

EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY-AGED LATINX ENGLISH LEARNER
STUDENTS IN VIRTUAL LEARNING DURING
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the many EL students I have come across throughout my educational and professional trajectory. Know that Ms. Saenz is cheering you on and wishing you a victory-lined academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative study seeks to understand the experiences of secondary-aged Latinx EL students during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the lens of CRT and LatCrit theories, the researcher analyzes the testimonios of eight secondary-aged Latinx EL students. This study addresses a gap in the literature as it pertains to online instruction during the pandemic and focuses on the challenges and victories that are unique to the Latinx ELs that participated in this study. It focuses on the many ways communities can support Latinx EL students by creating awareness to the issues of oppression that students experience in our schools. Understanding how disproportionately COVID-19 has affected Latinx ELs can provide more meaningful insight into their realities.

This study evaluates the academic and emotional support systems provided by Texas schools during the pandemic as well as the vital role the families played for the participants. Data was collected by conducting semi-structured individual interviews (testimonios) using an online platform. The research findings indicate that students that participated in this study significantly relied on the emotional support of their families to overcome the emotional concerns they experienced during the pandemic. This study highlights ways participants navigated uncharted territory as the pandemic presented many challenges to the existing school system. The results, implications and recommendations for future research will be more thoroughly presented in this study.

I. INTRODUCTION

To say the 2020 school year was abnormal is an understatement. Unprecedented changes in our education system brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to shut their doors to students while simultaneously finding ways to continue offering academic opportunities in a virtual environment. Without set standards or guidelines from states, teachers and administrators alike scrambled to create virtual learning communities as most schools were unprepared for such a development (Diliberti et al., 2021). While the COVID-19 pandemic created a time of uncertainty for everyone, the most likely impact of this pandemic will be its long-lasting effects especially for underprivileged, already vulnerable populations such as English language learners (ELs), and even more particularly for racially minoritized subpopulations—Latinx ELs—the focus of this study.

As an EL myself, I often wondered if I would have survived the pandemic academically if COVID-19 had happened in south Texas while I was a student. Of course, the lack of technology at that time would have made it more challenging, if not impossible, to attend school virtually for everyone and perhaps more schools would have resorted to distributing paper packets or textbooks for students to self-school, as some districts did during the height of quarantine (Silva, 2021). Regardless, with or without technology students like me would have suffered tremendously from an academic standpoint. While my parents supported and valued education, they would not have known how to help me. They did not speak English, they did not graduate from high school, and while my mother volunteered at the school my siblings and I attended, she still may not have known how to seek help.

Even with these challenges, I consider myself one of the lucky ones. To be blessed with parents who valued and supported my education was invaluable. Having a mother who was always home with a warm meal and encouraging words was priceless. Being homeowners and having the stability of growing up in the same neighborhood gave my siblings and me a sense of permanence that many students do not have these days. I wonder what it was like for students who faced challenges like my own during the pandemic, or better yet, what about those who faced more severe struggles? How did they manage—or did they manage at all?

Even for the highest performing students, the lasting effects of an unpredicted and unprecedented school shut down can be permanent (Kaffenberger, 2021). Yet even more troubling is the fact that our response to the COVID-19 pandemic magnified persistent academic disparities between White students and students of Black and Hispanic heritage (Dorn et al., 2020). While the volume of learning lost during school closures undoubtedly varies among students, the reality is those who were already struggling academically were affected the most by this sudden closure. Of the five million EL students nationwide, many have seen other district priorities take precedence while educators have struggled to connect with these students online (Robles & Belsha, 2020). Although efforts were being made at the onset of the pandemic to provide academic opportunities for all students, the education system failed at being prepared for this type of emergency (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). It took a pandemic to realize our education system is not equipped to adequately provide online schooling that is on par with the quality of education best delivered face-to-face in the classroom.

Among those most affected by school closures are EL students—students who already faced challenges prior to the pandemic. The inequities EL students have had to endure during the pandemic range from being in homes without computers, to parents with little digital knowledge or experience, and undependable connectivity (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). Perhaps most critical, these students were no longer able to attend schools, the “one place where they could regularly hear English and develop their English fluency” (Cortes, 2020, para. 4). For ELs, the limitations were and are countless, and the school system is not equipped to overcome these challenges.

Background of the Study

Between school years 2000–2001 and 2016–2017 the number of EL students in the United States grew by over 28% (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2020). In the fall of 2017, Spanish was the home language for 3.7 million students representing 74.8% of all EL students and 7.6% of all public K–12 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). With numbers this high, more and more teachers will instruct linguistically and culturally diverse students in their classes.

In order to begin to achieve equity in education we have to ensure students are given equal access to resources to prepare them for academic success. Remote learning, such as that required by the COVID-19 pandemic, can only be successful when students have access to broad-based resources including technology and connectivity, academic parental support, as well as academic and social support from teachers (Rosales, 2020). For many ELs, remote learning only exacerbates their lack of access to these resources. It is estimated that nearly 60% of ELs nationwide are from low-income families in which parents have disproportionately limited levels of education (Grantmakers for Education,

2013). According to a recent survey, 43% of all lower income parents said it was very or somewhat likely their children would have to do schoolwork on a cell phone (Lake & Makori, 2020). From this same study, 36% said it was at least somewhat likely their children would not be able to complete schoolwork because they do not have access to a computer at home (Lake & Makori, 2020). For these students, remote learning has turned into a profound digital divide that emphasizes the need to address equitable access for the underprivileged.

Statement of the Problem

While the number of EL students has grown significantly across the United States, their level of academic achievement has lagged behind others whose first language is English (Echevarría et al., 2000). A myriad of factors has challenged EL families for decades—and during COVID-19 these impediments have only been magnified. Prior to the pandemic, ELs faced obstacles such as lack of formal schooling, high levels of mobility, lack of access to consistent language instruction (as curriculum changes in every district) and having personal responsibilities at home outside of school hours (Breiseth, 2020). During the pandemic, these challenges were exacerbated, making it even more clear how disproportionately EL families were affected.

Understanding how disproportionately COVID-19 has affected ELs can provide more meaningful insight into their realities. Of those children killed by COVID-19, more than 75% have been Hispanic, Black, and Native American—fully 41% of all COVID-related deaths—according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Wan, 2020). Disparities among racially minoritized children mirror those of adults. As of June 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 33.8% of COVID-19

cases in the United States were Latinx, even though this group comprises only 18% of the U.S. population (Wan, 2020). As a result, the combined pressures of the pandemic have put a considerable strain on families, making it difficult for them to support children's learning at home (Breiseth, 2020). For many of these families, parents do not have the luxury to work from home, which means they expose themselves to the virus in their work locations and, as a result, may not be home to support their child's online learning.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this research was to shed light on the experiences of middle and high school Latinx ELs during the COVID-19 pandemic in a virtual learning setting. The hope was that this study can help provide justification for school districts to make the necessary accommodations to offer a quality education to all students, so Latinx ELs (among other marginalized student populations) have a reasonable chance to achieve academic success. As previously stated, prior to COVID-19, ELs already faced many obstacles—however, the circumstances of the pandemic amplified those challenges. In an effort to inform current practices and respond to the existing literature gap on how to meet the needs of Latinx ELs during a pandemic through online schooling, this study drew on existing literature that focused on the characteristics and academic needs of Latinx ELs, teacher perceptions of ELs, and academic and social supports available to ELs. The intent of this study was to provide school leaders with the data necessary to make informed decisions regarding ELs and their academic success in general, and more specifically during an unprecedented crisis that required a shift to online learning. This information is intended to help educators create strategies to promote academic and social advancement while providing equitable academic opportunities for ELs. The findings

from this study provide data as to how EL students experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. These data enhance the academic literature by providing valuable information to help foster positive academic learning environments for ELs. Results of this dissertation will help provide a deeper understanding of how to mitigate the shortcomings in our current education system.

Research Questions

The following research questions pertaining to Latinx EL students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic guided this qualitative study.

- Question 1: What have been the experiences of participating secondary Latinx EL students with virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 2: What emotional and academic supports have participating secondary Latinx ELs had during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 3: How do participating secondary Latinx ELs describe the role of their families in supporting their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 4: How can the narratives of participating secondary Latinx ELs inform best practices to support ELs more generally?

Theoretical Framework

We are presently experiencing several issues in education and society that disproportionately affect our most vulnerable populations. There is no better time than now to address these issues. If anything, positive can come from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the sense of urgency that seems to now surround issues of educational injustice. People have grown tired of battling racial tensions and the constant need to

demand fairness and equity. Perhaps a heightened sense of urgency concerning injustice in American society will be a positive outcome of the pandemic. If so, the pandemic combined with rising social justice tensions may be the perfect storm demanding we address the racial divide that has plagued this country for centuries.

As a body of work, critical race theory (CRT) is a framework built to help us make sense of the systemic structures and obstacles that disproportionately affect racialized groups (in this case, Latinx ELs engaging in virtual learning). LatCrit theory, an extension of CRT, examines experiences unique to the Latinx community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Pérez Huber, 2010). LatCrit theory can illustrate Latinx's multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Having chosen CRT and LatCrit as the theoretical frameworks for this study, I focus here on participants' *testimonios*—that is, their own explorations and explanations of their personal and academic experiences, shaped by socioeconomic and ethnic factors, as EL students during the pandemic. My use of *testimonio* as it has been outlined as a methodology based in these CRT and LatCrit frameworks allowed the participants' voices and experiences to come to the foreground, as participants told their own stories as students of color having to navigate through the educational system in such an uncertain time as the COVID-19 pandemic.

CRT offers a way of interpreting the world that helps people recognize the effects of historical racism in modern day American life. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2017) defined the CRT movement as “a collection of activists and scholars interested in

studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). The early origins of CRT began in the 1970s as a group of activists and scholars across the country realized that the civil rights advances accomplished in the 1960s had stalled, and renewed efforts were needed to further the racial progress of that earlier decade (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRT and LatCrit were utilized as the foundational frameworks to organize and explore the challenges secondary-aged Latinx ELs faced during virtual learning during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there are many scholars who have contributed broadly to the body of theory known as CRT and LatCrit, for the purposes of this research I applied the philosophies of Alim et al. (2016), Delgado and Stefancic (2017), Ladson-Billings (1998), Solórzano and Yosso (2001), Ledesma and Calderón (2015), Pérez Huber (2010), and Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001).

CRT, LatCrit and ELs

While the connection between language and race may be implicit, the study of *raciolinguistics* recognizes an inherent relationship between language, race, and culture (Alim et al., 2016). Raciolinguistics analyzes “the role of language in racial and ethnic relations and the linguistic marginalization of racialized populations across all social domains” (Alim et al., 2016, p. 6). As a framework, raciolinguistic thought argues that it is necessary to incorporate linguistic discrimination to fully dissect the effects of racism. At the heart of this study, and within the context of CRT and LatCrit, lies the lack of educational equity for Latinx ELs magnified by the pandemic. Despite advances in racial equality in the United States, the slow rate of racial reform has led many to accept the notion that perhaps racism is a normal way of life in American society. The concept of

equity is exemplified in all areas of CRT, which is based on the following tenets: (1) racism is ordinary, (2) our system of White-over-color domination serves important purposes, (3) race and races are products of social thought, (4) different racialization engenders a multitude of consequences, and (5) the experience of oppression has shaped the experiences of people of color in a way that gives such populations a unique voice and contribution (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The Reality of Racism

According to a CRT framework, racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of American society. As an intrinsic part of civilization whose existence has been ignored, it is difficult to cure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The intent of CRT is “unmasking and exposing racism in various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). While it is widely acknowledged the school system is responsible to equip all students with the resources needed to succeed, the system imposes gratuitous and excessive obstacles on Latinx ELs. The current systemic inequities that plague our system do not acknowledge the diverse needs of Latinx ELs as they navigate an educational system that does not value their racial, ethnic, or linguistic assets and instead labels and segregates them based on their non-English speaking status. Our education system should facilitate—not impede—education for Latinx ELs by no longer creating obstacles to equitable access.

Systemic Racism Serves Important Purposes

“Because racism advances the interests of both elite and working-class Whites, large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). Exacerbating academic obstacles, such as those created by the COVID-19

pandemic, impedes progress for Latinx ELs. Consequently, ELs become restricted to lower paying jobs and are forced to live a substandard way of life. Over 20 years ago Ladson-Billings (1998) noted this lack of progress for people of color that preserved White supremacy in America. Sadly, some 17 years later Ledesma and Calderón (2015) reported, “we continue to be on a fast track in which education continues to privilege the rich and underserve the poor” (p. 208).

Social Construction of Race

The notion of the social construction of race holds that races are a product of social thought, rather than objective or inherent realities. Personality, intelligence, and moral behavior are distinct for individuals and no scientific truth has accepted pseudo-permanent characteristics for one group of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Race is a socially constructed category “justified by an ideology of racial superiority and White privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 4). It sustains White dominance, maintains the standard of Whiteness, and categorizes others in relation to Whiteness. The message clearly transmitted to Latinx ELs is that they should aspire to perform in comparison to their White peers rather than to their own standards or expectations.

Different Racialization and Its Consequences

It should be noted that ELs are not all the same. They are a racially/ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse group with diverse needs. So much so that for the purpose of this study, I focused primarily on ELs of Hispanic, Spanish-speaking backgrounds, which I refer to as Latinx ELs. Dominant societies racialize groups “to justify certain attitudes and behaviors” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 4). Stereotypes have

validated low educational expectations for Latinx ELs and fueled negative teacher perceptions, inferring these students are not capable of excelling in their schoolwork. Beyond education, they have advanced the interests of Whites by affecting policies, laws, and structural aspects of our society. White privilege has endorsed the gain of some, and the demise of others. The consequences of stereotyping are always detrimental to human progress, because minoritized groups are forced to battle unfair predisposed beliefs to overcome unfair labels.

Unique Voice of Color

Each BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) group has unique experiences and has undergone racism and oppression throughout history in different ways. Through the concept of storytelling or *testimonios*, BIPOC writers are encouraged to retell their experiences and apply their unique perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Other proponents of CRT agree that “Stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.13). In the context of this study, my aim was to share the stories and experiences of Latinx ELs during the COVID-19 pandemic using the uniquely Latin American-originated indigenous methodology of *testimonios* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Mora, 2015).

When analyzing the factors that have affected the academic success of Latinx ELs, it is evident that even the concept of academic success itself is measured by the “normative category of whiteness” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). In a racialized society where the norm, or standard, is Whiteness, all other groups must perform in comparison to that Whiteness. Integrating LatCrit theory as the theoretical framework helped me find the language necessary to accurately and fully document and examine participating

students' personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways in which they met and overcame the challenges they faced while studying through virtual learning platforms.

Methodology

Due to the nature of this study, an interpretive qualitative approach was the most appropriate to address the research questions I proposed. In using an interpretive qualitative approach, I was interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon (in this case, virtual learning during COVID) had for those involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24). The unique experiences of secondary-aged Latinx ELs during the pandemic are not easily quantifiable and I found it was most appropriate to use methods of a qualitative study (Seidman, 2019). Using this approach, I uncovered and interpreted the meanings of the experiences of the Latinx ELs students who formed part of this research. The aim of this study was to foster a deeper understanding of those experiences that can be used to inform best practices for those educators who work with EL Latinx students now and in the future.

By collecting data through *testimonios* (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) from secondary Latinx EL students who experienced the pandemic, I developed a deeper picture of the lived experiences of these students, and I was able to paint an understanding of the lived experiences of the students interviewed. Sharing the stories or *testimonios* of the participants gives them a voice, celebrates their uniqueness, and sheds light on the trajectories of Latinx EL students in American schooling.

Testimonio “as a methodology provides modes of analysis that are collaborative and attentive to myriad ways of knowing and learning in our communities” (Delgado

Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364). The use of *testimonios* in this study served as a bridge to connect students' lived experience as both a "data" collecting tool and as the analytical process (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 365). Using this approach, I used open-ended questions to "gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues" (Seidman, 2019, p. 13). I used the *testimonios* of secondary-aged Latinx students and as the researcher I "develop[ed] a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.75).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it adds to the limited research on the experiences of middle and high school aged ELs during the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, information from this study can be used to reduce or eliminate the relentless daily challenges ELs face in their educational careers. Findings from this study can inform the work of school leaders to implement structures within schools to overcome experienced difficulties for ELs. Additionally, this research may have significance for education leaders to make changes in the way they educate ELs. This study also adds valuable and relevant information on how to provide equitable educational access to ELs.

Definition of Key Terms

In order to provide a common understanding of how certain terms are used in this study, each term is defined below.

BIPOC is an abbreviation which stands for Black, Indigenous, people of color.

Deficit thinking is defined as educators holding negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students thereby lowering their expectations accordingly (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

English learners (ELs) is a term that encompasses students who are native speakers of a non-English language. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on native Spanish speakers.

LatCrit is an acronym for Latino critical race theory which elucidates Latinas/Latinos' multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312).

Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably in several studies referring to people whose origin is Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish-speaking Central or South American countries or another Hispanic/Latino origin.

Microaggressions are defined as “stunning small encounters with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 179).

Parental involvement is defined in accordance with Epstein's (2001) typologies, which categorize parental involvement into six broad areas: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration (Epstein, 2001).

Secondary students are those attending middle school or high school, and are typically, ages 11–18 years old.

Testimonio is a form of narrative inquiry used to capture first-hand accounts (e.g., an oral history or story) of social or political inequality, oppression, or

marginalization experiences, specifically in regard to Latinx individuals (Pérez Huber 2010).

Summary

The following chapter provides a review of the literature which presents significant information regarding challenges Latinx ELs face in education. Chapter II begins with the origins of CRT and LatCrit and how these bodies of theory relate to and are based in the lives and struggles of CRT and LatCrit scholars. I then go into the literature on the characteristics of Latinx ELs, an analysis of the perceptions of teachers of Latinx ELs, and continue with the literature on academic and social supports granted to Latinx ELs. Chapter III focuses on the methodology used for the study and further explains the reasons for employing qualitative methods. The goal of this dissertation is to identify challenges for Latinx ELs. It is my hope as researcher that the data in this study will be used to transform institutional practices regarding Latinx ELs.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Virtual learning in public schools has become the new *norm* in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. With most schools shutting down in March of 2020, schools went from servicing students face-to-face to 100% virtual learning with only a couple of weeks to plan and make the necessary adjustments. However, successful implementation of virtual learning in schools requires an understanding of what supports are needed for this new style of learning to be effective. The purpose of this study is to discover the virtual learning experiences of secondary-aged Latinx EL students during COVID-19.

Even in the 21st century, little is known about virtual learning and its effectiveness for ELs (Smith et al., 2005). This study stems from a thorough review of literature surrounding relevant educational concerns for ELs and virtual schooling. Literature that I will review here because they are related to the research concerns I developed for this study include: (a) CRT and LatCrit as they pertain to Latinx ELs and education, (b) virtual learning environments, (c) characteristics of ELs, (d) teacher perceptions of ELs, (e) academic and social supports for ELs, and (f) EL parental involvement. The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss existing research that may be applicable to the experiences of ELs in a virtual school setting during the COVID-19 pandemic, grounding the present study in the work that has come before it.

CRT and LatCrit–Latinx ELs in Education

In this study, I utilize critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) as the lens to analyze my data. Specifically, through this study I aim to address the educational inequities that participating Latinx ELs may have experienced during online education through the COVID-19 pandemic. Policies guiding education do not

exist outside of external influence and can be tainted by a system that perpetuates oppression and promotes racialized barriers. In the scope of this study, I use CRT and LatCrit to analyze and critique the ways in which race and racism impact Latinx ELs in education.

The connection between embedded racial inequities and lack of educational success is undeniable. We must simply study the demographics and data pertaining to educational access for Latinx students to know that they are consistently and systematically disadvantaged in formed educational settings compared to their White peers. A report from the Annie E. Casey foundation (2006) affirmed that several factors such as ongoing racial segregation, unequal school resources, unequal academic opportunities, differential teacher quality and differential discipline contribute to a system that produces “unequal opportunities for educational success”(para 3). According to this same report, African American and Hispanic students trail White students academically by four grade levels by the time they finish high school (para 9).

For Hispanic students, “parents’ immigrant and socioeconomic status and their lack of knowledge of the U.S. education system” can put them at a disadvantage (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006, p. 179) relative to the knowledges that are valued in the U.S. educational system. It can be challenging for parents to advocate for their children when they themselves do not know how to navigate the nuances of how schools in the United States are structured and operated. Even more concerning is that examining data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from the 1990s suggests that while Hispanic children have made achievement gains as measured by standardized test scores, there are opportunity gaps (that is, access to quality instruction, sufficiently resourced

schools, and experienced and qualified teachers) that have only increased over that same time for Latinx students (p 195). This trend suggests that if we continue in this direction, these opportunity gaps (Ladson-Billings, 2006) will only widen throughout the years to come.

The data are clear and support the position that Latinx students are not being provided with sufficient resources to perform at the same rates academically as their White peers. Perhaps one of the reasons for this trend could be that curriculum does not acknowledge when children speak another language other than English. Rather than ignore the development of an EL's cultural and linguistic perspective, curriculum could be rewritten so as to cultivate the understanding of Spanish academic language and promote cultural relevance (Allen, 2011).

Keeping in mind the research cited above, which highlights the prevalent reasons for the lack of equal opportunities for Latinx ELs, I can presume that in the context of education during the COVID-19 pandemic, Latinx ELs students were negatively impacted. The uncertainty that surrounded the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the already noted challenges would undoubtedly exacerbate the academic challenges for Latinx EL students. The following literature review further discusses some of the most significant concerns as they relate to online schooling for Latinx EL students.

Virtual Learning Environments

Virtual learning existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic and has become increasingly available to K–12 students since the 1990s. In fact, the origins of virtual learning were intended to expand educational options and offer equal learning opportunities to students (Smith et al., 2005). Furthermore, as virtual school enrollment

has continued to increase, data on its effectiveness have been inconsistent. Despite increasing popularity for virtual education, little credible research exists to support its practice or justify its expansion (Molnar et al., 2014). A reason for the lack of research could be because online enrollment is difficult to track due to many different types of online schooling. These can range from:

- Online courses where most or all content is delivered online with at least 80% of the seat-time being replaced by online instruction, to
- Blended/hybrid courses in which online and face-to-face delivery are combined with 30% to 79% of the content delivered online, or
- Web-facilitated courses that use web-based technology in which 1% to 29% of the content is delivered online to support a face-to-face course.

(Picciano & Seaman, 2007, p. 12)

Another important aspect of virtual schooling is the lack of teacher preparation for virtual settings (Black et al., 2021). While this was a concern before the pandemic, it resonates even more now. If teachers felt unprepared before during standard situations, why would we think they are better prepared now during a crisis? Non-specific recommendations noted in extant research were to rely on comprehensive professional development to continually improve online teaching models (Molnar et al., 2014). Such mundane recommendations quickly became even more lame once COVID-19 shuttered schools across the country. Clearly during the pandemic, there was no such thing as professional development for teachers to prepare them for what lay ahead. Districts and teachers alike had only a few days to prepare before they launched a full transition from face-to-face teaching to complete virtual lessons.

Another theme of virtual schooling is the type of student who is successful in a virtual environment. Successful online learners typically possess skills that enable them to be more independent learners. These skills can range from self-motivation to discipline or organization. Research shows K–12 students tend to have less self-motivation than adult learners, placing more responsibility for motivation on teachers (Weiner, 2003). With specific reference to ELs, the skills mentioned above may not yet be developed and they will likely need greater academic and emotional support than other students not going through the same struggles.

Characteristics of English Learners

While I am would suggest all ELs are the same or have the same experiences, current research does depict ELs as having a collective set of characteristics that are viewed as being common among them. In truth, the vast majority of ELs—some 3.8 million students—are of Spanish speaking descent (Sanchez, 2017). But, aside from this single shared attribute, do ELs possess other common characteristics?

For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on secondary-aged Latinx EL students who attend middle or high school. While there is significant research for EL students at the primary age, there is a lack of research for students in the secondary age group. (Menken et al., 2012). This literary gap is most concerning, because while 44% of EL enrollments are students from Grades 1–3, the remainder of EL enrollments (56%) are students on their way to becoming secondary students in Grades 4–12 (Kindler, 2002).

Even within this group of secondary-aged ELs differences are present among their EL status. For instance, some of these students have been in the United States for less than 5 years, and some may have gaps in their schooling while some may have been

schooled consistently in their home country. Some long-term ELs have been schooled in the United States for more than 7 years and have yet to make adequate progress in academic English. The needs of these students can vary, depending on their native language proficiency as well (Menken et al., 2012).

Research has shown two-thirds of ELs come from low-income families as identified by eligibility data from the National School Lunch Program (Aud et al., 2010; Van Roekel, 2008). Even in a face-to-face academic setting without a pandemic at hand, ELs face challenges schools may not be prepared to address. A report published by the Institute of Educational Statistics noted the connection between low income and lower educational performance (Aud et al., 2010). Facing these obstacles, ELs have higher dropout rates than any other sub-group and often must leave school to help support their families financially (Lopez, 2009).

Additionally, schools are often in denial as to the ways in which they contribute to the inequities that ELs face in navigating the education system and achieving academically. School personnel, given that the majority of teachers are White, native English speakers, do not sufficiently comprehend the trials associated with being a native Spanish-speaker in U.S. schools. This lack of understanding sometimes persists until it is too late to provide services to assist these students (Lee, 2012). Aside from the lack of knowledge about how to teach ELs, schools fail to invest sufficient resources in English as a second language (ESL) programs (Lee, 2012). The research shows ELs struggle not only in part due to their lack of English understanding, but also because of the lack of preparation by schools to properly teach them. ELs face unique challenges, but they also

represent a tremendous asset to our country if their full potential can be unlocked and cultivated.

As noted above, ELs' skills can vary depending on the grasp they have of their native language. Many skills that ELs have are transferable and some ELs may have already acquired a core content skill in their primary language (Breiseth, 2015). For example, some EL students may have already learned a math concept in Spanish and being retaught that concept in English. ELs are not blank slates, they come to the United States with skills of their own that can be developed. It would benefit students if teachers "were able to assess students' prior knowledge and systematically build on this knowledge in order to accelerate their literacy development" (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016, p. 309).

Teacher Perceptions of English Language Learners

This section focuses on research regarding the relationship between low teacher perceptions of ELs and EL characteristics. According to Sanchez (2017), nearly 5 million students are enrolled in public schools learning English. While this number of students continues to increase significantly, very little is known about the perceptions of teachers toward ELs. In a 2006 study conducted by Reeves, of the 279 teachers surveyed, an overwhelming majority of the participants were native English speakers (98.2%). Only two (0.7%) participants spoke a native language other than English. One hundred eight (38.7%) participants reported speaking a second language, 166 (59.5%) did not speak a second language (p. 135). These numbers indicate that most teachers may not be aware of the struggles of an EL as they have not experienced learning another language themselves.

The same study by Reeves (2006) dictates that while 72% of mainstream teachers have a positive attitude toward teaching EL students in their classrooms, 81.7% do not feel adequately trained to teach EL students (Reeves, 2006). Even though teachers may have a positive attitude toward ELs, the lack of teacher preparation to adequately understand and serve ELs is a problem (Echevarría et al., 2006). The same Reeves study reported that teachers are working under misconceptions about how second languages are learned. This study examined teacher perceptions of the length of time ESL students need to acquire English proficiency. Most teachers (71.7%) agreed “ESL students should be able to acquire English within 2 years of enrolling in U.S. schools” (Reeves, 2006, p. 137). This popular misconception is contradicted by research that shows that it can take from 5 to 7 years for students to learn the English necessary for participation in a school’s curriculum without the need for linguistic support (Takanishi & Le Menestrel, 2017). If teachers operate under the assumption, it only takes 2 years to learn English proficiently while it really takes 5 to 7 years, then it becomes highly likely teachers may think ELs are underperforming.

Another drawback to teacher perceptions of ELs is that this group is very diverse, as mentioned in the previous section. Given their limited knowledge about the social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of their students, many teachers may feel overwhelmed and underprepared to serve EL students (Takanishi & Le Menestrel, 2017). Although this study focuses on ELs whose first language is Spanish, there is still great diversity among Spanish speaking cultures. “At nearly 37 million, Mexicans are the largest origin group and make up 62% of Latinos” (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019, paras. 1–2), but the Latinx population is diverse. Noe-Bustamante et al. also noted that

“Venezuelans, Dominicans and Guatemalans saw the fastest population growth since 2010” (para. 1). While most educators use their own experiences to relate to students, their limited understanding may cause them to feel inadequate to support EL students and their academic success.

Teacher characteristics play a vital role in the education of all students, but it is especially significant when referring to ELs. Despite the increasing presence of racially diverse children of immigrants in schools, teacher preparation and practice have not yet adapted to respond to the needs of changing classroom demographics (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). Teachers often are underprepared to work with “children who live in immigrant families and may fail to adequately support their success in school and society” (Cardenas et al, 2020, p. 13).

Focusing on teacher beliefs about ELs is critical because teacher perceptions of those who deviate from the assumed norm engender negative consequences for these students (Lucas et al., 2014). It is generally accepted that teachers’ beliefs provide a basis for action and influence how they respond as educators (Borg, 2011). Research illustrates that teachers who see students through a deficit lens focus on what learners *cannot* do rather than what they *can* do. These teachers are likely to form low expectations of their students and treat them in ways that repress learning, rather than foster growth (Reeves, 2006). Naturalistic studies have repeatedly supported the existence of self-fulfilling prophecies and when teachers develop erroneous expectations of their students, it inevitably impacts student motivation (Madon et al., 1997). These factors can contribute to a negative perception of ELs rather than addressing the lack of preparation on the part of school districts to equip these students for academic success.

Academic and Social Support for ELs

This section of the literature review discusses the importance of academic and social supports available to ELs in general, and in a virtual learning setting. The supports typically afforded in successful online settings range from “asking students how they learn online, to providing pacing support, monitoring engagement with instructional materials, and supporting families” (Carter et al, 2020, p. 324). Not all students learn the same. When teachers are informed about how students learn, they are better able to tailor instruction around the learners’ needs. Teachers of ELs must make content accessible to students who are not proficient in English or who have varying levels of English proficiency.

Support for appropriate pacing is particularly important during emergency remote schooling as is the case during the pandemic. Some students may have more limited access to the internet or devices than others, or a slow internet connection may leave some students feeling left behind. Poverty and lack of access may be a concern for EL students, and they may fall behind if pacing is not considered.

Monitoring of student work is also essential to successful online schooling. Most of the monitoring during online lessons comes through instructional materials in which parents and teachers use a dashboard that provides information about whether the student logs on and completes assignments. This assumes a parent can and will log in to check a student’s progress. In the case of ELs, parents may not be prepared to log onto a system they are unfamiliar with, and which is presented in English. Parents, and other adults who support learners, may need support just like the students to ensure these children are successful (Carter et al., 2020). In addition, students may not have access to parents when

they need help or parents may not be able to help their child if they themselves are not technologically savvy (Carter et al., 2020). Considering the preparation and capabilities parents might bring to online work is essential for planning and supporting families in an online environment.

As mentioned previously, one of the main challenges for ELs is the language barrier, and because state-level content assessments are conducted in standard American English, they may not be equipped to master these exams (Menken, 2010). The lack of English proficiency could cause negative impacts on assessment results, not because of a genuine lack of content knowledge, but because of a lack of language understanding. Assessment results shed light on the low academic achievement levels of ELs across the United States (American Youth Policy Forum, 2009). These results highlight how in testing for content, students are also inevitably being tested in English language proficiency.

Research states students in traditional face-to-face school settings are less likely to drop out of school if they have a meaningful relationship with their teachers (Rice, 2006). It is assumed these dynamics hold true in virtual settings as well. The relationship between students and teachers significantly influences whether a student remains enrolled in a virtual school setting (Rice, 2006). While most research suggests the importance of meaningful relationships with teachers is pivotal to a student's success, more research needs to be conducted to better understand which student/teacher interactions have the greatest impact on student success. Aside from the challenges ELs present, even highly motivated students can find virtual learning to be an isolating, difficult, and discouraging experience. Given the lack of human interaction, some students find it difficult to feel

connected or to feel as if they are a part of a learning community. Some schools have a high number of students who feel no connection to the school they are enrolled in or their classmates. These students often skip class or do not participate which makes online learning even more challenging (Kolonay & Kelly-Garris, 2009).

Teaching online is very different compared to teaching face-to-face. A study by Lowes (2005) indicated teaching in an online environment requires different strategies to “reach and evaluate students when you cannot interact with them face-to-face on a daily basis” (p. 12). With virtually no advance notice and little preparation, few teachers had the tools to adjust their teaching methods to accommodate to students’ needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Achieving equal opportunity through online instruction requires not only preparation, but effective recruitment and support for teachers who are qualified to teach in online environments (Molnar et al., 2015). In the face of the urgency the COVID-19 pandemic presented, school districts did not have time to prepare teachers and students, nor could they properly distribute technology to support a proper learning environment. Little did school officials know the pandemic would last well over 6 months and students would be left without a solid, consistent plan of education to meet their academic and social needs.

An additional aspect of support that was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic was peer interaction. In fact, this factor affected not only ELs but all students. It is easy to overlook the importance of peer interaction especially for adolescents. However, reflecting to a study conducted in 2001 by Frid and Soden, we are reminded of its importance. Frid and Soden found students who talked to other students while working

online were more likely to persist on a challenging task. Working with others provided not only motivation, but enthusiasm for the assignment and even generated ideas for those students. The extent to which peer interactions helped students be successful in an online course are clear in this study and in other research as well. Further, aside from its academic value, peer interaction also involves an emotional component that is critical for adolescents (Frid & Soden, 2001).

To offer ample support for ELs—both academic and social—educators must consider the fact these students are simultaneously learning both the English language and academic content. They need teachers who can scaffold the content and make the subject matter comprehensible and significant to them while also supporting their development of English proficiency (Villegas et al., 2018). With students in secondary education, most learning materials are provided by means of written texts. In order for students to study the learning material independently, they need to be able to read comprehensively and to process information adequately which can be a challenge for students who are not yet proficient in English (ter Beek et al., 2018). With these challenges in mind, how can teachers and schools provide academic and social support for students facing these struggles? If research shows teachers and districts are not adequately prepared to teach ELs under normal circumstances, how do we expect schools to support these students during the COVID-19 crisis?

Parental Involvement

Often schools assume parents of minority students do not value their children's education (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, studies indicate minority parents do value education and have high educational expectations, but they demonstrate their

appreciation in ways that differ from the norm. They might support their child's education by decreasing household chores for students to have more time to focus on school, or by providing a quiet area to do homework (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). This type of parental support is not as visible as traditional parental support such as attending back-to-school night or parent-teacher conferences. As such, it is a type of parental support that often goes unnoticed by the school but not by the student. For Latinos, almost two-thirds (65%) of youth strongly agreed their parents played an active role in their education (Lopez, 2009). It is important to note therefore, the measure of parental support is not necessarily the one dictated by school norms.

Perhaps offering more diversity in the opportunities for parental engagement would be beneficial for school districts (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). This would allow parents to participate even if their work schedules do not permit much time to attend events. Parental support helps students both academically and socially. Research suggests higher levels of parental involvement are linked to more advanced social skills and fewer behavioral problems (El Nokali et al., 2010). Especially in an online setting, parental support is monumental as they are like to be the only adult present to supervise or help the students. In a study conducted by Frid and Soden (2001) involving teenagers in a virtual enrichment program, the extent of adult support directly impacted the students' level of participation and success in school. The same study noted those adolescents who did not have support from an adult were not successful in completing the course.

Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic parents were not prepared to actively support their students in a virtual setting. It was not an option they had chosen, or their work schedules did not allow them to be present while their student was taking

classes. The pandemic forced families to convert to virtual learning with no time to prepare or adjust. Many parents may not have been around to provide the much-needed parental support for their students, not because they did not want to, but because they may not have been able to due to work schedules, or they simply may not have been equipped with the technology skills to help their student.

Although there is currently not much research regarding parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on student achievement, we can use existing data to speculate what the outcomes would be. Undeniably, research shows students who have parental support perform better academically compared to those who do not. Therefore, it would be reasonable to expect this same assumption to hold true in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since parents were not prepared to guide students in a virtual school setting, they may not have effectively mentored or supported their student. Again, not because of a lack of desire, but rather a lack of preparation.

Equity in Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic

“Equity is achieved when all students receive the resources they need and are prepared for success after graduating high school” (Burton, 2020, p. 35). Due to the lack of preparation and urgency of the response needed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the assumption can be made that EL students did not have equitable access to an education. Further, because of the proximity of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is not much research that demonstrates absence of equitable access to EL students, but we can presume that prior research asserting that ELs lack equity in access under normal circumstances holds true in this situation as well. While all students’ education was interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, “children in affluent schools, never missed an instructional beat”

(Burton, 2020, p. 85). Burton notes the Education Trust reported in 2012 that the poorest districts in the nation, received \$1,200 less per pupil than the wealthiest districts. Clearly lack of funding is one of the main reasons EL students do not experience an equitable learning environment.

Another aspect regarding educational equity is the preparedness of teachers who work with minority students. Research suggests Black, Latino, Native American, and Alaskan Native students attend schools with higher concentrations of first year teachers. In fact, most ELs attend schools in which 20% of teachers are in their first year of teaching (Burton, 2020). The research clearly illustrates EL students do not have the same quality of teachers as other non-minority students. Teachers who have insufficient experience are practicing their craft at the expense of ELs and other minorities. It is evident ELs would benefit from working with teachers with more expertise to undertake the challenges ELs already have to cope with.

Summary

The literature illustrates a lack of research on the effectiveness of virtual learning. While research shows students who are successful in an online environment typically have a prerequisite set of skills that enable them to be independent learners, research also illustrates this skillset is not traditionally linked to EL populations. EL students struggle with several challenges that make it even more difficult for them to succeed in an online environment.

A strong connection also exists between teacher perceptions of EL students and their academic achievement. Additionally, the lack of academic and social supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, may exacerbate a negative impact on the academic

success of ELs. While there is a lack of research that focuses on student experiences in virtual school environments, current research does illustrate ELs may have faced more challenges in a virtual setting than their colleagues. Most of the research regarding virtual schooling is based on the perceptions of education experts. This research is mostly confined to the experiences of administrators or teachers in virtual school settings, rather than the experiences of students or families who take part in virtual schooling (Cavanaugh et al., 2009). With the COVID-19 pandemic coming to an end, reopening schools is the foremost topic of discussion among school leaders. Ideally, we will take this unfortunate event and learn ways to provide a more equitable learning environment for all students.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, I focused on the experiences of Latinx secondary-aged EL students during the COVID-19 pandemic in a virtual learning environment. The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to understand and interpret the experiences of secondary Latinx ELs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of this study called for a basic qualitative research design. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 6). Specifically, I used a qualitative *testimonio* methodology (outlined in detail below) to gain the insights of my participants, which is imperative to accurately understand the attributes and characteristics of Latinx EL students. Taking this approach to the research acknowledged a personal and cultural recollection of what it means to be a person of Spanish-speaking heritage attending public education in Texas during the pandemic.

Researcher's Role

My role as researcher's in this qualitative study was to gather, record, interpret, and reflect on the data collected. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted, humans are best suited for the task of data collection and as the primary instrument for this data collection and data analysis I had a responsibility to strive to derive meaning from the data.

As humans and researchers, our social identity shapes our positionality and how we interpret experiences. To be entirely transparent, my own positionality as researcher is that of a former EL student myself, and an administrator during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In essence, our positionality shapes what we research and how we research. As a researcher, I did not seek neutrality but sought to bring awareness of my

positionality as the researcher. Consequently, CRT and LatCrit harmonize in that they both seek to recognize the subjectiveness of this research. The use of *testimonios* as the method of data collection complements this study because *testimonios* seek to “challenge objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363).

To successfully conduct my research, I evaluated my role as the researcher and the inherent connection I have with my research topic. As a result of my personal upbringing, my own experiences as an EL student, and my professional background as an educational leader, I not only recognize but own the biases and personal perspective I bring to the table. These are not limitations of my research design—they are strengths.

In my personal upbringing, I was raised with a strong family support system. While my parents did not speak English when I was a student navigating through the U.S. public education system, my siblings and I were raised with the expectation that we would all graduate high school and go to college. Not knowing the details of where, how, or even what to study, I knew early on that the expectation was that I would go to school. Knowing that my family had these hopes for me inspired me to keep pushing forward, even when times were tough and the light at the end of the tunnel seemed distant.

Another resemblance I share with my participants is that I am and always will consider myself an EL student. I take pride in having overcome the obstacles that many EL students encounter. At the same time, I recognize that not all students of color have the same support that I received. Not having the opportunity to practice English at home left me with a sense of having to “catch up,” so I developed an intrinsic motivation to read and find ways to expand my knowledge of the English language. In fact, I pursued

language acquisition actively, and I acquired a third language to prove to myself that I could learn a language that I was not exposed to as a child.

As an educational leader, I acknowledge that I have observed the struggles in and out of the classroom of EL students in their academic careers. I bear witness to countless heartbreaking stories of challenges that have disrupted the path of my students in their academic journey. I have also cheered my students on in their successes and have oftentimes been filled with pride when students go on to new adventures. Primarily because most of my professional experience is in secondary education, I sympathize with my students and the participants in this study who are the same age as most of my own former students. Through this study, and more generally as an educator and now researcher, I am committed above all to empowering students, especially those that are underrepresented, to push forward and break those “glass ceilings.”

In this study, I intentionally researched the experiences of secondary EL Latinx students during the pandemic through the lens of CRT and LatCrit. As previously mentioned, I am drawn to explore the experiences of secondary Latinx EL students during the COVID-19 pandemic due to my own experiences as an EL student and administrator during COVID. By using the storytelling tenet of CRT as *testimonios*, I anticipate that my research will shed light on the experiences of these students.

CRT and LatCrit: Theory as Method

I employed a descriptive qualitative design based in CRT and LatCrit to feature the unique academic experiences of my Latinx participants during the pandemic. Since LatCrit is an extension of CRT, it was fitting that it be used for this research. CRT draws from multiple disciplines to challenge dominant ideologies such as meritocracy and

colorblindness, which suggest educational institutions are neutral systems that function in the same ways for all students (Pérez Huber, 2010, p 78). In using CRT and LatCrit as my theoretical frameworks, I am challenging this belief that all students are given the same and equal opportunities in educational institutions.

The LatCrit framework is an extension of CRT that developed during the mid-1990s to emphasize a variety of concerns unique to those in the Latinx community. LatCrit stemmed as a response “to the long historical presence and general sociolegal invisibility of Latinas/os in the United States” (González et al., 2021, p. 1319). Through my use of a LatCrit theoretical perspective, I employ a critical lens to examine the experiences of participating Latinx students with the larger goal of achieving social justice for communities of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This research has given voice to my participants and will bring to light the unique challenges and successes that they experienced as EL Latinx students during the pandemic in a virtual school learning environment.

Research Rationale

When conducting this descriptive qualitative research study, I used *testimonios* as my main source of data collection (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). The *testimonios* were guided by a set of open-ended questions that allowed flexibility as the conversation flowed. Allowing this type of exchange and freedom within the *testimonios* ensured that I as the researcher did not have an agenda on the outcome of the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Testimonio was chosen as the main method of data collection because “it is an account told in the first person by a narrator who is the real protagonist or witness of

events” (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012, p. 527). While the length of the *testimonios* cited in my findings chapters may not have the same lengthy narrative structure often seen in *testimonio*-based work, I attribute that to the relative youth of my participants who are still finding and building their sense of self-agency and personal voice. To be true to those voices, the text of the *testimonios* cited hereafter is done to be as authentic as possible to what participants said without being edited to more closely correspond to what is often seen or described as “correct” English. In so doing, I hope to trouble our notions that there is such a thing as “correct” language use, instead honoring my participants’ manners of speech as being just as “legitimate” as that found in the dictionary.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study.

- Question 1: What are the experiences of secondary Latinx EL students in a virtual school setting during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 2: What emotional and academic supports did secondary Latinx ELs have during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 3: How do secondary Latinx ELs describe the role of their families during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 4: How can the narratives of secondary Latinx ELs inform best practices to support Els socially and academically?

Research Protocol

The purpose of using a qualitative research method was to gain insight into the trajectory of the school experience of Latinx secondary-aged students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were allowed to reflect and share their unique experiences of

how being a Spanish-speaking student of Latinx descent affected their educational experience.

In order to conduct this research study, the researcher followed a research protocol that includes the following four facets: (a) research design, (b) IRB approval, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis.

The first phase of the research focused on the narrowing of the topic to research and selecting essential research questions that would drive this study. After the research questions (as outlined in Chapter 1) were written, in my discussions with my chair we deemed it appropriate for me to use a qualitative methodology to respond to these questions. Once the method was developed, the theoretical framework was chosen that would best interpret and respond to the questions at hand.

The second phase of the research was to gain approval from my institution's IRB committee. Due to the nature of this research and that it focused on interviewing minors, I had to gain approval from the full-review board IRB session. As the researcher, I was asked to submit documents for IRB approval that would include parent permission for minors to participate, assent form for minors to agree to participate and a complete interview protocol. I complied with all requirements set forth from the IRB committee in order to pursue this research.

The third phase of the research was collecting the *testimonios* of the students. I recruited student participants through the use of social media, which I used to reach out to parents of Latinx secondary-aged students identified as ELs. After being connected to these parents of potential participants, I sent out a "first steps email" to ensure that parents understood and agreed with my research before moving forward. I would then

meet with each parent and each potential participant online to obtain permission and answer any questions about participating in the study. To maintain anonymity and protect the confidentiality of each participant I asked them to choose a pseudonym that I could use to refer to them in my study. After this, I was able to set up an appointment to meet virtually with the participant. The data collection phase then proceeded, including a 45–to–60–minute semi-structured interview with the participants in which they shared their *testimonio*. I also kept a research journal in which I took notes relevant to the research and kept track of trends in the data that I found interesting.

Table 1*Matrix Aligning the Research Questions to the Interview Questions*

Interview Questions	Research Questions			
	1: What been the experiences of participating secondary Latinx EL students with virtual learning during the COVID-pandemic?	2: What emotional and academic supports have participating secondary Latinx Els had during the COVID-19 pandemic?	3: How do participating secondary Latinx Els describe the role of their families in supporting their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?	4: How can the narratives of participating secondary Latinx Els inform best practices to support Els socially and academically?
1. Tell me about yourself. A) what grade were you in? B) who were you living with? C) Do you have any sibling that live with you?	✓	✓	✓	
2. How long have you been enrolled in a school in the United States?			✓	✓
3. What would you rate your level of English proficiency was in March of 2020? Do you feel like it improved?	✓	✓		✓
4. During the pandemic, did you have someone at home that could help you with classwork? How would you describe the influence and the role of your family in your schooling?	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 1 (continued)

Interview Questions	Research Questions			
	1: What been the experiences of participating secondary Latinx EL students with virtual learning during the COVID-pandemic?	2: What emotional and academic supports have participating secondary Latinx Els had during the COVID-19 pandemic?	3: How do participating secondary Latinx Els describe the role of their families in supporting their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?	4: How can the narratives of participating secondary Latinx Els inform best practices to support Els socially and academically?
5. How do you feel about your academic experience during the pandemic?	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. During the pandemic, were your teachers supportive of your needs?	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Did you have a computer and internet connectivity?	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Were you able to attend online classes regularly?	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Did you feel connected to anyone at school during the pandemic?	✓	✓		✓
10. Reflecting on the past two years, in what ways could the teachers/school better support you during virtual learning?	✓	✓		✓

The final phase of the research was to analyze the data collected. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest it is best to begin qualitative data analysis during data collection. While a researcher knows the research questions that form the heart of their study before data collection, they may not know “what will be discovered” and how the “final product is shaped by the data that is collected” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 197). Throughout the process of interviewing, I continued to compare responses after each *testimonio* in order to reframe and improve my interview questions.

After having transcribed the *testimonios* and having read and listened to them a few times, I began to find emerging themes that I started entering in a self-made Excel spreadsheet. As I found emerging themes, I began coding the data according to those themes. Coding is defined by Saldaña (2009) as “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Throughout the process, I checked in with my chair to ensure that I was on the right track.

Population and Sample

My research highlights the experiences of Latinx secondary-aged EL students during the COVID-19 pandemic. I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants, based on the assumption that as the investigator I wanted to discover, understand, and gain insight, and so I must therefore select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 96). I witnessed and recorded *testimonios* from eight participants who met the following criteria:

- Students must be secondary-aged (6th to 12th grade) and between the ages of 11 years old to 18 years old

- ELs and Latinx students must have attended a public or charter school in Texas during the onset of the pandemic in March of 2020
- Students must identify as Latinx
- Students must have been English Learners previously or currently during the pandemic
- Students' first language must be Spanish

My plan was to locate participants through social media and networking as a former educational leader, which I did following what I outlined above under the heading "Research Protocol."

Data Collection

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the safest mode to interview participants was by using a virtual platform. All interviews were held online using the Zoom® virtual platform due to health safety concerns of the ongoing pandemic. Since the primary research method was *testimonios*, the use of open-ended questions allowed students to engage in storytelling. The participating students had a verbal parental permission form on file which informed them about the nature of the study and their commitment to be interviewed. To maintain the essence of storytelling as a tenet of CRT and LatCrit, the *testimonios* were informal and the interactions were intentionally kept light. Both strategies helped students feel comfortable in sharing their experiences with candor.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) emphasized that “the design of a qualitative study is flexible, relevant variables are not known ahead of time, findings are inductively derived in the data analysis process, and so on” (p. 18). Since so much of a qualitative study is uncertain, it is important for the researcher to be adaptable as the study progresses.

Due to the nature of this qualitative study, in my analysis of the data I sought to establish a sense of “commonality” and discover the “essence” of the lived experiences of my participants by studying “multiple perceptions of the phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 26). As I read the transcripts I noticed meanings, phrases and words that occurred regularly, leading me to find patterns within the data. As Saldaña (2009) suggested, the process of coding can reveal common themes as well as shared characteristics that can enable the researcher to discover relationships within the codes.

I also kept a reflection journal throughout the process of collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data. The use of the journal helped me to take note of my own experiences and how they related (or not) with those of the interviewees (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Writing about one’s own experience is common practice in qualitative research to be able to examine the researcher’s own biases about the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Limitations of Methodology

Qualitative research has its limitations and a degree of unpredictability that could result in “potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher” (Creswell, 2007, p. 198). Researchers should be transparent in affirming any limitations of the research. A key limitation to this study is that the participants had to be willing to

participate and volunteer to be interviewed. Being that the group in focus was comprised of minors ranging from ages 11–18, it was challenging to find students who willingly wanted to participate in the interview process. Participants were also allowed to withdraw from the study if they wanted to and they were allowed to not respond to any question that may make them uncomfortable. Because this study was focused on gathering the *testimonios* of minors, another limitation was that adolescents can have a harder time expressing themselves and conveying their perspectives than adult subjects, particularly when the researcher is also an adult. The results of this study were therefore limited by participants' candidness and their ability to communicate their experiences in a way that was meaningful to this study. My ability to establish rapport with the participants was of upmost importance so that the interviewees felt comfortable enough to share their experiences. Establishing rapport proved to be more challenging in a virtual platform and when interviews are conducted via Zoom.

I interviewed eight participants ranging from the ages of 13 to 17 years old. I focused my research on Latinx EL students participating in virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Texas school. Another limitation is that the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable to other locations or populations, and do not necessarily neatly reflect the experiences of other EL Latinx students in Texas schools. The results of this research are not intended to be generalized. Rather, the purpose of this research was to further understand the experiences of the Latinx EL students who participated in these *testimonios* during the pandemic.

Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest that “qualitative research is based on assumptions about reality different from those of quantitative research” (p. 237). Due to the nature of qualitative research, it is especially important that results of the research can be trusted. I have previously mentioned my personal and professional biases as the researcher being that I identify with being a Latinx EL student myself. It was my commitment to ensure that reliability and trustworthiness were conveyed in this research study. Due to the nature of qualitative research the strategies for establishing the authenticity and trustworthiness of a study vary from those of a quantitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The processes I used to ensure validity were site triangulation, peer review and observations, which I will talk about in turn.

Site Triangulation

“Site triangulation may be achieved by the participation of informants within several organizations so as to reduce the effect on the study of particular local factors peculiar to one institution” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). The participants in this study ranged from different school districts throughout Texas. Participant representation came from various cities such as El Paso, Austin, Pflugerville, Round Rock, and the border town of Juarez, Mexico. It was an asset to this study that participants came from various cities and districts, and yet similar results emerged in the data despite these different locations, showing some commonalities to the Latinx EL experience during COVID.

Peer Review

A fresh perspective on the research by colleagues familiar with the research topic was welcomed and encouraged. Allowing peer review can “challenge assumptions made

by the investigator, whose closeness to the project frequently inhibits his or her ability to view it with real detachment” (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). Due to the repetitiveness in the process of coding the data, it was especially invigorating for me to be able to discuss and review findings with colleagues well-versed in research methods and the field of education.

Observations

While in the data collecting portion, “what to observe is determined by several factors” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p 140). For the purpose of this research, I observed participants’ willingness or lack of willingness to share their experiences. Observations were used to “triangulate emergent findings” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p 139), and using my knowledge as a former educational leader and my own extensive experience in interacting with youth, I was able to make note of patterns and read into things that were sometimes left unsaid, yet apparent in the interviews. Related to the theoretical frameworks of CRT and LatCrit, I was able to detect when students were hesitant to share especially negative experiences. Perhaps fueled by previous experiences, or lack of confidence in expressing themselves, I noticed some students were more comfortable in advocating for themselves than others.

Summary

In this chapter I discussed the role of the researcher, the research design, population sample, and data collection and analysis. I also outlined the methods of this study and spoke to the reasoning that was used to come this methodology. I concluded this chapter by disclosing the limitations of this study as well as highlighting the aspects of trustworthiness and validity.

IV. FINDINGS

Research Participants

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of secondary-aged Latinx EL students who engaged in virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter, I first describe each of the eight participants interviewed for this study. I then share their *testimonios*, which I gathered during semi-structured interviews guided by the frameworks of CRT and LatCrit theories. Findings from these interviews follow.

I met with the participant and their parent(s) before data collection to ensure they were aware of the specifications of the research study. I gained verbal parental permission for the participants to be interviewed and I also asked for verbal assent from the participants. During this phase, I explained the purpose for my study and answered questions from the parents and the participant. After this initial joint meeting I made an appointment to meet with the participant individually at a later date. The *testimonios* I collected from these students were all conducted via Zoom.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants to tell me about themselves. During this introduction they shared their age, the grade they were in, the school they attended, and their family background. Participant demographics are summarized below in Table 2. Some participants shared more than others, and the conversation flowed organically as I tried to build rapport with the students (especially important because this was the first time we met, following an online meeting with their parent to obtain parental permission).

Table 2*Participant Demographic Information*

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Grade	City	Parents' Country of Origin
Luna	14	Female	9th	Austin, TX	Mexico
Mateo	13	Male	9th	El Paso, TX	Mexico
Gabriel	13	Male	9 th	El Paso, TX	Mexico
Timothy	17	Male	Graduated	El Paso, TX	Mexico
Mars	15	Female	10 th	Austin, TX	Cuba
Andrea	14	Female	9 th	Juarez, Mexico	Mexico
Ash	16	Female	11 th	Pflugerville, TX	El Salvador
Maria	15	Female	10th	Round Rock, TX	Honduras

Participant Profile 1: Luna

Luna is a very shy, extremely polite, 14-year-old student who is on her way to high school. I interviewed her the summer between her 8th grade year and her freshman year in high school. Luna has attended school in the United States since first grade. She is a long-term EL student, as she has not been exited from the EL program. She was a 6th grader when the pandemic started in March of 2020, so she was just learning to navigate the world of middle school when the pandemic unexpectedly disrupted her middle school years. It was challenging at first to get Luna to express herself because of her timidity. She responded to all questions in English, although she had the option to respond in Spanish. I asked her to use the language she felt most comfortable with. During the

pandemic, she lived in Austin, Texas, with her parents, older brother, her aunt, uncle, and three cousins. She stated that she was very nervous at the beginning of the pandemic because she did not know what was happening or how long it would last.

Participant Profile 2: Mateo

Mateo is 14-year-old student who is on his way to high school. When the pandemic started, he was in 6th grade living in El Paso, Texas, and was ending his first year of middle school. In March of 2020, Mateo lived with his dad, mom, two brothers, and a younger sister. He is the middle child. His oldest brother is 17 and I was able to interview his brother as well as one of the participants. Mateo has attended school in the United States since Kindergarten. While he is fluent in English, he is a long-term EL because he has not exited the English Learner program. He responded to all questions in English during the interview. He expressed that he prefers going to school in person because he learns better this way. He was nervous when the pandemic started because he was not sure he would do well in school in a virtual learning environment.

Participant Profile 3: Gabriel

Gabriel is a 13-year-old student who is very outgoing and confident. He loves to play soccer and listen to music. He was on his way to 9th grade when I interviewed him. During March of 2020, he was in 6th grade in a school in El Paso, Texas. He was living with his parents, his brother, and his younger sister. Gabriel is the oldest of all the children. He has attended school in the United States since Kindergarten, but he preferred to be interviewed in Spanish because he felt more comfortable expressing himself in his native language. He feels that although he was not able to attend school in person

during the onset of the pandemic, his English improved because he listened to music and watched YouTube videos in English.

Participant Profile 4: Timothy

Timothy is a 17-year-old student, who resides in El Paso, Texas. He just had graduated from high school when I interviewed him. He attended a magnet school and is a high performing student who is very eloquent when he expresses himself orally. He was taking several AP courses in high school and felt that he would not be able to get help on schoolwork from his parents because of the difficulty of the work he was doing. While his mom has a 4-year degree from Mexico and his father has an associate degree, he did not feel that they would be able to help him on homework.

Unfortunately for Timothy, due to the pandemic he was not able to experience the full scope of the services that his school would have offered in normal times, such as medical rotations. He lives at home with his parents, two brothers, and a younger sister. He is the oldest of the siblings and Mateo's brother, whom I interviewed as well (see Profile 2 above). He has been going to school in the United States since he began his academic career in first grade. He began his academic career in Spanish classes and was exited from EL status in 4th grade but had to go back to receiving language supports until 6th grade, at which time he was completely exited from EL services. When the pandemic began, he mostly helped his younger brother, who at the time was in the second grade. His brother struggled academically during virtual schooling, and he was in charge of tutoring him and helping with his homework. Timothy kept himself busy during the pandemic by practicing his English, reading books, and teaching himself to edit videos. He is self-motivated to expand his English proficiency.

Participant Profile 5: Mars

Mars is a 15-year-old student who lives in Austin, Texas. When the pandemic began, she was in the spring semester of 7th grade. She was living with her mother, her mother's husband, and her older brother. Her brother was not fully living at home with Mars and her family since he was attending Texas A&M in College Station, so he came back and forth when he could. Mars is a 10th grade student attending a high performing school that focuses on leadership and college-readiness. She is confident and very articulate when she expresses herself. She likes reading in her free time, especially historical fiction books, which kept her occupied during the pandemic. She began school in Florida in the first grade and then moved to Texas. She felt prepared to attend school online because she was already using Canva and was used to meeting with her friends for online collaborative work. She has been an outstanding student since first grade and was recognized as an outstanding student in elementary school.

Participant Profile 6: Andrea

Andrea is a 14-year-old female student attending 9th grade in El Paso, TX. She resides with her father, mother, a younger sister and two younger brothers, and is the eldest of her siblings. While she attends school in El Paso, TX, she resides between the border towns of Juarez, Mexico, and El Paso. Her primary residence is in Juarez, but she commutes daily to attend school in El Paso. When the pandemic began in 2020, she had been enrolled in school in the United States for one year. In her opinion, the pandemic forced her to speak English because she could not shy away from speaking like she may have while attending school in person. Her mother is a teacher in Mexico, so she was able

to work from home while Andrea and her siblings were logged into school. The downside to that is that everyone was logged in simultaneously which often made the internet lag.

Participant Profile 7: Ash

Ash is a 16-year-old female student moving on to 11th grade in Pflugerville, Texas. Her demeanor is friendly and outgoing. Her family is from El Salvador and her mother works at a school district, so she was only able to stay home for a few months during the beginning of the pandemic. While her mother understands some English, she primarily communicates in Spanish. She lives with her mom, dad, and her two younger siblings. She also has an older sister who was a senior at the beginning of the pandemic. She has been enrolled in the U.S. school system since she started pre-Kindergarten. Originally when the pandemic began, she was happy that she was able to go to school from home, but after a few months she began to get tired of staying home and of the monotony.

Participant Profile 8: Maria

Maria is a very friendly 15-year-old student who lives in Round Rock, Texas. She is an extrovert and is very articulate when she communicates. Her family is from Honduras, and she has attended school in the United States since the first grade. Her English proficiency is advanced, and she expresses herself using an extensive vocabulary. In fact, she only speaks Spanish with her parents, and she admits she is starting to forget her Spanish. She lives at home with her mom, dad, and a younger brother who is 7 years old. While her mother was home when she was attending online school, she does not remember connecting much even with her family during the first few months of the

pandemic. She claims that it was difficult to connect because everyone had such a different schedule.

Emerging Themes

The purpose of this study was to research the experiences of secondary-aged EL Latinx students attending a Texas school in a virtual school setting during the onset of the pandemic. A thorough review of the data collected revealed several findings. The themes that naturally emerged are:

- Academic and emotional support from the Latinx family
- Academic and social supports from school
- Resourcefulness and self-motivation
- Emotional side-effects from the pandemic

In this chapter I responded to the research questions utilizing a lens of the theoretical frameworks of CRT and LatCrit. My main focus was to determine if Latinx EL students were afforded equal academic opportunities during the pandemic. The following segment represents the collective narratives, or *testimonios*, that my student participants shared during our semi-structured interviews. I asked the participants questions about the role their family had played during the COVID-19 pandemic. I inquired about their personal experiences as students in the midst of language acquisition during the onset of the pandemic. I encouraged students to share their experiences during virtual schooling as ELs. For example, what had it meant to be an EL receiving EL services during the pandemic? Did they feel that being an EL placed them at a disadvantage to receive quality instruction in a virtual platform? What effects did the sudden closure of in-person schooling have on their learning? Did they need help and

were they able to find someone who could help them navigate through their online classes? Did the school provide sufficient academic and social supports for them during this challenging and uncertain time? Through these questions and others, I asked them about their challenges and their successes as ELs during virtual schooling.

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

- Question 1: What have been the experiences of participating secondary Latinx EL students with virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 2: What emotional and academic supports have participating secondary Latinx ELs had during the COVID-19 pandemic?
(School support)
- Question 3: How do participating secondary Latinx ELs describe the role of their families in supporting their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Question 4: How can the narratives of participating secondary Latinx ELs inform best practices to support ELs

The following table illustrates major themes and categories derived from the coding process.

Table 3*Student Experiences Emerging Themes*

Academic & Emotional Support at Home	Academic & Social Support at School	Self-Motivation	Emotional Side Effects of the Pandemic
Parental involvement, role of the family, expectations, motivation from parents, supervision, family values, importance of education	Slow internet, lack of one-on-one time with teacher, not enough explanation, not engaged, too much homework, lack of guidance, no one checked in	Resourcefulness, seeking out peers, collaboration, online resources, gaming, reading, exploring interests, practicing English	Loneliness, social awkwardness, sadness, uncertainty, stress, worry, lack of social interaction, exhaustion from screen time

Theme One: The Role of the Latinx Family During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the third research question (“How do participating secondary Latinx ELs describe the role of their families in supporting their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?”), it was clear the students valued the influence of their families. Participating students shared the ways their family played a significant role in their schooling.

Luna expressed how she felt support from her older brother and her mother who stayed home during the pandemic by stating, “My older brother helped me sometimes with math.” She said her parents “were trying to help us all.” Mateo responded, “My parents made me go to school and motivated me to log in. They wouldn’t let me be absent.” Timothy mentioned that as the oldest sibling he was tasked to help his youngest brother do his homework also noting, “My parents’ push helped because they were always on me to do well in school.” They especially “pushed me to join extracurricular activities so that I would keep my grades up and keep me accountable.”

Overwhelmingly, the participants noted that their families played a vital role in their decisions, and often they leaned on their families to encourage them to overcome academic and social challenges. Gabriel highlighted that had his mother not been home to support his education, “it would’ve been hard.” He claimed that he does well in school “for his parents” and they “have a lot” of influence on him.

Mars mentioned that although she did not rely on academic help from her parents, she recognized their “push to always do better.” In living through the “immigrant experience,” Mars appreciated the sacrifices her family made for her to have a “better life.” While Andrea relied heavily on her father’s help in mathematics, she was grateful to have a family who “hyped me up when I didn’t feel like logging in.” Ash noted that her “parents made all of my siblings log in right away, ’cuz they didn’t want us to miss anything” and her older sister helped her logging into Zoom the first few times. Maria expressed that although her parents do not speak English and could not help with the classwork, they did “help her to keep going.”

The results of this research support the importance and the role of the Latinx family. Participating students documented that even though their families could not always help academically, it helped tremendously to count on their emotional support, or what Yosso and Solórzano (2005) might call their “familial capital.” Especially during a time when peer relationships and school connections were unstable, the participants relied on their families to motivate, support and encourage them to excel in school and overcome the challenges of learning in a virtual platform.

Theme Two: Academic and Social Supports at School

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a time in history when schools struggled to provide high quality learning. Educators and policymakers faced daunting challenges during the pandemic and with more than 50 million school age children in the United States affected by sudden school closures, “education policy has rarely been more pertinent and contentious” (Olneck-Brown, 2021, para. 1).

In response to research questions one and two (“What have been the experiences of participating secondary Latinx EL students with virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?”, and “What emotional and academic supports have participating secondary Latinx ELs had during the COVID-19 pandemic?”), I was able to inquire what academic and social supports the school and teachers had provided for students during the onset of the pandemic. The following subthemes emerged from the conversations, each of which I will explore in turn:

- 1) Access to high quality instruction
- 2) Language acquisition support
- 3) Access to technology
- 4) Emotional support

Access to High Quality Instruction

After asking students how they felt about their academic experience, and if they felt supported by their teachers and reflections as a student during the pandemic, I was able to compile the following results from the data collected. Timothy stated he wished he would have had “in- person instruction” for math and physics. While the teachers tried to do one-on-one instruction, “there [was] a lot of stuff that could have been done to

better grasp, it was very different to try and learn through a computer, it wasn't the same as having a paper and a pencil." For those courses that involved a lot of reading, like reading and science, he was able to get work done in an online setting much better than in-person. He appreciated just having to print out the worksheet and "not having to go at the same pace as the other students and not having to wait 10–15 minutes for the whole class to be finished." Most of his teachers tried to be supportive and allowed flexibility during the pandemic. His English teacher ensured they discussed "real-life" topics and debated so that they were more engaged. Most teachers accepted work late, but as the pandemic progressed teachers expected students to already "know what was going on" and were not as accommodating. After some reflection, Timothy stated, "giving teachers some sort of training to use computers so that technology could be used to their full potential" would have been helpful. If they had training, they would have been able to explain concepts better—as it was, so many technological opportunities were left unexplored.

When asked about his academic experience during the pandemic, Gabriel felt that "he did well and did learn," but would have made greater academic gains in person. Mostly he "struggled asking questions and getting the help [he] needed" on his classwork. He was also "embarrassed" to ask questions during virtual schooling. Out of the six teachers he had during the pandemic, most of them were supportive, but he recalled having two teachers who would not explain or give relevant examples to students. He also showed appreciation for his science teacher, who made class "engaging and fun by playing Kahoot, using visuals for examples" and relying a lot on interactive learning games. When reflecting on the past school year and COVID, he felt "it affected"

his learning and he could have learned more in better circumstances. He could not articulate how we could have learned more, but felt that he could have been more successful. He felt like he was “missing something” but could not pinpoint what it was.

Maria expressed dissatisfaction with her schooling during the pandemic. She was not shy to state that the school year “set me back so much academically, especially in algebra.” While she passed algebra, she “didn’t learn a single thing” and has “no clue” how she passed the state exam. She says her teacher “did not give them any assignments” for a few months during the pandemic. Her history class was “awful,” but she said “surprisingly I learned a lot in science” while she did not expect to. Most of her teachers were not understanding during the pandemic, perhaps because “it was new to everyone, including the teachers,” but “everyone should have been more flexible.” She was bothered because “not all students could turn on their cameras and some were sharing rooms with their siblings...the teachers should have been more understanding of that.” Her science teacher was flat out “mean about it” and “it made the class super hard.” “Everyone had different reasons for not turning on their cameras” and it upset her that teachers did not understand that. She showed appreciation for her history teacher, although the class was “awful” academically, it was “nice because at the beginning of class she would ask people about their day and their concerns with COVID.” In fact, she made the students so comfortable “they would turn on their cameras willingly because they felt comfortable.” The teacher was supportive of students’ emotional needs, but she was not able to offer quality instruction so that Maria could focus and grasp the dates and concepts. There was not “enough material” presented and not “enough examples” to make the content memorable. Students “were on their own” while the teacher instructed

them to read articles on their own but there was no reflection or discussion. “It was really difficult, and I couldn’t learn history like that,” Maria said with a bit of frustration in her voice.

Mateo maintained that “half” of his teachers were “helpful,” but he expressed that the other half “would not explain” the work and if they asked a question they were told to “pay attention.” Those teachers who were supportive would “explain and seemed really nice.” They would “review the work” so that students could understand it. It was “boring” to go to school online and “sit for 8 hours a day.” He thought it would have helped if they had done one-on-one after the regular lessons because he could have asked more questions. None of his teachers offered one-on-one time with the students. He did like the Zoom break out groups because he was able to collaborate with other students.

Mars, who is typically a high-performing student, stated that she “liked going to school online because I was able to stay home.” In classes that were “informational” like English and history she “learned better at home.” For classes like math, she “had a hard time learning.” She felt that “in math, teachers demonstrate and do more examples” and they could not do that during online schooling. The teachers tried with virtual whiteboards or screenshares but “it wasn’t the same and I had a hard time focusing on it.” Teachers tried calling on students to engage them, but it “still wasn’t the same.” For the most part her teachers were supportive of her needs and made themselves available to help. She really liked that about her school and felt teachers tried to “bring up the energy on the online classroom.” She felt she could contact her teachers if she needed help. Her U.S. history teacher “noticed most students were struggling and took time out of her day to re-do assignments that were not up to standards.” At the beginning of the pandemic,

her school started “doing online assignments right away and students got used to this.”

By the time they started the new school year in August of 2020, most students were used to online schooling. She does recognize the limitations of online schooling and is grateful to having returned to in-person school because she was able to take dance and other classes that would have been hard to take online.

Luna struggled with elaborating her perspective on online schooling. For the most part, she “was nervous” at the onset of online schooling. She felt scared and experienced a lot of anxiety. She felt her teachers “helped during the pandemic and they sent me videos to explain the Math problems.” Due to her shyness, she claimed that “it was weird” when they were put “into Zoom break out groups.” Teachers were “kind of nice” but they “could have explained things better.” She would have benefited from more one-on-one meetings with her teachers after the group lesson. The teachers were good at showing examples, visuals, and presentations. She felt that despite circumstances, she learned during the pandemic and made some academic gains.

Ash expressed that at the beginning of the pandemic from March of 2020 to the end of that school year, they did not do much work. Teachers did not “teach any lessons and just had students check in on Google classroom.” She did OK during the first months of the pandemic, but in November of 2020, her grades started “tanking” and she felt that teachers were “giving them so much work” that she felt “burned out.” After the work was given to the students, “the teachers would ask us to email them for help.” The problem was that “they would take forever to respond” and when “I was confused I didn’t have a teacher to go to and I had to look on YouTube, but I didn’t always find what I was looking for.” Eventually that took a toll on her, and she started to “give up” and stopped

logging on. She felt like “what’s the point if they are just ’gonna give us the work and then tell us to log off.” She had mixed feelings about her schooling during the first year of the pandemic, as she does not feel like she made significant academic gains. While some teachers were supportive during the pandemic, some were not. Her English teacher was one who was “hard on the students,” but it helped to keep them accountable. This teacher would “make us participate because it was part of our grade, while our biology teacher had us watch a video and just gave us questions to go along with the video.” In her reflection, she wishes her teachers would have reached out to her parents when she was absent. She is sure they noticed that she was not there, but “they could have done better notifying people and parents that their child was not going to class.” When parents called the school, “they were never told that I was being absent.” Ash says, “I would not have missed 30 days had someone from school reached out.”

Andrea used GoogleMeet at the beginning of the pandemic, but she did not have lessons or lecture during the first few months of the pandemic. She did not log into Zoom until the beginning of the next school year, in August of 2020.

Andrea appreciated the online experience because it “forced me” to speak English. She felt she would not have practiced her English as much had she been going to school in person, because she would have relied on the proximity of the teachers. Especially in her speech class in which she “had to make speeches,” she liked that it was online because it helped to soothe her anxiety. Her online experience “was good,” she had new classes where she felt she learned, but math was tough because sometimes the teacher was not there to answer questions. She felt that “when the Zoom meeting ended, it was like I think I’m on my own now.” While she could email the teacher or type a

comment, she felt “it wasn’t the same” as in being there in person. Most of the teachers were supportive of the students, “they always told us they were there if we had questions,” or “sometimes they even gave us their phone numbers.” She said, “the teachers tried, but they were busy, and they would take [too] long to respond.” They did not do break out groups that much, and while that would have helped, it would have also put more pressure on her. She would not have liked being one-on-one with a teacher because she is too shy for that. She does recall a teacher who “screamed at her through the screen” when she did not turn on her microphone and respond right away. She thinks that “everything was OK during the pandemic” for her, but maybe it would have been good for the teachers “to be more patient, because they were frustrated because of the internet and the computers.” She wishes she could tell her teachers to “chill out, everything is going to be OK.”

The students seemed to have mixed feelings about the quality of the instruction they received during the first year of the pandemic. While they appreciated the efforts made by most of their teachers, most of them expressed that an online platform was missing student engagement and was not the best platform to learn math. Most of the students struggled with math during the pandemic and stated that they lacked an effective way to be taught mathematical concepts and step-by-step problem solving. Interestingly, they seemed to have mixed reactions to the proportion of group work compared to one-on-one instruction, with some of them wishing they had had more one-on-one time with their teachers, and others who felt shy being glad that there was not more of that.

Language Acquisition Development

Since one of the requirements to participate in this study was for participants to be former or current ELs, I felt it important to discuss the supports they received in online schooling to improve in English proficiency. I specifically asked students how they felt their English acquisition progressed during the pandemic. Their responses surprised me, as most of them said that despite the lack of language supports, they felt their English still improved.

Andrea stated that the pandemic helped her to improve in English. Due to the nature of online schooling, she was embarrassed to single herself out and speak in broken English to ask questions, so she “forced” herself to improve in English. Aside from her lack of English proficiency, she is shy and expressed that had she been going to school in person she would have most likely “continued speaking Spanish,” and she would have continued relying on her Spanish. She has only been enrolled in U.S. schools since 7th grade (the 2019–2020 school year). Being a new student to U.S. schools, she found a way to improve her English despite the lapse in in-person schooling. Before the pandemic, she understood English but had trouble speaking it. During the pandemic, she used online programs that her teacher suggested, and she read more in English. She was able to choose the books that interested her, so that encouraged her to seek ways to improve in her English. The pandemic prompted her to improve in English.

On the other hand, Ash felt that her English had consistently been “good” even before the pandemic. While she has been enrolled in U.S. schools since pre-Kinder, she was not exited from receiving services until her 10th grade year. She especially feels that her grammar in written English has improved because of the pandemic, but she does not

attribute this improvement to her teachers. Rather, she says she improved because she took it upon herself to read books and teach herself academic grammar.

Luna has been in U.S. schools since Kindergarten and was in 6th grade when the pandemic started. She feels that her English proficiency was OK back then, but she considered herself still “learning.” She was receiving services for ELs when the pandemic started and has yet to exit from the EL program. Reflecting on the last two years, she says she improved in her written and spoken English, despite the school disruption of COVID.

Mars was 13 at the start of the pandemic and had been enrolled in U.S. schools since the end of her first-grade year. She feels that she is fluent in English and was identified in elementary school as one of the top students in reading comprehension. She read a lot during the pandemic, and she is certain that her vocabulary has improved in both written and oral form. She has not received EL services since the 3rd grade.

Mateo has attended U.S. schools his entire life. He was “good in English,” but was still receiving services at the onset of the pandemic. He feels that while it “was difficult to learn online,” overall he still improved in his English proficiency. He has not been exited from the ESL program yet but has made gains in his English expression. He was glad to go back to school in person because he did struggle in a virtual platform. He did not like going to school online and prefers the traditional form of schooling.

Maria has attended schools in the United States since the first grade. She was unsure why she was still taking the TELPAS exam, the English proficiency test given to students who are still considered to be ELs. She has passed the exam before, so she was not sure why she was still being tested every year. She says she passed the reading

STAAR as well, and said she was going to ask why she had not been exited. She believes her English is a 9 out of 10 and she thinks it has improved even during the pandemic. She says it would make sense that the lack of practice in English would have negative effects, but in her case, she felt it did not affect her negatively. She argued that she found ways to continue practicing English while immersing herself in English TV shows, music, and texting friends in English. She only speaks Spanish with her parents and says she is even starting to forget her Spanish.

Gabriel preferred to be interviewed in Spanish, as he felt that he would be able to express himself better in his native language. He is currently going to begin the 9th grade. He has been attending schools in the United States since he started his education. He feels that his English proficiency is OK, but he has struggled with English acquisition. He still says he “got better in English by watching videos on YouTube” and listening to music in both English and Spanish. He did not read beyond what he was asked to read at school.

Timothy is very comfortable speaking English. He has been in U.S. schools since first grade and was in the 10th grade when the pandemic started. He was exited from receiving services in the 4th grade but then was put back into EL services in middle school. Since that time, he has exited from receiving language acquisition services once again. He feels he was proficient in English by the time he was in the 8th grade. He felt that he improved in English because he was able to pass his AP English exam after the pandemic, while he had not been successful on this exam before the pandemic. While he appreciates the help of his teachers, he attributes his improvement to being a “self-learner.” He read books he ordered on Amazon and watched YouTube videos. He also

made sure he would look up words when he did not know their meaning. He is certain that his self-motivation was the main reason he had made such significant improvements.

Access to Technology

While the pandemic and the sudden disruption of in person schooling tasked school districts across the United States to provide students with computers as well as Wi-Fi connectivity, the majority of the students I interviewed had access to a personal laptop well before the onset of the pandemic.

Timothy expressed that he had a laptop that his school had provided since his freshman year and already had Wi-Fi that his parents provided. He did have to occasionally rely on the district-issued hotspots, because having four siblings and parents all logged on at the same time slowed down the network. His family had a rule in which no one was allowed to use the internet for anything other than schoolwork until 4:00 p.m. He also mentioned he had his own computer that his parents purchased for him.

Gabriel expressed that he had access to a laptop provided by the district that he had received at the beginning of that school year. His parents also provided Wi-Fi for him, so he did not need to rely on the district issued hotspot. His internet connection was strong, and he rarely had any issues with lagging.

Maria did not have a computer when the pandemic started. She did not receive one until late summer of 2020. Before having access to a computer, she was able to log into Google classroom from her phone and was not able to do some of the assignments. She had access to an iPad, but she was not able to do all of the work. “Luckily,” she said “they didn’t have to meet on Zoom until the beginning of the next school year.” She then got a Chromebook from school and a hotspot. She “quickly realized that the hotspot was

not potent enough for her and her brother to share.” Eventually they got Wi-Fi in late September because she was getting “kicked out” of Zoom meetings.

Fortunately, Mateo had internet supplied by his parents, and he had borrowed a computer from school when he started middle school. He was prepared when the pandemic started with a school computer and internet provided by his parents. He did not experience a lot of technical issues because his parents did not allow his siblings to log on to anything other than schoolwork during school hours.

Mars had her own computer provided by her family and had internet as well when the pandemic started and throughout virtual schooling. She did not have issues connecting to her classes. Luna shared that she had a computer provided by the school that she had been assigned from the beginning of the year. She relied on the hotspot from the district because she did not have internet at home. She received her hotspot in August of 2020, about two weeks after they had started Zoom lessons. She tried to attend all her online classes once she received the hotspot.

Ash claimed she “convinced” her parents to buy her a computer pre-COVID because she would be needing one for high school. This was a “win-win” situation for her, because she was then prepared for the pandemic. She had internet at home provided by her parents and did not experience many connectivity issues.

Andrea had her own computer when the pandemic started that her parents got her, and she also had a school issued computer. She had her own internet from home. She says the “school computer was very old and was very slow,” but she did not have a chance to “change it for a newer one.” She struggled with a class in which a teacher used software that she could not access from her personal computer. This teacher occasionally

allowed her to log in from her personal laptop because the school one “lagged a lot.” When the computer lagged, she would “[post] a comment” to let her teacher know and the teacher would decide if she could log on from her personal computer to continue the assignment.

Overall, while the digital divide may have been a broader issue for Latinx students during COVID, for the students in this study, most of them had access to the technology they needed. It was challenging for some students who had more siblings all trying to connect simultaneously since the amount of bandwidth available was slowing down the internet or would kick them out of the Zoom classes. Depending on how far along they were into the lesson, they would log back in although sometimes they did not.

Emotional Support

When the COVID-19 pandemic caused sudden school closures in March of 2020, not only did students lose access to in-person instruction, but they lost in-person contact with their peers, teachers, and school counselors. For many students, this meant they had to rely on filling their need for social connection with their immediate family, as their options to foster social relationships outside the home became very limited. With the unique situation the pandemic presented, the participants in this study mostly agreed that they did not feel connected to anyone at school during the pandemic.

Despite the situation, Andrea maintained connections with her friends by texting and calling them. She intentionally “checked on them” to see how they were doing during the first weeks of the pandemic. For the next school year, 2020–2021, she tried reaching out to her new classmates, but that did not work out, and so she reverted to maintaining contact with her former friends. She says she relied on her friends from before the

pandemic if she ever needed help or wanted to connect. She tried to make connections with her female teachers but found it difficult because of her shyness.

Ash did not feel connected to anyone at school. Prior to the pandemic, she was not a very social person, but had a good friend with whom she had lost contact. She felt “alone and that no one was there for me, not even the teachers.” Lacking anyone to “vent to or talk to,” she felt very alone. Eventually she stopped logging into her classes in November 2020. She was upset that no one reached out to her parents to let them know that she was not logging into her classes.

Luna did not feel connected to others during the pandemic, either. She expressed that “it was hard, because I didn’t know nobody.” She felt it was “weird” to connect with others online. She was new to middle school, so she did not know very many students. While teachers were “kind of nice,” she did not feel like she knew them very well.

Mars relied on her family for social connections. Occasionally, when she felt the need for human interaction aside from her family, she would log into online games and just chat with others there. She rarely interacted with her classmates on a personal level. Even though they collaborated on group assignments, the connection was superficial, and she only connected on a personal level with the small group of friends she had from before the pandemic. She did not make any new friendships during virtual classes. Students never exchanged contact information for reasons other than to discuss classwork.

Mateo expressed concern about meeting his new teachers when the new school year began in the fall of 2020. He did not feel like he knew his teachers well enough to ask them questions about the class work. Maria said, “I don’t think school was even

taking attendance or grading anything either” when the pandemic started. “I think P.E. took attendance on Google classroom because we would just check-in,” she said. “No one called us, to check on us,” said Maria. “I did not feel connected to anyone at all...I only knew like two people.” Maria continued, “I was scared to talk the whole time. It was hard because you couldn’t even get anyone’s numbers on the chat ‘cuz the teachers would get mad.”

Gabriel felt connected to his friends but said he did not feel supported by the adults at school. He did not feel that he could reach out to them for any emotional support. He said reaching out would have felt “awkward” and he feels that affected his learning, although he could not specify how.

Timothy stated he and his friends “found a way to make it work since we had known each other since the 6th grade.” This group of nine friends were able to connect on Zoom calls and video chat. They also watched the same movies even though they were each at their own homes. He felt connected to his English teacher, since she allowed students to express their concerns, as mentioned previously in another section. While he respected his chemistry teacher’s knowledge in the subject and felt at ease talking to her, he maintains that he would not have approached either of his teachers if he had a personal concern. The relationship, while genuine, was strictly academic.

Theme Three: Resourcefulness and Self-Motivation

While interviewing students about their school experiences, the theme of self-motivation began to emerge. Since the interviews were semi-structured, this allowed for themes to emerge as the interview transpired. One of the benefits of using semi-structured interviews is that “this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to

the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p 111). Even though I was not looking for or asking about self-motivation, I quickly noticed that participants shared this theme in common. They prided themselves on taking responsibility for their learning and finding resources to help them through the pandemic, either by finding ways to connect with other students or finding external resources to help improve their knowledge.

Perhaps it was the uncertainty of being able to rely on what they were used to, or perhaps the pandemic inadvertently prompted people to become more self-sufficient, or perhaps the participants in this study overly represent this trend which was not true of their peers from the same demographics. While the theme of self-motivation was unexpected, it emerged from the conversations with the participants. Most of the participating students commented that they found ways to improve their English proficiency on their own and sought resources outside of those offered by the school to be able to complete their schoolwork.

Mateo responded that “it was hard to do schoolwork because sometimes the internet went out when the teachers were explaining.” He resorted to meeting with his friends online “to explain to each other what they had missed.” Andrea empowered herself by “forcing” herself to “practice English during the pandemic.” Not having the opportunity to practice English with her peers during online schooling, she used online programs and practiced on her own. She found books in subjects that interested her to expand her vocabulary. This allowed her to come back from the pandemic with a stronger sense of confidence to speak English. Prior to the pandemic, she shied away from speaking English because she did not have to speak English in an in-person setting. Ash

expressed that she “didn’t feel like I was doing a lot of learning” during the first few months of the pandemic, she often “depended on YouTube” to “learn what I was missing from school.” Mars “like[d] being at home” and for her, online schooling was welcomed. She considers herself an independent learner and during the pandemic she found ways to ensure she could improve her essay writing skills. She read historical fiction books to emulate effective writing formats. When she found the need for social interaction, she would “reach out on online games and talk to other people.”

Maria articulated that although the lack of interaction at school could have “set me back,” she felt that it did not have that effect on her. During the pandemic she “watched TV shows in English and practiced texting in English with friends” to compensate for the lack of social interaction at school. When she started logging into Zoom, she relied on her friends to help her log in. She would call her friends and they would figure it out together.

Gabriel said he watched videos on YouTube and listened to music in both English and Spanish. He responded mostly in Spanish and said he did read the books that were assigned to him but did not look for outside reading projects on his own. He did rely on his friends to log into Zoom, and they collectively helped each other to navigate online schooling. He says at first “logging in was confusing” and he and his friends did not know what to do. To maintain a sense of social interaction he and his friends would connect on Messenger or play Fortnite together.

Timothy, being the oldest of the participants, responded with a sense of self-awareness and maturity. He considers himself a “self-learner” and was able to “learn on my own.” While taking classes online he especially appreciated being “self-paced” in his

studies. While taking in-person classes, he always struggled with having to “wait for other students to finish their work” to continue. Setting his own pace allowed him to research how to work on the subjects he struggled with, and he was able to teach himself. During the pandemic, he ordered books on Amazon, watched YouTube videos and other videos to improve his public speaking skills. When he would struggle with learning a new concept, he would reach out to his friends to study online together. He especially enjoyed what he called “unconventional learning,” such as video editing and skills that he enjoyed mastering, rather than simply working on classwork was assigned to him. Luna took some initiative for her learning by asking her older brother to help her with her math classwork. While she did not seek outside reading, she occasionally watched videos online to help with her schoolwork.

Theme Four: Emotional Side-Effects of the Pandemic

“Psychological science tells us that social context, interpersonal relationship, and emotional well-being are important to student learning” (American Psychological Association, 2020, para. 1). While schools made efforts to provide virtual education to students, they may have overlooked the importance of providing emotional supports during the pandemic. Most of the participants expressed they felt loneliness, anxiety, and fear at some point during the pandemic. The emotional repercussions for students of the last two years have yet to be fully dissected.

Andrea was grateful her mother had been home to help her cope with her anxiety and stress. “Mom was there for me and made things positive,” she said. “My anxiety and stress were bad, and I didn’t wanna log into classes.” She affirmed that her mother helped her get through that. Ash seemed to struggle most emotionally. She stopped logging into

classes in November 2020 and missed about a month of school that she must now make up. She did not feel her teachers “reached out to find out why I wasn’t going to classes.” The lack of social interaction remained with her, and she is currently seeking support from a counselor. She felt “alone and like no one was there” for her. She could not “vent or get anything off,” The support of her family was available, but it was not enough for her. She feels that the experience changed her and she “can’t connect with my teachers anymore.” The experience has made her “socially awkward” with teachers and other students, even though she is going back to school in person.

Luna did not feel connected to anyone at her middle school. In Luna’s words, “It was kinda hard because I didn’t know nobody...it was weird.” Mars was not as concerned with the personal connections or lack thereof during the pandemic, she was mostly concerned with the way it felt to turn in her work. She did not feel that her work was “personal,” she felt it was “superficial” online. She specifically recalled an art project that should have been more “interactive” and felt that her artwork “felt like just another assignment.” For most subjects that was not an issue, but something as personal as art, did not feel “special” because it was not tangible. Fortunately, Mateo remained connected to his friends from elementary school while in middle school. He did not feel as connected with his teachers while he was learning online, which meant he was not comfortable asking clarifying questions. Regardless of the lack of connection, he felt that he was able to somehow complete his classwork anyway.

Maria was transparent and comfortable sharing a lot of her experiences. She did not feel a connection to anyone during her online classes. She did not do much talking during her classes, but nonetheless appreciated that her history teacher was open to

communication, even though she did not take advantage of those opportunities. She “had no emotional support” during all her 8th grade year. She had “one friend she would occasionally hang out with and [who] kept her sane during that time.” Most of the time “I felt sad and disconnected for the whole year.” She even felt disconnected from her family because “everyone’s schedule was so different...I don’t even remember talking to anyone...it was just online-sleep-online-sleep...” She wishes she could have had someone to talk to while the pandemic was happening. Even wishing someone would have “acknowledged” the pandemic was happening. She continued,

Nothing was happening, but it was real, we were online, and people were dying, everything was awful and it’s hard to get online and pretend like everything was normal when it really isn’t. If they were just a little more sensitive a lot of kids would have felt better about everything...so many people would have found that more comforting. I don’t know how anyone could’ve felt good during the pandemic. A little more support from an adult would have been good...I had no idea who my counselor even was...

Similarly, Gabriel did not feel deeply connected to adults at school. He stated that had he had an emergency or a crisis, he would have felt “awkward” reaching out to anyone at his school. Even though he perceived he had a “good relationship” with his science teacher, he recognized that bond was purely professional and not go deep enough to make an outcry.

Timothy felt some connection with his English teacher mostly because she incorporated real-world discussions and acknowledged the current situation. She was “easy to converse with.” His chemistry teacher also helped him apply for internships in the latter part of the school year. His personal connections and the need for forming bonds were mostly fulfilled by the time he spent with his friends connecting online.

Whether it was gaming, watching movies, or discussing school, he socialized mostly outside of school hours.

After speaking to the participants, it appears that their school settings did not foster building relationships. Perhaps the lack of attention paid to nurturing these relationships was unintentional on the part of educators because schools were focused purely on academic learning. The pressure to perform and fill learning gaps coupled with the lack of cohesiveness left districts, schools, and teachers without much guidance. Never had schools been tasked with meeting academic and emotional needs of students to this degree. Schools operated on the assumption that families and friends would meet the needs of students, but with the limitations the pandemic created, social connections were not always available.

Summary of Findings

Interacting with these students and having them share their stories gave me invaluable insight to their experiences during COVID-19. Some of the findings correlated to what I witnessed as an educator during the height of the pandemic, and some were surprisingly refreshing to hear. I am especially impressed and grateful to have heard their stories of resilience and strength during a time where everyone, including adults, were alarmed. To know that these students were tested as we all were during the pandemic, and yet still managed to rely on their own resolve to figure out ways to improve, makes me proud to have shared intimate space with them.

V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The changes to our education system resulting from the ongoing pandemic are so drastic as to seem almost irreversible. Perhaps necessary, but undeniably unanticipated, the pandemic has set the stage for permanent changes in the ways we provide support for our students. While all students were affected by the pandemic, the evidence suggests that vulnerable student populations will take the longest to recover (Bhula & Floretta, 2020). As a focus for this research, I was prompted by the need to explore whether Latinx EL students had experienced inequalities in academic opportunities during COVID. The findings suggest that even though participants' school districts and educators attempted to provide quality online education during an unprecedented time, the reality is that they struggled to meet the needs of the students who participated in this study. Whereas this study does not speak for all Latinx EL students, it certainly can highlight the challenges of the students who participated. Repercussions of academic and emotional setbacks can be permanent for our students and the more we know, the better we can respond to these challenges.

My study stemmed from the lack of research focusing on the perspectives of EL Latinx students during the pandemic. Research focusing directly on Latinx EL student experiences has been difficult to locate, as most of the studies on this topic come from the teachers' perspective and focus heavily on a deficit mindset in regard to ELs' academic performance (Straubhaar, 2013). Rather than recognizing the strengths of ELs, so much research focuses on their perceived deficits (Yosso, 2005). In this study, I flipped that script and rather than focus on deficits among participating students, I focused on the deficits of the educational system as it pertains to ELs and highlighted the strengths

participating ELs displayed during the COVID-19 pandemic. While their stories describe several forms of inequities in the educational system, nonetheless the students who shared their *testimonios* also displayed strength, resilience, and most of all, kinship.

The Role of the Latinx Family

One of the foremost differences that sets Latinx families apart from non-Hispanics is their strong sense of family and community. A 2019 study referred to this concept as *familismo*. Familismo is a core value for the Latinx community which holds “the family as central to oneself” (Piña-Watson et al., 2013, p. 206). For the Latinx adolescent, this could mean they turn to their family as a means of support since feeling connected to family is a fundamental need for most Latinx youth. A more recent study suggested that familismo is “an important component in the social life of Latinx people, and it has been related to positive mental health outcomes” (Piña-Watson et al., 2019, p. 328). The findings in this research confirm the importance of having the support of the Latinx family for the participants. The students interviewed agreed that had it not been for the support they received from their family, they would have done far worse during the pandemic.

For those who participated in this study, family played a pivotal role during and after the pandemic. For Mateo, Maria, Andrea, and Ash, the support and supervision of their family gave them a sense of accountability to attend school and log in to their classes, even when they did not feel like it. For Gabriel, doing well in school signified a sense of duty to his parents to do well in his academics. For Mars, acknowledging the “sacrifices” her parents had made to come to this country gave her a sense of indebtedness. Timothy felt an obligation to help his younger brother log into his classes

when he was not able to on his own. In his words, he was “in charge” of making sure his younger sibling logged in and completed his classwork. The research findings in this study reinforce the importance of the role of Latinx families.

Through the lens of CRT and LatCrit, the strong familial bonds the students in this study demonstrated are a testament to the strength and resolve Latinx communities display in their daily lives. As a construct of CRT and to challenge deficit thinking mindsets, Yosso’s (2005) theory of community cultural wealth exemplifies the ways in which communities of color are empowered “through at least 6 forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (p. 77). While these forms of capital are intertwined and not independent of each other, for the purpose of this study, I focused primarily on the aspect of familial capital.

Familial capital refers to “cultural knowledge” and learning the “importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This form of cultural wealth fosters a “commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Forming bonds, nurturing relationships, and maintaining a closeness to the family is a necessity for Latinx students. Building strength from these relationships serves to overcome challenges, in this case, the pandemic. The concept of familial capital represents a shift in the deficit mindset as it pertains to the knowledge Latinx students come with to the classroom. Rather, this shift highlights the strengths Latinx students bring to the classroom in the form of cultural knowledge and family support.

Academic and Emotional Supports at School

High-Quality Instruction

One of the motivations behind this research was to explore the academic experiences for Latinx EL students during the pandemic. I wanted to determine if Latinx ELs had received high quality instruction during school shutdowns. While high quality instruction can be measured in various ways, one of the ways I gaged instruction was based on the Texas state standards provided by the Texas Education Agency. According to the effective schools framework (ESF) website, it provides “a clear vision for what districts and schools across the state do to ensure an excellent education for all Texas students” (TEA, 2022, para. 1). The five levers the ESF provides allow for a system to measure the effectiveness of the instruction provided to students. For the purposes of this study, I measured the quality of instruction provided to the EL students who participated in this study based on the Texas Education Agency’s own rubric. The ESF (TEA, 2022) concludes that there are five levers consisting of the following:

- Strong school leadership and planning
- Strategic staffing
- Positive school culture
- High-quality instructional materials and assessments
- Effective instruction

Although all these levers are important and pertain to high quality instruction directly or indirectly, for the purpose of this research I focused on the fifth lever of effective instruction as this pertains directly to high quality instruction. As is highlighted on the ESF chart below, “at the core of effective schools is effective instruction: interactions

between students, teachers, and content determine learning outcomes” (TEA, 2022, para. 2).

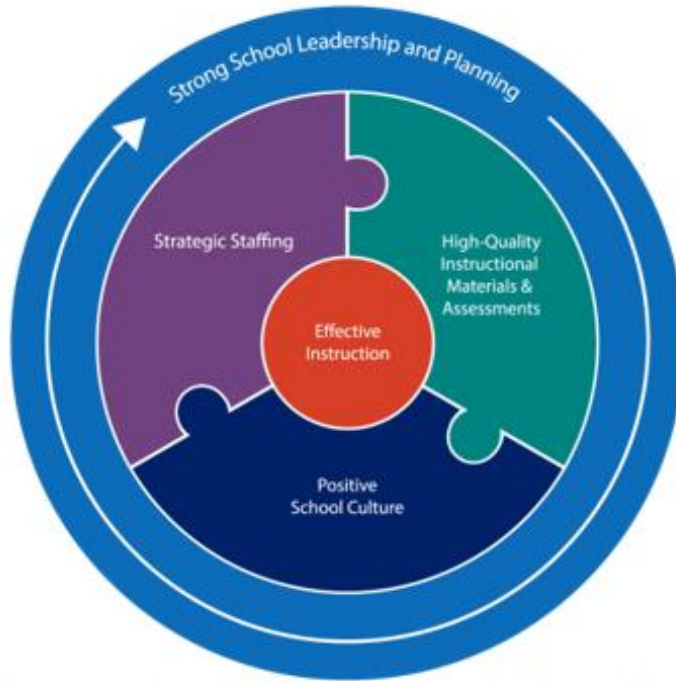


Image source: Texas ESF Website <https://texasesf.org/framework/>

Figure 1

The Effective Schools Framework

Essential Action 5.1 is focused on effective classroom routines and instructional strategies. It states,

Campus instructional leaders provide training and ongoing support so that teachers effectively use high-quality instructional materials and research-based teaching practices that promote critical-thinking skills and include differentiated and scaffolded support for students with disabilities, English learners and other student groups.

Based on this expectation, my findings imply that the students I interviewed did not receive high quality instruction during the pandemic. At the heart of this lever is that teachers “include differentiated and scaffolded support.” From the *testimonios* collected,

seven of the eight students—with the exception of Mars, who asserted that her U.S. history teacher did some sort of scaffolding by stating she “took time out of her day to re-do assignments that were not up to standards”—expressed a lack of differentiation. Mars further explained that while she “learned better at home” for “informational” classes like U.S. history, she struggled in math. Unanimously, students interviewed expressed they struggled with learning mathematical concepts on a virtual platform. Even Timothy, who was the oldest and most independent of the students interviewed, claimed he struggled learning math because “there [was] a lot of stuff that could have been done better to better grasp” his teacher’s math instruction.

As outlined in the Essential Action 5.1 expectation, differentiation and scaffolding are essential for effective instruction. Differentiation “may mean teaching the same material to all students using a variety of instructional strategies, or it may require the teacher to deliver lessons at varying levels of difficulty based on the ability of each student” (Weselby, 2021, para. 3). Scaffolding is a teaching strategy focusing on “that area between what a learner can do independently and what can be accomplished with the instructional support” (Djoub, 2020, para. 4). The students interviewed received subpar instruction and/or instructional support—they all struggled in learning math, and some struggled in other subject areas as well, and many of them specifically pointed to a lack of scaffolding and individualized instruction on the part of their teachers.

Aside from policy driven measures, I relied on research-based literature that highlighted the quality of instruction during the pandemic specifically for English learners. One key recommendation for teachers of ELs was to “invite English Learners to engage in multimodal tasks that support and reinforce listening, speaking, reading, and

writing in English throughout content areas” (Billings & Lagunoff, 2020, p. 9). Most of the participants in this study did not refer to having lessons taught utilizing a variety of modalities, nor did they mention having options as to how they would demonstrate mastery of concepts taught. Rather the consensus of the participants is the lack of instructional choices with which they were provided. Participants expressed they did not have an opportunity to communicate very much with their peers. While a few mentioned participating in breakout groups months into the pandemic, most stated during the first few months of the pandemic they did not even have lessons at all. They specifically mentioned checking in on Google Meet and filling out a survey for attendance purposes until the end of the school year, which had 10 remaining weeks of instruction. Some research highlighted that “when schools were forced by the pandemic to hurriedly switch to virtual learning in the spring, most Texas districts didn’t require teachers to conduct live virtual lessons” (Swaby & Platoff, 2020, para. 11). The academic losses of just that school year alone are tragic.

While the existing data suggest a “loss of learning” that disproportionately affected already vulnerable communities, it is hard to say what the lasting effects of this loss will be. A study released in January of 2022, comparing test scores from 5.4 million U.S. students in grades 3–8, overall found that “math achievement dropped across the first two years of the pandemic, while reading achievement dropped primarily between fall 2020 and fall 2021” (Kuhfeld et al., p. 6) The same study also found that “achievement gaps between low- and high-poverty schools widened in elementary grades” (p. 7). The good news is that this study also indicated “changes in gaps by school poverty were much more modest in the middle school grades” (p. 7), which leads me to

believe that students who are old enough to be more independent in middle school were able to manage better through the academic disruptions of school closures.

I suspect there will be a plethora of new research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for all students as time passes. It is still too early to know the full effects on student learning, and we are also not completely out of the pandemic yet. However, I am hopeful that this research can add to the already growing body of research pertaining to EL Latinx students. Below are several of the areas in the literature to which I argue this study can make a contribution.

Language Acquisition Development

For this study, eight secondary-aged Latinx ELs students shared their experiences during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this research highlight the circumstances unique to Latinx EL students. With a focus on language acquisition support and development and in observance of the theoretical frameworks of CRT and LatCrit, EL students were not afforded equitable access to education. They were not provided with adequate accommodations to improve their English proficiency development. While all students may have suffered academically during the pandemic, “learning losses from school shutdowns are further compounded by inequities, particularly for students who were already left behind by education systems” (Bhula & Floretta, 2020, para 2).

In reviewing the elements of the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) model, we can establish the lack of the educational system in addressing the specific language acquisition needs of ELs during the pandemic. The SIOP model is a research-based, validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the academic

needs of English learners throughout the United States (Echevarria et al., 2000). As described by Echevarria et al. (2000), the SIOP Model consists of 30 interrelated components that integrate language and content with a focus on scaffolding instruction whereas “teachers pay careful attention to students’ capacity for working in English, beginning instruction at the current level of student understanding and moving students to higher levels of understanding through tailored support” (p. 9) The *testimonios* of the students who participated in this research do not confirm the presence of this kind of “tailored support” in their daily lessons.

In hopes of learning more on what language supports these students received, I indirectly asked them by questioning the perception of their own language development during the pandemic. Most of them concluded there had been a lack of language acquisition support; yet despite that lack of support, they felt their English still improved. While they did not state the lack of support directly (perhaps because they did not know what they were missing), they did state in several instances they did not feel like they could comfortably ask clarifying questions, did not have the opportunity to meet with their teachers one-on-one and would have felt “singled out” if they had been called on during an online platform. As pertaining to the SIOP Model components, it does not seem that teachers of participating EL students had the opportunity to provide necessary components such as pre-teaching vocabulary, making content comprehensible, making connections to students’ backgrounds, or any form of hands-on approach. While it is understandable that through the pangs of the pandemic, teachers were on survival mode and were staying afloat by relaying content in the most efficient way they could, they did not provide adequate language supports. Due to the circumstances of the pandemic, most

teachers were not able to (or did not know how to) offer language acquisition supports through a virtual, unprecedented platform. Regardless of the obstacles, it is clear that EL students did not receive adequate language acquisition supports during the pandemic and “state and local education agencies must continue to provide English language development services, academic supports, and appropriate accommodations to EL students” (Mavrogordato et al., 2021, p. 2).

Despite the lack of language acquisition supports during the pandemic, there are some positive outcomes in the *testimonios* obtained. Andrea revealed that she appreciated the online experience of the pandemic, because it “forced her” to speak English. She expressed that being in an in-person classroom would have kept her from learning English because she would have heavily relied on the proximity of the teachers and would have spoken more Spanish. I wonder how many students were like Andrea and flourished during the pandemic in their language acquisition.

I particularly noted the credit students gave themselves for their improvement in English acquisition. There was a sense of pride and empowerment in knowing they had relied on themselves to overcome this challenge. The commonalities in the *testimonios* of Ash, Andrea, Mars, Maria, and Timothy especially come to mind. All of them expressed in their own words that they had improved because they took it upon themselves to read books, seek online resources and collaborate with their peers.

Access to Technology

During the onset of the pandemic, most participating students had a one-to-one device provided by the district. Districts did well in preparing their students with technology well before the pandemic. In fact, most participants had received their one-to-

one device at the beginning of that school year. Of the eight students participating in this study, only Maria had to wait for a laptop and used her phone to log into classes for the first 2 weeks of school in August of 2020. Most of the students also had their own internet provided by their parents which meant they had continuous connectivity. Even then, though, with siblings logging into the same network during the school day, most of the students experienced some sort of lag in connectivity or even got “kicked out” of lessons on occasion. Luna was the only student who relied on the district-provided hotspot for connectivity the entire time. Maria had to wait for a laptop a couple of weeks when the 2020–2021 school year began and relied on the district provided hotspot for a month until she realized she needed more reliable and faster internet. Her parents agreed and subscribed their home to Wi-Fi in September of 2020.

While some research suggests “the digital divide is pronounced for EL students, who are less likely to have access to digital learning devices and internet connectivity” (Mavrogordato et al., 2021, p. 2) my research findings suggest that this was not necessarily true for all students, as it was not true for the majority of my participants. The students who participated in this study had access to technology during the pandemic. While these students may present an anomaly, nonetheless they exist. Other available research reflects the lack of access to technology for socioeconomically disadvantaged children. A recent study from the U.S. Census Bureau referred to as the Household Pulse Survey (2020) confirmed “that the most socioeconomically disadvantaged households do not use online educational resources for distance learning at the same rates as higher-income households” (McElrath, 2020, para. 17). To put things into perspective, the same study highlights that “65.8% of people in households with incomes of less than \$50,000”

do not have access to technology at the same rather as “households with incomes of \$100,000 or more, with 85.8% of people with children reported using online resources for distance learning. (para. 6).

Emotional Support

The emotional effects of schools having to abruptly shut down during the pandemic remain to be fully discovered. What we do know is that the uncertainty of the times, the ongoing grim nature of the news, as well as a lack of social interaction took a toll on most of the student population. Research illustrates that “mental health supports are needed for students more than ever during the pandemic” (D’Costa et al., 2021, p. 343).

The commonalities in my research findings correlate with existing research. All of the participants in this study expressed some form of social unmet need during the height of the pandemic. Participants stated they did not feel connected to adults at school past academic relationships, some even claiming they did not know their guidance counselor. Maria, Timothy, and Mars expressed their relationships with adults were adequate, but they also indicated the relationships were superficial and solely focused on schoolwork, as they did not feel they could seek out adults at school for any type of emotional need. All participants relied on family and fostered friendships they had established before the pandemic. While Maria disclosed the efforts of her U.S. history teacher to ensure her students had a place to discuss how they felt and a place to connect during the pandemic, she admitted she did not participate in the class discussions due to her timidity. Nonetheless, she appreciated the availability.

Timothy, Gabriel, and Mateo met online with their friends often either to play online games or to simply connect. Mars joined online gaming communities on occasion to fill the void of social interaction. Andrea tried reaching out to new students but was unsuccessful and maintained the relationships she had established before the pandemic. Ash and Luna found it more difficult to navigate the loneliness of the pandemic as they did not have an extensive social circle prior to the pandemic.

As mentioned above, the *familismo* and *community cultural wealth* that Latinx students are accustomed to satisfied some of the social needs of the participants. That said, even with the presence of these nurturing family relationships, the participants still felt a need to develop connections with their peers. With schools being the main place where peer relationships are established, the lack of those relationships left a social void. Even without the emotional effects of the pandemic, adolescence already marks a difficult time in the development from childhood to adulthood. This period “sees significant shifts in interpersonal relationships, particularly with parents and peers” (Rogers et al., 2021, p. 44) During this developmental period in their lives, teenagers thrive on their relationships with their peers. The uncertainty of the pandemic seems to have exacerbated participants’ need for social interaction.

Self-Motivation

Due to the isolation and the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants in this study had to learn to rely on themselves. Not having the usual external supports from their teachers, extended family, or social circles, they found ways to trust in their own abilities to learn. While I did not anticipate the emergent theme of self-motivation to arise from the *testimonios*, I was pleased to learn these students

displayed such self-efficacy. From logging on to various online resources, seeking external sources to help with difficult subjects, to looking for ways to communicate and connect with others, these students stepped outside of their comfort zone. Most of the students looked for books to read of their own choosing and they recognized the need to push themselves to learn despite the circumstances.

Many scholars and theorists have varying theories about self-efficacy, specifically as it relates to traumatic events such as the pandemic. Some existing research is consistent with the findings in this study. A 2019 study reflected some consistencies as it confirmed “evidence showing that Coping Self-Efficacy (CSE) may bolster adaptive recovery following a traumatic event” (Mahoney & Benight, 2019, p. 481). In the case of the EL Latinx students interviewed, maybe the best way for them to cope with the traumatic shutdowns of the pandemic was to develop a sense of self-efficacy. This finding correlates with Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1977), which suggests that a basic human function is to adapt to changing environmental conditions. The circumstances induced by the pandemic presented an unfamiliar environment to the students. The students coped with the changes in their environment of online schooling and loss of social interactions by developing into more autonomous learners. “Coping is about how we deal with or overcome problems and difficulties” (Godor & Van der Hallen, 2022, p. 238), which is what the students in this study displayed.

The findings in this research highlight participating students’ ability to cope with their changing environment. Either by reaching out to their peers to collaborate, seeking outside resources such as YouTube to explain academic concepts, or finding books that would help them expand their vocabulary and academic writing, my participants

displayed a significant degree of ingenuity and self-efficacy in finding and utilizing the resources they needed. This leads me to wonder if these students would have done the same without the circumstances of the pandemic. Would they have been as self-directed and resilient as they turned out to be? Potentially this phenomenon could be further studied by other researchers so as to provide us with more conclusive results.

After finding these results, it made me wonder about the correlation between coping and motivation. Could it be that self-motivation was a coping mechanism for these students, a way to give them a sense of control when so much of their world was out of control? The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and its effects were catastrophic on a global scale never before seen. COVID disrupted the world, brought it to a halt. In response, I wondered if the trauma experienced by these students fostered the resilience that developed into self-efficacy. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), developed in 2003, defines resilience as “the personal qualities that enables one to thrive in the face of adversity” (Thomas, 2022, p. 76). I use the CD-RISC to define resilience because it is one of the most well-respected tests to measure resilience in the field. Perhaps it can shed light on the findings of this research.

The concept of resilience as it relates to these students and how they dealt with anxiety, stress and depression would be a good research focus for future studies. Typically, this test is administered by trained counselors to determine the degree of resilience in patients, with the aim of finding the best treatment for them. What I found interesting is the correlation among the population who experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and resilience. People who have PTSD typically score lower on the CD-RISC test, but it is worth noting that those scoring higher on the resilience scale can cope

with PTSD more effectively (Thomas, 2022). To many, the COVID-19 pandemic can be perceived as a traumatic event to the degree that it may have caused PTSD. Perhaps the participants I interviewed displayed a certain level of resilience, and maybe that is why they were able to cope with the pandemic in more effective ways, such as motivating themselves to take charge of their own learning. I am not a trained psychologist or a counselor, yet I still argue there is a compelling potential relationship in my data between coping mechanisms, resilience, and the experience of trauma that could have guided these students towards self-efficacy.

Emotional Side-Effects of the Pandemic

While we are not yet done with this epidemic, emerging research highlights the emotional side-effects of the pandemic which may be with us for years to come. For those EL Latinx students who participated in this study, it may be too soon to tell what the effects will be of the loss of social interaction, the abruptness of school shutdowns and the imminent fear of contracting the COVID virus. As Maria earnestly noted, "...we were online, and people were dying, everything was awful and it's hard to get online and pretend like everything was normal when it really isn't." Her words sum up the sentiment of the pandemic in a way that echoes both throughout the literature and our collective lived experience as COVID survivors.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association (2021) joined forces to "declare a National State of Emergency in Children's Mental Health" (para. 4). Their statement declared that the "worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health is inextricably tied to the stress brought on by COVID-19" (para. 2). With already an

increase of mental health issues in children and adolescents prior to 2020, the effects of the pandemic only exacerbated those concerns. The public announcement calls for policy makers across all facets of government to advocate for an increase in funding and mental health care accessibility for America's youth.

Aside from policy, additional research on a global scale has shown a rise in mental health issues stemming from the pandemic. A knowledge-synthesis study consisting of a compilation of eighteen research studies across several countries presented by the Meherali et al. (2021) indicated "most of the adverse effects come from the school closures, isolation, limited physical activities, social distancing, and imposition of a restriction of liberty" for youth (p. 14) The common theme in these studies reported that the "pandemic caused stress, worry, helplessness, and social and risky behavioral problems among children and adolescents (e.g., substance abuse, suicide, relationship problems, academic issues, and absenteeism from work)" (p. 1).

Summary and Recommendations

This research study formally began in 2020, but the intellectual curiosity that ultimately fueled this work began much earlier. My need to learn about the experiences of Latinx EL students was a result of the countless EL students I have encountered in my professional career, as well as my own personal history as an EL student. I hope this work has done my participants justice and that these findings can lay the groundwork for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations should contribute to expanding and deepening our understanding of the impact unexpected and unprecedented situations can have on Latinx EL students.

Larger Sample

Given the limited reach of this study, I think the applicability and utility of the findings could be expanded by doing similar work with a larger sample size. This could also help to verify whether certain trends I saw within my study (for example, participants' access to steady Wi-Fi) is an anomaly in the larger Latinx secondary EL population.

Language Acquisition in Virtual Environments

Further research should be conducted to determine the needs of Latinx ELs in respect to language acquisition in a virtual platform. There is a significant amount of research on language acquisition for ELs more broadly, and for Latinx ELs specifically (which I cover in part here in Chapters 1 and 2). However, there is a relative dearth of such research on language acquisition in specifically virtual environments, which will be very important for informing how we teach literacy to Latinx ELs in a post-COVID world.

Mental Health

Further research should be conducted for EL Latinx adolescents to understand and treat long-term mental health concerns that resulted from the pandemic. This is a needed area of inquiry for all age groups honestly, but one that I saw particular need for when conducting this work with secondary Latinx ELs.

Coping With Trauma

Lastly, further research can focus on the correlation among coping mechanisms after experiencing trauma and self-efficacy. This could provide insight for the mental health community on which coping mechanisms are healthiest and should be promoted amongst K-12 students more generally, as well as the secondary Latinx EL population of this study specifically.

Overall, more work remains to be done to provide adolescents the mental health support they need. The magnitude of the outcomes of the pandemic is not yet fully understood. In 2020, the world was immobilized by COVID, yet babies were born, children were just starting formal schooling, adolescents across the globe were transitioning from middle school to high school—and yet the world relentlessly continued. For the eight EL Latinx adolescents who participated in my study, and to those whose story remains to be told, may you find a silver lining in the challenges you may have experienced during the pandemic. May you find new strength in your own abilities and learn to rely even more fully on yourselves.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A

Informed Consent



CONSENTIMIENTO DE ASENTIMIENTO

Título del estudio: Experiencias de estudiantes de inglés latinx en edad secundaria en inclinación virtual durante la pandemia de COVID-19

Investigador Principal: Diana Sáenz

Email: d_s570@txstate.edu

Teléfono: 915-328-6216

Co-Investigador/Asesor de la Facultad: Dr. Rolf Straubhaar

Email: straubhaar@txstate.edu

Teléfono: 512-245-6055

Mi nombre es Diana Sáenz y soy una estudiante de doctorado en el Programa de Mejora Escolar de la Universidad Estatal de Texas. Estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación titulado Las experiencias de los estudiantes de inglés latinos en edad secundaria en el aprendizaje virtual durante la pandemia de COVID-19. Estoy haciendo este estudio porque quiero una idea de lo que los estudiantes experimentaron durante la pandemia de COVID-19 en su escolarización. Te pido que seas parte de este estudio porque eres o fuiste un estudiante de inglés latinx de edad secundaria en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual durante la pandemia. Este formulario te dirá un poco sobre el estudio para que puedas decidir si deseas participar en el estudio o no.

Si quieres participar en este estudio, se te pedirá que te reúnas conmigo a través de ZOOM para un testimonio (entrevista) individual que tardará una hora. Este estudio se llevará a cabo virtualmente y no me reuniré contigo en persona. Te haré algunas preguntas sobre tus experiencias durante la pandemia, como qué apoyos académicos y emocionales tuviste durante ese tiempo. Es posible que algunos estudiantes no quieran hablar de esto. No tienes que responder a ninguna pregunta que no quieras. También puedes dejar de estar en este estudio en cualquier momento.

También hay algunas cosas buenas que podrían sucederte si participas. Por ejemplo, esto le dará la oportunidad de discutir sus experiencias durante la pandemia. También podríamos encontrar información que ayudará a otros niños algún día. Además, le enviaré a su padre una tarjeta de regalo electrónica de \$ 20 por su participación en este estudio.

Por favor, habla sobre este estudio con tus padres antes de decidir si deseas estar en él. También les pediré a tus padres que den su permiso. Incluso si tus padres dicen que puedes estar en el estudio, aún puedes decir que no quieres. Está bien decir "no" si no quieres estar en el estudio. Nadie se enojará contigo. Si cambias de opinión más tarde y quieres parar, puedes hacerlo.

Puedes hacerme cualquier pregunta sobre este estudio la próxima vez que me veas. También puedes hablar con mi asesor, el Dr. Rolf Straubhaar, o con tu mamá o papá sobre este estudio. Después de que todas sus preguntas hayan sido respondidas, puede decidir si deseas estar en este estudio o no.



Si deseas estar en este estudio, por favor dé un acuerdo verbal. Si no quieres, por favor no des acuerdo verbal.

Acepto ser parte de este estudio de investigación y participar en el testimonio (entrevista) que tardara una hora. Sé que puedo dejar de participar en este estudio de investigación en cualquier momento. Este estudio me ha sido explicado y entiendo los riesgos involucrados. Algunas de las preguntas pueden hacerme sentir incómodo, pero si lo hacen, no tengo que responder a esa pregunta. I agree to participate in this study.

Sí _____ No _____

La entrevista será grabada en audio. Acepto que se grabe el audio. Si me sintiera incómodo en cualquier momento, puedo pedirle al investigador que deje de grabar.

Acepto que se grabe el audio.

Sí _____ No _____

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Appendix B

Parental Consent



CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO DE LOS PADRES/TUTORES

Título del estudio: Experiencias de estudiantes de inglés latinx en edad secundaria en inclinación virtual durante la pandemia de COVID-19

Investigador Principal: Diana Sáenz

Email: d_s570@txstate.edu

Teléfono: 915-328-6216

Co-Investigador/Asesor de la Facultad: Dr. Rolf Straubhaar

Email: straubhaar@txstate.edu

Teléfono: 512-245-6055

Estimado padre/tutor:

Mi nombre es Diana Sáenz y soy estudiante de doctorado en el Programa de Mejoramiento Escolar de la Universidad Estatal de Texas. Le pido permiso para incluir a su hijo/a en mi investigación. Este formulario de consentimiento le dará la información que necesitará para entender por qué se está realizando este estudio y por qué se invita a su hijo/a a participar. También describirá lo que su hijo/a tendrá que hacer para participar, así como cualquier riesgo o inconveniente conocido que su hijo/a pueda tener mientras participa. Le animo a que haga preguntas en cualquier momento. Si decide permitir que su hijo/a participe, se le pedirá que acepte verbalmente que le dé permiso a su hijo/a para participar en el estudio de investigación. Su respuesta será grabada en audio y servirá como documentación de su acuerdo. Se le entregará una copia de este formulario para que la conserve.

➤ PROPÓSITO Y ANTECEDENTES

El propósito de esta investigación es encontrar información que pueda ayudarnos a servir mejor a los estudiantes que aprenden inglés. Los resultados de este estudio pueden darnos más información sobre lo que los estudiantes experimentaron durante la pandemia. Como parte de mi disertación, me gustaría recopilar el testimonio (entrevista) de su hijo/a para ayudarnos a comprender las experiencias de su hijo/a durante la pandemia de COVID-19 en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual.

➤ PROCEDIMIENTOS

Este estudio incluirá una entrevista semiestructurada (testimonio) de una hora que se recopilará a través de ZOOM. En esta entrevista le haré preguntas a su hijo/a sobre sus apoyos académicos y sociales al comienzo de la pandemia de COVID-19 de 2020. La entrevista de su hijo/a será grabada, pero solo incluirá audio y no video.

Se estima que el estudio de investigación tardará aproximadamente una hora en completarse. En ningún momento su hijo/a se reunirá conmigo personalmente. Su hijo/a solo se reunirá conmigo a través de ZOOM.

➤ RIESGOS/MOLESTIAS

Su hijo/a puede sentirse incómodo sabiendo que habrá una grabación de audio de la entrevista, pero la grabación no incluirá video de su hijo/a. Puede pedir que su hijo/a no sea grabado en ningún momento. Su hijo/a también puede pedir que no lo graben en ningún momento. Usted puede sacar a su hijo/a del estudio en cualquier momento.

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➤ **ALCANCE DE LA CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

Se harán esfuerzos razonables para mantener la información personal en su registro de investigación privada y confidencial. Cualquier información identificable obtenida en relación con este estudio permanecerá confidencial y se divulgará solo con su permiso o según lo exija la ley. Los miembros del equipo de investigación y la Oficina de Investigación e Integridad (ORC) de la Universidad Estatal de Texas pueden acceder a los datos. El ORC monitorea los estudios de investigación para proteger los derechos y el bienestar de los participantes en la investigación.

Su nombre o el nombre de su hijo no se utilizarán en ningún informe escrito o publicación que resulte de esta investigación. Los datos se conservarán durante tres años (según las regulaciones federales) después de que se complete el estudio y luego se destruya.

➤ **BENEFICIOS**

No habrá ningún beneficio directo para su hijo/a al participar en este estudio. Sin embargo, la información obtenida de esta investigación puede ayudar a los profesionales de la educación a comprender mejor cómo los estudiantes que están en aprendizaje de Inglés y como se involucran en entornos académicos de aprendizaje virtual.

➤ **PAGO/COMPENSACIÓN**

Se le enviará una tarjeta de regalo de \$ 20 por correo electrónico al final de este estudio de investigación, como resultado de la participación de su hijo en este estudio.

➤ **PREGUNTAS**

Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud sobre su participación en este estudio, puede comunicarse con la investigadora principal, Diana Sáenz al 915-328-6216 o d_s570@txstate.edu.

Proyecto 8418 fue aprobado por el IRB del Estado de Texas el July 5th 2022. Cualquier pregunta o inquietud sobre la investigación, los derechos de los participantes de la investigación y / o las lesiones relacionadas con la investigación a los participantes deben dirigirse a la Presidenta del IRB, Dra. Denise Gobert al 512-716-2652 – (lasser@txstate.edu) o a Monica Gonzales, Gerente Reguladora del IRB 512-245-2314 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTACIÓN DEL CONSENTIMIENTO

He leído este formulario y he decidido que mi hijo/a puede participar en el proyecto descrito. Sus propósitos generales, los detalles de la participación y los posibles riesgos han sido explicados a mi satisfacción. Discutiré este estudio de investigación con mi hijo y explicaré los procedimientos que se llevarán a cabo. Entiendo que puedo retirar a mi hijo/a en cualquier momento.

Doy permiso verbal para que mi hijo/a participe en este estudio de investigación:

Yes _____ No _____

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La participación de su hijo en este proyecto de investigación se grabará utilizando dispositivos de grabación de audio. Las grabaciones ayudarán a documentar con precisión sus respuestas. Tiene derecho a rechazar la grabación de audio. Seleccione una de las siguientes opciones:

Doy permiso para la grabación de audio de mi hijo/a durante el proceso de entrevista:

Sí _____ No _____

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Appendix C

Email to Parents

Para: Correo electrónico de los padres

Desde d_s570@txstate.edu

CCO:

Asunto: Invitación a la participación en la investigación: Experiencias de estudiantes de inglés latinos en edad secundaria en la inclinación virtual durante la pandemia de COVID-19

Queridos Ppadres/madres de familia:

Este mensaje de correo electrónico es una solicitud aprobada para participar en investigaciones que ha sido aprobada por la Junta de Revisión Institucional del Estado de Texas (IRB). Gracias por su interés en que su hijo/a participe en este estudio de investigación. Este estudio se centrará en las experiencias de los estudiantes de inglés durante la pandemia de COVID-19 en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual. Este estudio es importante porque informará las mejores prácticas para apoyar a los estudiantes de inglés en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual. Para que su hijo/a participe en este estudio, su hijo/a debe cumplir con todos los siguientes criterios:

- Los participantes deben haber sido estudiantes de secundaria de (6º a 12º grado) durante el inicio de la pandemia en marzo de 2020 (de 11 a 18 años)
- Los participantes deben haber sido identificados como estudiantes del idioma inglés durante el inicio de la pandemia en marzo de 2020
- El idioma nativo de los participantes debe ser el español
- Los participantes deben identificarse como Latinx o Hispanos
- Los participantes deben haber estado asistiendo a una escuela pública o charter en Texas durante el inicio de la pandemia en marzo de 2020

Como parte de mi investigación, me gustaría obtener el testimonio de su hijo/a en una entrevista que tardara una hora para dar una mejor idea de las experiencias de su hijo/a durante la pandemia de COVID-19 en un entorno de aprendizaje virtual.

La entrevista de su hijo/a será grabada en audio para fines de transcripción.

Se estima que el estudio de investigación tardará aproximadamente una hora en completarse. En ningún momento su hijo/a se reunirá conmigo personalmente. Su hijo/a solo se reunirá conmigo a través de ZOOM.

Se harán esfuerzos razonables para mantener la información personal en su registro de investigación privada y confidencial. Cualquier información identificable obtenida en relación con este estudio permanecerá confidencial y se divulgará solo con su permiso o según lo exija la ley.



El nombre de su hijo no se usará en ningún informe escrito o publicación que resulte de esta investigación.

Se enviará una tarjeta de regalo de \$ 20 por correo electrónico al final del proyecto de investigación como agradecimiento por la participación de su hijo en este estudio.

Para continuar, lea el formulario de consentimiento informado de los padres que incluí como archivo adjunto.

Luego tendré que organizar una reunión de Zoom con usted para que podamos revisar ese formulario y usted pueda dar su consentimiento verbal. La reunión de Zoom le ayudará a aclarar cualquier pregunta que pueda tener sobre este proyecto de investigación.

Por favor, envíeme una hora en la que esté disponible para reunirse para que pueda enviarle una invitación a la reunión de Zoom. Esta reunión va a durar unos 30 minutos. Establezca una hora para reunirse entre las 9 a.m. y las 6 p.m. de lunes a viernes o los sábados de 9 a.m. a 5 p.m y luego le mandare el enlace de ZOOM para reunirnos.

Sería mejor si tiene a su hijo/a con usted durante esa reunión para que pueda explicarle qué esperar y también pueda revisar el formulario de consentimiento para su hijo/a. Esta llamada será grabada en audio y servirá como documentación para dar su consentimiento verbal para que su hijo/a participe.

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta investigación, también puede llamarme al 915-328-6216 o enviarme un correo electrónico a d_s570@txstate.edu.

Proyecto 8418 fue aprobado por el IRB del estado de Texas el July 5th, 2022. Las preguntas o inquietudes pertinentes sobre la investigación, los derechos de los participantes de la investigación y / o las lesiones relacionadas con la investigación a los participantes deben dirigirse a la presidenta del IRB, Dra. Denise Gobert 512-716-2652 - (dgobert@txstate.edu) o a Monica Gonzales, Gerente Reguladora de IRB 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

Gracias.

Diana Saenz



Appendix D

Interview Protocol



INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. The purpose of this testimonio is to learn about the experiences of Secondary-Aged Latinx English Learner students during the COVID-19 pandemic that were in a virtual learning environment in a TX school. Specifically, I want to understand what academic and emotional supports you had during the pandemic. I'd like to remind you that all interviews (testimonios) will be audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis, using pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants. This interview will last about an hour. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Pseudonym (name you'd like me to use for you in my dissertation):

1. First, tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - A. What grade you were in when pandemic started in March of 2020?
 - B. Who was living at your home at that time?
 - C. Do you have any brothers/sisters that lived with you at that time? Older or younger?
2. How long had you been enrolled in a school in the United States when the pandemic started?
3. What would you rate your level of English proficiency as in March of 2020? Do you feel like it's improved?
4. During the pandemic, did you have someone at home that could help you with classwork? How would you describe the influence and role of your family in your schooling?
5. How do you feel about your academic experience during the pandemic?
6. During the pandemic, were your teachers supportive of your needs? Can you give some examples?
7. In March of 2020, did you have a computer/laptop for yourself? If not, how long did it take you to get one?
8. Were you able to attend online classes? What would you say your attendance was like?
9. Did you feel connected to anyone at school during the first year of the pandemic?
10. Reflecting on the past two years and your education, in what ways could the school/teachers better support you during virtual learning?

Is there anything that you have not mentioned that you'd like to include about your academic experience in 2020 and 2021?

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