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Perceptions of Students With and Without Limited Formal Schooling

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Perceptions of Students With and Without Limited Formal Schooling

Sarah L. Schmidt de Carranza

**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Educational Doctorate Degree
in Educational Leadership**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato
Mankato, Minnesota**

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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the perceptions that refugee and non-refugee English language learners hold of their academic performance and their perceived sense of membership in a school community. Students currently served in EL programs in grades 9-12 in a large urban school district were invited to participate in the study. Student perceptions were measured using the Morgan Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES) and Goodenow Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale.

Unexpectedly, the results indicated that differences of perceptions of student efficacy and school membership between the two groups of students were not statistically significant. There was no correlation between efficacy and school membership for refugee students, and a small correlation between the same variables in the non-refugee student group. Student responses to open-ended questions were also coded for emerging themes around student perception of academic performance and school community.

The results from the study do, however, serve to provide new perspective around the experience of Karen students in a large, urban, district in the Midwest. This is unique information, and possibly the first such study to measure Karen students' perspectives of both academic achievement and school membership.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Immigration to the United States. The United States is a nation of immigrants. During the peak of immigration in the early 1900s, millions of people came to this country in search of a better life and better opportunities for their children. (Advocates for Human Rights, 2011). Although immigration decreased significantly after the 1900s, and the systems and laws in place became much more regulated and complex over time, in recent years the number of immigrants have again increased significantly. It is estimated that immigrants now are arriving to the United States in numbers not seen since the peak in the 1900s. (Freeman & Freeman, 2003; Advocates for Human Rights, 2011).

An important fact to note is that more of those migrating to the United States of America (USA), than ever before, are immigrating as refugees and asylum seekers (Advocates for human rights, 2011). In the 2012 fiscal year, approximately 119,630 of 990,553, or roughly 12% of lawfully admitted immigrants to the United States were admitted as refugees and asylum seekers, (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2013) a statistic which has held steady for the last decade (Advocates for Human Rights, 2011).

Immigration to Minnesota. While nationwide immigration statistics indicate that the majority of immigrants to the United States are coming from Latin America, particularly Mexico, (Minneapolis Foundation, 2010), and the vast majority, nearly 80%, of English Language Learners (ELL) nationwide are of Hispanic origin (Lazarin, 2006),

the Minnesota demographic is distinctly different. Minnesota has a lower percentage of foreign-born residents than the national average, but the percentage of refugees residing in Minnesota is significantly greater; in fact, Minnesota is home to a significantly larger percentage of refugees and asylum seekers than one would expect to see based on the percentages of immigrants admitted nationally (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006; Minneapolis Foundation 2010). It is estimated that, in a given year, 25%-50% of new immigrants to Minnesota are refugees (Minneapolis Foundation, 2010, Davies, 2004) and that Minnesota's overall population of refugees is roughly 25% (Advocates for Human Rights, 2011), while roughly 12% of immigrants nationwide are refugees or asylees (Department of Homeland Security, 2012). This is due in large part to the significant number of voluntary agencies (VolAgs) in Minnesota that work with the United States State Department to rehome refugees that are approved to come to the USA (DeRusha, 2011, Davies, 2004, Wilder Research Center, 2000, Zittlow, 2012). These agencies provide a variety of assistance such as finding affordable housing, accessing medical care, and searching for employment (Davies, 2004; Advocates for Human Rights, 2006).

The resettlement of refugees to Minnesota is not a recent phenomena; since the 1970s, many Asian immigrants and refugees of various backgrounds including Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese, have come to call Minnesota home. This is attributed to the end of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War (Holston, 2012). This phenomena, however, is not exclusive to the Asian population residing in Minnesota. Starting in the 1990s, many refugees from Eastern Africa, in particular, Somalia, resettled in Minnesota after fleeing Somalia's civil war (Holston, 2012), and this influx continues today (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2015) Additionally, there has also been

ongoing immigration of Hispanic and Latino immigrants for economic and political reasons; for instance, the example of the unaccompanied minors fleeing gang violence in the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Associated Press, 2014).

Currently, Minnesota is home to the largest Somali and the second-largest Hmong population in the United States (Advocates for Human Rights, 2014). Additionally, Minnesota has become a resettlement destination for many ethnic KaRen and Karenni refugees from Myanmar, and has currently the largest and fastest-growing population of KaRen refugees outside of Myanmar (Stone, 2012; Karen Organization of Minnesota, n.d.)

This immigration, refugee placement, and asylum seeking has amounted to a 300% growth in immigrants living in Minnesota over the last two decades (Zittlow, 2102). Unfortunately, Minnesota has been named the state with the worst gaps in education and other indicators of well being between white and nonwhite/immigrant residents, especially in the areas of “employment, health and civic engagement, and educational outcomes” (Advocates for Human Rights, 2014, p.5). Additionally, immigrants of color living in Minnesota experience discrimination; particularly Muslim immigrants (Bigelow, 2008; Advocates for Human Rights, 2014). This data is especially important in urban areas, where the largest amount of English Language Learners reside (Zittlow, 2012).

The refugee condition. Refugees and asylum seekers come to the United States, or any other host country, in order to escape extreme conditions such as humanitarian emergencies in their home country (United States Department of State, 2013). In order to

be designated as a refugee, one must meet very specific criteria. The legally recognized definition of refugee, drafted in the Refugee Convention of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), defines a refugee as “...someone who is outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,” (UNCHR, 2012a, p. 2); however, it is also recognized that “...people fleeing conflicts or generalized violence are also generally considered as refugees, although sometimes under legal mechanisms other than the convention,” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2012a, p.12).

School-age immigrants and refugees. As immigrant populations increase, so do the numbers of children born to them. School age children of immigrants make up approximately 25% of the total population of school-aged children currently in this country. (Urban Institute, 2006).

Immigrant children bring a unique set of skills and needs to the table with respect to their schooling. In recent years in particular, the number of students coming from homes labeled as “Limited English Proficient” (LEP) has increased significantly. According to Freeman & Freeman (2001), the LEP, or English Language Learner (ELL) population of school age children “has grown at a much faster pace than that of native English speaking children. The general school population has increased by only 24%, the ELL population has increased by over 105%” (Freeman & Freeman, 2001, p.5)

Not only has the immigrant/ELL learner population of students grown faster than the native-born non-ELL population of students, but the overall percentage of students

identified as ELL learners has increased to a larger share of the overall school aged population; it is estimated that children of immigrants, which includes ELL learners, to be approximately 25% of the population of all children currently (Urban Institute, 2006).

English language learner student performance. Although the estimated number of children of immigrants, at 25% of the total number of school-age students, is an impressive portion of the school-age population, it was not until the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 that ELL learners and their teachers received intensive scrutiny nationwide. Under NCLB, ELL learners became a discrete subgroup identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). As Manna (2011) explains, prior to this legislation, ELL learners were not included in the overall picture of data used to measure student achievement. As a result, they were “underserved and underchallenged” (p. 128). Therefore, once ELL students became a subgroup to be measured in compliance with NCLB, their achievement, or lack thereof, became very apparent.

There have been many attempts to explain why ELL learners do not achieve academic parity with their non-ELL peers. One reason why the ELL subgroup achieves at lower levels than their mainstream counterparts relates to the criteria for inclusion in this subgroup. The criterion to be placed in the category of LEP, or Limited English proficient, requires that one must not be proficient in English. Unfortunately, because of the fluid nature of students arriving to the country as new ELLs as well as students attaining proficiency and therefore being exited from this group, attempts to measure success rates have been significantly complicated (Manna, 2011). Once a student reaches proficiency in English he/she can be reclassified as non-LEP and placed in the same

category of students from their same ethnic background. Therefore, ELL students, by definition in NCLB high stakes testing, are not proficient.

Academic language of assessment. Another reason why ELL students struggle to meet targets on standardized tests is the highly academic language that standardized testing requires. Cummins (1979; 1999) distinguishes between the two types of language that students acquire when learning a new language: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The former, BICS, refers to the informal everyday linguistic tasks that one needs to complete daily. Examples of BICS include social, non-academic tasks such as asking for directions, holding an informal conversation with a peer or colleague, navigating the lunch line in the cafeteria at school. CALP, on the other hand, is more difficult to acquire. CALP refers to academic tasks such as academic reading and writing skills to navigate a course textbook, write a research report, and usage of formal speech patterns to engage in a cognitively demanding academic discussion or debate. Students require far less time to acquire BICS than they do CALP (Collier & Thomas, 1999; Cummins, 1979). Because standardized tests are written and designed to assess academic language and content, BICS alone would not sufficiently demonstrate student proficiency as measured on a high stakes test. This is problematic considering that "...immigrant children often acquire peer-appropriate conversational fluency in English within about 2 years, but it requires considerably longer (5-10 years) to catch up academically in English" (Cummins, 1999 p.1). Additionally, in order to catch up, ELLs need to "accomplish more than one year's achievement for six years in a row to eventually close

the 40-percentile gap between them and the native English speakers” (Thomas & Collier, 1999, p1).

Heterogeneity of ELL population. Another complication faced by ELL students is that this subgroup is very heterogeneous in nature, which gives rise to unique challenges to address the wildly divergent needs of the students that comprise this group (Manna, 2011). These needs include varying degrees of literacy skills in their first language (L1), which impacts the level of support needed to acquire English, as well as varying degrees of school skills that students may or may not have acquired in their countries of origin. Not only are ELL students heterogeneous in terms of language and cultural background, they are also heterogeneous in terms of experience with content and language learning in both their first and second languages. For example, according to Freeman and Freeman (2003), there are three subcategories of learners that comprise the ELL subgroup. First, there are newcomer students who come to the USA with adequate formal schooling; meaning that they are cognitively comparable to their peers in terms of content knowledge in their first language, but may lack knowledge of how to perform these cognitive and academic operations in English. The next group is newcomer students who come to the USA without adequate formal schooling. This group includes students such as refugees who have limited or interrupted formal schooling, or migrant workers who may not be able to attend school year round due to their work demands. The third group consists of ELL students who were born in the USA or came to the USA at a very young age that are still not proficient in reading and writing, although much, if not all, of their schooling has taken place in the United States.

Students with limited/interrupted formal education. Although all three groups are important, the focus of this research is the second subgroup described previously: students who arrive in the United States having experienced limited or interrupted formal schooling in their home countries. Because they have not had the opportunity to study in any language, they lack age appropriate academic content knowledge and literacy skills in both their first and additional language(s) (DeCapua, 2010).

This subgroup of students, known as ELL Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (ELL SLIFE) students, are comprised of secondary-aged children who are new to the United States (Alcala, 2000). As students who are learning English as a new language, they do have some of the same needs as the more traditional adequately schooled ELL population. Both groups must build their linguistic capacity in English, for example, acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical structures in English. However, ELL SLIFE have additional needs that must be met as well in order for their learning experience in the United States to be successful. These differences include emerging alphabetic print literacy, emerging age-appropriate academic content knowledge, and emerging school skills. (New York State Department of Education, 2011). In addition, ELL SLIFE students may not be motivated to learn in ways that are considered traditional in the United States due to these differences (Decapua and Marshall, 2011). For example, many ELL SLIFE learners view learning as a collective, rather than an individual effort due to the cultural norms of their countries of origin (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). These cultural and cognitive differences that ELL SLIFE have with mainstream students may also contribute to the high dropout rate among ELL students in the USA. This is especially true in light of the increased dropout rate among ELL

students. Several studies (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2009, Robertson and LaFond, 2008, Advocates for Human Rights, 2010) have highlighted the correlation between ELL status and school dropout events. According to this research, it is estimated that ELL students are 4 to 5 times more likely to drop out of school than their grade level mainstream peers. Even more concerning is the overrepresentation of ELL SLIFE students within the context of ELL students dropping out: it is estimated that, while ELL SLIFE students make up about 6% of all foreign born ELL students, they account for somewhere between 38% and 70% of all ELL dropouts (Fry, 2005, p.9).

This data when combined with data regarding refugee employment data is critical to the long term well being of ELL SLIFE learners. According to Codell, Hill, Wolts & Gore, (2011) as the time one spends as a refugee increases, the likelihood that he or she will be able to maintain employment decreases. If students do not finish high school, and their likelihood for maintaining employment has decreased, the prospects for success in the future are indeed grim.

Refugees and SLIFE. Because refugees and asylum seekers come to their new host country based on humanitarian emergencies, it is not uncommon for refugee children to also be ELL SLIFE students. Examples of families fleeing war, famine, natural disasters, genocide, and other humanitarian crises are reported nearly daily. Children fleeing from their home country and into refugee camps may or may not have access to education in the camps as they wait for visas to move on to their host countries (DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009). Consequently, a higher incidence of refugees can be an indication of a higher incidence of ELL SLIFE students. As ELL SLIFE students are not as widely studied as their mainstream counterparts, and comprise

a highly fluid and heterogeneous population, much can be learned about their views and attitudes towards their American public school experience to attempt to improve their experience and outlook. (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004).

There are many ELL programs throughout the country that are being touched by the needs of ELL SLIFE students which preexisting programs may or may not be set up to address (New York Department of Education, 2011). ELL SLIFE students, whose needs lie beyond language acquisition alone, typically are placed in ESL classes that are not designed with their unique needs in mind (Ruiz de Velasco, Fix, & Chu-Clewell, 2000; Taylor, 2008). SLIFE students tend to settle more in urban areas than suburban and rural areas. Thusly, information about how ELL SLIFE students are being served and their impressions and opinions of this service from the point of view of the ELL SLIFE students and teachers of SLIFE will be beneficial for districts that service ELL SLIFE students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the similarities and differences in how English Language Learners (ELL) with limited and/or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) differ from their non-SLIFE ELL peers view regarding their perceptions of their educational environment and attainment in an American public school in a large, urban district using quantitative data.

Hypotheses

As ELL SLIFE and non-SLIFE ELLs have different unique needs, it can be hypothesized that they also may have different and unique perceptions of facets of their

experience in academic settings in their new country. Thusly, the following hypotheses will be tested.

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that ELL SLIFE students and their non-SLIFE ELL peers would report differences in perceptions of their academic self-concept as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire.

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that ELL SLIFE students and their non-SLIFE ELL peers would report differences in perceptions of the factors of welcoming in a school climate as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire.

Hypothesis 3. It was hypothesized that ELL SLIFE students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self-concept data and welcoming school climate data.

Hypothesis 4. It was hypothesized that non-ELL SLIFE students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self-concept data and welcoming school climate data.

Significance of the Research

The information gathered regarding student affect and perception in this study can be used by teachers and programmers to revise current curriculum and climate aspect in their schools and districts and implement a more culturally competent set of strategies that make all students feel welcomed and valued in class and in school, regardless of background or label. The juxtaposition of both SLIFE ELL student and non-SLIFE ELL student data offers a multi-faceted perspective on how students with limited formal schooling fare both academically and emotionally in a large urban district when

compared to their peers. In addition, this knowledge will help schools and districts align their school environments more closely with the characteristics that are most helpful for ELL SLIFE students. This will then, in turn, create environments where students are more likely to maintain enrollment, experience success, and leave school prepared with a skill set that will benefit them in further study and the work force.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. A key limitation of this study is that generalization of results will not be possible due to the widely diverse nature of ELL students, especially SLIFE students. SLIFE students come from such widely different backgrounds that replicating the study may not be possible in other school districts or regions as the population available for a purposive sample may be completely different than the population in this study.

Delimitations. Delimitations for this study include the inclusion of perspective of students only. Neither students' families, nor community leaders or organizations will be included. Only Language Academy schools servicing all 4 levels of ELL students are to be included. Schools servicing levels 3 and above only will not be included in the study. Only high-school aged students in grades 9-12 will be included in the study, no middle or elementary grades will be included. Lastly, no alternative programming sites will be included due to the potential differences in environment. In order to reduce all potential bias as much as possible, one site that would be eligible for inclusion under the criteria for selection will be excluded as it is the site where the author of this study is employed.

Definition of Key Terms

Academic content knowledge. The knowledge one obtains from instruction in a formal academic setting in an academic discipline.

Asylee. A person who leaves their homeland without prior approval to immigrate to a new host country not by choice but out of necessity due to armed conflict, political or religious persecution, or other perilous situations

Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). The cognitively undemanding language tasks that one uses on a daily basis with peers in order to interact socially in non-academic settings such as a cafeteria or to play a sport.

Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The cognitively demanding language and register used in academic texts and settings such as in a classroom where students are studying a grade-level subject.

English language learner. (ELL). A student who is learning English as a new language who does not speak English as their native language. Interchangeable acronyms include: ESL, EL, and LEP.

English learner. (EL). A student who is learning English as a new language who does not speak English as their native language. Interchangeable acronyms include ESL, ELL, LEP, and MLL.

English as a second language. (ESL). A term used to describe both students learning English as a new language as well as the classes designed for the language development of these students. Interchangeable Acronyms include ELL, EL, and LEP.

First Language. (L1). The language that an English Language Learner student learns at home, and/or in their country of origin.

Limited English proficiency. (LEP). A descriptor of students who are learning English as a new language. This term typically refers to the subgroup created for inclusion in results of high stakes tests under No Child Left Behind. Interchangeable acronyms include ESL, ELL, and EL.

Limited formal schooling. (LFS). A term to describe students learning English as a new language who have also had gaps or interruptions in their education prior to arriving in their current country. Interchangeable acronyms include SIFE, SLIFE, and LFS-ELL.

Multilingual Language Learner. (MLL). A student who is working to become bi- or multilingual in two or more languages.

Non-SLIFE English language learner. (Non-SLIFE ELL). An English Language learner who does not have interruptions or gaps in their formal schooling.

Oracy. The ability to express oneself fluently in speech according to the customs of one's culture.

Refugee. A person who leaves their homeland with prior approval to immigrate to a new host country not by choice but out of necessity due to armed conflict, political or religious persecution, or other perilous situations.

Second Language. (L2). The language that a multilingual student learns after their first language. In the case of English Language Learner students, the L2 is English.

Students with interrupted formal education. (SIFE). Students who have not had the opportunity to study consistently in their home culture and/or language. Students in this category are typically secondary-aged, and a minimum of two years behind their

grade level peers in both language and content knowledge. Interchangeable acronyms include SLIFE, LFS, and LFS-ELL and ELL SLIFE.

Students with limited or interrupted formal education. (SLIFE). Students who have not had the opportunity to study consistently in their home culture and/or language. Students in this category are typically secondary-aged, and a minimum of two years behind their grade level peers in both language and content knowledge.

Interchangeable acronyms include SIFE, LFS, and LFS-ELL, and ELL SLIFE.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Population of English Language Learners

Immigrant and English language learner population growth. The population of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States is growing rapidly; it is in fact outpacing the non-English Language Learner school-age population significantly (Reyes & Her, 200, Consetino de Cohen & Chu-Cluwell, 2007, Urban Institute, 2014). It is currently estimated that children of immigrants represent 25% of all children in the United States, (Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools, 2011, p.1) and that not only are ELL students the most quickly growing subgroup (Consetino de Cohen & Chu-Cluwell, 2007), they have grown 65% since 1993. In contrast, the non-ELL school population has grown only 9% (Reyes & Her, 2010). Additional studies indicate that this is a conservative estimate; Freeman and Freeman (2003), for example, estimate the figure to be 105% growth of the ELL school population.

Heterogeneity of the English language learner population. English language learners are often thought of as a diverse population in terms of their “otherness” from the mainstream culture, but what is less researched and less often taken into account is the wildly heterogeneous nature of the ELL population. Within this population include both legal and undocumented immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, the potential for Native populations who do not use English, and a wide range of academic backgrounds, experiences in print literacy, and social and emotional experiences, including trauma. In fact, it could be argued that the label of ELL is so broad that it is not as helpful as one would think. For example, the differences that ELL students bring to the table are wildly

diverse, and may even be more important than their commonalities (Rance-Roney, 2009, Lee, 2010, Garcia & DiCerbo, 2004, Niehaus & Adelson, 2013, Han, 2006).

Additionally, all students come with a different skill set (Bigelow & Viogradav, 2011), and it is important to remember to remember that “...No two ELLs are the same. Each student’s exposure to English, his or her educational history, and the socioeconomic level of his or her family are among the factors that influence student success” (Flynn & Hill, 2005, p.4). When examining this information, and taking into account the vast differences between individual ELL students, one realizes that “there is no typical [ELL] child” (Garcia & DiCerbo, 2000, p.3). Thusly, it is clear that there are additional important factors that influence the ELL learner’s experience at school; for instance, students from different racial backgrounds self-reported widely different feelings about their perceived school success according to their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Anderson & Niehaus, 2013).

Although ELL students are grouped together for data analysis purposes, this does not mean that they are limited to a singular outcome as a result of belonging to this group. For example, there are the long held beliefs and/or stereotypes of Asians being the ‘model minority’ (Moon, Kang, & An, 2009), in terms of quickly acculturating to the norms of the dominant culture both linguistically and culturally. However, exceptions to this stereotype are evident. For instance, certain populations of immigrants and students from Southeast Asia, such as the Hmong, may be an exception to this stereotype (Salomone, 2010a). Data indicate that Southeast Asian students are far less likely than their East and South Asian counterparts to complete a college degree, and many do not finish High School (Salomone, 2010a).

Challenges Faced by English Learners

ELL students are the fastest growing population of K-12 students in the United States currently (Cosentino de Cohen & Chu-Clewell, 2007), and are usually born to families of first or second-generation immigrants. As a result, there are many barriers that families and students; particularly those of a refugee background, must overcome upon immigrating to the United States (Duguay, 2012).

Poverty. The incidence of poverty and health problems is significantly higher in schools with a higher percentage of ELL students than in schools where there is not a large ELL student population (Cosentino de Cohen & Chu-Clewell, Maddox, 2010). This incidence is not a causal relationship; rather, it indicates that immigrant families tend to settle in neighborhoods of low socioeconomic status (Crosnoe & Lopez-Turley, 2011, Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Consequently, immigrant students then face higher levels of poverty than American-born students (Suarez-Orozco, et.al, 2010, p.603, Urban Institute, 2014, Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools, 2011), and attend schools where there many students are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, resulting in poor learning conditions and high mobility (Garcia & DiCerbo, 2000, Crosnoe & Lopez-Turley, 2011). In addition to negative student perception, emotional engagement and achievement are at risk, especially so for male students (Feliciano, 2012). Poverty and the conditions of poverty have far reaching effects for ELL students; their “forced assimilation to neighborhoods with under resourced schools”, (Suarez-Orozco, 2010, p.203), requires that they “capitalize on public education if they are to become upwardly mobile”, (Crosnoe & Lopez-Turley, 2011, p. 131). This, then, affects educational outcomes for ELL students later on in their careers; as students living in poverty have

vastly different educational trajectories than those who do not (Cummins, 2007, Gallego & Wise, 2011). This is especially important for refugee populations, who experience an inverse correlation of time spent as a refugee and educational and earning potential as adults, as Codell, Hillm & Woltz (2011) explain: "...this disadvantage is present even after for controlling for education level and English proficiency, suggesting that factors inherent in the refugee experience itself represent an additional barrier to meaningful work" (Codell, Hill & Woltz, 2011, p. 221). This competition for resources in already resource-scarce environments has the unfortunate effect of widening an already existing chasm between ELL and native-English speaking students in the same environment, where "divisions are deepening as resources become scarce and dominant group members feel threatened by the influx of newcomers who speak little English and appear to selectively acculturate to the new environment" (Faltis & Valdes, 2011, p.286).

Linguistic adjustments. Acculturation to a new country is neither an easy nor a simple process (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Immigrants and refugees need to adjust to a number of new cultural norms, not the least of which is learning a new language. Immigrants overwhelmingly recognize that English is necessary for life in the United States (Farkas, et.al, 2003), however, learning a new language is a lengthy process, and can be impeded by lack of access to, or long waiting lists for English classes (Duguay, 2012, Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Moreover, learning a language is more than just learning the grammatical rules, structures, and vocabulary; it is linked to identity, culture, and shared experience as well, as Salomone (2010) explains:

"Language is a mechanism of intra-group communication and representation. A shared language and the way it is used reflect shared reflect shared patterns of thinking,

including values, attitudes, and prejudices, and of behaving. It links individuals to the past and to each other,” (Salomone, 2010a, p.71).

Family separation. In recent history, there has been a great deal of notoriety about the phenomena of undocumented unaccompanied minors coming to the United States. While this situation illustrates the desperation that many families in Central America are facing currently, their stories are not so unique when examined on a worldwide scale. It is currently estimated that there are roughly 51,000,000 refugees and other displaced persons worldwide (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Of this figure, somewhere between 45% and 55% of these people are thought to be children (UNHCR, 2012b). One singular cause cannot be named; there are “a confluence of factors, including massive poverty in the global south and east; a demographic deficit in much of the north and west, and economic globalization worldwide are producing new migrations and refugee flows (Salomone, 2010a, p.53).

Once settled in the USA, another factor that can affect student well-being is immigration status. It is estimated that there are currently 11.5 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, and many of them are children, or have small children born here (Romero, 2012). The stress of being undocumented can have negative affects on children and their academic performance, especially in areas where immigration raids are taking place. (Capps, Castañeda, Chaudry & Santos, 2007).

Trauma. Immigrants, and refugees in particular, are at greater risk for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hodes, 2000, Birnam & Chan, 2008). Although there is a higher incidence of trauma and PTSD in refugee youth, it is not the case that all refugees have PTSD, nor are all who have PTSD refugees (Hodes, 2000, Jaycox, 2002).

This higher incidence can be attributed to experience of trauma at some point in their immigration journey, which is, unfortunately, not an uncommon event:

Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, (2010) note,

Being a young refugee involves growing up in contexts of violence and uncertainty, experiencing the trauma of loss, and attempting to create a future in an uncertain world. The refugee experience is one of being cast out, being socially excluded, where belonging, to family, community, and country is always at risk.

Resettlement in a third country offers a safe haven for building a stable life and hopeful future to belong (p.1399).

As a result of their having experienced difficult circumstances, refugee children develop many coping strategies; however, this does not mean that they may not experience mental health symptoms later in life (Lustig, et.al, 2004).

The experience of fleeing one's homeland and resettling in a new country brings with it its own set of emotionally difficult experiences. The triple-trauma paradigm (Advocates for Human Rights, 2014) explains the ways in which immigrants may be exposed to trauma in their journey to a new homeland. In this process, immigrants may be exposed to trauma in the country of origin; in the journey to their new country; or in the relocation to their new country.

Refugees exposed to trauma in their country of origin flee their countries to escape persecution and violence; in fact, the legal definition of refugee is that one has a "well founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2012a). However, many children

who do not fit the legal definition of refugee are also fleeing from problematic circumstances such as poverty, social unrest, and crime (UNHCR, 2012a).

Refugees may also experience trauma in the migration journey. Leaving behind all that one knows to some to an unknown land can be emotionally traumatic for anyone; and for children in particular, it can be a “shock sufficiently large to affect the educational outcomes of immigrants” (Crosnoe & Lopez Turley, 2011 p. 137). In addition to the shock of leaving the familiar behind, youth, and Hispanic youth in particular, are at “high risk of exposure to violence at all points of the migration process” (Gunino, Nadeem, & Lau (2011). During migration, youth are exposed to high levels of danger, with assaults and robberies being fairly common depending on where and how one is migrating (Jaycox et.al, 2002). Rape of female migrants, particularly undocumented migrants, is also a prevalent form of abuse (Amnesty International, 2010).

Trauma for refugees within the country of resettlement can take varied forms, and is equally as damaging as trauma taking place in the country of origin and during the migration process (Correa-Velez, et.al, 2010). Feelings of isolation and social exclusion (Correa-Velez, et.al, 2010) are common as refugee youth struggle to make sense of their new environments. It is common for immigrants and refugees to resettle in low socioeconomic status neighborhoods (Crosnoe & Lopez-Turley, 2011, Cervantes & Cordova, 2011) where there is a higher likelihood of violence than in neighborhoods that are from a higher socioeconomic status (Jaycox et al, 2002).

Unfortunately, students and families with limited English proficiency are less likely to seek out mental health services for a variety of reasons. Families may not have the economic resources to seek treatment, or may be facing cultural and linguistic

barriers. In some cases a language barrier may prevent access to such services, and in others, cultural taboos around mental health treatment may prevent one from seeking such assistance (Thao, 2009, Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools, 2011).

The need for ongoing support for refugee students and families is clear. As Codell, Hill, Woltz, & Gore (2011) explain,

Refugee resettlement represents the end state of a process of upheaval and flight from persecution in a hostile country to the establishment of refuge in a welcoming host country. It is assumed that a new host country will not only provide safety, but also future opportunities for permanent residence. Successfully escaping a conflict-torn region, however, is often characteristically tempered by new struggles as refugees negotiate the process of re-establishing a livelihood in a country in which they have little familiarity (p. 216).

Acculturation. Once arrived and settled into their new country, the arduous process of acculturation to the new country begins (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). This is a complex and multifaceted process that requires one to endure a variety of stressors, including discrimination and racism:

Individuals and families from one cultural orientation constantly being exposed to new, novel, and challenging events and situations require some form of psychological and behavioral adjustments. Some contextual stressors have been related to the social environment and specifically, for example, the exposure to racial/ethnic discrimination...constitutes a source of daily stress. (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011, p. 338)

Exposure to racism has been related to numerous negative physical and psychological outcomes; it is a stressor that is continually present in the victim's lived

experience (Harrell, 2000). This stress is not only present when students face racism, it can also occur as a result of religious discrimination as well (Bigelow, 2008). These experiences make negotiation of identity in a new country and culture a complex and difficult process.

There have been many theories of immigrant assimilation and identity negotiation over the years, from the “melting pot” to the “salad bowl”, but they have all required that the immigrant in question give up a part of their identity, their self in order to become “American” enough. These types of paradigms view the immigrant through a lens of cultural deprivation, where the immigrant culture, language, and identity are perceived as inferior to those of the dominant culture. In school settings, this gives rise to the “undermining of educational reform efforts arising from educators’ deficit beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse students and families, and a general unwillingness to examine traditional assumptions about education” (Myhill, 2004, p.1).

This is particularly important to note in the context of ELL SLIFE students, especially refugees (Mosselson, 2006). The school systems they are entering are not designed for their needs, (Lee, 2010) resulting in unintentional marginalization of this population of students (Lee, 2010) is due to the belief of the dominant culture of the United States that subordinated groups must adjust to and adopt the mainstream Anglo Saxon Culture (Bartolome, 2010). For refugees, the concept of identity negotiation can be even more complex. Their identity collides not just with the mainstream expectations of the dominant culture in the United States, but also their cultural background, country of origin, and relationship with their people’s diaspora (Mosselson, 2006).

As Myhill (2004) explains:

The cultural deprivation paradigm prevents educational institutions and practitioners from assuming the level of responsibility needed to develop techniques and strategies that positively impact the learning and assessment of ELLs. The paradigm persists as the vision of the melting pot places the responsibility for adjusting to the learning modes of mainstream school culture upon the student. This paradigm is ‘particularly dangerous because it diverts the attention from the real deficits in our educational system to imaginary deficits in the child (p.404).

This cultural deprivation model suggests that immigrants and immigrant children must abandon their identity in order to become fully American. However, this is not the case; one can retain aspects of one’s home culture as well as adopt new practices to be able to access one’s new country more fully; that “Becoming American” (Bigelow, 2011, p. 29) is not necessarily dichotomous; use of L1 [first language], and retaining aspects of home culture while also adopting aspects of the new culture help students cope with living in a new world (Bigelow, 2011).

Bigelow’s (2011) findings echo the research findings of students in other subordinated communities, such as African American communities; communities who are not necessarily immigrant communities or English learners, but people who are in power relationships with other groups that result in school failure (Cummins, 2012). Research on African American youth suggests that, “the problem that African American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society (Ladson-Billings, 1985 p. 485). Nevertheless, the problem ELL students face is not only a devaluation of their culture, but also a devaluation of their language. It is suggested that when the students’ first language is supported, that “minority students’

language and culture represent forms of social capital that can be mobilized in the service of academic achievement. Thus, the ways in which teachers negotiate identities with students can exert a significant impact on the extent to which students will engage academically or withdraw from academic effort” (Cummins, 2012, p.1983).

Access to Educational Opportunities

Currently in the USA, one in five students is either currently or formerly an ELL student. It is of critical importance that this large and growing group be serviced in such a way that they are encouraged and supported to complete their education at a high level.

Limited English proficiency has been correlated with lower academic trajectory (Suarez-Orozco, et.al, 2010); however, the cause(s) of this correlation are widely debated. While prior education and age on arrival are significant variables in terms of student achievement and academic trajectory (Collier, 1989, Gahungi, Gahungu & Luseno, 2011), the opportunities that are available to immigrant and refugee English learners once they have arrived to the United States are important to explore; indeed, it is the only factor that educators and educational institutions have sufficient access and power to change.

It has been widely argued that in the accountability-focused era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) there have been drastic changes to pedagogy and curriculum afforded to children in this country (Hostetler, 2006, Manna, 2011, Salinas & Kimball, 2007). Often times, ELL students are placed in newcomer track programs, and given instruction exclusively in basic skills (Koelsch, 2006, Callahan, 2005), rather than higher level skills; and consequently often arrive to higher education settings unprepared (Koelsch, 2006), indicating that not only is there an achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL

students, but that this gap is never eliminated as a result of being placed in an ELL track (Perkins, 2000; Callahan, 2005, Cavasos, 2009).

Tracking students into educational pathways is a controversial, yet not uncommon practice, as elucidated by (Callahan, 2005):

Research on K-12 education in the U.S. schools has identified tracking as the assignment of students to differentiated coursework with varying levels of academic content. The theory behind tracking posits that low-performing students must be separated from other students and taught a simplified curriculum. This allows high track peers to move ahead unhampered by their peers. In theory, remedial curriculum and instruction will bring low-performing students up to par with their peers. In reality, low-track placement frequently results in less exposure to rigorous content and fewer learning opportunities than the high track placement. In short, low-track students fall further behind. (p. 307).

The practice of tracking ELL students also affects beginning level students who are placed into tracks based on their newcomer level of English skills. Unfortunately, this also is a potentially damaging practice that may do more harm than good, as it allows for “constructions of English learners as deficient, bilingual programs as compensatory, and ESL classrooms all linguistic rather than academic, [to] speak to the marginalization of English Learners in U.S. Schools” (Callahan, 2005, p. 322). This deficit view has a variety of other negative outcomes for ELLs as well, such as ELL students being less likely to enroll in advanced classes (Callahan, et.al, 2009). Additionally, ELL students may begin to view the very programs intended to help them as more of a hindrance than an asset (Li, 2010) since they are effectively held in ELL classes until they are able to

“handle” academic and linguistic demands of mainstream classes (Valdes, 1987). Therefore, viewing ELL students through a deficit model is harmful; as it creates an expectation that the children are not able to learn as their non-ELL peers are (Nieto & Bode, 2012, Nelson & Guerra, 2014). The practice of retaining ELL students exclusively in ELL classes and denying them access to mainstream curriculum creates an even bigger challenge in terms of “catching up” with mainstream learners in terms of both language and content (Valdes, 1987, p.17, Miller & Windle, 2010). Furthermore, students exited from ELL classes often perform poorly in the mainstream classes they were to have been prepared for, indicating, “that the language and academic needs of these students are not being addressed by the existing academic program” (Temple-Adger, 1996, p.1). This is not a condemnation of the ELL programs solely; ELL students may very well be struggling with not only increased academic and linguistic rigor in their new mainstream classes, but also teachers who are not well versed in strategies and scaffolding techniques to make these concepts more comprehensible to ELL learners.

Legal requirements for ELL students’ education. There are many precedents and rulings regarding ELL students’ needs and the legal requirements of schools and districts to ensure that children receive a high quality education. Perhaps the most important precedent was set by *Lau vs. Nichols* in 1974, which ruled that “Students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). While this is an important victory for immigrant ELL children, the precedent is vague in its wording and there is wide latitude in interpreting it in other contexts. Resultantly, the decision set forth in 1981 in *Castaneda v. Pickard* requires that

school districts meet a threshold of proof in determining whether or not they are meeting the requirements set forth in law:

- 1.) ELL programming must be based on sound educational theory that is supported by qualified experts;
- 2.) ELL Programming must be provided with sufficient resources and personnel to be implemented effectively;
- 3.) After a trial period, students must be shown to actually be learning English and to some extent, subject matter content.(Casteneda v. Pickard, 1981, Hass, 2005).

While this legislation is an important victory for the educational well-being of ELL students, its implementation has been shown to at times follow the letter of the law, but not its spirit. As Hass (2005) explains:

When challenges to existing practices and/or programs are made, the burden of proof falls on the plaintiff to demonstrate that one of the three prongs of the Castañeda test is not being met. Additionally, there have been cases of courts using fringe science to prove they are not in violation of the ruling. In recent challenges, courts have accepted this, and it is concerning (Hass, 2005, p.369).

As a result of the vague language in the precedents, and also the subsequent rulings of other courts on education for immigrant and ELL learner youth, there have been many politically motivated challenges over the years to force ELLs to quickly assimilate to the dominant culture. Proposition 227 in California mandated that ELL instruction should not exceed one year; and that bilingual programs were to be eliminated. It should be noted that this was not based on existing research on language

acquisition, but on “little more than the legislators’ gut feelings that this should be sufficient to learn English” (Ellern, 1999). The Arizona model designed in the controversial SB 1070 law poses even more restrictive policies, seeking even to eliminate ethnic studies curriculum from schools (Salinas, 2012).

These examples of restrictive legislation, while not in conflict with existing rulings and precedent regarding education for ELLs, have been widely criticized; the elimination of bilingual educational programs has been called ‘perilous’ (Li, 2007), ‘deaf to linguistically diverse populations’ (Moran, 2010), egregious (Garcia & DiCerbo, 2000), and ideologically negative (Nieto & Bode, 2012) due in large part to the fact that what it puts in policy is in fact contrary to what researchers have deemed most effective practice (Garcia & DiCerbo, 2000). Also of note is that in the existing rulings that there is no language regarding the heterogeneity of ELL populations and the unique needs within them. ELLs all fall under the same umbrella and there is no differentiation between ELL, refugee, ELL-SLIFE, or any other subgroup which may fall under the label of ELL.

Educational Outcomes for English Language Learners

When ELL students operate within the systems and structures available to them in the schools in which they matriculate, various outcomes occur. The subsequent sections will discuss these outcomes.

Dropout events. There are myriad factors that influence students’ likelihood to drop out of school. Having been born in another country, age of migration, and prior educational difficulties are all correlated with student dropout rates (Fry, 2005). Since ELLs are more likely to drop out than native born English speaking students, and they are

the fastest growing population of students in this country, this becomes much more urgent a question for educators (Sheng, Sheng & Anderson, 2011). Some studies estimate that the dropout rate of all ELL students approaches near 50% (Advocates for New York, 2002; Reyes & Her, 2010); other studies have verified this phenomena and argue that 50% is a conservative estimate (Heilig Vasquez, 2011, National Association of State Boards of Education, 2009).

ELL SLIFE students are even more likely to experience a dropout event than non-SLIFE ELL students. In one study (Fry, 2005), the population of students in the sample that could be labeled SLIFE would account for 6% of the n-size of the population. However, they were drastically overrepresented in terms of dropping out at an alarming 70% (Fry, 2005).

School attendance is a basic indicator of well being, (Fry, 2005). Therefore, it is important to determine which factors impact a student's decision to drop out, and what potential solutions to these factors may be.

Cultural Factors. Differences in home culture school norms and new cultural norms in school create a cognitive dissonance that is difficult for students to reconcile (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011; Myhill, 2004). Unfortunately, some of these cultural underpinnings are so deeply embedded in American public schooling that many educators are not even aware of their effects and impact on newly arrived students (Myhill, 2004). This can lead to feelings of isolation in students, which can also lead to increased likelihood of dropping out of school (Hamilton Boone, 2011). Transparency around implicit expectations is of critical importance for immigrant students; one can not assume that they have a shared knowledge of these new cultural norms that no one has

ever taught them (Hamilton Boone, 2011). In addition to the explicit explanation and teaching of American school norms and practices that native-born English speakers take for granted, another dimension of complexity that the ELL learner faces is the marginalization felt at the hands of the dominant culture (Lee, 2010). Unfortunately, this marginalization has far reaching impacts on the students. Not only are schools designed with the cultural norms of the dominant group in mind, they also fail to recognize students' strengths if they do not align in this paradigm (Krajewski-Lockwood, 2010), as well as place the responsibility solely on the student to ascertain how to successfully operate in these systems (Brinegar, 2010).

Social emotional factors. Negative social emotional experiences in school can also increase student likelihood to drop out (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004). These can be negative interactions between peers and unfortunately, even staff at the school, as Krajewski-Lockwood (2010) explains:

...all respondents acknowledged that they had experienced bullying in the classroom as well as in school in general. Selected examples of this bullying include the story of one of the eleventh grade students who described the biggest bully he personally encountered was his teacher (p. 68).

Diversity in Populations of English Language Learners

National. The ELL student demographics nationwide describe a very different student population than when one examines demographic data at the state level. Nationwide, the overwhelming majority of immigrants are of Hispanic origin (Valdes, 2013), which also is reflected in school enrollment of ELL students. In Southern

California, for example, 65% of ELL students are Hispanic, whereas only 16% of students are of Asian descent (Frey, Fisher, and Nelson, 2010, p.224).

State of Minnesota. Minnesota's ELL demographics are significantly different than the nationwide averages. This is attributed in part to non-profits working to resettle refugees (Zittlow, 2012, Wilder Center, 2002). The work of non-profits has had a tremendous impact on the immigrant population of Minnesota. It is estimated that roughly 24% of the total immigrant population in Minnesota are refugees, whereas the national average is only 8% (energyofanation.org, 2012). Minnesota is home to the largest populations of Somali and Oromo immigrants, the second-highest Hmong population and the largest KaRen population in the country (Advocates for Human Rights, 2012, KaRen Organization of Minnesota, n.d.).

Types of English Language Learners. In addition to the cultural and ethnic differences between students who share the ELL label, there are additional differences in their educational backgrounds to consider as well. According to Freeman and Freeman (2003), there are three types of ELL students. These types include: (a) newly arrived ELL students with adequate formal education, (b) long term ELL students and (c) ELL students with limited or interrupted formal education.

Newly arrived ELL students with adequate formal education. Newly arrived ELL students arrive to the United States with adequate formal education from their home country in their home language. Although this group is heterogeneous in many ways, there are some important shared characteristics to note. They have an age appropriate level of schooling in their first language, they have been in the United States for 5 or

fewer years, and their academic skills, including metacognitive skills, in their first language are also appropriately developed for their age (Freeman & Freeman, 2003).

The primary need of this type of ELL student is to receive English Language support to develop age-appropriate language skills concurrently with age-appropriate content knowledge (Freeman & Freeman, 2003). This is of particular importance because if ELL students are not allowed to participate in academic classes where they build their academic content knowledge until their English skills have reached a highly proficient level, they are in essence being denied access to education and would leave their language program years behind in content skills, which was not the case on arrival for this type of learner.

Long-term English language learners. The students in this subgroup of ELLs have either been born in the United States, or arrived so young that they were able to matriculate for the majority, if not the entirety of their education in the United States. As a result, long-term ELL students may not have age-appropriate academic literacy or academic language skills from their first language as they typically have been educated exclusively in English. However, speaking skills in their first language are variable and may range from basic or beginner level to advanced speech abilities in their first language, depending on the opportunities that the student has to use their first language.

Due to their time in the country and in school in their second language, the students in the long term learner group typically have excellent Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which are skills involving language that is frequently used, but not highly technical or academic in nature (Cummins, 1979, 1980). However, academic language skills for long term ELL students in English have typically not been

developed to the extent of that of their mainstream non-ELL peers (Freeman & Freeman, 2003).

The needs of the long-term ELL population in some ways echo those of their newly arrived adequately schooled classmates: ESL language support and access to grade level content. However, as these students have a different cultural background and educational experience than the previous group, it should be noted that the way this information is presented to and scaffolded for the long term ELL students should be in a way that is tailored to their unique needs and experiences, which are not the same as those held by adequately schooled newly arrived newcomers (Freeman & Freeman, 2003).

English language learners with limited or interrupted formal education. The third category, English language learners with limited formal schooling, ELL SLIFE students, will be the focus of this dissertation. ELL SLIFE students, while also very heterogeneous, demonstrate several shared characteristics to comprise this subgroup (Freeman & Freeman, 2003, New York Department of Education, 2011). For example, ELL SLIFE students have not had what would be considered a typical educational trajectory in the USA. Often, due to the fact that ELL SLIFE students have not been able to attend school consistently in their countries of origin, they experience gaps in their academic knowledge in their first language. Their prior academic knowledge is not consistent with what one might expect of a student of their same age (Miller & Windle, 2010). These interruptions or limitations occur for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to migration due to economic factors, war, natural disaster, family disruption,

violence, and a host of other calamities (Freeman & Freeman, 2003, DeCapua and Marshall, 2010).

In addition to the potential limitations of academic content knowledge that ELL SLIFE students may possess, there is also a likelihood the students have limited academic language and emergent literacy skills in their first language as well (Miller & Windle, 2010, Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Similar to the students identified as long-term ELL learners, ELL SLIFE students have not had the opportunity to study in their first language to the extent that one would expect and as a result may have highly developed BICS in their first language, but CALP may be significantly less developed (Freeman & Freeman, 2003, DeCapua and Marshall 2010, 2011, Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). It is possible for ELL SLIFE students to arrive the USA without any literacy skills at all, in any language. While that does increase the level of difficulty that the student will face (Garcia & DiCerbo, 2000), it is important to note that illiteracy and pre literacy are not permanent conditions that students cannot overcome (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004).

Another important characteristic of students who comprise this subgroup is that the students are typically a minimum of two years behind in terms of amount of content knowledge acquired from schooling in their home or host country. This is an important distinction as it examines total time in schooling and not years behind in language proficiency alone (Freeman & Freeman, 2003). Although they are behind academically, this should not be misconstrued as an indicator for Special Education needs. While some ELL SLIFE students may indeed have learning difficulties, the reason for their discrepant academic performance when compared to other types of ELL learners is more likely

explained by lack of access to education and a lack of foundational knowledge rather than a learning disability (New York State Department of Education, 2011).

This is not to say that meeting ELL SLIFE students' needs is a simple undertaking; many times ELL SLIFE students have greater needs than what the typical ELL teacher has been trained or prepared for (Taylor, 2008, Advocates for Human Rights, 2010, Garcia & DiCerbo, 2000, Khan, 2012). Not only are the students in need of academic and literacy skills, they may also need assistance adjusting to using the institutions citizens are expected to use in the United States, such as banks, hospitals, and other institutions (Valdez-Pierce, 1987).

It takes several years for ELL SLIFE students to reach academic and linguistic parity with their native-English speaking peers. It is estimated that an average of 7-10 years is needed (Miller & Windle, 2010; Bigleow & Tarone, 2004) for ELL SLIFE students to reach this parity. This is especially concerning when taking into consideration that ELL SLIFE students arrive already aged at the secondary level; they have to make up years of academic and linguistic instruction (Collier, 1978) and may not have enough instructional years available to them to do so in the K-12 setting.

Linguistic Needs of English Language Learners with Limited Formal Schooling

There is much debate around how long it takes to learn a second language. Research studies suggest that the length of time it takes to learn a second language to a high degree of proficiency is several years, that the level of proficiency one has on their first language is a key determinant of future success in their second language, (Thomas & Collier, 1997) and that "empirical research suggests that a span of four to seven years to

achieve academic language proficiency as a challenging but achievable goal” (Hudson, et. al, p.104).

While research indicates that a four to seven year span is typical for an ELL student to develop proficiency, this figure was not calculated using students who fall into the ELL SLIFE subcategory of students:

Young students who had little or no schooling in their first language had not reached the 50th percentile of 50th NCE within the first 6 years of LOR were projected to reach it in 7 to 10 years at their demonstrated rate of progress...those students aged 12 to 16 scored dramatically lower than students with an age of arrival of 8 to 11...at this rate of progress, they would be unable to score at the 50th percentile or 50th NCE before graduating from high school (Collier, 1989, p.519).

In other words, students ran out of time to acquire proficiency before they could become proficient, which also severely impedes students’ eligibility for post-secondary education (Murphy Odo, D’Silca, & Gunderson, 2012). Additional research studies by Dicerbo and Garcia (2000), also found that ELL SLIFE students needed more intensive intervention to reach grade level proficiency. This raises concerns for the educational well-being of ELL SLIFE students on various levels. Their age on arrival often precludes them enough years of schooling available to them in the K-12 system before they will age out (Advocates for Human Rights, 2010; Roessingh, 2003). Furthermore, gaps in academic content also create an additional barrier to moving forward at a rapid pace in a student’s educational trajectory (DiCerbo and Garcia, 2000).

Types of language needed for academic success are also important factors in length of time needed to learn a second language. While both BICS and CALP are

necessary for success in school, CALP is acquired over a much longer length of time than is BICS (Cummins, 1979a, Cummins, 1999, Haynes, n.d.). BICS is necessary for daily life and social situations, and is embedded in the learner's context. However, CALP is more removed from learners' daily lives and requires intentional, purposeful, and explicit instruction along with sufficient opportunities to practice in order to become proficient at this register of language (Frey, Fischer, & Douglas, 2010) as well as the academic content information the language is communicating (Krashen, n.d.). This is essential for ELL SLIFE students to be able to perform the academic functions that they will need to be successful in classes, and also, fairly or unfairly, in high stakes tests that will determine future educational options available to them (Gallegos & Wise, 2011; Haynes, n.d.).

Role of first language. One's academic proficiency in their mother tongue at their time of arrival to the United States is one of the strongest, if not the strongest predictor of the level of achievement in the student's second language (L2) (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981, Cummins, 2007a). This relationship in proficiency, referred to as Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP), acknowledges that language proficiency in a second language is not indicative of one's level of academic content knowledge (Collier & Thomas, 2009). This concept of proficiency illustrates that "skills, ideas, and concepts that students learn in their first language will be transferred to their second language" (Haynes, n.d.). Students who are not yet literate in their first language typically have a much more difficult time learning to become literate in their second language (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010); and students whose skills are supported in their L1 in addition to their L2 fare better than students whose L1 is not supported (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010).

There is a preponderance of literature describing the benefits that learners experience when their first language is supported in conjunction with their second language and content information acquisition, such as literacy decoding improvement (Mesychan and Hernandez, 2002), improved content understanding (Cummins, 1980,) improved social and emotional experiences (Birch, 1996,) improved self-concept with academics (Lukes, 2011), improved cognitive functioning, (Nieto & Bode, 2012), among others (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010).

Academic needs of English Language Learners With Limited Formal Education

ELL SLIFE students come to the United States with different needs than other types of non-SLIFE ELL learners. They arrive to instructors that are not familiar with their needs and school settings that are not designed for them, but for more adequately schooled newcomers (Ruiz de Velasco, Fix, and Chu-Clewell, 2009, Taylor, 2008). Therefore, the existing educational system is not designed to be able to meet their diverse needs, which often times exceed the available resources in the area (Taylor, 2008, Faltis & Valdes, 2011). This creates an even more urgent educational quandary for ELL SLIFE students. ELL SLIFE students are not “disembodied cognitive devices for processing language input, but persons with histories,” (Medley, 2012, p. 112).

These histories indeed have a lasting and far-reaching impact on educational experiences once matriculated in schools in the USA. Not only do ELL SLIFE students arrive as older students, who because of their age have less time available to catch up academically, they also experience an additional obstacle in terms of access to appropriately leveled and designed school programming for their needs. Academic programming in the United States at the secondary level, both in ELL and non-ELL

settings, assumes a higher level of academic literacy and metacognitive skills. Due to their limited previous formal education, age appropriate academic content is difficult for ELL SLIFE students, even if they are learning in their first language (Ruiz de Velasco, Fix, and Chu-Clewell, 2000, Crosnoe & Lopez-Turley, 2011). This is generally attributed to extended absences from school, curricular differences, and limited resources (Dooley, 2009), all of which affect the “likelihood of an [educational] advantage or disadvantage when they arrive to the USA (Crosnoe & Lopez-Turley, 2011, p. 336). Additionally, the prior educational experiences of many immigrant students, ELL SLIFE and refugees in particular, can be radically different than the educational experiences that one could expect to receive in the United States. This can be attributed to a variety of factors including both scarcities of resources as well as the cultural norms in different areas that may be incongruent with western style education (Grogorenko, 2007).

Because ELL learners overall, and ELL SLIFE learners in particular, have a higher likelihood of experiencing failure in schools, it is of utmost importance that schools and teachers consider the methods that they employ to make content and language accessible and comprehensible to students, while also honoring their unique backgrounds. Sink-or-swim methods, where there are no strategies employed that take these learning and cultural differences into account, are among the most damaging and least effective for students (Cummins, 1981). Not only is there no differentiation to make the content and language more comprehensible, the fault of the system to adjust to the needs of the child is transferred as blame to the child for not learning (Cummins, 1981).

As the literature has strongly suggested, ELL SLIFE students may arrive not academically ready for grade level work. Thusly, a different educational approach

should be considered. This approach should begin at the District intake center, where a system wide identification and intake procedure collects the relevant data about student demographic information, as well as prior education and refugee camp experiences to ensure that students are placed in programming that adequately meets their needs (Advocates for the Children of New York, 2010). Once placed, Rutter (2003) advocates a sheltered English program where students are able to take some mainstream classes and some sheltered content courses to help students acquire assistance on high stakes tests, basic literacy, grammar, and/or have additional emotional needs that the traditional classroom does not or is not able to meet (p. 99). Resultantly, this structure where the students learn English through content is especially effective when ELL teachers work together with both content area teachers to ensure students are building both grade level and age appropriate content knowledge and skills in conjunction with language skills (Spaulding, 2004) as well as community service organizations to help provide additional services that the school may not be able to provide (Spaulding, 2004, p.1).

Cultures of Oracy. Another difference that ELL SLIFE students experience in their journey to academic and linguistic proficiency in the United States is that often times, ELL SLIFE students come from a culture of oracy and oral tradition whose values and norms of communication collide with those of the United States (Advocates for Human Rights, 2014). This requires a complete and total paradigm shift on the part of the learners, many of whom are not prepared to abandon their cultural values of oral transmission; unfortunately, these ways and means of communication are not accepted and valued in American academic institutions (Ramirez-Esparza, et.al. 2012).

The requirement of change being placed exclusively on the learner creates a home to school disconnect for ELL SLIFE learners, as elucidated by Nieto and Bode (2012):

Language is intimately linked to culture. It is a primary means by which people express their cultural values and the lens through which they view the world. It should come as no surprise, then, that the language practices that children bring to school also invariably affect how and what they learn. Yet, in multicultural education, native language issues are frequently overlooked or downplayed (p. 210).

The mindset that students must abandon their customs and traditions in order to achieve academic success is a troubling one. Due to the low status given, either intentionally or inadvertently, to the oral tradition of certain cultures in the United States, (Sarrou 2008), cultures are losing an important tradition that is not able to be replaced; for example, the custom of storytelling from elders to younger members of a cultural group is often lost in the transition to the United States (Perry, 2011).

There are also several things to consider when examining the relationship between oracy as dominant communication function in a language as contrasted with more literacy-based cultures, such as the United States. The ways that knowledge is transmitted within and between orality based cultures are fundamentally different from the ways and means of transmission of knowledge in print based cultures (Watson, 2010). This affects much more than communication; even the worldview of the cultures can be impacted by their orientation towards orality or print literacy (Watson, 2010). As Bigelow and Tarone (2004) explain, most research around second language learners and second language acquisition describes literate and educated learners; therefore, the findings are not generalizable to populations who are not educated and not yet literate (p.

690). Attempts to determine the importance of literacy in terms of acquiring a second language are beginning to be explored (Tarone, 2010), and the results are significant when one regards ELLs as individuals with distinct needs rather than a homogeneous group.

Building Literacy. Literacy skills have a tremendous impact on the educational experiences of ELL SLIFE learners. Literacy in a learner's first language is one of the most powerful determinants of success in a second language (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981, Cummins, 2007a). When learners have even minimal literacy skills, there are impacts in how they are able to process language differently (Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011). Due to widely different experiences and prior education in literacy, it is possible that ELL SLIFE students will need explicit emergent literacy instruction that may not typically be associated with secondary-aged learners (Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011; Valdez Pierce, 2007).

While the impacts of learning to read as a preliterate second language learner are not as widely studied as the acquisition process of literate learners learning a second language (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004), this area of research is beginning to grow little by little. It has been found that not only are there cognitive differences between literate and pre-literate learners, (Reder & Davila, 2005), the process of becoming literate also changed the way that oral language was processed in formerly pre-literate learners (Tarone, 2010, Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011). This indicates that teachers should be mindful of using specific and effective strategies and practices with ELL SLIFE learners who have never learned to read in their first language (Tarone & Bigelow, 2005).

ELL SLIFE Student’s prior knowledge of school skills. Research also indicates that ELL SLIFE students may arrive to school unfamiliar with the implicit rules and procedures that students will need in order to navigate both academic and social tasks. (Ramirez-Esparza, et.al, 2012; Ruiz de Velasco, Fix, and Chu-Clewell, 2000.) Students may not understand “socio-interactive practices such as asking for help, getting started on an academic task, may be unfamiliar and students may be unsure of how to proceed, and feel shame in not understanding” (Ramirez-Esparza et.al, 2012, p.561). While it is possible that students may arrive to school unfamiliar with these sorts of academic tasks such as questioning, agreeing or disagreeing; it is also possible to explicitly teach these skills and also to link them to students’ existing language schema (CREDE, 1997). With this new learning, students will be able to participate in these sorts of routines and procedures that they may have been unfamiliar with before.

Challenges for English Learners with Limited Formal Schooling

SLIFE students have been called the “highest of high-risk students” (Indiana Department of Education, 2009). This is an important, although not insurmountable characterization. While it is true that ELL SLIFE learners arrive and may be pre-literate or emergent readers in spite of being developmentally and chronologically older than this skill level would suggest, this is not a permanent characteristic. As one develops one’s reading and literacy skills, one then becomes literate, and the previous label of illiterate or preliterate no longer applies (Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011; Alcalá, 2000).

Defecit Perspective. The effects of the deficit perspective on students have been well documented. In order for schools to move beyond the conditions that they cannot change and effect real change in students’ educational outcomes, certain changes are

necessary. For example, environments where students' motivations are constructed using inclusion, developing attitudes, enhancement of meaning, and engendering competence, rather than being dismissed are more effective than those that do not (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 19); a framework where students are viewed as having different skill sets rather than as lacking skills is necessary (Herrera & Murry, 2005).

In addition to the emerging literacy that ELL SLIFE learners develop, there are usually content and skill gaps that need to be addressed as well (Dooley, 2009) resulting from the interruptions in prior schooling, and also to the type of schooling to which ELL SLIFE students were exposed prior to arrival to the United States (Perry, 2011). For instance, educational experiences of students receiving education in a refugee camp setting are vastly different than the education they would receive in a non-refugee camp setting (Perry, 2011).

Prior experiences have a direct and significant impact on the student for much longer than just their time prior to coming to the United States, and these prior experiences have far-reaching effects. Students who are in environment unlike any they have ever known require special attention that may exceed what an ELL teacher is able to and has been trained to give (Faltis & Valdes, 2011, p.288, Advocates for Human Rights, 2010).

Emotional Needs of English Learners with Limited Formal Schooling

In contrast to other types of immigrants who may have immigrated for employment reasons or to reunite with family members (MN Advocates for Human rights, 2006), SLIFE students come with a different narrative. SLIFE students often

times, although not exclusively, immigrate as refugees or asylum seekers from situations of war, natural disasters, or other calamities (UNHCR, 2012a, UNHCR, 2012b).

For refugees, it is extremely important that they have assistance in resettling in a new country and adjusting to a new culture and school system. The trauma of the refugee experience can affect the refugees far beyond the initial event that caused their forced migration; the trauma is compounded with the experience of living in a camp and finally relocating to a new country. As Bigelow (2008) explains, “for refugees, the experience of fleeing, living in a camp for a long time, and moving to a strange land are almost more than a person can bear” (p.31). These experiences can cause students and their families to react in different ways; students may act out or internalize their trauma, negatively impacting their schooling experiences (Medley, 2012). Students’ feelings of vulnerability, isolation, invisibility, and disconnectedness can negatively impact students’ academic and emotional experiences in school (Feierverger, 2011, Gale-Kugler & Acosta-Price, 2009, Giulano-Sarr & Mosselson, 2010). It is important that trained staff work with refugees in these situations and that the school to be aware of possible traumas to attempt to support students’ well being (NY State Department of Education, 2011).

In many cases school and healthcare systems assume that clients know how to operate within these institutions to successfully get the assistance they need. However, this is not the case with refugee clients, whose needs often times exceed the training a typical social service provider has been trained to provide (Engstrom & Okamura, 2007).

Although it is true adjustments can be extremely difficult, they are possible under the right social and emotional conditions. School climate and student perceptions are among some of the most powerful factors (Conderman, 2013, Carbonell, 2011, Han,

2006, Feuerverger, 2011). Students learning in a positive school climate reap a positive benefit in terms of academic achievement, behavior, attitude (Conderman, et.al, 2013) and physical and psychological health (Correa-Velez et.al, 2010). This is especially important to consider in terms of the immigrant experience in schools. While first generation immigrants are typically more highly cognitively engaged in school, the opposite is true for their emotional engagement (Chiu, Pong, Mori, & Chaw (2012), indicating that additional strategies for emotionally and socially engaging immigrant students must be considered and implemented (Medley, 2012).

There are many considerations to take into account when creating a welcoming and emotionally supportive environment for SLIFE students. One factor that is particularly important is the need for students to feel safe in the classroom. For SLIFE students, this applies both to physical and emotional safety. Many students who have little academic and school experience in the past may avoid academic and literacy tasks for fear of looking “stupid” in front of their classmates, and may feel shame of their limited literacy and academic backgrounds (Lukes, 2011). For this reason, many [SLIFE] feel more comfortable when they are grouped with other students of newcomer/SLIFE backgrounds (Lukes, 2011).

Environments that promote student resiliency both in students and in the classroom and school environments also decrease students’ risks of academic failure and emotional distress (Rivera & Waxman, 2011). ELL learners face additional obstacles to educational success and attainment than do their mainstream peers (Salinas & Kimball, 2007), and this effect is magnified in the case of adult learners (Lukes, 2011) as well as ELL SLIFE learners (Advocates for New York, 2010). According to the Advocates for

New York, ELL SLIFE students who are not properly identified and placed where they can receive adequate service for their unique needs are much more likely to drop out; leading to an abysmal estimated 1-2% graduation rate (Advocates for New York, 2010).

Cultural orientation. Cultural orientation may be a tool to help refugee families and students adjust to life in their new country. It is designed especially for refugees and starts in the country of origin, before leaving for the new destination (Costello & Bebic, 2003) to help refugees know what to expect and how to operate in the new systems they will be expected to navigate upon their arrival in the USA. The outreach does not stop there, however; refugee sponsors called Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGS) are organizations that work with the state department to get refugees placed in certain areas and assist in their transition once here (DeRusha, 2011). Ideally, these organizations would also partner with schools and teachers to ensure that all needs are being met to the extent possible. Schools also should be encouraged to reach out to refugee families to make them feel welcome and to help clarify any issues or concerns (Gale-Kugler & Acosta-Price, 2009) in clear and concise terms that are respectful, yet direct to ensure the issue is clearly communicated and understood (Advocates for Human Rights, 2014).

Relationships in schools. Lack of relationships is one of the factors linked to higher likelihood of dropping out. In order to address this issue, schools should create structures and climates where students have ample opportunities to forge these relationships with caring adults. An example of a way that a school could do this is to have newcomer class specially designed to give the students a protective environment where they can form close relationships with fellow students and staff (Brinegar, 2010).

Affirmation of identity. A powerful action that can be, but frequently is not taken by teachers and schools is to affirm the identity of students (Cummins, Mirza, & Stille, 2012). This applies not only to racial and ethnic minority students but also to linguistic minority students as well. Programs that affirm students' identities "have been found to create powerful teaching and learning contexts" (Reyes & Her, 533). When teachers and educational institutions begin to leverage students' cultural capital, they are able to help the student in making greater connections in their learning and schema. While English can be used to wield power over others, it is important to understand that students bring their own linguistic and cultural capital, no matter what culture or linguistic background they come from (Riggs & Due, 2011).

This is often easier said than done. It is not uncommon for there to be "gaps between the cultural capital possessed by [ethnic and linguistic minorities] and the cultural capital valued by the teachers and other educational professionals they face; there are also major gaps between the cultural capital possessed by the families and children at home and the expectations of teachers at school" (Roxas, 2008, p.5). This dissonance of having vs. not having cultural capital can be present in any context where there are subordinated communities, but where refugee youth are concerned, there are additional factors to consider regarding the refugee condition and identity, as Guilano-Sarr and Mosselson (2010) elucidate:

Discrimination takes many forms, including negative and positive discrimination, stigma, panethnic labeling, and racial prejudice. Refugees confront an imagined identity different from their self-conception and perceived identity in their place of origin. The assumption that others make about refugees and their adaptation have repercussions for

students' enthusiasm for and success in schooling. Such generalizations contribute to a condition of 'refugee-ness' that needs to be overcome (p.555).

This creates a complex set of circumstances for educators to consider. How can one honor students' cultural capital and strengths without making them examples of the 'other' that is separate and different from us?

There are several practices that work towards a framework of inclusion and build on student and family cultural capital (Giulano-Sarr and Mosselson, 2010, p. 563). These include knowing individual students and families implementation of critical pedagogical techniques that affirm students' experiences and serve to educate the greater host country student body (Giulano-Sarr and Mosselson, 2010, p. 563,) strengthening the home-school partnerships into the homes as well as the greater community (Giulano-Sarr and Mosselson, 2010, Woods, 2009, Thao, 2009, Center for Health and Healthcare in schools, 2011), promoting resiliency (Rivera & Waxman, 2011) and reinforcement of administrative support of students, parents, and teachers (Giulano-Sarr and Mosselson, 2010, Farris, 2011).

Promising Practices for ELL SLIFE Students

There are a number of instructional practices associated with higher student achievement, positive perception, and increased engagement in school. Condelli and Wrigley (2005) identify a number of practices that are particularly effective for ELL SLIFE students, such as allowing for students to connect classroom material to the real world, using the students' first language to help clarify confusion, presenting information in multiple ways, emphasizing oral communication, and increasing hours in school each

week (LESSLA, 2005, p.127). Opportunities to connect language learning to real life experiences are more effective and relevant for students (Wood, 2011).

There are several additional pedagogical techniques, frameworks, and classroom practices are currently emerging at the forefront of research regarding ELL SLIFE students. Cummins' Transformative Literacies Pedagogy (TRP) (2009) is an example of this type of pedagogical framework. As Cummins (2009) states, this framework is a "radical departure of pedagogical assumptions operating in classrooms serving low income students in the post-NCLB era of high stakes testing" (p. 51). This is a reference to the deficit perspective outlined above, which does not help in resolving student barriers to success; it only attempts to explain them. However, in Cummins' TRP, students are to be viewed as intelligent and as having special talents rather than as lacking skills or knowledge. Additionally, this pedagogical framework not only acknowledges but also builds on students' prior knowledge and experiences, which serves to promote cognitive engagement and reinforce cultural identity.

Another potential method to address marginalization of ELL SLIFE students is the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) model. This model focuses on making instruction relevant to students whose backgrounds are different than the dominant culture. This is critical because "school practices have been calibrated to the cultural norms of the dominant social group" (Lee, 2010), which results in inequitable results for students. The CRP model consists of three main parts: (Lee, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995): The conception of Self and Others; The Conception of Social Relationships; and the Conception of Knowledge. These conceptions work to engage students in the material

in an authentic and meaningful way, avoiding the sink or swim mentality that has been prevalent in the United States (Bartolomé, 2010).

Newcomer students, in addition from benefitting from CRP, also benefit from differentiated programming and pedagogical techniques that are sensitive to their cultural and linguistic needs. Several factors have been identified as being effective for newcomer students: Programming that is distinct from the mainstream curriculum (Short & Boyson, 2003, CAL Digest, 1998); includes instructional strategies for literacy development (Short & Boyson, 2003, Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011, Tarone & Bigelow, 2005); instructional strategies for integration of language and content (Short & Boyson, 2003, Collier, 1978); the use of appropriate materials (Short & Boyson, 2003), paraprofessional support (Short & Boyson, 2003), and family and community connections (Short & Boyson, 2003, CAL Digest, 1998, Wood, 2011).

Curricular designs and instructional practices that take into account SLIFE students' unique needs are also of critical importance to the well-being of SLIFE in the school environment, both socially and academically (Matthews & Mellom, 2012). Methods such as the Radical Pedagogy (Glasgow & Behr 2011), stress making connections between student lived experience and the school environment in order to more comprehensibly teach social consciousness. This connection to students' lives has been identified as a factor that makes learning more relevant and meaningful for students.

In addition to honoring students' backgrounds in the classroom (Cummins et.al, 2005), as well as authentic and relevant curriculum (Bigelow & Vonogradav, 2011), there is also an emerging paradigm designed with ELL SLIFE in mind. The Mutual Adaptive Learning Paradigm, or MALP, is the result of the research of DeCapua and Marshall,

who have published on this topic extensively. The underlying philosophy of MALP is that educators must make changes in their instructional methods to make them more culturally comprehensible to SLIFE. MALP suggests that by using processes that are familiar to the students, such as building on their paradigms of oral communication, as a scaffold to help them better access language and content, that they will be able to better bridge the gap in expectations from home culture to school culture. By leveraging the students' strengths, and using them as a vehicle to introduce concepts that are not familiar and comfortable, SLIFE will be able to access this information at a greater level. In MALP, before taking additional steps, teachers must first accept the conditions that SLIFE students need to be successful (Marshall, DeCapua, & Antolini, 2010). These conditions include interconnectedness, and relevance, whose importance has been discussed at length earlier in this work.

By accepting these underlying conditions, educators are then able to combine familiar with unfamiliar processes, effectively scaffolding new procedural and content knowledge by using student's cultural knowledge and leveraging their cultural capital. (Decapua & Marshall, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Summary

It is currently estimated that roughly 13% of the entire population of the United States is foreign born (Salomone, 2010a); and of that 13%, over half hails from Latin America, particularly Mexico (Salomone, 2010a). As a result, ELL students of Mexican origin are the most prevalent and often studied group (Salamone, 2010a, Gallegos & Wiose, 2011). This creates the question of generalizability of existing research results among ELL students of non-Mexican origin, such as refugees, asylees, and ELL students

with limited and interrupted formal education (ELL SLIFE). It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of research conducted about ELL students and Second Language Acquisition is executed using learners who have high degrees of literacy in their first languages (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). This is an issue, as ELL students are a widely heterogeneous population who have different needs. If research studies are carried out using only literate and extensively formally schooled learners, then “theory has limited applicability and little value in guiding teachers who want to work with illiterate learners” (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004, p.690). Much less is known about SLIFE learners than is known about adequately schooled newcomers. This adds to the challenges SLIFE face when matriculating in American public schools, as it is not likely that their teachers will have a great deal of knowledge about their needs.

Successful education for SLIFE students requires a paradigm shift for educators (Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011) both in terms of rethinking pedagogical methods, which may not be meaningful to SLIFE as well as in terms of appropriate curricular materials and procedures around methods and assessment (Bigelow & Vinogradav, 2011; Naidoo, 2011).

There is a relative dearth of research about SLIFE students in comparison with other groups of ELL students, such as traditional newcomers and long-term English learner students. Additionally, much of the existing research around SLIFE students examines second language learning processes for students who have no or limited literacy in the first language. While there is plentiful data establishing the patterns of school dropout events and poor educational outcomes for ELL students in general, there is very little research examining ELL SLIFE exclusively; neither is there much existing research

around how the perceptions that SLIFE have of their educational environment may impact their educational trajectories.

Likewise, there is very little data comparing and contrasting ELL SLIFE students' perceptions of academic achievement and environment with the perceptions that non-SLIFE ELL students have of the same. It is therefore surmised that a study comparing and contrasting the ELL SLIFE perception of facets of their educational environment with their non-SLIFE ELL peers' perceptions of same will provide an additional and understudied perspective to the existing research base.

Chapter III Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the similarities and differences in how English Language Learners (ELL) with limited and/or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) differ from their non-SLIFE ELL peers view regarding their perceptions of their educational environment and attainment in an American public school in a large, urban district using quantitative data. At the time of the study, there was not a way to determine which students were ELL SLIFE students and which students were non-SLIFE ELL students. Therefore, students' status as a refugee or nonrefugee was used as the closest available metric at the time of data collection. As a result, the following hypotheses were tested:

- 1.) It was hypothesized that EL SLIFE/refugee students and their non-SLIFE/refugee EL peers will report differences in perceptions of their academic self-concept as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire.
- 2.) It was hypothesized that EL SLIFE/refugee students and their non-SLIFE/refugee EL peers would report differences in perceptions of the factors of welcoming in a school climate as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire.
- 3.) It was hypothesized that EL SLIFE/refugee students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self concept data and welcoming school climate data.

- 4.) It was hypothesized that non-SLIFE/refugee EL students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self concept data and welcoming school climate data.

Research Methods and Design

The study was quantitative and descriptive in nature. All students were given a survey using a Likert-scale response system. Students had the choice to take the survey in English, Hmong, KaRen, Spanish, or Somali. The survey was recorded in the languages translated to give students auditory input for the questions as well. Translation and recording was executed by bilingual District employees who routinely perform translation and interpreting services. The survey also included a section of open-ended questions where students were able to respond and give more detailed information of their perceptions of academic self concept and welcoming school environment in the language of their choice. Their responses were translated by bilingual District employees who routinely perform translation and interpreting services.

Subjects

Two discrete groups of students were recruited for participation in the study: ELL refugee students and non-refugee ELL students. All subjects, both ELL SLIFE and non-SLIFE ELL were invited based on the following criteria: 1.) Matriculation in the same large, Urban district in the Midwest. 2.) Matriculation in grades 9-12. 3.) Currently receiving direct service in the school's ELL department. Mainstream students who are not currently served in an ELL program were not be included. 4.) Only students attending school at High School sites which provided service for all levels of ELL proficiency were included.

These sites included one grade 9-12 High School, which were labeled School A, and two grade 6-12 Secondary schools, which were labeled School B and School C, in order to safeguard confidentiality. A fourth site was invited, but declined participation in the study. No Alternative Education sites were included as the difference in environments could potentially have had significant impact on student perceptions and responses.

Students were classified as SLIFE/refugee or Non-SLIFE/refugee ELL learners based on the following criteria:

1.) Recruitment for all subjects required placement in ELL classes at proficiency level 2 or higher in their daily schedule. Level 2 refers to learners at the high beginner, or developing stage of English acquisition. The decision to invite students at English Proficiency level 2 and higher was taken to ensure that students had more time in the educational institution to be able to respond with more accuracy to the questions.

2.) As there was no formal indicator for SLIFE ELL learners collected by students at District intake at the time of data collection, students labeled as having been refugees in their student record were recorded as SLIFE ELL learners as this was the closest metric available at the time to determine SLIFE status.

As only students in grades 9-12 were invited to participate, their ages ranged from 15-21 years of age. No student older than 21 is allowed to be in a K-12 setting under state law. Students over 18 will be able to sign their own consent and assent forms. However, students under 18 years of age will sign their own assent forms and will also need to get parent permission to participate in the study. Parent permission forms, translated by bilingual employees of the District, will be made available in English,

Hmong, Karen, Spanish, and Somali. Student assent forms will also be available in English, Hmong, Karen, Spanish, and Somali.

According to District demographers, the n-sizes of the ELL populations in the District were as follows.

School	Refugee Students				Non-Refugee Students				TOTAL
	Lev. 2	Lev. 3	Lev. 4	Lev.5	Lev. 2	Lev. 3	Lev. 4	Lev.5	
A	62	69	53	5	11	23	42	9	274
B	70	53	52	15	33	85	182	52	542
C	75	73	44	5	12	18	27	2	256
D	46	107	106	22	17	46	66	30	440
TOTAL	253	302	255	47	73	172	317	93	1512

Table 1

Refugee and Non-Refugee ELL Student Population and Distribution Districtwide **Measures.** Students were asked demographic, empirical, and open ended questions in a confidential, paper and pencil based questionnaire.

Demographic questions. Students were asked the following demographic questions: (a) current age (b) age on arrival to the USA (c) country of origin (e) years of education prior to matriculation in USA (f) years in current school District (g) gender (i) Language spoken at home (j) race/ethnicity, (k) school attending currently (School A, B, or C), and (f) student ID number (to determine presence of refugee background according to student records).

Measures of perceived belonging. Subjects were presented with Likert-scale statements on the *Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale* (PSSM) (Goodenow, 1993), to measure the subjects' perceptions of belonging in school. The PSSM is a validated survey instrument that has been used with both ELL students and mainstream students. The PSSM, with a reliability alpha score of .88, was designed to measure "adolescent students' perceived belonging or psychological membership in the school environment (Goodenow, 1993, p.79)". The instrument is comprised of eighteen Likert-scale items related to sense of belonging in a school environment. Subjects chose the number that best represented their level of agreement with the statement, on a scale of 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true).

Measures of perceived academic self-concept. All subjects were also be presented with the *Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale* (MJSES) (Jinks & Morgan, 1999) to measure their perception of their own academic self-efficacy. The MJSES is a valid and reliable measure "designed to gain information about student efficacy beliefs (Jinks & Morgan, 1999, p. 225)." The MJSES is comprised of two sections: (a) 30 Likert-scale statements that relate to the respondent's perception of academic achievement and efficacy and (b) 5 additional Likert-Scale items where students self-reported their most recent academic grades in Math, Science, Social Studies, and English. All 30 of the items in section one can be categorized into three subscales (Jinks & Morgan, 1999, p. 227): talent items, context items, and effort items that give information about these areas of perceived self-efficacy. Section one Likert-Scale items are rated on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing "Really agree", 2 "Kind of agree", 3 "Kind of disagree" and 4

“Really disagree”. Section two items are rated A, B, C, D, and F, corresponding to academic grades awarded in the four subject areas listed in the statements.

Open-ended questions. Subjects were given the following questions to answer in an open-ended format in order to give the opportunity to provide additional information regarding their perception of the school climate and academic self-concept.

- 1.) How do you feel about your academic performance in school? Why?
- 2.) How do you feel about the community at your school? Why?

Student responses for the open-ended questions were recorded and grouped together to determine emerging themes.

Procedures for Data Collection

All students receiving ELL services at levels 2 and above at all three schools included in the study received an invitation to participate in the study, as well as an assent and consent form. All forms were made available in English, Hmong, Karen, Spanish, and Somali. Students under 18 provided their assent to participate, and their parents provided consent. Students over age 18 provided their own assent and consent. Reminders were sent home via student communication through their ELL teachers as well as automated recordings for two weeks prior to the date of survey administration in order to provide students with ample opportunity to return the consent forms. Once consent was acquired, data was collected using a paper and pencil questionnaire at the school site as certain languages (eg. Karen) did not have fonts readily available in electronically delivered questionnaire software options.

Procedure for Data Analysis

First, student demographic data were transcribed and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and then into JASP. Identifying information, such as school name, student name, and student ID number was removed prior to analysis. Subjects were placed into SLIFE/refugee ELL Learner or non-SLIFE/refugee ELL learner based on the presence or absence of time spent in a refugee camp according to the information provided by students and their families at the District intake center.

In order to test Hypotheses 1 and 2, a t-test was performed for each instrument in order to compare responses between the two groups once all data from the empirical questions were transcribed into JASP.

In order to test Hypotheses 3 and 4, data will be divided into SLIFE/refugee and non-SLIFE/refugee groups. Individual student means for academic self concept were correlated with individual student means for student sense of belonging. Data were evaluated using the Pearson correlation coefficient (r).

In this study, respondents overwhelmingly reported Thailand as their country of origin, Karen as their ethnicity, and a refugee background. Due to the imbalance in refugee and non-refugee populations, the method was modified to include two groups of 14 students. The refugee group was chosen on a case by case basis on the basis of age on arrival and time in country to match each respondent in the non-refugee student population. Once two groups of equal size were chosen, the data were analyzed.

Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions. Due to the confidentiality of responses, it was assumed that the respondents would be truthful in their answers. Due to the translation and audio recording of surveys that occurred prior to their administration, it was assumed that

students were able to understand the questions being asked to ensure that they are answering accurately.

Limitations. A key limitation of this study is that generalization of results will not be possible due to the widely diverse nature of ELL students, especially SLIFE students. SLIFE students come from such widely different backgrounds that replicating the study may not be possible in other school districts or regions as the population available for a purposive sample may be completely different than the population in this study.

Delimitations. Delimitations for this study include the inclusion of perspective of students only, not their families, nor community organizations. Only schools directly servicing all levels of ELL students 1-4 were included. Schools servicing levels 3 and above only were not be included in the study. In order to reduce all potential bias as much as possible, one site that would have been eligible for inclusion under the criteria for selection was excluded as it was the site where the author of this study was employed. Only high-school aged students in grades 9-12 were included in the study. No middle or elementary grades were included. Lastly, no alternative programming sites were included due to the potential differences in environment that would have impacted student responses.

Ethical Assurances. Participation in this study was voluntary. There were no consequences for electing to abstain from participating in the study. There were no known risks or consequences to participation in the study. All information was and continues to be kept confidential. Any material containing potentially identifying information is stored in a closed and locked cabinet at Minnesota State University-

Mankato. No participant was identified in the study, and all participants quoted were given pseudonyms.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the procedure used for collecting and analyzing quantitative data regarding the potential differences in perception of ELL SLIFE and non-SLIFE ELL students in sense of membership in their school communities and academic self concept in a large, urban district.

Chapter IV Findings

Demographic Characteristics

The study was presented in class for potential respondents to receive the information and obtain clarification on any questions. Across the three schools where approval to conduct the study was granted, participation was offered to 378 students. 177 students ultimately participated, participation rate resulting in a rate of participation from 40% to 51% in each building, resulting in a mean response rate of 46.8%.

Site	Students Offered Participation	Students Participated	Response Rate
1	114	51	44.70%
2	88	36	40%
3	176	90	51%
TOTALS	378	177	46.80%

Table 2: Response rates

Genders were not equally represented in the sample. Of all students offered participation, one hundred ninety nine, or 52%, were listed as female and one hundred seventy nine, or 47%, were listed as male. Of the students who ultimately participated, one hundred five of the subjects, or 59% identified as female, sixty-six, or 37% identified as male, and six, or 0.3% of the respondents did not indicate gender.

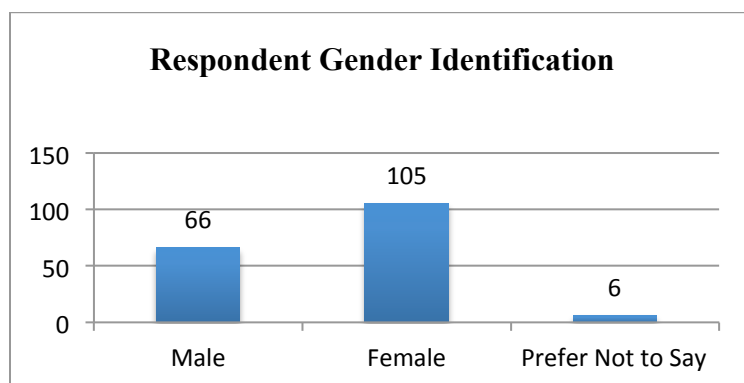


Figure 1. Bar graph of genders reported by respondents.

While respondents reported originating in sixteen different countries, the typical respondent overwhelmingly reported Thailand as their country of origin.

Country of Origin	Refugee Respondents	Non-Refugee Respondents	Total Respondents	Percentage of sample
Burma	5	0	5	2.80%
Djibouti	1	0	1	0.56%
Dominican Republic	0	1	1	0.56%
El Salvador	0	1	1	0.56%
Ethiopia	8	0	8	4.50%
Gambia	0	1	1	0.56%
Honduras	0	2	2	1.10%
Kenya	1	0	1	0.56%
Laos	2	3	5	2.80%
Mexico	0	2	2	1%
Nepal	2	1	3	1.60%
Somalia	3	0	3	1.60%
Thailand	125	14	139	78.50%
Turkey	1	0	1	0.56%
Uganda	1	0	1	0.56%
Vietnam	3	0	3	1.60%
Total	152	25	177	100%

Table 3. Respondents' refugee status and countries of origin

Respondent age on arrival and current age ranged from 5-19 years and 14-21 years respectively.

Descriptive Statistics		
	Age on Arrival	Current Age
Valid	177	176
Mean	13.42	16.94
Std. Deviation	2.577	1.608
Minimum	5.000	14.00
Maximum	19.00	21.00

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of sample.

Overall characteristics of sample

Overall, the typical subject was a female student (105 students, 59.3%, SD = 0.54) originating in Thailand (139 students, 78.5% , SD = 3.01), arriving to the United states at 13.42 years (SD = 2.58) of age and who was 16.94 (SD = 1.61) years old at the time of the study. She typically had 6.885 years of study (SD = 3.06) in her home country prior to emigration and had been in her current US School District for 3.43 years. (SD = 1.71)

Students originating in Thailand. Of the students originating in Thailand, the typical subject was a female student (82 students, 59.0% percent of sample, SD = 0.54) arriving to the United States at 13.03 years (SD = 2.49) of age and who was 16.87 (SD = 1.62) years old at the time of the study. She had 6.549 (SD = 2.94) years of study in her home country prior to emigration and had been in her current US School District for 3.71 (SD = 1.65) years. Within this sample, 125 students (89.9 percent of the sample) reported a refugee background, while 14 students (10.1% of the sample) did not.

Thai Refugee Sample. Of the students originating in Thailand who reported a refugee background, the typical subject was a female student (n=70, 56.0% percent of sample, SD = 0.54) arriving to the United States at 13.15 years (SD = 2.55) of age and who was 16.97 (SD = 1.65) years old at the time of the study. She had 6.628 (SD = 3.04) years of study in her home country prior to emigration and had been in her current US School District for 3.65 (SD = 1.67) years. Of this sample, 67 students reported an ethnicity of the Karen culture, 1 student reported an ethnicity of the Hmong culture, and two students reported an ethnicity of the Karenni culture. Notably, of the students

reporting a refugee background from Thailand, 20 respondents (28.5%) reported English as one of the languages spoken at home.

Thai Non-Refugee Sample. Of the 14 students originating in Thailand who did not report a refugee background, the typical subject was a female student (12 students, 85.7% percent of sample, $SD = 0.39$) arriving to the United States at 12 years of age ($SD = 1.519$) of age and who was 16 ($SD = .8771$) years old at the time of the study. She had 6.036 ($SD = 1.781$) years of study in her home country prior to emigration and had been in her current US School District for 4.25 ($SD = 1.312$) years. Student ethnicities reported are Karen (10 students, 71.4%), and Karenni (4 students, 28.6%).

Comparison of Thai Refugee vs Non-Refugee Student Responses

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that EL refugee students and their non-refugee EL peers would report differences in perceptions of their academic self-concept as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire.

The typical refugee student had a mean overall response of 2.390 ($SD = 0.34$) on the Morgan-Jinks instrument, indicating somewhat positive feelings about their own academic self-efficacy overall. The mean of their self-reported grades is 3.3036 of a possible 4 points, with A receiving 4 points, B 3 points, C 2 points, D 1 point, and failing grades 0 points. ($SD = 1.01$). The scores are further delineated into subcategory scores regarding talent, effort, and context items. The typical refugee student had a mean a score of 2.390 ($SD = 0.34$) on the Talent items of the instrument, and a mean score of 2.382 ($SD = 0.27$) on the Context items of the instrument, and a mean score of 2.04 ($SD = 0.44$) on the Effort (E Mean) items of the instrument. The typical non-refugee had a mean score of 2.379 ($SD = 0.31$) as an overall score on the Morgan-Jinks instrument, also

indicating overall positive feelings about their academic self efficacy. The mean of their self-reported grades is 2.833 of a possible 4 points, with A receiving 4 points, B 3 points, C 2 points, D 1 point, and failing grades 0 points. (SD = 0.56). Non-refugee students had a mean score of 2.420 (SD = 0.36) on the Talent items (T Mean) of the instrument, a mean score of 2.373 (SD = 0.40) on the Context items (C Mean) of the instrument, and a mean score of 2.232 (SD = 0.59) on the Effort items of the instrument.

	Group N		Mean	SD
Mean	1	14	2.336	0.216
	2	14	2.379	0.308
Effort Mean	1	14	2.036	0.437
	2	14	2.232	0.592
Context Mean	1	14	2.382	0.286
	2	14	2.373	0.404
Talent Mean	1	14	2.390	0.342
	2	14	2.420	0.357
	1	14	3.036	1.014
	2	14	2.833	0.556

Table 5. Means of Academic Self Efficacy Totals and Subcategories.

Independent Samples T-Test

	t	df	p
Total Mean	-0.436	26.00	0.667
Effort Mean	-0.999	26.00	0.327
Context Mean	0.069	26.00	0.946
Talent Mean	-0.225	26.00	0.823
Grades Mean	0.655	26.00	0.518

Table 6. Independent Sample t-Test of academic self efficacy.

On the overall mean of the measure, there was not a statistically significant difference [$t(26) = -0.436, p = .667$] between the refugee and non-refugee populations. For talent items, there was not a statistically significant difference between the refugee and non-refugee populations [$t(26) = -0.225, p = .823$]. For Context items, there was also not a statistically significant difference between the refugee and non-refugee populations [$t(26) = 0.069, p = .667$]. Lastly, for Effort items, there was not a statistically significant

difference between the refugee and non-refugee populations [$t(26) = -0.999, p = .327$]. Therefore, there was not a statistically significant difference on student self-efficacy between the refugee and non-refugee populations as measured by both the total instrument and the subcategories on the Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale .

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that EL refugee students and their non-refugee EL peers would report differences in perceptions of the factors of welcoming in a school climate as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted using data collected from the Goodenow Psychological Sense of School Membership scale. The overall mean from the refugee and non-refugee sample was 3.571 (standard deviation of .5542) The typical refugee student had a mean of 3.699 (Standard Deviation of 0.572), which is a higher mean score than the typical non-refugee had (Mean 3.444, SD 0.153). However, there was not a statistically significant difference in perceptions of school membership between the refugee and non-refugee populations; ($t(26) = -1.231, p = 0.229$).

Independent Samples T-Tests

	Test	statistic	df	p	Cohen's d
Goodenow PSSM Scale Means	Student's	-1.231	26.00	0.229	-2.372

Table 7: *t*-test of differences regarding perceptions of school membership.

Group Descriptives	Group	N	Mean	SD
Goodenow PSSM Scale Means	N	14	3.444	0.572
	R	14	3.699	0.524

Table 8: Perceptions of School Membership means

Hypothesis 3. It was hypothesized that EL refugee students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self-concept data and welcoming school climate data.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was computed to assess the relationship between the refugee student's academic self-concept and perception of

welcoming school climate. There was no correlation between the two variables

[$r=-0.008$, $p=0.510$].

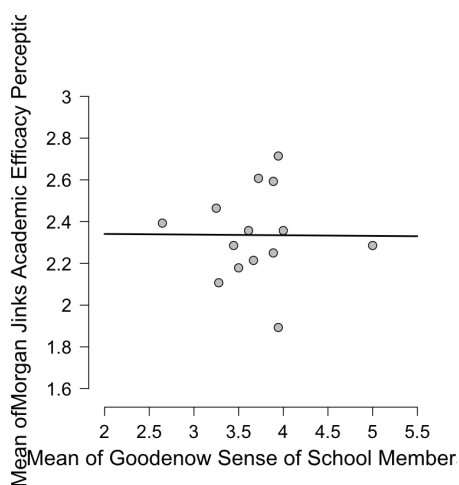


Figure 2. Scatterplot of correlation between perception of academic efficacy and school membership in refugee students.

Pearson Correlations		Mean of Morgan Jinks Academic Efficacy Perception
	Pearson's r	-0.008
	p-value	0.510
Mean of Goodenow Sense of School Membership	Upper 95% CI	1.000
	Lower 95% CI	-0.465

Table 9. Pearson correlation coefficient for refugee students' perceptions of academic efficacy and sense of school membership.

Hypothesis 4. It was hypothesized that non-refugee EL students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self concept data and welcoming school climate data.

Another Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was computed to assess the relationship between the non-refugee student's academic self concept and perception of welcoming school climate as measured by the Morgan Jinks scale and the Goodenow scale respectively. The mean scores of each measure were used in data analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient test determined that there was a small inverse correlation between the two variables [$r=-.215$, $p=0.770$].

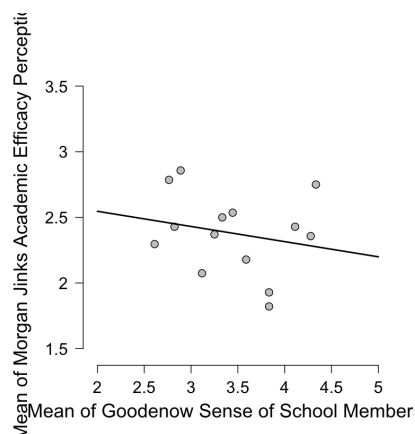


Figure 3. Scatterplot of correlation between perception of academic efficacy and school membership in non-refugee students.

While both hypothesis 3 and 4 used Pearson correlation coefficients and reported negatives in the results for their correlations, it is important to note that the scales used in the Morgan Jinks and Goodenow scales are opposite. The Morgan Jinks scale uses a 1 for “really agree” and a 4 for “really disagree”. Inversely, the Goodenow measure uses 1 for “Not at all true” and 5 for “Completely true”. Therefore, while it appears that there is a small inverse correlation in hypothesis 4, the opposite is true.

Pearson Correlations

	Mean of Goodenow Sense of School Membership	Mean of Morgan Jinks Academic Efficacy Perception
Pearson's r	—	-0.215
p-value	—	0.770
Mean of Goodenow Sense of School Membership	Upper 95% CI	1.000
	Lower 95% CI	-0.613

Note . all tests one-tailed, for positive correlation

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, one-tailed

Table 10. Pearson correlation coefficient for non-refugee students' perceptions of academic efficacy and sense of school membership.

Open Ended Question Data Analysis

Student responses were read and grouped according to similarity of answer.

Analysis of the student responses to two open ended responses yielded several emerging themes.

Open ended 1				
	Refugee	N	Non-Refugee	N
Theme 1	Overall positive feelings about school/academics	5	Overall satisfaction about school/academics	5
Theme 2	Appreciation for school personnel	3	Frustration with school and classroom practices	3
Theme 3	Pressure to achieve academically	2	Sense of urgency to improve English	4

Table 11. Emerging themes in refugee and nonrefugee student responses to question 1.

Open Ended 2				
	Refugee	N	Non-Refugee	N
Theme 1	Feelings of Welcome and acceptance	10	Feelings of welcome/acceptance in school community	10
Theme 2	Issues with bullying and violence	4	Issues with bullying	2

Table 12. Emerging themes in refugee and nonrefugee student responses to question 2.

Emerging themes from open-ended question 1. Several emerging themes presented themselves in relation to the first open ended question “How do you feel about your academic achievement in school? Why?”

Nonrefugee Responses. Within the group reporting a non-refugee background, the following themes emerged in relation to academic performance.

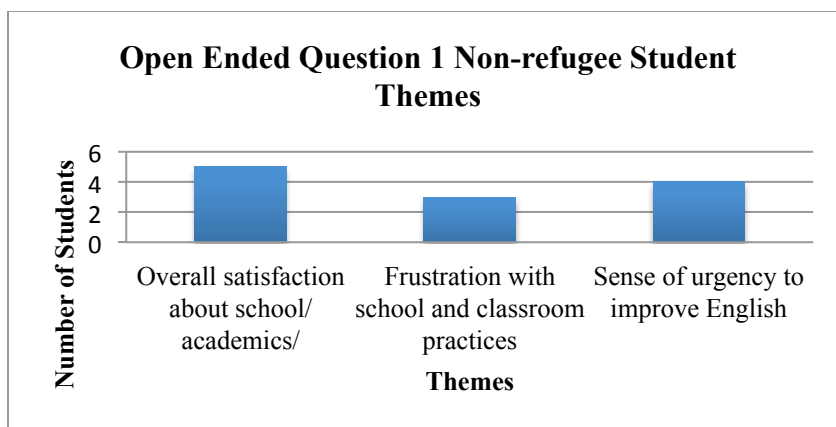


Figure 4. Nonrefugee Student themes for question 1.

Overall positive feelings about academics. Several students mentioned feeling positively regarding their academics, stating that “I feel happy because I get to learn a lot of new things”, as well as “[I feel] not bad because most academic class are I got B”.

Improvement of English Language skills. Of the 14 nonrefugee respondents, 5 specifically indicated that they feel they must improve their English skills in order to be successful. Students reported that “I feel about my academic performance in school is to learn more English, to be good and to do better”, and that it is important to “learn more English”. Students associated academic success with improvement in English language skills, also stating that “...if I study more and I know more get better speak English”. One student indicated that he struggles with reading and writing, stating that “some word I don’t know and it hard to read and spelling word.”.

Frustration regarding academic support and school practices. Another theme that emerged in student responses is frustration. One student expressed frustration with the school schedule not offering elective classes in addition to academic support classes, explaining that “I don’t feel good at all because we got like full years of boring 5/10, so at least give us 2 qtrs. Of other 5/10”. 5/10 refers to the after school program where

students receive either academic support or enrichment options. Two other students reported feeling unsupported by their teachers and the schools, stating that “My school should understand the situation students are struggle with because most teacher will not understand their students” and that “...the teacher...talk too much and he love to jokes with the student[s]. He talks a lots when the class start and rush at the last minute in class. His test was not really related about what we learn...”.

Refugee Responses Within the group reporting a non-refugee background, the following themes emerged in relation to academic performance.

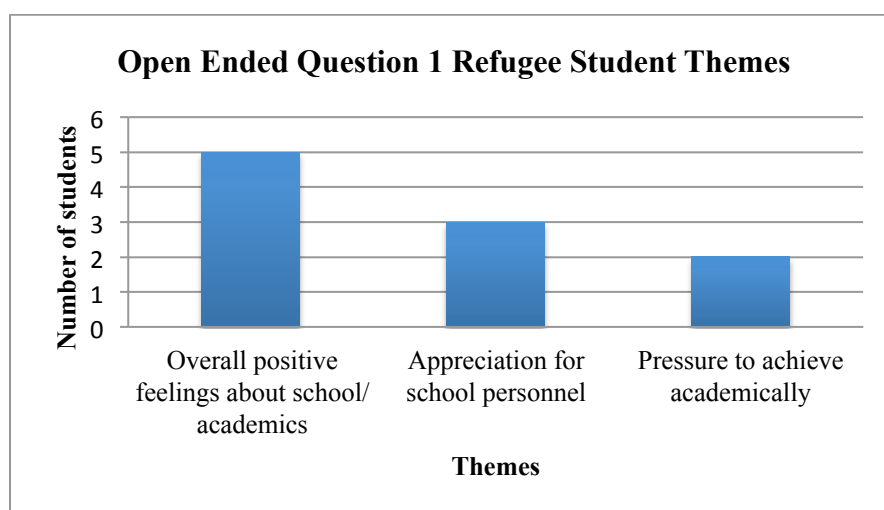


Figure 5. Refugee Student themes for question 1.

Overall positive feelings about academics. Several students reported feeling an overall sense of satisfaction with academics, stating that they “feel good”, “feel great”, and “feel good because I am brave” regarding academic performances.

Appreciation for help from teachers and other school personnel. Students in the refugee group also reported feeling appreciation and thankfulness for school personnel that are helpful to them, stating that “I feel great about school because all the teachers help me...”, and that they “Love the way teacher/students respect each other and get

along with each other.” Students also mentioned that when I didn’t understand something, my teachers always help me” and that in the school, there is “support...gived us to understand the situation.”

Pressure to catch up to other students academically. Another theme that emerged from the refugee responses to question 1 was a sense of being behind academically. Students reported that “I feel god that I’m getting good grades in my classes. But the classes are not advanced classes like other students are taking, so I kind of fell like I’m behind”, and that “...sometimes in school its hard. Sometime I don’t understand what’s teachers say and what other students say unless they speak Karen.”

Similarities and differences in Non-refugee and Refugee responses

Both non-refugee and refugee students reported some satisfaction in their academic achievement. Refugee students reported feeling appreciative of their school personnel for extra help and a sense of pressure to catch up academically. Non-refugee students reported a sense of frustration with programming and school practices, and a sense of urgency to improve their English skills.

Emerging themes from open ended question 2. Using responses from only the matched pairs chosen for the groups in hypothesis 1-4, several emerging themes presented themselves in relation to the second open ended question “How do you feel about your school community? Why?”

Non-refugee Responses. Within the group reporting a non-refugee background, the following themes emerged in relation to school community.

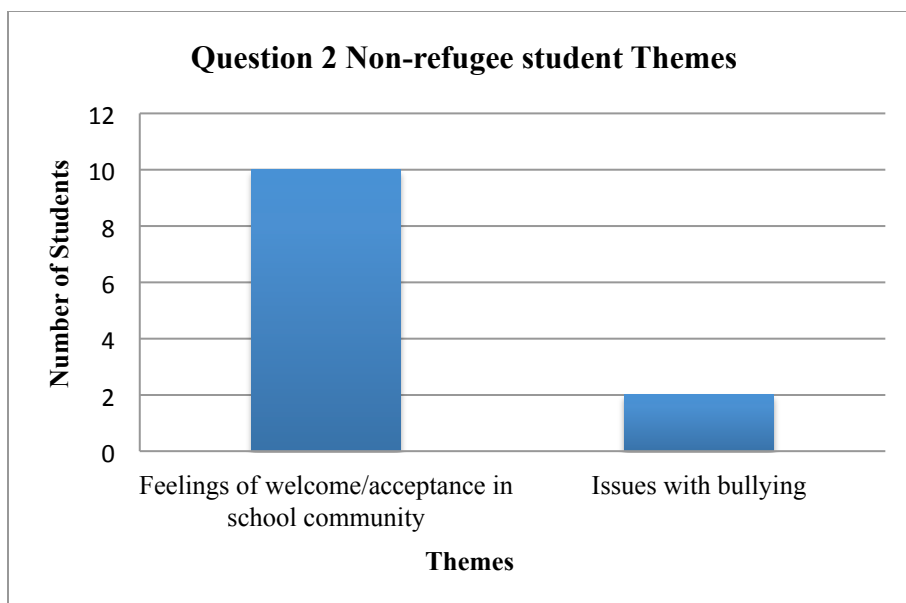


Figure 6. Non-refugee Student themes for question 2.

Feelings of welcome and acceptance in the school community. Students in the non-refugee group reported overwhelmingly positive feelings about their schools. Students cited “everybody treated each other with respect”, and that they have friends and others who care about them in the community, people who “love me for who I am.” Feeling welcomed in the school was another factor reported by student 3008, who stated that “The school was so big and I met a lot of new friend. Its very awesome to be in this school”. Students in the non-refugee group feel that their teachers are high quality and available to students, stating that “we have good teachers that can explain me more things”, and that the teachers are “nice, so I feel comfortable talking to them”.

Bullying. Fewer students reported experiences with bullying and even violence in their schools. One student stated that “[school 1, name redacted] is fun, but sometimes student fight and don’t have pass to go to the bathroom or the library it hard to other student”, indicating that violence can be an issue in their school environment.

Additionally, another student, Student 3035, perceived that s/he was being bullied on the

basis of their race, stating that “African American would not like me to walk pass them at first at hallway because I walk behind them means I should stay behind. I don’t like how other races become my obstacles when trying to go to my classes (NOT racist) but the only problem my school had is start with them and how they react toward Asian teachers”.

Refugee Responses. Within the group reporting a refugee background, the following themes emerged in relation to academic performance.

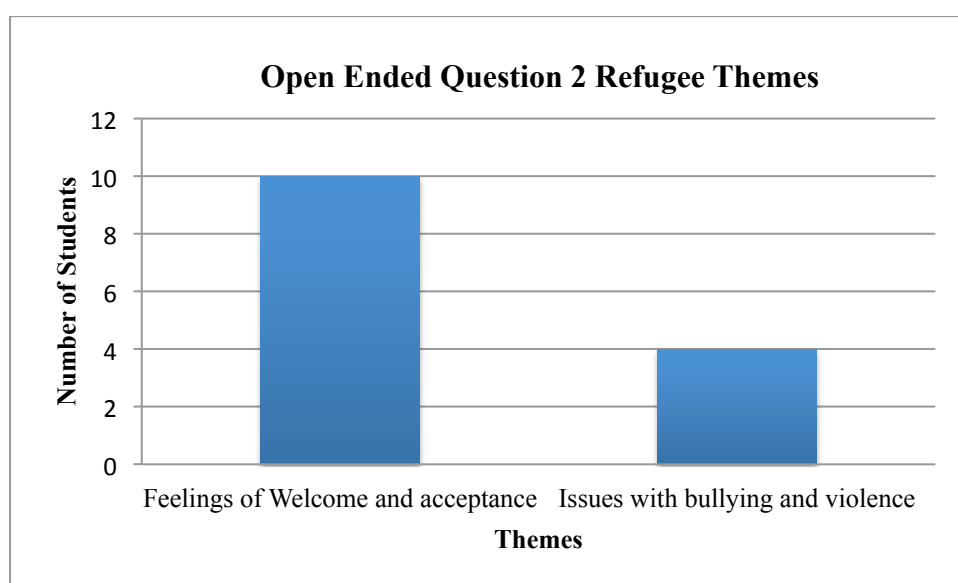


Figure 7. Refugee Student themes for question 2.

Feelings of welcome and acceptance at school. Refugee students overwhelmingly reported overall positive feelings about school due to feelings of welcome and acceptance. Students stated feeling that “The opportunity in school is everywhere [sic] and if you want it, you apply for it. People are nice to each other and are friendly”, as well as that “I feel great to be with them because they are nice and treated me as if I’m their friends”.

Four students reported issues of bullying and violence in school. Students reported that “sometimes...some people are mean and can even beat you up when they don’t like you”, and that “something I hate and didn’t like is when people bother me and bulli [sic] me even I don’t know them...I came to school for learning, not for people bothering me.”

Similarities and differences in Non-refugee and Refugee responses. Open ended question 2 shows more congruency between refugee and non-refugee responses. Both groups reported themes of feeling welcomed and accepted as well as issues with bullying in the schools.

Chapter V

Discussion

Currently, English Learners are the fastest growing group of students in the United States (Reyes & Her, 2000, Consetino de Cohen & Chu Clewell, 2007, Urban Institute, 2017). This group is by no means homogeneous, with at least three subgroups comprising the label English Learner (Freeman & Freeman, 2003). SLIFE and refugee students are an exceptional subcategory of EL students in the United States whose needs include some of the same as the traditional English learner, but also include many additional needs, both academic (Miller & Windel, 2010, Bigelow & Tarone, 2010), and socio-emotional (MN Advocates for Human Rights, 2006, Bigelow, 2006). Leaving behind all that is known, to come to a new country in search of a better life, free of danger and persecution can be a trying change for students (Hodes, 2000, Birnam & Chan, 2008). In fact, refugees often come with trauma from their country of origin, and it is not uncommon that trauma is experienced both in their journey to, as well as their eventual settlement in the United States (Advocates for Human Rights, 2014). Due to the interruptions or limitations on SLIFE and/or refugee students' formal education, they may come to the United States needing more educational services than a typical EL teacher has been trained to meet (Taylor, 2008). This gives rise to a variety of negative educational and lifelong outcomes, such as higher dropout rates, poverty, and ongoing issues with mental and physical health (Duguay, 2012).

With this information aforesaid, this study was enacted to compare refugee and non-refugee student perceptions of their academic achievement in school as well as their perceptions of their school environment, which are factors that impact students'

educational and personal outcomes later in life. Data were collected from EL students in three high schools in a large Midwestern district. The results could be significant as they will give an idea as to how students from Thailand perceive their American public school experience.

Summary of Findings

For the purposes of this study, English Language Learner students currently serviced in an ELL class from levels 2 (low intermediate) through 4 (advanced) were offered the opportunity to participate in the study. This amounted to 378 students total being offered participation, and 177 ultimately participating. The students overwhelmingly came from refugee backgrounds, reported Thailand as their country of origin, and Karen as their ethnicity. The respondents overwhelmingly identified as female.

Results of hypotheses. The study proposed four hypotheses, which will be briefly summarized below.

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that EL refugee students and their non-refugee EL peers would report differences in perceptions of their academic self-concept as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire. Students from refugee and non-refugee backgrounds did not exhibit statistically significant differences in their perceptions of academic self-concept.

Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that EL refugee students and their non-refugee EL peers would report differences in perceptions of their membership in a school community as measured by Likert-scale question items on a questionnaire. Students from

refugee and non-refugee backgrounds did not exhibit statistically significant differences in their perceptions of school membership.

Hypothesis 3. It was hypothesized that EL refugee students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self-concept data and welcoming school climate data. There was no correlation between these variables.

Hypothesis 4. It was hypothesized that non-refugee EL students would exhibit a positive correlation of academic self concept data and welcoming school climate data. There was a small correlation between these variables.

Results of open-ended questions. Student responses to open-ended questions served to provide additional perspective and knowledge around ELL students' experiences in American schools, both academically and socio-emotionally. There was some overlap and some difference when comparing refugee and non-refugee student responses. When asked how the respondents felt about their academic performance in school, both groups reported positive feelings about their school and academic achievement. Refugee students reported an appreciation for school personnel, and a sense of pressure to achieve academically. Non-refugees reported a sense of frustration with school and classroom practices as well as a sense of urgency with respect to improving their English language skills.

When asked how they felt about their school community, there was much more overlap. Both groups of students reported feelings of welcome and acceptance, as well as issues with bullying in school. The non-refugee group indicated that the issues with bullying could even escalate to violence.

Potential Explanations

There are many reasons why respondents answered the way they did. Students coming from a varied background, including both refugee and non-refugee educational opportunities in their country of origin may have influenced students' response to the questions. Students coming from an environment of trauma and who no longer feel unsafe may view their school in a more positive light than a student who has not experienced these prior hardships.

Students' perceptions of bullying may stem from real or perceived experiences with bullying. It may be possible that students of certain origins or ethnicities are being bullied at school. It may also be possible that when interacting with students from different cultures than their own, students may perceive an interaction as negative or as bullying when the intent of the other student involved was not as such.

Implications

There are several implications from this research that should be considered. The first is the lack of statistically significant differences between ELL students of refugee and non-refugee backgrounds in 3 of the 4 hypotheses. These results suggest that refugee and non-refugee students who are currently being serviced in ELL classes are sharing many of the same perceptions about both academic achievement and belonging to their school communities. There is tremendous opportunity here for school districts, individual schools, and classroom/building staff to glean information regarding the perspectives that ELLs from both refugee and nonrefugee backgrounds can bring to school with them.

However, as all students were from Thailand, regardless of refugee status, and all students were currently serviced in their school ELL department could also be reasons for the lack of statistically significant differences in the results of the hypotheses.

There also exists the potential for schools and districts to examine the data obtained from students of Thai origin and Karen ethnicity. This is a significant, and growing population in the District where the study was realized, and this study presents a great opportunity, if not a moral responsibility to examine the students' perspective around their experiences in their new country and school.

Districts. School districts which are home to students of Karen ethnicity will be able to use the results of this study as a guide to what students are perceiving regarding academic achievement and school climate. Beginning to look at student perspective for a large and growing population of students can help to create District level policy regarding how Thai Karen students are served and how their needs are being met. Districts will be able to use student perception in their decisions regarding the level of academic supports to be made available to students in terms of EL models and pathways for Karen refugees as well as services meeting socio-emotional needs for students. Districts may also be able to use the results, particularly from the open ended questions section to plan professional development opportunities for staff.

Buildings. Individual buildings which are home to Thai students of Karen ethnicity will be able to use the results of this study to examine how the students attending their schools perceive the academic opportunities available to them as well as their perceptions of climate in their schools. School leaders can use the data from this study to make building level determinations regarding designation of course pathways most appropriate to meet Karen student needs in their buildings. School leaders may also use the data regarding perception of membership in a school community to create collective commitments among students and staff to improve climate overall in the

building. School leaders may also use the perceptions of Karen students regarding bullying to take preventative actions building(s)-wide regarding bullying and implement systems and structures to create safe environments for Karen students.

Classrooms. Perhaps the greatest implications of this study are for instruction and climate at the classroom level. At the classroom level, teachers can use the data from this study to inform their practices around what Karen students found helpful and unhelpful regarding their academic achievement. Student perception of academic achievement can inform teachers' decisions around classroom practices around motivation and scaffolding. Student data in open-ended questions can inform teachers of specific student concerns about their academic performance as well as teacher/staff behaviors the students perceive both helpful and unhelpful with regards to helping the students learn English and other subjects.

With respect to school community, teachers in both ELL and mainstream classrooms may be able to use the data to implement classroom practices where Karen students feel safe and capable. Teachers may choose to implement community building practices and/or anti-bullying curriculum to address student concerns regarding bullying.

Overall, the implications of this study are that there is varied and rich opportunity for school leaders and personnel to gain needed understanding regarding Karen refugee students from Thailand. Due to the relatively recent arrival and growth of this population, there has been much less research conducted regarding all facets of this population.

Strengths and Limitations

The present study demonstrated two main strengths. The first strength was the application of two validated instruments in a new manner. Use of both the Goodenow Psychological Scale of School Membership and the Morgan-Jinks self efficacy scale instruments with populations of exclusively English learner students, many of whom are from a refugee background is a new usage of these instruments. Furthermore, exploration of the relationships manifested in the results is another distinct application of these validated instruments.

Another strength, arguably the most important element of the study, is the contribution of knowledge regarding Thai refugee students of Karen ethnicity to the existing research base. This is a population that has been infrequently studied, but that is present and growing in certain areas of the country. Contributions to the research base to help inform effective practices for these students will have positive impacts in the future.

Despite the strengths of the present study, there were also four main limitations that were manifested, including sample size, non-refugee underrepresentation, student prior experience, and generalizeability. The sample size in general and non-refugee underrepresentation in particular manifested in the study pose important limitations to the results of the study. Due to the fact that the non-refugee group was drastically smaller than the refugee group, and that the students were overwhelmingly from Thailand, stating with certainty that any group other than refugee students of Thai origin were represented well in the sample is not accurate. The sample size limitation of non-refugee students of Thai origin presented a challenge in the analysis of data collected in the present study. Due to the fact that only 14 students were not identified as refugees, the results cannot be considered demonstrative of the population in general.

Due to the unique cultural and educational backgrounds of the respondents, their lived experiences in vastly different environments, and their unique circumstances in their current educational experiences, generalizing the results of the study to other populations of EL refugee and non-refugee students whose educational and cultural backgrounds are not similar, is not possible.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study gives rise to various topics that warrant further exploration in subsequent research. First, it is recommended that student concerns regarding bullying and violence be examined more thoroughly in future studies. Gleaning an improved understanding how bullying and violence manifests itself in Karen students' lives as well as gaining student perspective around how to prevent it would be an impactful addition to the existing research around EL refugee students. This research would also serve as a starting point to learn how to identify tensions between immigrant and nonimmigrant groups, as well as within immigrant groups including both refugee and non-refugee student members.

A second recommendation for further research would be to deepen understanding of refugee students perspectives around school membership. As Thailand is home to many different groups of refugees from various countries, it is worth examining also the differences between perspectives of students from different ethnic backgrounds, such as Hmong, Karen, and Karenni, among others, to determine which needs are being met, as well as which needs are not, and what students perceive to be helpful and unhelpful district, school, and classroom practices. This research could also be executed with other refugee groups as well; depending on where the study takes place, there may not be a

large population of refugees who originated in Thailand who are ethnic minorities such as Hmong or Karen.

A third and final recommendation for further research is to examine which factors specifically are perceived as positive or negative in a school setting. A qualitative study involving multiple members of the aforementioned communities may deepen existing understanding of how school impacts these students' lives once they arrive to their new country. Longitudinal research with refugee students may improve understanding of the relationship between academic outcomes and perceived membership in a school community over time and help determine if these outcomes differ significantly from students of non-refugee backgrounds.

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