### **Treatment of the Data**

This data collection procedure used qualitative methods that primarily involved one-on-one interviews. A total of eight graduates were interviewed, all of whom had experienced an interruption in formal schooling. Participants were interviewed individually over web conferencing software and each interview was transcribed with field notes. Interviews were scheduled at agreed upon times and dates and conducted using a standardized interview instrument and cell phone recording device. The interview instrument was designed to be in alignment with current research and the research questions. All recordings and field notes were transcribed verbatim (Patton, 2015).

Data collection involves obtaining permission followed by effective sampling, recording of information, storage of information and planning for ethical issues that may arise (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method, modified by Creswell

(Moustakas, 1994), is a six-step narrative inquiry approach. The steps in this study involved gathering the data from the interviews and then developing a list of significant statements about individual's experiences in receiving support to persist through high school. The researcher then categorized statements into groups to create themes. Verbatim examples were included with data and finally a structural description was developed. The researcher reflected upon the context in which the phenomenon was experienced to write a composite description.

### **Provisions for Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research requires that the researcher go through certain steps to guard against bias and other factors that would result in a lack of reliable and accurate results in their study. Validation strategies are often used to verify accuracy in what participants stated during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), validation is an evolving construct that requires an understanding of both traditional and contemporary perspectives. Validation is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researchers, the participants, and the readers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of the validation strategies in any given study. These strategies are the researcher's lens, the participant's lens, and the reader or reviewer's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, students who began secondary schools with interrupted education were asked to describe their perceptions of what supported their persistence through high school. They were asked to share their feelings about support from family, their new schools and their communities. This form of discussion has the potential to lead to topics

related to family dynamics, social justice, and equity. In order to obtain this information, a trust needs to be established between the researcher and the interviewee. The researcher allowed the interviewee to set the time and location of the interview to build rapport. The researcher explained the confidentiality and anonymity measures being taken for the study. The questions were validated, and all interviews followed a consistent protocol. Participants were interviewed using a recording device as well as some handwritten field notes. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. The coding will be gathered into spreadsheets to further analyze for meaning. Participants will have the opportunity to read and approve the final transcripts as additional means of ensuring validity.

Ensuring reliability is a key component of qualitative research. Reliability is always enhanced if the researcher has detailed field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Butcher & Eikenberg (2019) recommend a method of using a good recording device and then transcribing the field notes. Additionally, recording must be transcribed to record the minor, but significant, pauses and overlaps (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To further ensure reliability, the researcher can have a peer reviewer to review the coding with a critical lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The peer reviewer is a person is familiar with the topic and phenomenon and can ask hard questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This person acts as a “devil’s advocate” and keeps the researcher truthful (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, the researcher recorded the interviews on a hand-held recording device as well as a second electronic recording device. The interviews were then transcribed and gathered with the handwritten field notes. Once this phase was complete, the researcher examined the transcripts and began with the coding phase. These codes were added to this study’s codebook. Next, the researcher categorized the data to find

commonalities in the responses. Finally, the researcher employed a peer reviewer to analyze the results of the first coding attempts. The expectation was that the peer reviewer would offer feedback that might change or guide future coding for reliability.

### **Epoche**

An epoche, or bracketing, is a concept in which the researcher sets aside their own experiences, to the extent possible, to see the phenomenon through fresh eyes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must be an observer, data collector, and an active participant in the interview process. An attempt was made to maintain a neutral role in relation to the study participants (Patton, 2015). In order to avoid any potential bias the researcher bracketed opinions regarding the phenomenon, past experiences regarding the phenomenon, and interpretations of non-verbal cues. The process of creating an epoche allows for readers to better understand the researcher's experiences and how those experiences might affect the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this phenomenological study, the researcher has an understanding of the broader philosophical assumptions and must identify these assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's epoche follows this discussion.

I was born in Houston, Texas to a first-generation immigrant family from Monterrey, Mexico. Neither of my parents was educated beyond high school when I was growing up and much of my mother's education was in her native language of Spanish. There was a lack of academic English in our home and as a child, I marveled as my older sisters became avid readers. Despite inequities of language and being from a home characterized as low-socioeconomic, both of my sisters excelled in school. I, on the other hand, was averse to reading from a young age. As they experienced more successes, I



became convinced that I was not as smart as they were. This led me to read less and rebel against academics. I created gaps for myself and as a result, while in high school I was reading several years below grade level. I repeated several classes and did not graduate on time with my peers. I returned to high school to finish two years later than my cohort. It was not until my mid-twenties that I decided to apply myself in school. I drew on the support of my family, my community, and the academic institutions for support. What I realize now was that I was developing what Dweck (2010) calls a growth mindset. I began to believe that I could get better about math, reading and any subject I was studying. I took advantage of the support available to me and, along with this mindset, I was able to persist through years of undergraduate work, even though I often held two jobs to make ends meet. I also went on to obtain my master's degree while raising my children and working full time. My own attitudes about persistence are strong with respect to my own journey. While my challenges were not as severe as those of the students I will interview, I do have some first-hand experience with having to persevere through adversity. Another area of concern is that my professional journey has led me to eventually teach students with interruptions in education. I became a teacher later in life and began my career as a bilingual and special education teacher. Every year I would receive students with a host of challenges from poverty to second language acquisition to interruptions in formal education. My attitude toward all of them was always to help them see that their mindset needed to be focused on what they were able to do. I received professional accolades for the growth my students experienced and eventually became an instructional coach in my district. I employed the same tactics with teachers who were not confident about their abilities. I asked them to draw on everything available to help

them grow as teachers. Then in my most recent years as an educator, I returned to the classroom to work with students who were not only English learners, but also coming into secondary schools with interruptions in formal education.

It has been a goal to remove from this research any potential bias that I may have regarding my passion for educating students with interruptions in formal education.

While formulating the interview questions and analyzing the data, I focused on letting the participants tell their story apart from my own personal beliefs. With this mindset, I worked to gain an unbiased accurate account of how the participants viewed this phenomenon.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter explained the methodology of the research study and the factors that contributed to the persistence of students with limited or interrupted formal education. Other components of the methodology such as the research questions, the research design, population, participants, instrumentation, and data collection were also included. The study was a phenomenological qualitative study that collected data from interviews, field notes, and participant observation notes. The researcher explained the method of data analysis and measures taken to address trustworthiness. In Chapter IV, the researcher will give detailed data analysis and the results of the study. In Chapter V, a summary of the study and conclusion will be presented, while making recommendations for future research related to the study.

## Chapter IV

### Analysis of Data and Findings

The current system of reporting consistently shows poor educational outcomes for adolescents classified as English Learners (ELs) on standardized tests written only in English (Browder, 2014). The dropout rate in the United States for ELs is significantly higher than that for young adults who speak English at home (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Growing evidence suggests that Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) may account for up to 20% (Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000) of all students identified as ELs in the United States, and research suggests that ELs who have not learned to read by age nine are more likely to drop out of school (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012). While research indicates these students may struggle academically (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015), there are some SLIFE who persist and remain in school despite challenging home lives and formal school settings.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate SLIFE regarding secondary support systems. Systems were generally described as family support, faculty support, school systems support, and community support. The research questions for this study focused on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school and are grounded in acculturation theory. The central research question for this study was: What are the factors that support acculturation of SLIFE and impact their educational success and persistence through to high school graduation?

The specific research questions were:

- RQ1 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their family?
- RQ2 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to people at their school?
- RQ3 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to school programs?
- RQ4 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their community?

Qualitative data collection procedures consisted of online interviews, audio recordings, self-transcription, and measures to keep participants' identities confidential.

The research questions for this study focused on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school. The data are presented by research question with descriptive details regarding emergent themes. Findings are organized by emergent themes which were extrapolated from key statements collected directly from the participants. Prior to the discussion and presentation of findings, an initial section provides demographic information about the participants.

**Participant Demographic Information**

The study included seven participants. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research so that the researcher can thoughtfully form generalizations about the phenomenon of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the low number of graduates who are limited in formal schooling, snowball sampling was used to locate the participants. As noted in Table 1, all participants were SLIFE (i.e., Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education). SLIFE was operationalized with three indicators: (a) gaps of at least 2 years of schooling relative to grade; (b) low self-reported first language schooling; and (c) low level self-reported English proficiency when entering US schools. All participating graduates had graduated within four years of when data collection occurred. The participants were limited to persons who had been enrolled in public high schools because of their ages (i.e., social placement), despite having significant gaps in formal schooling. All have since graduated from a public high school in Houston, Texas and are over the age of 18.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

	Gender	Interruption in Education	Reason for Interruption	Place of Birth	Native Language	Year of Graduation
Participant 1	Male	None Prior to Age 10 Then Sporadic from Elementary to High School	War, Moving Between Refugee Camps for 15 years	East Africa	Swahili and French	2017
Participant 2	Male	Missed 2 years of High School	War in Syria, Faced Racism in Jordan/New Country	Syria	Arabic	2020
Participant 3	Male	Missed 3 years of High School	Family's Financial Situation in Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnamese	2018
Participant 4	Female	Missed 3 years of High School	Family was Threatened and Persecuted in El Salvador	El Salvador	Spanish	2019
Participant 5	Male	Missed 2 years of High School	Relocating from Cuba to the United States	Cuba	Spanish	2019
Participant 6	Female	Missed over 7 years of Elementary to High School	Refugee Camp and Mobility Due to Mother's Illness	Ethiopia	Arabic and Amharic	2019
Participant 7	Male	Missed 2 years of High School	War in Syria, Faced Racism in Jordan/New Country	Syria	Arabic	2019

***Participant Profiles***

In addition to data presented in Table 1, the following information was shared by each participant. These descriptions are meant to offer further insight into their lived experiences:

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 is a male with minimal formal education prior to arriving in the United States. He did not have opportunities for education until the age of 10. From age 10 – 18, his schooling opportunities were in the refugee camps and were sporadic. He described school in the camps as optional and “not good... not by a teacher that graduated high school or anything.” His family was living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1995 during a time of war. They were moved to Rwanda as refugees, and he was born in the camp months later. After some time, the family was moved to a camp in Burundi. He claims that in his first 18 years of life, the family was moved back and forth between refugee camps in those three countries. Participant 1

arrived with comprehension and some speaking ability in multiple languages as a result of living in different countries and interacting with humanitarian workers who spoke French. He reports that he tried to learn English before coming to the United States. Participant 1 is the oldest of his siblings. His high school education in the United States did not include a New Arrival Center experience but he was enrolled in ESL classes in his first year in the U.S.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 is a male who missed two years of high school just before arriving in the United States. His family moved to Syria and built a supermarket to start a new life when the civil war broke out. They lived through the war for about one year when a missile landed near their home. They left the next day for the country of Jordan where there was not the imminent danger of war. Participant 2 lived in Jordan for five years but did not stay in school. He described how he faced racism and resentment from many Jordanian people. Going to school became dangerous. He reports that he knew no English when he arrived in U.S. Schools. His family was settled in a low-socioeconomic area of Houston. His high school education in the United States did not include a New Arrival Center experience but he was enrolled in ESL classes in his first year in the United States. He reports that his family moved to an area with less crime, but the new school did not have as much ESL support.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 is a male who missed three years of high school before coming to the United States. He was born and living in Vietnam when his family went through difficult financial challenges. He explained that school was not free, and when his father filed for bankruptcy, the family did not have the funds necessary for his education. Participant 3 described the frustration he experienced when trying to

understand English speakers and trying to be understood. He claims that he studied English in Vietnam, but he was unable to use it upon arrival. When he first arrived, Participant 3 attended a New Arrival Center which was part of his school district.

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 is a female who missed three years of high school. She was being educated in El Salvador when her family fell under persecution. Her family was threatened and extorted for payments. She described how much her father worked to pay for their safety and about life-threatening consequences for her and her siblings if he did not. Due to this danger, she and her sisters missed three years of education as it was not safe to leave their home. She reports that she did not comprehend any English when she arrived in the United States and was placed into high school. Participant 4 attended her district's New Arrival Center when she was first enrolled in U.S. schools.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 is a male from Cuba who did not attend school for more than two years after arriving in the United States. He explained that he arrived with no English abilities. He and his mother lived alone, and she worked many hours. Participant 5 reported that he did not have academic or language support at home because his mother did not know English and was often not available. He shared that it was difficult to be put in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade when he was older than the average 9<sup>th</sup> grade student. Participant 5 was enrolled in a New Arrival Center class as part of his education when he first began school in Houston.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 is a female with minimal prior schooling. She arrived in the United States as a teenager and reported that she had no native language literacy. Her mother died just a few months before she was resettled to the U.S. She claimed that



much of her life was spent in and out of refugee camps, and she was not able to attend school. Like Participant 1, she explained that school in the camps was optional and inconsistent. With her mother being in and out of the hospital, she was tasked with helping to raise younger siblings. She reported that it was difficult to live through the violence of war and explained that, for most of her life, she and her family lived in extreme poverty in camps with no running water or electricity. When she arrived in Houston, Texas, she began her education without a formal New Arrival Center program. She did take ESL classes in her high school and shared about how difficult it was when not understanding the language and not possessing the literacy for high school subjects.

**Participant 7.** Participant 7 is a male who missed over 4 years of formal education from age 11 to age 15. He reports that his education in his home country of Syria was poor, so he arrived without proficient literacy in Arabic. His interruption in education was due to war. His family moved to Jordan, and he claims that he needed to work to help support a big family. He arrived in the United States and was resettled to an urban high school without an official New Arrival Center school or program. He did take ESL classes for beginner speakers, but he claims that he did not learn anything during that time. His family moved to a suburban area where he finished high school.

### **Presenting the Findings**

Qualitative research is a situated activity in which the observer is placed in relation to the rest of the world. This method of research includes data gathered through interviews, observations, and fieldwork (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This phenomenological study aimed to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a group of people. Interview sessions were conducted with a specific

interview protocol. Participants were presented with questions that were specifically tailored to each individual research question (see Appendix D). Additionally, each research question had a direct connection to the four main elements that make up the Support System Effects on Persistence Framework: *Family Support Systems, Faculty Support Systems, School Program Systems and Community Support Systems* (see figure 2). The emergent themes were categorized by each research question and reinforced with anecdotal information, explanations, and quotes from the transcripts.

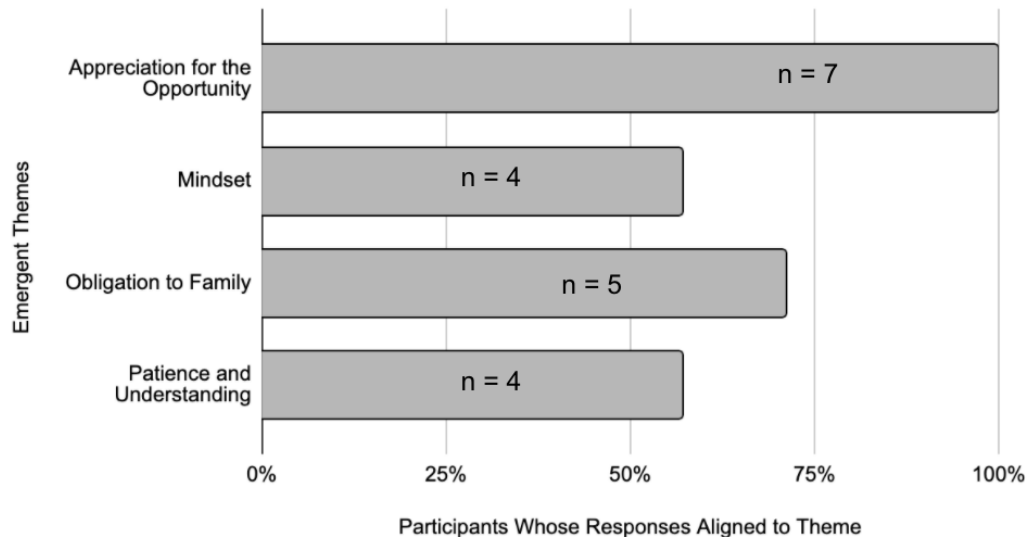
### ***Emergent Themes for Each Research Question***

**Research Question One (RQ1).** Participants were presented with protocol questions that elicited responses related to RQ1 (see Appendix D), which stated: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their family? The researcher reviewed the responses of all seven subjects for emergent themes. The emergent themes for RQ1 were:

- Appreciation for the Opportunity
- Mindset
- Obligation to Family
- Patience and Understanding

All seven participants identified the theme of appreciation for opportunity. Four discussed mindset and four mentioned patience and understanding. Five discussed obligation to family (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

*Family Impacts on Ability to Persist*

***Appreciation for the Opportunity.*** While all participants were limited in their English abilities, and all experienced significant gaps in formal education, each of these immigrants arrived with an appreciation for education. Each reported that their families held high expectations for their academic efforts. Participant 6, who had the least amount of formal education, and had suffered the loss of her mother in a refugee camp, recalled the encouragement of her siblings and father:

They always supported me. Always. They love it. Whenever I'd go to school, they're always just happy. They wanted something different for me. My dad. My brothers, my older sister, because none of them graduated from high school then. That was the tone for several participants as they explained what was expected of them.

Participant 1, who is the oldest of many siblings, was also coming from over a decade in a refugee camp with no running water or electricity. He recalled that his parents helped him believe that he could overcome his academic and linguistic challenges. He

stated, “They knew I was, you know, I was focused. And I knew what I wanted...they were confident in me. ... with a parents’ confidence, believing that you can do it ... it made me push harder and, you know, and move forward.”

Participant 4, who spent years in hiding after her family was threatened in El Salvador, explained the support of her family and how they wanted her to further her life with education. She was smiling when she explained, “They just wanted me to get ahead. ... They gave me a lot of support. They told me to never give up. To just keep pushing myself to become someone in life, so I could have a better future.”

**Mindset.** Four of the seven participants were explicit about the mindsets they had to possess in order to be able to succeed. These participants, who overcame significant challenges, were initially describing their families’ mindsets. They explained that their parents were convinced that they could improve and succeed which, in turn, affected what they themselves believed they could do. This mindset is exemplified in participant 6’s follow-up to what her family expected. She has difficulty reading but explained that she is getting better. “Because I believe in myself. I know I can do it. It’s hard. Yeah, but if I push myself up there, I know I can do it, I can do better because I’m thinking differently than other people.” Participant 4 explained that her family’s support helped her to see what she could do. She described it this way:

Their words were always beautiful words. Those words gave me life. So, I could come out ahead and keep studying. ... I started from the bottom. ... So, I keep challenging myself and challenging myself till I get to the point. That I feel good.

**Obligation to Family.** All participants expressed appreciation for access to opportunity, however, five of the seven participants explained that they felt an obligation

to make the most of the opportunity. Several articulated this idea by saying that it was the whole reason they came to the United States. Participant 5 described how he and his mother were here from Cuba by themselves and with her working so much, he had to be on his own a lot. He explained his feelings by saying:

It was just us. And she was working so hard. So, I would say, hey, she's working very hard. I also have to work hard. I kind of feel like the obligation. So now I have to, like, study and I have to work hard. So, I guess it's the same idea, like, it inspires me to do better.

Participant 7 described his feelings about school in the context of leaving Syria and finding himself in Jordan where there was no opportunity for education. His father did not finish high school and it left him and his siblings feeling obligated to make the most of this opportunity. He stated, "My dad went through that, and he didn't have a high school diploma, but he wants us to be more educated and more experienced. And then that's the only reason we came here."

*Patience and Understanding.* While most comments were full of pride and explanations of how supportive their families were, four of the seven participants expressed that the pressure could sometimes have a negative impact on their ability to succeed. High family expectations sometimes left them feeling obligated and overburdened and led to pleas for parents to have patience and understanding with their children. Participant 6, who lacks literacy in her home language, expressed that "...they wanted me to do something better for myself, but they don't know how difficult it is for me to face it." Participant 3 also expressed the challenge of familial expectations but specifically related it to his culture. After missing years of education in Vietnam, he was

grateful to be able to study here in the United States. However, at times the high expectations were stressful. He explained:

Yeah, they expect me to study hard. Because I'm Asian. Most Asian families they expect the children to work hard. And even if I cannot get it, they are going to be disappointed in me. And sometimes it makes me... sometimes it makes me stressful. Yeah, because they expect me to do good and everything from here is new. If I could study in my language that's going to be easier for me. But right now, I need to learn a new language and study everything from that language. It is harder than learning in my mother language.

In a similar fashion, Participant 1 offered this explanation:

First of all, my family, they don't speak English. So, you understand that's very tough. So, when they came here, it's like and they expected me to do a lot for English. So, they knew I knew some English and I was the oldest. So, and I was going to school at that time. But they expected me to do this, you know, every time there's someone who needs English, they expect it to be me. [with emotion] If they want to do anything, I had to be there. If they want to take my siblings to the hospital or to the clinic, how they expect me to do that? So, I kind of had this a lot of stuff to do at the same time, and it was really tough because they expect that. It's like I had to, you know, to do both of them. So, there's like you got to attend to the appointments of your siblings and translate sometimes your parents, they need translators, and you need to go to school. You need to study for homework and stuff.

Five of the seven participants had the same advice for parents of SLIFE when they begin school in a new country. The common advice was to be patient and understanding.

Participant 1 went so far as to suggest that parents look to reduce burdens for their new arrival students so they could focus on school. He explained it this way:

I would tell parents to maybe don't push your kids too, too much. By that I mean, don't push them to go to work if you can, because you don't want to mix work and school, especially if your kid doesn't speak English, especially if your kid doesn't have much you know? So, give them time. Let them study. And I think that's the best thing, to give them time. (pauses) And I understand it would be hard for the family too because they still need the kid to translate sometimes...they can do that to help sometimes. Yeah. But sometimes don't. If there's a way you can reduce the work for them that would be great. That, that would be, that would be good.

Participant 5 offered practical reasons new student need grace from their parents. He suggests practicing patience, understanding and encouragement. He explained in this way:

Be patience with them because they're not going to be used to doing school anymore. Like, you know, I didn't miss that many years in Cuba, but I didn't do a single homework from like ninth grade to twelfth grade. I didn't touch a book. I didn't touch a notebook. So, coming here, having to do a lot of homework. Like studying was challenging for me. It was very hard. And I had to sit for hours and try to focus, and I forgot to focus and all those things (laughs). So, like I guess it's um, helping them out, you know, and like being there for them, and asking them hey, what you need? Do you need to study for this today? Do you need to study

for that? Do you need help with this? Are you studying something? It is encouraging them to do those stuff, to continue.

### *Review of Findings for Research Question One*

All participants had an appreciation for the opportunity to access education in the United States. Each had lived through some level of trauma and were now in a new environment with low levels of proficiency in the English language and gaps in formal education. Despite these challenges, each expressed gratitude that there were educational opportunities for them here that were not available to them in the past. Their families were a strong support system for each of them in that parents held high expectations for their children to succeed. Familial support had a positive impact by helping each of them realize the opportunities being afforded to them. Another theme that emerged from this question was that the discussions and encouragement from parents helped grow the mindsets of the participants. They quoted encouraging words from their families and explained feeling as if they could accomplish more because their families believed in them. The participants all arrived in U.S. schools as teenagers. They were old enough to understand and be able to explain that their parents had persevered through difficult circumstances to provide them an opportunity. The participants were able to clearly explain that they had an obligation to do their best because of the sacrifices their families had made so they could have educational and other advantages. When asked about advice for other families, these participants suggested that parents practice patience and understanding with their children who have missed formal schooling and are working to be successful in U.S. schools.



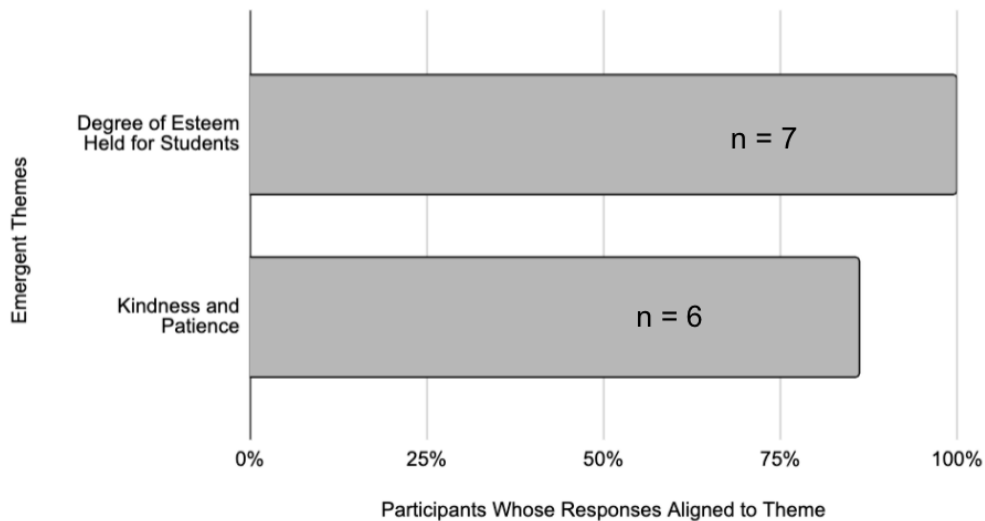
**Research Question Two (RQ2).** The second research question stated: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success with respect to faculty? Participants were presented with protocol questions that elicited responses related to RQ2 (see Appendix D), and the researcher reviewed responses for emergent themes. The emergent themes for RQ2:

- Degree of Esteem Held for Students
- Kindness and Patience

All seven participants identified factors related to degree of esteem held for students. Six of the seven identified kindness and patience (see figure 4).

Figure 4.

*Faculty Impacts on Ability to Persist*



***Degree of Esteem Held for Students.*** All seven participants spoke about the strong impact faculty had on their ability and desire to persist. Each gave examples of specific actions and words of encouragement from educators. Yet, subjects also shared negative actions from faculty when asked about what created a more challenging

environment for their learning. The theme of esteem, or degree of respect for the students and their abilities, emerged as each participant shared what was encouraging and discouraging in regard to faculty actions. Participant 6 explained that she felt important when staff would take an interest and support her beyond issues happening in the building. She described how a school social worker took time to talk to her to help resolve a family conflict:

When I was a girl, you're not allowed to wear makeup till you get married. Or dress up like others. You have to cover yourself up even though if you're Muslim or not. But if so, it was the same, you have to cover yourself up. So I went there with a really big problem with my father. He said that if you keep doing like this, I'm going to burn all your clothes. And I started to feel so sick ... She told me a good thing..., she said that just because you're not you're not 18 yet. So, I think if you really love your parents or your brother, you want to stay with them. I think you should just do whatever he wants. And you look beautiful without makeup anyway. So just be you and go to school like this. I'm like, I guess she's right. I was just being a teenager.

Participant 4 had earlier described her initial experience with high school as very traumatic. She recounted crying every day when she first started school in the U.S. because of her confusion, sense of isolation and feelings about not knowing the language. She described how her teachers held her in high esteem and offered her opportunities to grow her own self-esteem. She shared specific anecdotes to illustrate her transformation. One description was:

Because in the beginning I was scared to be up in front of other people. But the teacher just kept pushing me and pushing me. Until finally I got to a point where I felt good helping other people. I got to the point where I felt like I was the teacher even though I wasn't. And if there was something that I got wrong the teacher just corrected it. But in those two classes I was like an assistant to the teacher so that made me feel good.

Participant 4 went on to describe how she eventually took on other leadership roles at the encouragement of her teacher. She described how she began leading, supporting and encouraging others. She claims that this motivated her as well. Her explanation was:

I would always stay with them in the afternoons. I would help with the new students who were coming in that they didn't know English at all. ... It was like tutorials helping others that were coming in new to the school. And then the teacher made me the leader of that group and I felt good being the leader and helping the other students that we're just coming here. There were many of them that were rebelling. They didn't want to do anything. And they just wanted to sleep or be on their phone. But I knew how to motivate them to study. I helped them feel like they were not in a country where the language and everything was going to be difficult for them. That really motivated me also. Being in that group with that teacher.

Participant 2 had missed several years of education and had lived through bombing in his neighborhood in Syria. Although his counselor was aware of the challenges he was facing, she consistently offered him words of encouragement, filled

with a sense of esteem for him. He recalled the positive impact she had and described memories of her this way:

Always when she sees me, ...she gives me a hug. And she said ... oh, you're going to be something very successful in life. Always, always, always. You know? Like I felt so good that year. And when I got to her office and she would say, oh, what are you, what are you going to be in the future? I was like, oh I want to be a pilot. And she said, "I see you as a pilot right now." You know? It's just little words. It is words like that. And it supported me so much.

Just as several participants had memories of teachers being encouraging, four out of the seven subjects volunteered memories of when there was a lack of respect or blatant disparaging actions by faculty (i.e., students held in low regard or esteem by faculty). The lack of support, negative comments, and belittling words had a discouraging effect on these individuals. Participant 7 described the clear difference when he moved to a school where teachers were supportive and seemed respectful of him as a learner. He reported that the absence of support was challenging:

On my year one at [School 1], the teachers weren't helpful at all. They didn't help at all. So later when I went to [School 2], I kind of saw the difference between these two schools. Like at [School 2],... they are giving you a chance. And at [School 1], I didn't get all that. I didn't have that. *I didn't even have a favorite teacher* [emphasis added].. All of them are like very strict. Especially with us. Because you know like I told you, there is a high percent of Arabic people. And most of [the Arabic students] would laugh or act up in class and so with us they wouldn't give us any chance. Not to retake or do any of it, you know? They

weren't helpful at all. Even my English teacher, I didn't learn anything. Zero, you know?

This disdain for lack of support was volunteered by the participants when asked about actions that had a negative impact on ability to be successful. Participant 4 shared that teachers stood by and allowed her to be bullied by other English learners who had more proficiency in English. She said:

I don't know if one day there will be a way to stop the bullying, because I feel I suffered from that. And that really hurts you so much. So, there was a lot of times that people were making fun of me for not speaking English well. And the teachers didn't say anything, they just let them say whatever they wanted to say to them. And that hurt me a lot.

Beyond lack of encouragement from staff, and allowing ridicule from students, Participant 6 felt belittled by faculty and offered examples of staff making disparaging remarks. This research subject was not literate in her first language upon arrival, but she claims to have had significant listening comprehension. She understood her teachers and shared that more than one of them would talk about the English Learners in front of them assuming they did not understand what was being said. She recounted:

They like to make fun of us, especially people that don't know how to speak English well. I understand everything. .... They say things like "They can't even do nothing, *not even their assignment* [emphasis added]. They don't know how to speak English, *how they're going to do that* [emphasis added]?" Yeah, they say like, "Look at this student every day, getting an F. Is she going to do better if I try to explain to them? They will understand nothing. I'm just going to put the grade

like that.” And I got that a lot (pause)...a lot. Not just one teacher, like three or something like that.

Participant 2 offered a different example of how a teacher’s comments could be discouraging and have a negative effect their ability to succeed. He described a scenario with a grade-level teacher in this way:

Then I moved to [a Houston suburb] in the second semester. So, the English class specifically was very, very hard. She would have us read a novel like 40, 50 pages a day and answer some questions. And it was very hard. So, when we read the novel, you know, students read for her, you know, she had the student read two pages, two pages, two pages, everyone. So, when it comes to me, I would read in an accent and very slow. So, the next day she said, “OK, you're not going to read English because you're too slow and you don't know how to pronounce, you know, words.” And it made me feel terrible. And she was very hard on me and she said, oh, you need to learn English more and more. You know, I said, yes, I'm trying, but, you know? I mean, give me time... be nice to me. Like other teachers. ... She was very tough.

As participants described the difference between encouraging and discouraging remarks from faculty, the theme of esteem became more evident. While faculty members were aware of the challenges and academic gaps for these students, some still high regard for them and their abilities. All seven research subjects felt this had an impact on their success. In some instances, this esteem for the participants was evident when faculty held high expectations for their abilities with grade level content and future educational opportunities. When Participant 2 relays that his teacher said “Okay, you're not going to

read English because you're too slow and you don't know how to pronounce, you know, words," he did so with tone that suggested he was left both embarrassed and feeling that his skills were good enough to participate. His teacher's low confidence for his ability to improve in a timely manner was a challenge and he conveyed that by saying, "Yes, I'm trying, but you know? I mean, give me time."

Conversely, Participant 6's comments were also specifically about teachers who held ELs in low regard and voiced doubt about their ability to succeed. She chose to share her teacher's comments such as "They say things like...Is she or is he going to do better if I try to explain to them? They will understand nothing." This anecdote was shared in a remorseful tone.

While those memories stood out as examples of low expectations, several subjects testified to the high esteem in which they were held by faculty. Participant 1 felt that it was important to name the counselor that helped him navigate the college application process. He felt that it was important to have a person showing you how to go beyond high school and stated:

Yeah, you know, before I forget. I remember Ms. [counselor]. She is not a teacher, but she did help me a lot when I was about to graduate. She helps students to apply for colleges. She was the counselor for college, and she helped me. Yes. Yes. So much.

Other participants described counselors and teacher's high expectations as well. Participant 5 explained that neither he nor his family had aspirations of college, but his New Arrival Center teachers had faith that he would be able to go on to post-secondary education. He described their support in this way:

I had really great teachers. ... all of them. That really helped me a because they were you know, they were pushing in a good way. Like they would be like, hey, you need to learn this so you can get here, you know? Like this is where you want to go. They were the ones that put the idea in my mind, you know, because I wasn't thinking about college. I didn't know what college was. So, they would be like, hey, you want to get here? Because, like, if you pay the price now, you're going to have what you want later. They taught me how everything works here.

This same participant described challenges once he transitioned from the New Arrival Center to the mainstream classes. He explained that he was not held in the same high esteem by some teachers and counselors. He said:

I guess, like it depended on the teachers. Like how their perspective of new arrival students, you know? Like what would they expect from them. So if someone didn't speak much in class it would be discouraging I guess. Because they would be like, oh, you just got here a year ago, you know, you're not going to learn the language. And you're not going to learn the content of this class. And that was discouraging.

Participant 5 also detailed his challenges with taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses. He described counselors who did not believe that AP classes were appropriate for him. But others, some of the actual Advanced Placement teachers, saw potential and advocated for his inclusion. Participant 5 explained it this way:

I remember that I wanted to take AP classes because it's all about AP classes. And they tell me how important they were to get to college. So, I was trying to take AP History, and they didn't let me because I was here for only one year. But then in



my history class, my teacher was really good, and she knew how well I was doing the class and one day she was like, “Hey, why are you not in my AP classes? Because you would be doing great right now.” And I was like, hey, they didn't let me. Yeah. And actually in 12th grade, I had the same issue also. They didn't want to let me into AP classes, ... I took Bio, Economics, Government and English at the same time. And all of them, the AP teachers, actually emailed my advisor and they asked them to let me into AP courses. And because of them, I was let into AP classes.

Participant 5 continued to speak about teachers that held him in high esteem as opposed to those that held low expectations for his abilities. He described the awareness of teachers who did not have faith in his abilities. He said that this lack of esteem would affect his thoughts about his own abilities, thereby affecting his own self-esteem. He again talked about advanced placement classes and summed up his thoughts by saying that it goes beyond offering opportunities. His advice for was “[Teachers should be] introducing them to AP classes and then believing in them. If they want to take them, believing in them and helping them out, yeah, I think that's very important.”

***Kindness and Patience.*** Research subjects were asked to offer advice for faculty working with immigrant students who have been through difficult circumstances and are missing formal education. Six of the seven participants emphasized the importance of treating learners who are SLIFE with kindness and patience. This is exemplified by Participant 7 when he advised:

To just be very helpful and gentle with the new student. I mean, they will be scared. And no English, no desire because they don't know. So just help them, ask

them, help them. And be kind to them. That is most important that you be kind. If you speak to them, and they feel like important. I think it's more than [teachers] realize.

Participant 1 also offered that faculty should “make them feel welcome to this society and in the school, you know... because that's good. That's a very important thing.” Participant 2 offered similar suggestions by stating, “They should be nicer to them, actually, like support them.” Participant 5, who was not aware of what college was, but is now attending university, had this to share as his first piece of advice for faculty:

I think like people can encourage you, like, you know, in the most meaningful way. That's important. Like someone that is nice to you on a day that you're, like, going through a lot. I think that's very important when it comes to like, you know, high school. Because high school is more of a very closed system. You know, during the school the whole year, the same people in the same hallways. So, like, you feel trapped sometimes. I feel trapped sometimes and those things helped a lot.

Along with this suggestion of being kind, these subjects advised that faculty practice patience with learners who are SLIFE. Because these participants had all arrived in the United States as teenagers, with low to no English abilities and significant gaps in formal education, this advice may be crucial. Each of them has made significant progress and closed their education gaps to the point of qualifying for high school graduation. As he reflected on his own journey, Participant 1 was quick to name patience as the first priority when faculty is working with SLIFE. He explained:

So, the first advice I would say is to be patient with them. (smiles) Yeah, because it's tough for them and we understand it's tough for the teacher, too, but it's really for the students, for students it's really tough because where they came from and what they experienced and then and they didn't get enough education and stuff like that. So it wasn't, I will say, wasn't their fault. So I think that's the first advice I'd say.

He went on to point out that patience is needed because new arrival students are going to be shy when they arrive. He said, "Okay, you know how students, when they come to the states, they're pretty much shy? They are very shy. So, try to talk to the students and find out what's going on." Participant 5 suggested faculty consider the life of a new arrival immigrant. He said:

You never know what those students are going through. Because they saw so many things in their countries. There are so many things in their daily lives and now they are coming to this new system. This new high school and they don't know what to expect or what to do anymore .... so, be patient with them. They need a lot of patience, and they need confidence.

Participant 1 also shared that teacher's time and patience after school was instrumental in helping him master content. When speaking about how he learned the content, he said "There's definitely a lot of, you know, people who impacted my graduation, especially teachers." He added, "When the school was over, I would go back to the teacher and ask them what I didn't understand, and I stayed there for like two hours. So, yeah. That's (pauses) that's really good."

The theme of kindness and patience continued to emerge as Participant 2 expressed his need for teachers to understand that SLIFE may need more time than other students. He suggested kindness and patience by stating:

I know it's going to take time ... they're not going to move fast with the class like as you would, but it's OK to take some time, you know, be nice to her or him and support her so she can, you know, speak English and learn faster.

This is the same learner that was told they did not need to read because they were too slow. He added that discouraging comments and lack of patience from a teacher could have a direct effect on a student's desire to give up and drop out. He explained:

But if she would tell them, oh, you don't speak English and you're not going to read again, I mean, it's going to discourage her, and she is not going to go. Maybe she would think, oh, I'm not going to go to school again and she would drop out. You know?

### ***Review of Findings for Research Question Two***

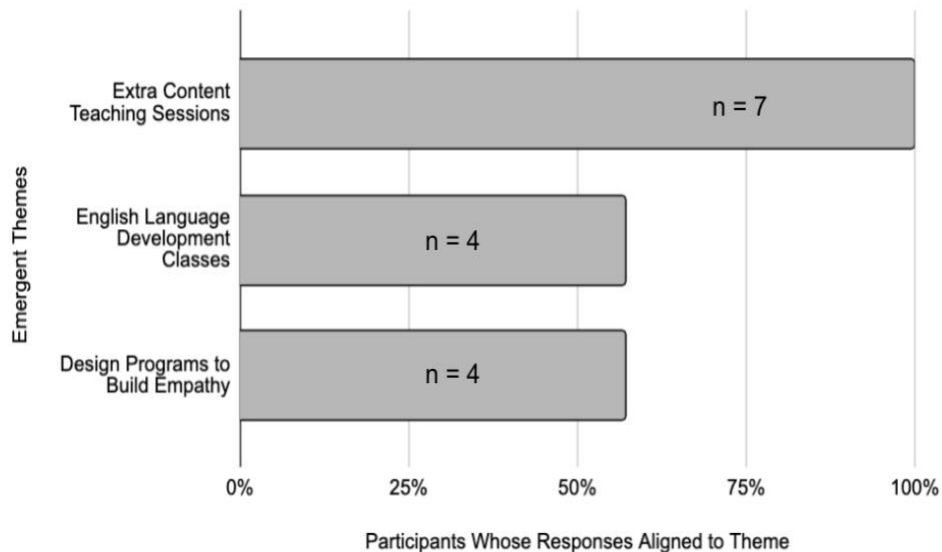
All participants felt that faculty had an impact on the ability to persevere and persist through to graduation. Some of the impacts were positive and some were negative according to the research subjects. Themes that emerged included the degree of esteem in which they were held by the faculty and if they were treated with kindness and patience. The degree of esteem was explained through examples of when faculty held these participants in either low or high regard. Academic and non-academic anecdotes were shared. When asked about advice for school staff, their pleas for kindness and patience were intertwined in their responses.

**Research Question Three (RQ3).** The third research question stated: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting with respect to school programs? Each subject was presented with interview questions (see Appendix D) that aligned to RQ3. After the researcher reviewed responses from all seven participants, the three emergent themes for RQ3 were:

- Extra Content Teaching Sessions
- English Language Development Classes
- Design Programs to Build Empathy

Figure 5.

*School Program Impacts on Ability to Persist*



***Extra Content Teaching Sessions.*** All participants reported being off level for language, literacy, and content area background. All seven subjects shared that some form of extra teaching sessions had a positive impact on their ability to persevere through to graduation.

Some of these extra sessions, available through the school system, were not exclusively for English Learners. When asked about the systems at their school, four of the seven subjects specified that mainstream, after-school tutorials had a significant impact on their ability to persevere. Participant 1 explained, “I think it was really good... You can go if you don't understand things, you can still have one-on-one with teachers and ask them. I think that was really good for me.” Similar sentiments were shared by Participant 7 who endured yet another interruption in education during his first year in U.S. schools. He suffered a severe injury and hospitalization that resulted in a five-week absence from school. He described his appreciation for tutorials this way:

Probably I would say tutorials. That was a very positive thing. One time, when I was a junior, I got injured very bad from soccer. I have to have surgery on my knee. So, I skipped school for a month. It was one month and one week. So when I came back. I had literally my grades from 90 to 45. You know, I came back after a month because I had to do the surgery very bad. So then I had every day tutorial. Every day, every day. Every day until 5:00. My school ends at 3:00. So, I always stayed like two hours extra. Just to catch up...yeah, very positive.

Participant 2, who came to the United States after living through war and lack of educational opportunity in Jordan, also described the tutorials as important to his success. He began by explaining that teachers would not just be available for tutorials, but they intentionally encouraged specific students to attend each day. Initially, the researcher asked Participant 2 if this wasn't more of a teacher-specific impact. The subject explained that this was a school-wide, coordinated process. He elaborated by saying:

They would say, “You should come to tutorials because I saw you did not pay attention and you need to come in. . . . It is probably from the principal explaining to the teachers, oh, you need to watch the student if he didn't get it.”

He explained that this advice was likely the principal's directive, because all teachers were intentional about promoting tutorials as a matter of routine. He felt that encouragement was a good system to keep students moving forward with content that was challenging.

An example of a positive impact was shared by Participant 4. She reported that she came to the United States with no English and she was too shy to speak to other students. However, an after-school program was helpful to her and she eventually began leading the group and helping other, newer students.

Participants 3 and 6 also spoke about the benefits of extra teaching sessions when they recounted the importance of summer school. Participant 3 emphasized that he was able to receive individualized instruction during summer school. He stated, “Yeah, I took the summer class every summer when I studied in high school...I studied only one class and I could stay more focused on that. Not like the whole eight classes in a day.”

Participant 6 felt more supported and less rushed in her summer school classes but also shared that some aspects of extra teaching sessions could at times have a negative impact. She felt that the system was not supportive when she was told to get help from other teachers. She was struggling with literacy and felt that she would benefit more if she was helped by her own teacher. She said:

I don't know what to do, like, I need help. And when you go to a teacher to ask for help, he is going to be like, ‘I have to do this. I have to do this. I don't have time.

Go to different teacher.’ But it's difficult when it is your own teacher, you want them to help you and they would tell you to go to a different teacher to help you.

*English Language Development Classes.* All seven subjects participated in some type of English Language Development class during their first year of U.S. schooling. Some of their experiences were in a full day New Arrival Center (NAC) while others had only one English Language Development (ELD) class as a new arrival student.

All seven participants were in favor of a newcomer or new arrival class as part of a school district’s system. Six of the seven subjects volunteered examples of positive experiences. Their length of time in the classes varied from one to two years. Participant 3 described his time in his NAC class as a motivator for attending school. He said, “Everything we did there is like teamwork. And so, we can help like a family and help our new community. And that makes me want to go to school.” Participant 5 added more praise for the NAC program and contrasted it with the rest of the school by saying:

Yeah, new arrival teachers. They were the ones that were the most understanding and helpful (...) They were the ones that knew what to expect from us and they knew how to you know, they knew what we were going through, but everyone else was kind of like, you know, a stranger to it because they were not really used to us.

While Participant 2 did not have the opportunity to attend a new arrival center, he recalled the positive impact of his ELD (English Language Development) class:

Literally, I loved it so much there. The teachers were so nice, like really nice. They would have us do some activities for us, the students, to talk to each other. We liked it because they would put me with somebody who spoke Spanish. So,



she can't speak with me in Spanish and I can't talk with her in Arabic. So, we had to learn English there. So, we talked in English.

These subjects described the feeling of safety and inclusion while they were in their ELD classes. Participant 2 exemplified this by claiming:

In the NAC class, most people are like me. If I say something wrong... if my [pronunciation] is not good... no people are laughing at me. Like in the regular class... sometimes they are going to look at me and then they are going to laugh at me.

To emphasize the importance of a new arrival class, Participant 2 also shared that the teacher helped him “get control” and “learn how to be in the United States.” Some English language development classes emphasized concepts and skills needed for high school and post-secondary success. Participant 5 felt that this exposure was critical to his success. He mentioned that he arrived without an understanding of what college was, but eventually went on to a nursing program after high school. He credits his New Arrival Center program for giving him explicit tutoring and practicing with standardized tests that were “very weird. I didn't have anything similar to that in Cuba. So, coming here and having to take like five or six of those (laughs) was very challenging.” He went on to explain that the hands-on experience with physical copies of practice tests:

Helped a lot actually. They made us go through them and I studied them more and more and more in-depth, you know. So that helped because we actually got to see them and work through them.

Despite the fact that all seven subjects reported positive impacts, two participants felt that sometimes the English development class was less than ideal for acquiring a new

language. When asked to give advice to program leaders, Participant 2 and 7 both suggested more time speaking and practice the English language. Nonetheless, Participant 7 shared that his first school's newcomer class was detrimental to his progress by stating:

The first time in my first year, I didn't learn anything. Because at [School 1] High School there were a lot of Arabic speaking people. There were a lot. Like 25 percent of the class is Arabic and they speak it in the class. All of them. And then outside. So, when I go to class I was new. I don't know how to talk or to understand and I was always speaking Arabic. I didn't get to learn English very good because I was always with them and they all speak Arabic. They weren't good for me to learn English.

Participant 2 echoed this sentiment by commenting that in the ESL class, teachers should not allow students to speak at length in their first language. From his perspective, "if they don't speak their mother language, ...it makes them better every day." He also mentioned that using languages other than English can lead to misunderstandings among students when they don't have a common first language. He offered that a student may misinterpret and "then he would say 'What [did] he say? He [said] something bad about me?' or whatever." He went on to explain that if "everything you say is in English and what they say [is] in English, we understand each other."

Participant 1 asked that districts consider the unique needs of SLIFE and incorporate specific English development programming for foundations of grammar, writing and reading skills. He explained that "the education system is set up for the student who were born here." He went on to say that "when kids get here, the teacher I

guess... or the system or school...needs to understand that the kid doesn't know much.”

His request is that for SLIFE, schools focus on essential skills for un-educated immigrant students. He stated, “if we're really looking to educate those kids who were not educated, we need to focus more on what they need.” He suggests programs dedicate more time on speaking, writing and reading in English with a focus on grammar. He went on to say that SLIFE must understand the value of grammar and writing correctly in English. He stated, “Even if it's a two year or a technical program ...you're going to need to read and write in English and be able to get a higher paying jobs.”

*Design Programs to Build Empathy.* Participants shared positive impacts of their classes and their school programs, they also shared challenges and advice for program leaders. In those responses, the theme of Empathy emerged as it relates to how school programs are designed. As previously stated, six of the seven participants had previously emphasized the importance of educators having patience with them. When subjects were asked to give advice to program leaders designing school systems, four of the seven suggested something be formally put into place to help build understanding and caring from faculty and/or students.

Participant 5 and 6 both described challenges associated with leaving the NAC program. Participant 5 specifically spoke about how systems could be in place for mainstream teachers to help the transition. “Sometimes that transition takes some time for us to, like, accommodate, you know?” He elaborated by saying “everyone that I knew were from NAC. So, once I had to go to a regular class, I didn't know anybody. (laughs) I didn't know how to talk to people.” He again praised his NAC teachers and some mainstream teachers who took time to work with him. “So, I guess if everyone knew

[how to do]dd that, it would be way more helpful.” Participant 6, who reported that she struggled with native language literacy, English language proficiency and gaps in background knowledge, also made a suggestion that teachers have support to help SLIFE. She noted that some teachers were able to support her, but she claims that other teachers were not interested or were unable to do so. She suggested that principals urge teachers to find other ways to teach students who struggle. She said all teachers should have to find other ways to explain content to SLIFE by stating, “Yes, they have to. That should change. They should help the teachers find other ways to teach us.”

Programs that supported students-to-student empathy were suggested by both Participant 4 and Participant 5. They specifically spoke about the negative effects of segregation and advised districts to find ways to integrate new arrival students. Participant 4 commented that she would ask the principal of the school to realize that different cultures are not mixing in classrooms. She said the “different cultures were in the same room, but in small groups.” She expressed her disappointment in this by saying, “To me, that doesn't help at all. I think that we all should be able to work together and that is one thing that I would tell the principal.” If given the opportunity to advise a program designer, she would advocate for “more diversity among the students.” She went on to explain:

In their classrooms and everywhere. It's not good to have one group over here and one group over there. I'd have more activities so that the students are not bullying and making fun of people who are coming here from another country. They should not be making fun of how they speak. They are here to be a better person to get a better life.

Participant 5 also advised that schools be intentional about exposing students to new arrival classes and SLIFE students. He said:

I guess I wouldn't separate [SLIFE] from the rest of the school. I would have them right there in the center of the school. You know, everyone will know about them. Everyone would know that this is the NAC classroom. But it will be in the same school, in the same environment. You know, it wouldn't be a separate classroom content. And I will introduce them like more to the regular classrooms that would show them this is what it looks like, and this is what the regular classes expect from you. So, you know, it will be more... It would ease that transition, you know? Yeah. The difference from the two the two worlds. The NAC world and the regular world. It will be easier for them when it comes to trying to go from one to the other.

He went on to say that systems should not only “teach the regular teachers how to deal with us, but also teach the regular students about us.” His advice was to implement a program that encourages teachers and students “to be kinder to some of us.” He explained that “some of them were harsh.” His memory included mainstream students being confused about why he was assigned to that class, who he was and why he was in that school. He recounted that those students were unkind and added, “I guess if you expose, you know, both kinds of students, the new arrival student and the regular students, to each other, I think that would [help] them understand who we are.”

Participant 5 and Participant 6 both suggested that program leaders realize that SLIFE do not have the background for college or career readiness in this country. Participant 6 suggested that the school consider ways to help SLIFE understand more

about career opportunities. He recommended that they support these students to determine “what they want to do and what they are good at.” He added that “the teacher needs to know that also so they can help a student moving on.” Throughout the interview, Participant 5 continued to return to the topic of college. He wanted program leaders to realize that students who have limited exposure to formal education are capable of learning quickly, but they need explicit instruction on how to navigate standardized tests and so many other aspects of how to get prepared for post-secondary education. He commented that his NAC program did a good job of this and advised all schools follow that example by stating:

It's not only the standardized tests that we need to know about. Things like volunteer hours, and you have to have a very good GPA and lot of stuff. They actually did a really good job in NAC about this because they broke it down. . . . I knew that I had to aim for this many volunteer hours, this many college credit hours and all of that. And yes, that was really helpful.

Participants 1 and 7 both advised school leaders to have compassion for SLIFE with respect to the importance of extracurricular activities such as sports. Participant 7 suggests that school leaders understand that SLIFE need support to find activities that will connect them to the school and keep them active. He claims it was key to helping him push through difficult years in the US as he explained, “When I play soccer, I forget about anything, and I just focus on soccer. You know... it got me through a lot, to be honest.” Participant 1 made a plea to those in charge to consider the feelings of the older learner who becomes too old to play a sport they love. When the researcher asked him to

offer advice to those creating district or school programs, he shared an emotional response:

Actually, oh man, this is something that should at least change. How they do the sports. . . . Yes, so I used to play soccer and I still play. So. Well, when I got there, I did a try out and stuff, I made a team and I started playing. But at that time I was like 19 or 20.. somewhere like that. So, when I turned 21, I was told I can't keep playing. So that was like, *oh man, why can't I keep playing?* [emphasis added]. I understand it's the age thing. They go with the age, I know. But for the students it helps them, it helps them to keep going you know? Yeah. To get used to the, you know, to the community or to get used to the other students or to the system. I think that's a very important thing. I think it's really very important.

This subject went on to note that while there are age limits, and he would not be able to play, the school could have kept him involved in some capacity.

The theme of Empathy continued with Participant 7 recounting the difficulty of sitting through classes when you are hungry. While some older students drive themselves to school, he needed to take the bus. He felt that it was insensitive of teachers not to allow food in their classrooms when so many immigrant students were bus riders. Ironically, his school offered free breakfast, but he was rarely allowed to eat it:

It is hard because most of the time the bus comes late. It gets you there like one minute early and then it is 7:45 and you have to go to class so you don't even have a chance to eat. So you know, many people eat in school so now they have to stay in school hungry until like 12:15. We shouldn't do that to let them sit and

just be hungry. Like only just drink water early in the morning. I had three or four teachers that didn't allow anything to eat.

### *Review of Findings for Research Question Three*

All participants felt that the school programs had a significant impact on their ability to persist. The protocol questions (see Appendix D) that aligned to RQ3 asked the subjects about positive and negative school programs. The researcher also asked them to offer advice to school leaders designing experiences for new arrival SLIFE. The first theme to emerge was the appreciation for extra content teaching sessions. The subjects described the same after school tutorial sessions and summer school classes that were available to all students. They described the advantage of working in smaller groups, having more processing time and being able to focus on one subject at a time. One participant mentioned that tutorials with teachers who did not know her needs were not effective for her.

The second theme to emerge was the positive and negative effects of English Language Development classes. All seven participants were advocates of programs that offered at least one new arrival class. They volunteered examples of how they felt comfortable and able to take risks in the new arrival classes. Some of the NAC classes went beyond teaching English and made a significant impact by teaching skills needed for navigating high stakes testing and post-secondary education. Two of the participants felt that they should have had more opportunities to practice speaking English in their English development programs.

The last theme to emerge was that of Empathy. The participants all asked for school leaders to design programs that take into account the unique needs of SLIFE.

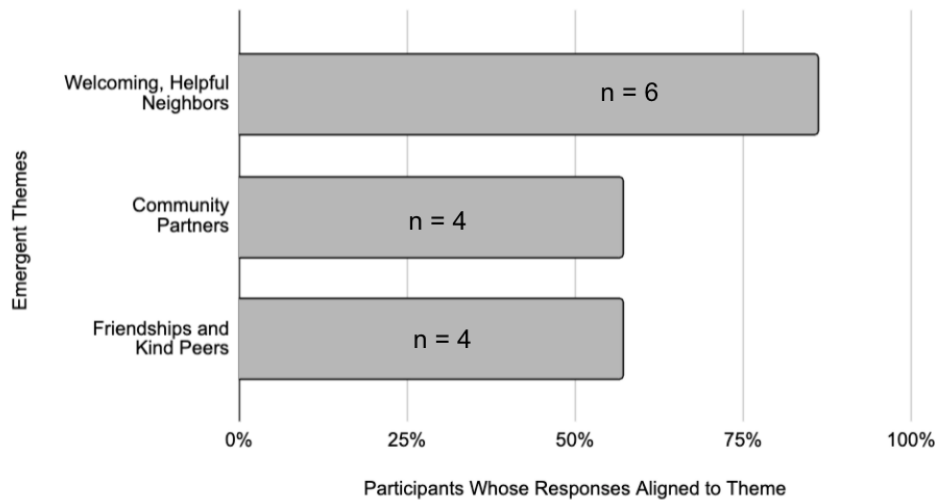


These are students with social emotional needs stemming from a background of trauma, missed education and culture shock (Yzquierdo 2017). Their pleas are to design systems that offer less segregation or intentional transition plans. They ask that mainstream teachers and students get an opportunity to learn about them. They suggest that leaders consider what it must feel like to be older than all your peers in high school. They offered examples like missing free school meals because of the timing of bus schedules and classroom policies. They also suggested solutions and advised that programs be designed with empathy for the unique needs of SLIFE in mind.

**Research Question Four (RQ4).** Participants were presented with protocol questions (see Appendix D) that elicited responses related to RQ4, which stated: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their community? The researcher reviewed the responses of all seven participants for emergent themes. The emergent themes for RQ4 were:

- Welcoming, Helpful Neighbors
- Community Partners
- Friendships and Kind Peers

Figure 6.

*Community Impacts on Ability to Persist*

**Welcoming, Helpful Neighbors.** Participants were asked to comment on their opinions regarding community actions that positively or negatively impacted their ability to persist through high school. Six out of the seven participants stated that kind, helpful neighbors are an important support to families of SLIFE.

Participants 2, 3 and 7 all gave specific examples of how kind and welcoming neighbors supported their families when they first came to the United States. They explained that this, in turn, helped their ability to focus on education. Participant 7 commented that he learned a great deal of English from a volunteer teacher who would come to his home. He stated that she came every Saturday and Sunday and “she helped us because she wanted to. She stayed with us for like two years. And she's the big reason I speak English.” Participant 3 shared that neighbors regularly volunteer when needed. He shared, “Some of the people in my community, they know English well, they can be a translator. They will go with you to the office... you can call them to translate [for] you.” Participant 2, who arrived in the United States as a refugee from Syria, explained that his

new neighbors were welcoming and supportive to his family in significant ways. He shared:

So when we came to the United States in 2016, many, many people around us, they helped us out. They helped whether we spoke English or not, you know? Paying rent and utilities, they brought us furniture and, you know, food. It is a really good neighborhood. It was just neighbors.

Participants 5 and 7 did not share specific examples but each emphasized the importance of feeling welcomed by the community. According to participant 5, it “goes back to the being kind to each other and to be welcoming of new people.” He went on to explain:

Because, you know, here in this country, we have a lot of people that come in and they're strangers to this community and they're strangers in this country. And it's really hard for them when they're not welcomed. You know, they don't know what to expect or know what to do.

Participant 7 simply restated what he had said in response to a previous question about teachers. His advice is the same for the community. He suggests that they “be kind. *Just be kind.* [emphasis added] They could be kind.”

Participants 4 and 6 suggested that immigrants can become important community members to new arrivals. Now that they have been in the U.S. for years, they both look to be welcoming and supportive to new arrival students. Participant 4 emphasized that she is friendly “because some people are not. Not friendly.” She added that she sees new families arrive and “they suffer a lot because when they don't have a home or food to eat it's hard. The community should give them support, we should help them however we

can.” Participant 6 feels that it is important to offer words of encouragement for students now that she is older. She shared:

If you can help them, help out. Talk to them, be more open to them. .... And like I said, kids are negative all the time. They think, I cannot do this. So, a person in the community can help them be better even if they think ‘I definitely cannot do this. I don't believe in myself.’

Participant 6 went on to say that positivity from a community member can help SLIFE when they hear messages like “please stay positive and you will definitely do it.”

Despite all the comments about the positive impacts of welcoming neighbors, Participant 2 had an opposing view based on his initial experience. His family was first resettled to a location with many other Syrian refugees, and in this area, the families began fighting among themselves. He described the circumstances as having a negative impact on his family’s life and his education. He explained:

In our neighborhood, other Syrian refugees, they were, you know...they were fighting each other, even themselves. They were fighting their mom and, you know, fighting with other kids. I think even the parents and the friends from the neighborhood. It was tough. So that's why the police was in our complex every day, every day. So, we couldn't stand it. So, we moved out to Sugarland to a nicer neighborhood. There, there was no problem, and everything was good.

**Community Partners.** A second theme emerged when four of the seven participants specified support from local community partners. Examples were shared by participants 1, 4, 3 and 6. Participant 6 named an outreach center in the community that supports refugees, immigrants and anyone needing assistance. Her mother had passed

away before her family came to the US. She shared that the outreach center “helped us a lot. Even sometimes my dad, he could not pay bills and they helped with that. So, I’m very grateful for that.” She also mentioned that “the church helped a lot. They brought us food, clothes...this helps. And sometimes it's just like to go. They don't need to help now because we've got it now.” Participant 1 also shared about the support of local churches for immunization requirements. He explained that “there was a church. ... I don't know if they still do that. They used to offer free shots, free immunization records. I think that helped a lot of students. Yeah, so I think that was really good.” Participant 3 emphasized the positive impact of the church supporting his family with paperwork needed for utilities, insurance and other contracts. He emphasized that the support was leading to independence. He noted that “the church helps you fill it out. And they are teaching us how to do it. So next time we can do it ourselves.” Participant 1 also mentioned a neighborhood grocery store. He felt it was important to offer this example of community support:

I was about to forget, but HEB helped. So, having a store close to the place you live is really good, too. When we got here we didn't have a car, you know? So, yeah. So, when you don't have a car, you use the shopping carts to take the food. That wasn't allowed but they let us take the shopping carts home because we were refugees and they knew we were not, you know, we didn't have any way to, you know, to transport ourselves. So, they let us use their carts to take food home and then bring it back every time. So, I think that that was really good.

**Friendships and Kind Peers.** The researcher did not ask questions about peers specifically, however, this theme emerged when four of the seven participants chose to talk about other students during inquiry about community support.

Participant 3 volunteered that a social group at school motivated him to want to go and continue going. He offered this detailed explanation:

When I go to school, I have friends. My classmates. I get to meet some people like me. And we will meet so we will be in a group and we help each other. And like when you have friends, you want to meet them every day. You want to talk because maybe you don't have anyone in your family at home. So when we go over there, we have a lot of people so we can talk [to] and that makes me want to go to school.

When explaining the positive impact of community, Participant 6 shared that students at school were kind to her. In fact, she commented that peers were often more supportive than some of the educators. She stated, “The kids weren't acting the way that some of these teachers were acting. ... I'm always nice to everybody there and they're just nice to me.” Participant 7 also recalled positive memories of his social circle in high school and how it was a motivator to attend school and to do his best in classes. He offered this through description of the positive impact:

Yeah, students. Friends. We had fun together, always together, always sit together, always talk together. You know, we were sharing a lot of positivity. You know, everyone showed us – ‘here, I got all A’s.’ Or ‘I took that class’ and someone would say ‘Oh, me too.’ And then, you know, talking about stuff like that all together it was good. ...First of all, they were all... well most of them did

not speak English, most of them spoke Spanish. But there were no Arabic speakers. So, they got me out of my comfort zone, you know. Just to go ahead and speak and whatever. You know. It helped me.

Participant 1 also explained that peers had a positive impact on his ability to be successful in school. He shared that other students can have a significant impact and offered this perspective and advice for students meeting new arrival SLIFE:

First of all, I think the most important thing people should know is when someone comes from somewhere, you know, like from Africa or somewhere, and then there is the system, of course, it is different and they're very shy. They're like, as for me speaking, for myself, I was very shy. I was like, I don't know this place. You know? So, I think the most important thing you can do to the person, (pauses) is being nice to them. Try to, you know, show them, try to actually help them out and see, you know. Yeah, I think that's the most the most important thing. And I see these students that were nice. So that helped me. So, yeah, that was good.

Participant 7 also recommended that peers “help each other in school.” He recounted an experience where a peer at school helped him after he returned from surgery:

When I when I had surgery, I was on crutches for a long time and would also go to school and this was very challenging. I had a lot of friends, but none of them would stand by me or have my back. None of them, to be honest. Like they would see me in the hall and say ‘Hi Abdul. Hey’ that’s it.

You know, but I had a really a friend I never knew. It was a girl I didn’t know.

When I had the surgery, she just came up to me. I didn't know her before. I didn't know her. And she just would come up to me and say 'Hey Abdul, do you need help?' And she stayed with me for these first weeks. She never left me. She brought me lunch, she carried my backpack, and she was always with me. And to be honest, she was very helpful. And that... that was a very positive impact.

Participant 7 also mentioned that peers do not need to do very much to have a positive impact for a Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education. He explained that simple greetings can be a significant support. His explanation was:

You can meet somebody and, you know, you have no idea what it will do when someone says good morning, you know? Like sometimes they'll be like 'Hi, how are you?' And they made me feel like (pauses) like there's somebody asking about me. It is important because I spent time in school more than I spent time with my family.

#### ***Review of Findings for Research Question Four***

The protocol questions (see Appendix D) that aligned to RQ4 asked the subjects about positive and negative community supports. They were also asked to offer advice to communities that are receiving new arrival families with SLIFE. The first theme to emerge was welcoming, helpful neighbors. Six of the seven study participants felt that this had a significant impact on their ability to persist. Subjects offered specific examples of how their neighbors welcomed and supported them. They explained that this helped their ability to focus on education. Supports varied with examples such as English tutoring, assisting with translation, accompanying new families to appointments, and assisting with basic needs. Advice for communities included being kind and helpful.



Participants emphasized that they themselves were now having a positive impact on newer members of their communities by being welcoming, supportive, and offering words of encouragement.

A second theme to emerge was support from local community partners. Some examples were coordinated, and some were informal, or not officially orchestrated by an organization. Examples included, but were not limited to immunizations, food distribution and translation services. These were offered by organizations such as churches and outreach centers. Subjects explained that these supports were critical to their families and lightened the burden experienced by SLIFE to assist their families. Subjects explained that this support resulted in more time to focus on school. An example of a community partner assisting in an informal way was when a manager of a grocery store made allowances for the subject's family to transport their purchases home in one of the store's carts. This theme was evident as six of the seven participants had examples of when community partners had positively impacted their ability to persist.

There were no specific questions about peers, yet four of the seven participants chose to talk about other students during inquiry about community support. The theme of friendships and kind peers emerged as subjects shared anecdotes of social groups in and out of school. Some participants explained that their friends were academically focused which inspired them to do well in school. Other participants talked about peers who were not in their social circles but were kind to them. Subjects again emphasized kindness as a positive support for their persistence.

## Summary

This research study examined the perceptions of recent high school graduate SLIFE regarding secondary school support systems. Systems were generally described as family support, faculty support, school program support, and community support. The central research question for this study was: What are the factors that support acculturation of SLIFE and impact their educational success and persistence through to high school graduation? The protocol inquiries for this study focused on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school. The results presented in this chapter indicate clearly that participants feel their affective needs were paramount to any other types of support as they sought to overcome challenges associated with being SLIIFE (see Table 2).

The qualitative research method of study offers a glimpse into voice and the “why” of a phenomenon and focuses on how the research subjects make sense of an experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This chapter detailed the backgrounds of the participants which revealed that they had all arrived in the United States after having lived through traumatic circumstances. Each arrived with low proficiency in English and having missed from 2 to 10 years of formal education. Open ended inquiries provided the opportunity for participants to share specific examples of supports such as special interventions, instructional practices or technology uses.

As outlined in Figures 3-5, an affective theme emerged for each of the support systems. Table 2 offers an overview of all research questions and the number of participants whose responses were in alignment with the emerging theme.

**Table 2***Quantity of Participants Whose Responses Aligned to a Specific Theme*

Support System	Emergent Themes	Number of Participants	Percentage
Family	Appreciation for the opportunity	7 out of 7	100%
	Mindset	4 out of 7	57%
	Obligation to family	5 out of 7	71%
Faculty	Patience and understanding	4 out of 7	57%
	Degree of esteem held for students	7 out of 7	100%
	Kindness and patience	6 out of 7	86%
Programs	Extra content teaching sessions	7 out of 7	100%
	English language development classes	7 out of 7	100%
	Design programs to build empathy	4 out of 7	57%
Community	Welcoming, helpful neighbors	6 out of 7	86%
	Community partners	4 out of 7	57%
	Friendships and kind peers	4 out of 7	57%

The results are in alignment with the conceptual framework presented in Chapter I (see Figure 2). Viewed through the conceptual framework, it is evident that acculturation supports persistence for SLIFE. These results indicate how the interactions of the larger society with SLIFE affect their ability to acculturate in a positive way and persist through high school. A more detailed summary of the study's findings and implications for practice are presented in Chapter V.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education) regarding secondary school support systems. Systems were generally described as family support, faculty support, program support, and community support. The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the study and provide an evaluation of the results with important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter IV. It provides a discussion of the major methods used in the study, a discussion of the conclusions generated from the study's findings, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Research has revealed that ELs may face obstacles with respect to culture, language, and academic background knowledge (Yzquierdo, 2017). SLIFE are ELs who face additional challenges associated with a disruption in formal schooling due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). The conceptual framework for this study was guided by acculturation theory. Acculturation is defined as "the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, first-hand contact with each other" (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 146). This study explored how SLIFE perceived systems that impact their educational success and persistence through to high school graduation. The research questions focused upon four main systems of support: family, faculty, program, and community. As the participants reflected on each area of support, they also shared

anecdotes of what created more challenging situations for them. Participants shared advice for families, faculty, program designers and community members based on their lived experiences.

### ***Brief Overview of the Problem***

The world is experiencing the highest levels of displacement ever recorded, with the United Nations Refugee Agency reporting that over 79 million people around the world were forcibly displaced at the end of 2019 (UNHCR, 2020). Forty percent of those displaced are children. Success rates of immigrants are influenced by many factors including their experience with literacy and formal education (August & Shanahan, 2006). ELs are required to master grade level content, a new language, and embrace the cultural nuances and norms of their new learning communities (Yzquierdo, 2017). Also, students who have missed a significant amount of formal education face additional challenges in secondary classrooms (Browder, 2014). The dropout rate in the United States for ELs is significantly higher than that for native English students (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015), and there is an even higher proportion of dropouts among SLIFE due to a variety of challenges (Capps et al., 2015).

Emergent themes were identified from the lived experiences of participants in this study. There are numerous connections between these themes and the current reported literature. In alignment with research on acculturation theory (Berry & Sabatier, 2010), responses from participants indicate perceptions that their success was impacted by how they were received and regarded by new people at their high schools and in their communities. In addition, participants commented on the support from their families. The

researcher found that social-emotional support was a significant factor throughout responses by all participants in this study.

***Purpose Statement and Research Questions***

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate SLIFE regarding secondary school support systems. Systems were generally described as family support, faculty support, program support, and community support. The research questions for this study focus on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school. The central research question for this study was: What are the factors that support acculturation of SLIFE and impact their educational success and persistence through to high school graduation?

The central research question in this study was examined through the following research questions:

- RQ1 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their family?
- RQ2 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to faculty?
- RQ3 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to school programs?

RQ4 What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their community?

### ***Review of the Study Design***

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological design aimed at exploring the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a group of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conducting a phenomenological study offers insight into the lived experience of participants experiencing a phenomenon either individually or as a group (Butcher & Eikenberg, 2019). Gaining access to research participants, conflict of interest, and our own bias are among the challenges of conducting phenomenological research (Butcher & Eikenberg, 2019). Participants were identified through snowball sampling. In snowball sampling, participants are asked to name other individuals who fit a certain profile and each of those participants are asked to name other potential participants as a means of finding participants who fit the research criteria (Goodman, 1961). The setting, population, data collection, and data analysis are discussed below.

**Setting and population.** This dissertation examined the perceptions of high school graduates who are SLIFE. The label SLIFE is used to describe a Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education. SLIFE was operationalized with three indicators: (a) gaps of at least 2 years of schooling relative to grade; (b) low self-reported first language schooling; and (c) beginner-level English proficiency when entering US schools. The seven participants in this study were limited to persons who were enrolled in a public high school upon arrival due to their age despite having significant gaps in formal schooling. Each has since graduated from a public high school in Houston, Texas

within the past four years of when data was collected. Each is over the age of 18. The demographic information for participants is organized in Chapter IV (see Table 1).

**Data collection and analysis.** Data were collected through one-on-one interviews. The goal was to record impressions, feelings and beliefs about the supports that were in place during their high school years. Data collection interviews took place using Zoom, an online web conferencing platform, that allowed the researcher to communicate with audio and video in each interview. Interview questions were developed and structured in accordance with guided protocol in the appendix section (see Appendix D). Extensive handwritten notes were also recorded during interviews to support accurate transcription and to serve as a data source for triangulation. The interview instrument was designed on the basis of and aligned with current research and the research questions. All recordings and field notes were transcribed verbatim as is recommended (Patton, 2015). The steps involved in this analysis involved gathering the data from the interviews and then developing a list of significant statements about participants' individual experiences in relation to receiving supports that enabled them to persist through high school. The researcher then categorized statements into groups to create themes. Verbatim examples were included with data, and finally a structural description was developed. The researcher reflected upon the context in which the phenomenon was experienced in order to write valid composite descriptions.

### ***Summary of Major Findings***

The identified emerging themes derive from the commonality of the reported personal experiences of former SLIFE regarding factors that impacted their ability to



persist through high school. The following is a summary of those findings organized by research question:

RQ1: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their family?

- Appreciation for the Opportunity
- Mindset
- Obligation to Family
- Patience and Understanding

RQ2: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to faculty?

- Degree of Esteem Held for Students
- Kindness and Patience

RQ3: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to school programs?

- Extra Content Teaching Sessions
- English Language Development Classes
- Design Programs to Build Empath

RQ4: What do SLIFE graduates perceive to be positive and/or negative factors that affect their success in persisting through high school with respect to their community?

- Welcoming, Helpful Neighbors
- Community Partners

### **Conclusions**

Acculturation theory served as the conceptual framework for this phenomenological study. Acculturation is defined as “the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, first-hand contact with each other” (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 146). Specifically, the present study explored how SLIFE graduates perceived systems that impacted their educational success and persistence through to high school graduation. The research led the author to conclude that the persistence of SLIFE was impacted by how they were received and regarded by new people at their high schools, in the community and also by their families. The researcher found that social emotional support was a significant factor throughout responses of all participants in this study.

### ***Research Question One***

Participants in this study were asked to describe familial expectations as well as actions by their families that had an impact on their success. The interview questions also prompted subjects to offer advice to families of SLIFE. In alignment with research by Fisher (2017), Fries-Britt et al. (2014) and Hynson (2019), all seven participants volunteered that their families had an impact on their ability to persist. Each research subject shared that they and their families had an appreciation for the opportunity of an education. Participants reported that encouraging words from family members helped them to understand the importance of focusing on school. Participants explained that their mindsets were key to their success. They described the importance of having a family

that encourages you to do your best. Supported by the research conducted by Dweck (2010), some participants described their family's belief system and how it contributed to their own growth mindset about what was possible.

While all participants shared that they and their families were grateful for the chance to receive an education, some felt that their families did not empathize with the challenges of their situations in school. Subjects described their perceptions regarding an overwhelming sense of obligation to parents and siblings. The current findings regarding a sense of obligation aligns with research findings of Fries-Britt et al. (2014). Participants reported that their obligations extended beyond their performance at school. While the students were beginning to acquire English after arrival in the United States, some explained that they were the person in the family who was needed as a translator for situations such as obtaining community services, doctor's appointments, and school meetings.

As participant shared anecdotes, comments and responses about family interactions, the theme of patience and understanding clearly emerged. The subjects in this study felt that families should create conditions where their children have less pressure. When asked to offer advice, participants recommended that parents of SLIFE be understanding and practice patience with their children as they acclimate to new language, new surroundings, and new workloads. This advice is in alignment with existing research (Fisher, 2017) suggesting that while acculturating, family support for adolescents is imperative for their well-being and a healthy adjustment to their new communities.

*Research Question Two*

All seven participants spoke about the strong impact faculty had on their ability and desire to persist through to graduation. Students with interruptions or gaps in formal education often arrive missing foundational skills (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et al. 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017). While each of the participants expressed frustration for their gaps in content or language, they emphasized affective support over skill building when describing teacher actions that had the most significant impacts on their success. In fact, six of the seven participants focused on anecdotes about how they were regarded, or made to feel, by the adults at school. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis supports the positive impacts of addressing the affective needs of language learners. Extensive literature now exists regarding successful outcomes when educators view ELs through an asset lens versus a deficit mindset about their abilities (Echevarría & Nora, 2016; Echevarría et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Miller, 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017; Snyder & Fenner, 2021). In his seminal work on psychological health, Maslow posits that feeling safe and self-assured is necessary for belonging and the foundation for well-being (Winokur, 2021). The participants exemplified what is noted by Winokur (2021) when they became more animated describing instances of faculty regarding them as valuable members of the student body.

The research on culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015; Snyder & Fenner, 2021) capitalizing on student assets (Echevarría & Nora, 2016; Echevarría et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Miller, 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017; Snyder & Fenner, 2021), and relationship building (Winokur, 2021) are all consistent with this study's findings. These former students arrived with limited or interrupted education and were new to their

community's culture. They offered examples of how adults in the building practiced patience, understanding and held high expectations for their abilities. These included, but were not limited to, situations where educators seemed happy to see them, when faculty encouraged them to aim higher with their life goals, and when they were put in positions of leadership. These examples were all described as having positive impacts and participants overwhelmingly reported that being held in high esteem had a positive influence on their ability to persist. By contrast, participants also shared the negative impacts of instances when they were belittled, underestimated, and made to feel unwelcomed by adults in their school. Subjects offered specific examples that included educators commenting about their limited abilities, teachers not having time for them, or when adults did not intervene during incidents of bullying. They were clear that those words and actions resulted in negative feelings and adversely affected their ability to persist. The findings in this study are in direct alignment with extensive literature on the positive effects of addressing ELs' affective needs (Krashen, 1982), capitalizing on their assets (Echevarría & Nora, 2016; Echevarría et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Miller, 2020; Hammond, 2015; Salva & Matis, 2017; Snyder & Fenner, 2021), and creating a sense of belonging (Claudius, 2018; Winokur, 2021).

When asked about advice for school staff, six of the seven participants mentioned kindness or patience. While each of them recognized the need for foundational skills, they instead made pleas for teachers and faculty to consider the feelings of SLIFE. Responses to RQ2 lead the researcher to conclude that their ability to persist is strongly affected by how adults regard them and how SLIFE are made to feel. This finding mirrors

Colón's (2019) research on the benefits of teachers and administrators developing an awareness of SLIFE's unique socioemotional, academic, and acculturation needs.

### ***Research Question Three***

Participants described both the positive and negative effects of their school programs, as well as ideas for leaders who organize such programs. All seven participants reported being off level for language, literacy, and content area background which is consistent with current literature on SLIFE (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et al. 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017). A theme of needing extra teaching sessions emerged when all seven subjects shared that additional time with content instructors had a positive impact on the ability to persevere through to graduation. This consensus among participants mirrors the research of Ahmed (2019). Many of these extra sessions, available through the school system, were not exclusively for English Learners. Four of the seven subjects specified that mainstream, after-school tutorials had a significant impact on their ability to persevere.

The findings in this current research also support extensive literature on the effectiveness of English language development classes and newcomer programming (Ahmed, 2019; Browder, 2014; Cigdem, 2017; Johnson, 2020) for new arrival students. Subjects in this study had attended different models of programming with some attending a fully dedicated new arrival center, others having only one class period of ESL instruction, and one having no ESL support during the school day. Despite their different experiences, all seven participants were strong advocates for ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction during the school day. The theme of including at least one English

language development class in programming for SLIFE was evident and clear to the researcher and is validated by current research (Browder, 2014).

During discussions about school systems, the theme of empathy emerged as it relates to how school programs are designed. Empathy is the ability to comprehend, share, and care about the feelings of another person (Cherry, 2020). Six of the seven participants had previously emphasized the importance of educators having patience with them. Having patience and understanding was also an emergent theme in discussion of family support. In relation to persistence, very little literature exists on programming that builds empathy for newcomer students. However, the findings in this current study clearly indicate that empathy had a strong effect on all study participants. When subjects were asked to give advice to program leaders designing school systems, four of the seven suggested that programming be established to help build understanding and caring from faculty and other, non-EL students. This advice was underscored by anecdotes of challenges with transitions to mainstream classes, frustration over being segregated, and a perceived lack of teacher efficacy.

Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) suggest that many secondary educators feel unprepared to support the needs of SLIFE. This idea is consistent with the current findings through the descriptions of students who participated in new arrival centers recounted their challenges in the mainstream classes. Those participants recommended systems or programs to help ease the transition from ESL programming to mainstream classes. Research subjects who did not participate in new arrival centers also recommended training for content area teachers. Training on "how to work with us" was a recommendation along with a focus on making time when students need support. The

need for more instructional training for teachers of ELs is substantiated in current scholarship (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019; Snyder & Fenner, 2021). However, these subjects did not make pleas for support of better pedagogy or instructional strategies. On the contrary, these participants made pleas for programming to specifically help educators with how they regard SLIFE.

Programs that supported student-to-student empathy were also suggested as they spoke about the negative effects of segregation. They explained that current practices and lack of empathy lead to exclusion and bullying from peers and at times, from educators. Subjects felt that leaders could improve programs with intentionality. Some suggested a more phased in approach to transitioning students while another participant advocated for building awareness of SLIFE struggles among the student body. Subjects advocated for programs to build SLIFE's awareness of college processes, any type of inclusion in sports after they surpass the legal age to play and intentional grouping with non-EL students. These different requests share a common theme of building programs with empathy for SLIFE in mind. Throughout the interviews, the former SLIFE recommended that we prioritize how they feel. The desire for inclusion, understanding and acceptance is aligned with the research of Schachner et al. (2017) that suggests schools can provide valuable opportunities for interethnic relationships with important acculturation outcomes for immigrant youth.

#### ***Research Question Four***

When they reflected on positive impact on their success, these former SLIFE offered specific examples of how community partners positively affected their ability to persist. This finding is consistent with research by Green (2019) documenting the



positive impact of community support on marginalized populations. Participants named several organizations that assisted their families when they were in need. The research subjects felt that community partners had a positive impact on their success when they received assistance with items such as food, clothing, immunizations, and other services. It is worth noting that some businesses were supportive without a formal program for doing so. One participant claimed that a local grocery store had a positive impact because the manager made special allowances for his family to borrow a grocery cart to transport food. Whether the organization was supporting the participant's family with major expenses or less substantial needs, these subjects claimed that the support made a significant difference and had a positive impact on their success.

The participants also recognized the positive support of welcoming, helpful neighbors. One participant had a negative experience with neighbors but was able to explain the positive difference when his family moved to a more welcoming community. Welcoming, helpful neighbors had a positive influence on these participants in varying ways. As stated earlier in this chapter, some participants felt overwhelmed at being the person to accompany parents to doctor appointments, meetings, and other commitments. Welcoming, helpful neighbors assumed many of those tasks. Their new neighbors not only lightened the load of responsibilities for these former learners, but also gave them a sense of being welcomed by the community. This current finding exemplifies research results of Claudius (2018) as we consider the effects of stress and trauma on well-being. This research is significant because the literature affirms that most SLIFE have a variety of challenges including, but not limited to, effects of having lived through traumatic circumstances (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et

al. 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017). When these graduates identify helpful, welcoming neighbors as a major support, doing so underscores existing research by Claudius (2018) on social connectedness and immigrant distress. Claudius found that the relationship between trauma exposure and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was found to be moderated by mainstream social connectedness.

While there were no questions about peers specifically, the participants chose to talk about other students during inquiry about community support. They felt that the friends in their communities motivated them to want to attend school. Fries-Britt et al. (2014) also found that social adjustment was a common theme among foreign-born students of color. That concept is supported in this current study as these participants of color spoke about empathy from other students. When subjects were asked what advice they would give the community, they shared that people do not need to do a great deal to have a positive impact for SLIFE. They stressed the positive impact of simply being treated with kindness and patience. This advice, for community peers exemplifies current research by Claudius (2018) and mirrored what participants advised for parents, faculty and program developers: Focus on how you are making the new student feel.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this research suggest ways in which SLIFE are supported to persist through to graduation. Taken together, the findings of this study support Acculturation Theory and Berry's research on immigrants' social, psychological, and academic integration to new cultures (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). These findings have critical implications on practice as the number of SLIFE continues to increase in the United States and around the world. (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010;

Freeman et al., 2001; Ruiz-de-Valasco & Fix, 2000; Short, 2002). The dropout rate for SLIFE is higher than that of the larger EL population (Osman, 2020) and substantial literature exists on challenges faced by SLIFE (Browder, 2014; Capps et al., 2015; Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et al., 2020; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Moreno, 2020; Osman, 2020). However, a weakness in the scholarship is the lack of research involving perceptions of SLIFE who do persist through to graduation regarding systems that supported them to do so. These learner perceptions could add to the existing research by providing an authentic view of systems that effectively support SLIFE. In so doing, this study and other research studies with similar findings about SLIFE and the larger EL population would suggest the following implications for consideration:

- Limited research exists on the effectiveness of one model of newcomer program over another (Moreno, 2020). While the participants in this study attended various models, all advocated for ESL classes as part of a regular schedule of courses for SLIFE. It is recommended that program leaders dedicate some time during school hours for SLIFE to focus on foundations of English language acquisition with educators who are trained in second language acquisition (Ahmed, 2019; Browder, 2014; Cigdem, 2017; Johnson, 2020).
- A sense of connectedness and mainstream belonging are important for the acculturation of immigrant youth (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Claudius, 2018). SLIFE attending new arrival centers can face challenges when moving into mainstream classes. This finding suggests that newcomer program designers

can positively impact the ability of SLIFE to persist with a plan for early exposure to mainstream population and a focus on easing adjustment into the general student body.

- A sense of connectedness and mainstream belonging are important for the acculturation of immigrant youth (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Claudius, 2018). SLIFE attending new arrival centers can face challenges when moving into mainstream classes. This finding suggests that newcomer program designers can positively impact the ability of SLIFE to persist with a plan for early exposure to mainstream population and a focus on easing adjustment into the general student body.
- A significant finding from this study was that mainstream extra teaching sessions had a positive impact on the persistence of all subjects including those that lacked foundational skills in their native language. All participants noted the importance of the opportunity to take part in extra instruction available to the general population. Extra sessions are common as funding is available (TEA, 2020) for public high schools to offer summer school, and other intervention sessions to their general population. However, we cannot assume that SLIFE understand how the system works, what is available if they need extra help, or the process in place for student who do not pass required classes. Educational institutions should take measures to ensure that SLIFE and their families are aware of all extra teaching sessions and how those intervention opportunities fit within their path to graduation.

- Understandably, when teens lack academic, educators may attribute a lack of foundational skills to a cognitive delay or learning issue. However, low levels of skill mastery for SLIFE are generally due to lack of opportunity (Salva & Matis, 2017), not lack of ability. Learning about needs and assets of SLIFE is of the utmost importance (Colón, 2019), therefore, intentional professional development for educators is recommended to support high expectations from educators (du Toit-Brits, 2019), to build teacher self-efficacy (Hattie, 2012) and to promote an asset-based orientation when regarding language learners (Snyder & Fenner, 2021). This type of professional development is critical as many educators feel ill-prepared to support SLIFE (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017) but may feel capable of supporting other off-level learners.
- Holding SLIFE in high esteem, creating a welcoming environment, practicing patience and being kind were among common themes from participant input. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that SLIFE would benefit from a community that is empathetic but also holds them in high esteem. Immigrants bring assets such as multiple perspectives, appreciation for education and a global view, (Echevarría & Nora, 2016; Echevarría et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Miller, 2020; Salva & Matis, 2017; Snyder & Fenner, 2021). Consequently, program leaders can educate the general population of staff and students on the varied backgrounds of their community, the assets that immigrants bring, and benefits of diversity. This recommendation would support a positive integration of SLIFE into the larger education community.

- Training to support SLIFE and effective practices already exist in our field. However, demographics are changing quickly due to global events, (UNHCR, 2020). It is possible that educators and leaders are not planning for SLIFE because they may be unaware of their growing need or the projections for their communities. State education agencies, local education agencies and school level leaders can prioritize collaboration and the sharing of data, predictions and plans for upcoming newcomer enrollment. This is suggested to raise awareness and support preparedness for the growing SLIFE population.
- The oldest school-aged children in a family are often relied upon heavily by the family as soon as they begin to acquire English. This assistance is an important obligation when so many EL families require services for basic needs (Breiseth, 2013). Communities and school systems can support SLIFE by ensuring that families are aware of what translation services and other supports are available to lessen the burden on their children who are SLIFE.
- Schools and communities can positively impact the integration of SLIFE and support their academic success by being intentional (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). Social organizations such a club that promotes multiculturalism are recommended to promote acculturation over assimilation (see Figure 1).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study should improve understanding of secondary school support systems that have impacts on persistence of SLIFE. The intent of this work is to advocate for programs, practices, and policies that best support SLIFE through high

school. Based on these findings and the current literature, the following are recommendations for future study:

The first recommendation is to further narrow the sample population to include only participants who had missed longer periods of formal education. While some of the participants had no prior formal education, and all had missed two or more years, the number of years of first language schooling varied widely in this study. Future research that controls for more years of missed education may offer insight into how to best support SLIFE with this specific background characteristic.

A second recommendation is to further narrow the sample population to participants with the same cultural background. The home country and cultures of these participants varied as noted in Table 1. Future research that controls for cultural background could offer valuable information on how to best support SLIFE of a specific cultural demographic.

A third recommendation is to conduct the study with school districts across a larger geographic region. Expanding the boundaries of the research beyond one city would be helpful by providing a view of supports for SLIFE in different areas.

The fourth recommendation is to conduct a mixed methods study to reveal statistically significant differences between perceptions of SLIFE who attended different types of newcomer programs. This may offer insight into lived experiences, while offering trends based on different program models.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The most significant finding from this study suggests that schools, communities, and families can have a positive impact on SLIFE's ability to persist by attending to how

these learners are made to feel. This was a common theme throughout all interviews and all questions. Importantly, the findings of this study support Acculturation Theory and Berry's research on immigrants' social, psychological, and academic integration to a new culture (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). This understanding is critical to the field because our education communities can expect to see the current rise in SLIFE continue to grow based on the increasing level of displacement globally (UNHCR, 2020).

The high proportion of dropouts among SLIFE can be attributed to a variety of challenges (Capps, et al., 2015). While SLIFE are often off-level for academic skills, it is important to note that the characteristics of SLIFE do not include cognitive issues or limited capacity to learn. Their low levels of language and, often, literacy are generally attributed to lack of opportunity. It stands to reason that educators, specialists, and program leaders may overlook the potential of a teen-aged learner who presents to us with a lack of formal schooling. Their low mastery of foundational reading and writing skills is deceptive and can result in low expectations from educators (du Toit-Brits, 2019).

The findings of this study offer tremendous hope. It is true that SLIFE come with a significant number of challenges (Browder, 2014; Capps et al., 2015; Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et al., 2020; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Moreno, 2020; Osman, 2020). However, none of these challenges are new to our field, none are too great to overcome, and none are unique to this demographic. Based on the findings and the current research, it seems logical that the average public school system has a great deal to offer for the success of SLIFE. These findings suggest that our work needs to be around our own mindsets and how we regard



these new community members. With patience and empathy, we can support these students to not give up. Attending to their social-emotional needs, and holding SLIFE in the high regard they deserve, could create welcoming spaces of belonging. These types of learning spaces are not only important for the persistence of SLIFE (Fisher, 2017), they are important for the well-being and motivation of all students (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2018).

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**Appendix A**



**CITI PROGRAM**

Completion Date 25-Jun-2020  
Expiration Date 25-Jun-2023  
Record ID 37199930

This is to certify that:

**Carol Salva**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher** (Curriculum Group)  
**Social & Behavioral Research** (Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**University of St. Thomas**

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

**CITI**  
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/wa5dc2504-92c6-4343-93eb-86ae8ccc19bf-37199930](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/wa5dc2504-92c6-4343-93eb-86ae8ccc19bf-37199930)



## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Participant Consent Form**

Persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education Dissertation  
The study will explore the perceptions of recent high school graduate students with limited or interrupted formal education regarding secondary school support systems.

**Carol Salva**, a doctoral candidate at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas is inviting you to participate in the research study. The researcher is seeking individuals who are high school graduates, who arrived in the United States with little to no English language skills and who missed 2 or more years of formal education. **Carol Salva** is conducting the interviews for this research study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate students with limited or interrupted formal education regarding secondary school support systems. You have been selected to participate in an interview based upon your status as a high school graduate, your arrival in U.S. schools as a beginning English speaker, and the number of years you received formal schooling prior to arriving in the United States. If you agree to participate in this research study, a virtual interview will be scheduled at your earliest convenience. The interview will be conducted via an online platform and will be audio and video recorded; the interview will then be transcribed verbatim. The interview should last approximately 2 hours and will be scheduled at your convenience. Upon completion of the transcription, you will be provided with a copy and a meeting will be scheduled to verify the transcribed information. The follow-up meeting should last no more than 1 hour.

#### **Participating in the Research Interview**

You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be entitled to otherwise.

#### **Data Storage and Confidentiality**

Once the research is conducted, the recordings and transcripts will be securely stored. Electronic versions will be password protected and hard copies will be stored in a locked storage bin to maintain the confidentiality of interviewees.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. However, the interview does ask you to recall educational and community experiences that you encountered, which could possibly raise negative emotions. If you experience any distress, you can contact the United Way Helpline by dialing 211 or visiting the website [www.211.org](http://www.211.org). The helpline operates 24 hours a day to connect people with public service

professionals including mental health support providers. United Way is able to recommend services that are at no charge.

**Possible Benefits**

There is no direct benefit, in the form of compensation, for participating in this study; however, your participation will add to the body of knowledge about the factors present in an urban school and its surrounding neighborhood that contribute to student success.

**Contact Information**

If you have questions or concerns about participating in this interview, or if there are any problems, please contact:

Lead Researcher: Carol Salva, [salvac@stthom.edu](mailto:salvac@stthom.edu) and 832.788.9478.

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Theresa M. Campos- email [campost@stthom.edu](mailto:campost@stthom.edu) and 713.857.6564

**Consent**

The signature below indicates that the undersigned agrees to participate in the study. The participant further affirms they are at least 18 years old, have received a copy of this consent form, and understand the information therein.

---

Signature

---

Date

## Appendix C



### Human Subject Committee Review Summary

Thank you for submitting your application to the HSC for review. Your status appears below. Items to address (if any) are included; please review them carefully.

Applications marked as “revise and resubmit” should be revised and resubmitted as soon as possible. The resubmission should be accompanied by a cover letter indicating how each of the required modification have been addressed in the revised application. These applications will be processed on the Monday following the date of re-submission.

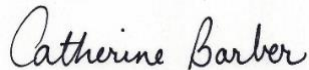
Applications marked “approved with modifications” should be modified before starting the study. The applicant should email the chair with a confirmation that the modifications will be implemented. No additional action is needed.

Applications marked “approved pending third party approval” do not require modifications; however, approval from the research site or other third party (e.g., agencies involved in providing support to participants who experience distress) must be submitted to the HSC prior to collecting data.

Applications marked “approved” are approved as submitted. No additional action is needed. The approval period is for one year from the date on this document. If any unexpected adverse events occur related to the research, please contact the HSC chair as soon as possible.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [barbercr@stthom.edu](mailto:barbercr@stthom.edu) or 713-525-3830.

Sincerely,



Catherine R. Barber, Ph.D.  
Chair, Human Subjects Committee

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Date: November 9, 2020

Name of applicant: Carol Salva

Title of study: Persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Status: Approved with modifications

Items to address:

- **Please clarify the recruitment procedures. How will the initial pool of potential participants be identified before snowball sampling can occur?**
- **In the consent form, please replace Dr. Torres's information with the following: Dr. Christopher Evans, Vice-President of Academic Affairs, 713-525-2164.**
- The University of St. Thomas Counseling and Disability Services office does not provide services to the general community. Please replace this resource with a community resource in the consent form.
- Provide confirmation that the community resource is available to provide services to any participants who might seek services and clarify what the terms of service are (e.g., fee for service, sliding scale, etc.). This information should then be included in the consent form so that participants do not expect that the research will pay for any services sought subsequent to the research.
- The fifth set of interview questions were identical to the third set. Please clarify whether additional questions will be asked to gauge community support.
- In the recruitment email, please change "anonymous" to "confidential" and delete "anonymity" from this paragraph, as you will presumably know the identity of the participants.

## Appendix D

### Interview

Researcher Name: Carol Salva

Title of the Study: Persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to examine the perceptions of recent high school graduate students with limited or interrupted formal schooling regarding secondary school support systems. Systems were defined as family support, teacher support, administrator support, and community support. The research questions for this study focused on the relationship between support systems and persistence through high school.

Central Research Question:

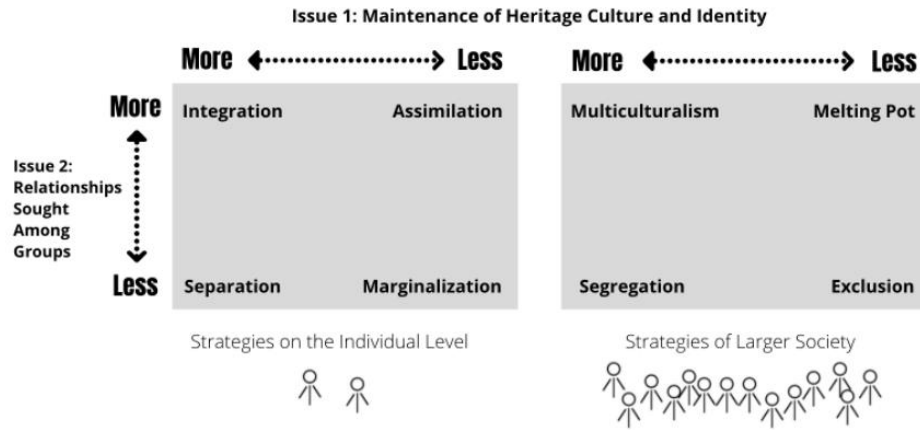
The central research question for this study was: What are the factors that support acculturation of SLIFE and impact their educational success and persistence through high school graduation?

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Proposed Interview Questions</b>
<b>What do SLIFE graduates describe as support systems they experienced while attending high school?</b>	a. Throughout your high school experience, what would you describe as support systems that helped you along the way? b. Is there one area of support that has helped you more than others? c. What has helped you the most?
<b>What do SLIFE graduates describe as family support systems they experienced while attending high school?</b>	a. Let's talk about the role of your family. What do you believe your family expects from you after high school? b. What has been the impact of your family on your graduation success? c. What would be your advice to families of SLIFE on the best way they can help their child?

<p><b>What do SLIFE graduates describe as faculty support they experienced while attending high school?</b></p>	<p>a. Let's discuss the people who worked at your school in any capacity. What would you describe as support from faculty that helped you along the way?</p> <p>b. What has been the impact of the school employees on your graduation success?</p> <p>c. What would be your advice to school employees on the best way they can help their SLIFE students?</p>
<p><b>What do SLIFE graduates describe as school support they experienced while attending high school?</b></p>	<p>a. Let's discuss the classes and programs at your school. What would you describe as support from the school that helped you along the way?</p> <p>b. What has been the impact of your classes on your graduation success?</p> <p>c. What would be your advice to schoolboards on the best way they can help their SLIFE students?</p>
<p><b>What do SLIFE graduates describe as community support they experienced while attending high school?</b></p>	<p>a. Let's discuss the people who worked at your community in any capacity. What would you describe as support from community members that helped you along the way?</p> <p>b. What has been the impact of the community members on your graduation success?</p> <p>c. What would be your advice to community members on the best way they can help their SLIFE students?</p>

Appendix E

Figure 1  
Acculturation Effects



Note: Adapted from "Comparative studies of acculturative stress." by Berry, J. W., Kim, U., Minde, T., & Mok, D., 1987, *International migration review*, 21(3), 491-511.21(3), 491-511.  
(<https://doi.org/10.1177/019791838702100303>)

**APPENDIX F**

**Figure 2**  
*Support System Effects on Persistence*

