Experiences of International Latinx Students When Studying in an Institution of Higher Education in the Southeast of the United States

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Abstract

This research study explored the experiences of International Latinx students (ILS) who sought a graduate degree at an institution of higher education (IHE) in the Southeast of the United States. ILS represent 4.3 % of the 1 million international students (IS) in the United States. In several research studies, ILS have reported cultural, linguistic, academic, and social challenges when studying at U.S. IHEs. Although studies about IS experiences exist, most of these concentrate on students from China, Korea, and India, whereas there is a gap concerning the ILS perspective in the literature on international studies. This study explored the experiences of ILS when seeking a degree in U.S. IHEs. I used a co-constructed autoethnography (CCAE) methodology and included ILS as collaborating research participants. The collaborators and I reflected on our experiences as ILS and positionality to construct an overall understanding of seeking a graduate degree at a U.S. IHE. *Testimonios* and follow-up conversations were used for data collection and analysis, which included coding and emergent themes. This research study provides valuable and original data about ILS' native language (Spanish) and the U.S. language of instruction (English). This study revealed that ILS had difficulties with the English language, which collectively led them to develop negative emotions when using English language as the language of instruction and learning. This research study provides an original contribution as it explores the experiences of ILS in the United States. IHE administrators, professors, and ILS can glean educational practices that ILS consider crucial for their learning process from this study.

Keywords: International Students, Latinx, LatCrit, English Learners, Acculturation, Assimilation, IHE, Autoethnography, CRT, Professors

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Chapter I

Introduction

Chapter I describes my journey to becoming a Latinx international student (ILS) in the United States. I share my experiences in academia and define my position in this study. When I researched the literature on ILS, I found a gap in empirical studies that address international students (IS) from Latin American countries. Therefore, this chapter also articulates a gap in the extant literature on IS and highlights discrepancies in the definitions of IS. I also present the research questions, the purpose, and the significance of the study that makes this study a contribution to ILS literature.

Background of the Study

I was born and raised in Colombia, where Spanish is the country's official language. Since I was a child, I have wanted to learn English and learn about the culture of the United States. My childhood was influenced by the *pop culture* that surged in the 1990s. In 2011, I graduated from Universidad Regional with a degree in English Language Teaching. This academic degree allowed me to pursue my passion and become an English teacher. In 2015, I moved to the United States as part of the *Continental Teaching* program that brings educators from around the world to teach various subjects in K-12 settings. I was hired to teach English as a second language (ESL) in Bradford,

North Carolina. I was beyond excited to be immersed in US culture. Initially, I assumed that this would be a monolithic culture, which denotes a singular cultural group (George Mwangi et al., 2018). To my surprise, I learned that this society is composed of a culturally and linguistically diverse population that stands for its pluralism. After one year of living in the United States, I started my journey as a graduate student. The program where I worked offered its visiting teachers an opportunity to enroll in a master's program with in-state tuition rates. I completed my master's degree in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) from Columbus College, North Carolina. I felt happy and honored to have a degree from this country as the United States is the top destination for IS (Ballakrishnen & Silver, 2019; Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Gennaro, 2009; Lee et al., 2019). Next, I decided to continue my education and pursue a doctoral degree. As I am not a U.S. citizen and was not considered a resident of North Carolina, the doctoral program options were simply not affordable for me. For most institutions, I was considered an IS, which required me to pay about three times the in-state tuition rate for residents; these institutions also required me to attend on-campus classes, and I could not afford it because my stay was temporary at that time. After months of sitting in front of my computer and looking for a suitable opportunity, I found a great option at Southeast State University in Georgia. This doctoral program was online, and the tuition cost was standard for all students. I started to learn that succeeding in this society requires more than merits and desires to advance in education (Markovits, 2019).

In 2022, and during the completion of this study, I started a master's program in School Administration (MSA) at Mercedes University in North Carolina. Most of my classes were on campus, except for two hybrid courses. In our cohort of 20 students, a

classmate and I were the only Latinx students. He was born and raised in the United States, and I was a IS. Only a classmate from Jamaica and I had been in this country for less than eight years and were considered IS. My experiences of on-campus masters-degree level in school administration (MSA) classes enriched the depth of this study.

International Students in the United States

The definition of IS can intersect with the definition of other terms such as foreign students, domestic students, or migrant students. Shapiro et al. (2014) explained that *resident immigrant* students differ from IS because resident immigrants complete part of their K-12 education in the host country and IS in their home countries. Lee et al. (2019) extended this definition, "domestic students are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, whereas IS are non-resident aliens i.e., temporary foreign visitors with an F-1 or J-1 status for studying in U.S. colleges" (p. 509). Lastly, Ballakrishnen and Silver (2019) shared that the term IS refers only to a student's identity that is associated with a visa status.

Due to unclear distinctions of these definitions, researchers often use these terms interchangeably. Karkar-Esperat's (2018) definition has similarities with Shapiro's (2014) and Gennaro's (2009) definitions. Karkar-Esperat (2018) used the term IS for "students from countries outside the United States who are enrolled in a graduate program at a university within the United States" (p. 1722). Shapiro et al. (2014) referred to IS as those who move to and stay in a country for academic purposes only. Meanwhile, Gennaro (2009) referred to IS as students who completed most of their academic degrees in their first language (L1) and who temporarily migrated to study in another country.

International Students Online and On-Campus

Online and on-campus IS experiences (Lee & Bligh, 2019) present similar challenges for culturally and linguistically diverse conditions regardless of the delivery system. Dick et al. (2015) explained that the instructional delivery status changes the circumstances of the learner's interactions with the classes. A notable difference between online IS and on-campus IS is that online IS receive synchronous and asynchronous instructional experiences while on-campus IS physically attend classes. However, a current study indicated that online IS "faced challenges in relation to language proficiency, isolation, inexperienced professors' motivation, and the features of online classes" (Karkar-Esperat, 2018, p. 1729), challenges that are regularly reported with on-campus IS students as well. Despite the differences between online and on-campus delivery forms (Dick et al., 2015), on-campus and online international studies present similar challenges. For this study, I use the term IS as an identity (Ballakrishnen and Silver, 2019) for students who completed their K-12 education in a foreign country (Karkar-Esperat, 2018), and I make the distinction between online and/or on-campus circumstances when necessary.

Institutions of Higher Education

Since the 19th century, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) in the United States have captivated IS' interest (Bevis & Lucas, 2007) for its academic rigor and/or the English language practice opportunities (Ravichandran et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2018; Urban & Palmer, 2016). More than one million IS are enrolled in U.S. IHEs (Banjong, 2015; Choudaha, 2018; Musto, 2017; "Annual Release: International Students," 2024; Senyshyn, 2019). IS from 200 countries enroll each year, but students from China, India,

South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada represent the greatest percentage of IS in the United States (Duffin, 2021). Approximately, 4.3% of IS come from Latin American countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela, but this percentage does not account for Latinx immigrants or online IS enrolled in U.S. IHEs (Duffin, 2021).

Research on IS experiences in the United States shows that non-native English-speaking (NNES) IS have greater challenges than those who are native English speakers (NES) (Postel, 2020). NNES IS face challenges based on nationality, language, and cultural background (Koo et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2014; Yao et al., 2019). Banjong (2015) noted that the language of instruction is the most significant difficulty for learning among IS as the English proficiency level has a negative correlation of r -= -.46 with their academic success. However, Martirosyan et al. (2015) noted that when IS were English proficient, they perform well academically. The researchers observed a positive effect between English proficiency level and GPA scores with "[$F(2, 45) = 4.03$, $p = .025$, partial $\eta^2 = .152$]" (p. 66). IS consider the language of instruction, English, to be the main challenge when pursuing a degree in U.S. IHEs, even if they have studied this language for years (Wu et al., 2015).

IHE policies normally require NNES IS to take an English language placement test as part of the enrollment process. These types of policies are in place to ensure that NNESs are prepared for the language skill demands within their academic course load. However, current research studies indicate that NNES IS struggle with the language of instruction, even when these students pass the language test enrollment requirement (Kuo, 2011). Gennaro (2009) also disagreed with the notion that language tests scores guarantee NNES IS success with the English language. IHEs offer IS additional services

such as ESL courses and tutoring in academic writing services, which affect IS satisfaction and academic performance (Colombos, 2011).

Critics of IHEs' services suggest a need for improvement in the assistance offered by IHEs. Wang and Sun (2021) suggested that these types of support services reflect deficit thinking:

> Although most selected institutions indicate in their missions or statements that there should be two-directional understanding, learning, and contribution between U.S. programs and their international students for a better global competence and development in the new century, the lack of support academically, culturally, and socially and the discourses of deficit and even discriminative attitudes toward international students imply the thought that it is solely the international students' own responsibility to adapt and even assimilate to the western society. (p. 8)

Some studies reveal different areas where those IHEs that host the greatest number of IS in the United States implement improvements. Collier and Hernandez (2016) analyzed 14 IHE websites, and they compared the services offered with the actual support these students received. Collier and Hernandez (2016) found that the support is consistent with their advertised offerings; although international studies still present numerous difficulties in U.S. IHEs. Collier and Hernandez suggested these websites' support concentrated on IS legal matters rather than academic and social support. Similarly, Wang and Sun (2021) conducted a similar study and found that IHEs perpetuated a form of neo-racism (Lee & Rice, 2007) and a deficit thinking mindset (Valencia, 2010) based on the website support they offered to IS. Wang and Sun (2021)

stated that English language support was the most common service offered, which constitutes a form of cultural racism (Bell et al., 2016). Their study revealed that the terminology on these websites included microaggressions, deficit thinking, neo-racism, and cultural superiority over IS (Wang & Sun, 2021).

The COVID-19 effects extended to discriminatory challenges for IS, especially for Asian students (Koo et al., 2021). The 2021 study by Koo et al. showed that the pandemic boosted racism and an unwelcoming environment for Asian IS. They suffered racial discrimination due to assumptions the virus was of Asian origin (Gover et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). Asian IS endured verbal and physical attacks in relation to their race, and there was no report of actions taken from their U.S. IHEs. Koo et al. (2021) claimed that the COVID-19 circumstances aggravated discriminatory challenges faced before the pandemic.

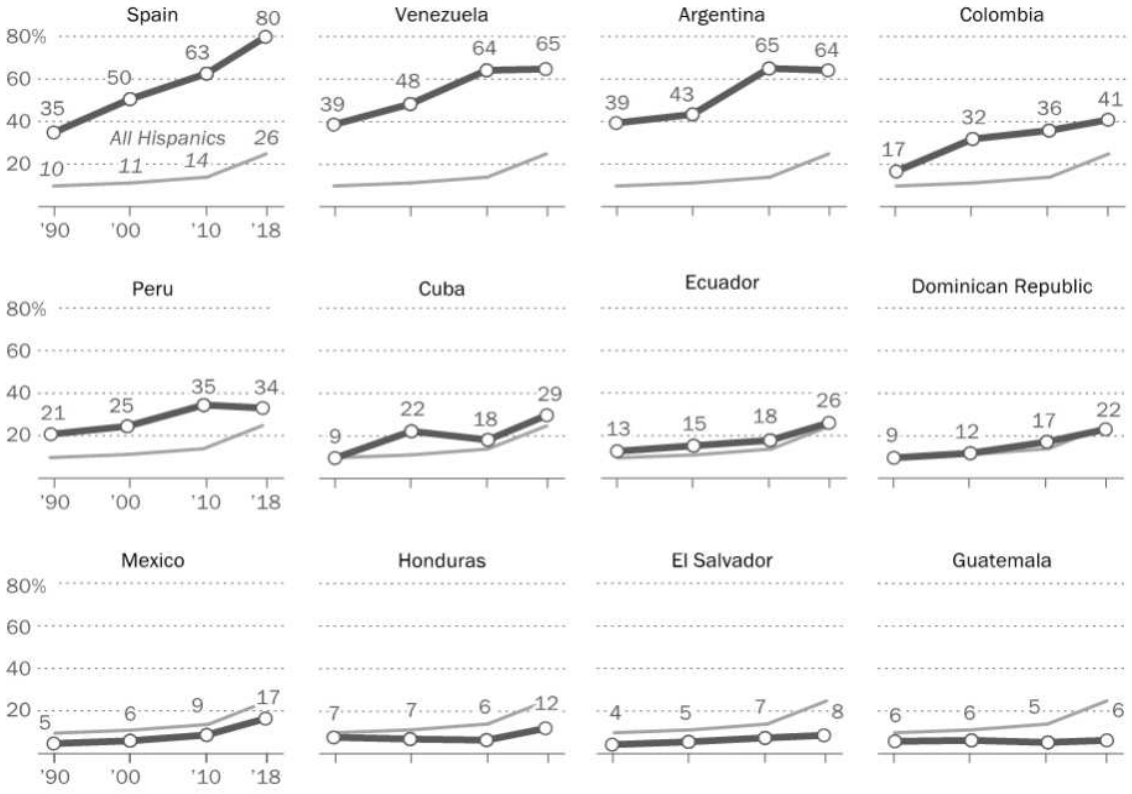
Problem Statement

Several researchers have indicated the need to expand research attention on IS (George Mwangi et al., 2018). A gap in the research literature limits our understanding of this student population. The existing research studies reveal that IS face difficulties when seeking a degree in the United States (Ballakrishnen & Silver, 2019; Banjong, 2015; Elturki et al., 2019; Senyshyn, 2019; Tang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015). However, these research findings are limited as they predominantly focus on students from China, India, and Korea, and they cannot be generalized to other IS such as ILS. A recent report showed an increased percentage of ILS from Spain, Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, and Peru in the United States (see Figure 1). However, little information is available to understand the reasons for the increase of students from South America and Europe and a

declining number of IS from Central America and the Caribbean. Maxwell (2013) explained that relevant literature informs the research design, and I believe that more research on ILS is needed.

Figure 1

Latinx Students with Secondary Degree From 1990 to 2018 by Country of Origin



Note. Participants in this report were Latinx immigrants older than 25 years old. Adapted from *Education levels of recent Latino immigrants in the U.S. reached new highs as of 2018*, by Noe-Bustamante (2020), Pew Research Center, https://pewrsr.ch/2UNGR8a

Most of the research addresses international studies with a monolithic approach, which refers to grouping different individuals into a single cultural block (George Mwangi et al., 2018). Yao et al. (2019) explained that referring to IS with this approach is problematic because IS have significant differences in regard to nationality, language, religion, and/or educational background (Bonazzo & Wong 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007). IS come from over 200 countries, but "the overarching perspective is that international graduate students are solely seen as 'international' without further consideration of the diversity present within that identifier" (George Mwangi et al., 2018, p. 6). Even online students are regularly considered a homogenous group, which affects the understanding of their characteristics as a diverse group of students (Lee, 2007). Pino et al. (2012) added that existing research addresses ILS with this monolithic approach. Even though the current literature on IS informs with *generativity* (Shulman, 1999), it is necessary to concentrate research on groups of students within the IS category to expand our understanding of IS.

Purpose of the Study

The goal for this study was to explore ILS experiences when seeking a graduate degree at IHEs in the United States. These research findings broadened the understanding of IS. This study contributes to the literature conversation of students who are part of a cultural and linguistic minority group. In the United States, Latinx experience discrimination in terms of origin, language, and race. Are these discriminatory occurrences passed to ILS? In response to a similar question, George Mwangi et al. (2018) analyzed how African IS experience discriminatory actions because their skin

color. Therefore, the present study shows whether LIS have comparable experiences due to an intersection of discrimination towards Latinx in the United States.

This study also shows how ILS experience instructional elements in a U.S. academic environment. First, the collaborators of this study, ILS, had the opportunity to express their experiences as NNES IS in an educational context where the English language was the language of instruction. Existing research has shown that NNES IS struggle more than English native speakers, and those struggles affect their academic performance (Banjong, 2015; Martirosyan et al., 2015). The research methodology of this study allowed ILS to describe their experiences with nuance and depth.

Significance of the Study

This critical co-constructed autoethnography (CCAE) study explored the experiences of IS and contributes to the ongoing academic discourse on Latinx students in the United States (Adams et al., 2015). This study explored the experiences and perceptions about studying at a U.S. IHEs. In addition, the collaborators and I addressed the experiences of learning in an academic environment where English is the language of social and instructional settings. This study signifies a contribution to Latinx scholarship. Critical scholars recognize that people of color have ways of theorizing that diverge from the White male predominant voice to narrate scholarly contributions (Taylor et al., 2016). Martinez (2016) argued, “It is important to have a presence and voice” for Latinx scholars. Therefore, this study signifies an original contribution to the literature on IS education.

Although qualitative studies do not contribute results that can then be generalized to a population (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015), this study provides researchers and

educators with essential information about ILS who are English learners. Educators such as academic professors, teaching the ILS community, can use this CCAE study's findings to explore culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' experiences with teaching and learning practices at U.S. IHEs. Besides, this CCAE study provides valuable information to promote IS enrollment and create plans to meet IS' expectations and needs. Further, my study indicates the motivations and circumstances that ILS expected to experience while learning in the United States. Prospective ILS can use this study to learn about other students' experiences and prepare before attending U.S. IHEs.

Research Questions

These research questions include my goals to understand a social phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of ILS learning at an IHE in the Southeast of the United States with the English language as the language of instruction?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of ILS regarding professors' instructional methodologies?

Discussion of Terms

International students: Students who have completed their basic education K-12 in their home country and study for a secondary degree in a host country (Shapiro et al., 2014). In this study, I used the acronym IS for international students without distinction of singular or plural numbers.

Latinx: This academic term involves Latinos and Latinas together, preventing ambiguity of gender with patriarchal control (Curwen, 2020; Salinas & Lozano, 2021)

LatCrit: Abbreviation for Latino critical race theory; LatCrit explains the experiences of Latinx in the United States (Perez, 2010, p. xxi)

English Learners: Students who are non-native English speakers and who are engaged in a process of learning the English language

Acculturation: The transformation of individuals' cultural patterns based on the continuous interaction with a new culture (Redfield et al., 1936)

Assimilation: The idea of adopting the cultural norms of a culture in power and leaving the own culture behind (Alba & Nee, 2005)

IHE: Abbreviation for institutions of higher education

Autoethnography: Qualitative methodology that incorporates the researcher as the subject of the study to expose the positionality within a phenomenon

CRT: Abbreviation for critical race theory; CRT focuses on the racialized circumstances that a system of power imposes over people of color because of their race and cultural background

Professors: Professors in the United States are diverse in terms of race, color, national origin, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.

Summary

I am an IS, and I am interested in learning about my position as a Latinx student in an IHE in the United States. Current literature on IS shows that IS face academic, social, and personal challenges when studying in U.S. IHEs. However, the IS population does not receive enough research attention, and that lack of information results in a literature gap. Researchers often address IS as a monolithic group. The goal of this study is to broaden the understanding of the experiences of ILS when seeking a higher degree

at IHEs in the United States. In addition, this study gives a minority group of students a voice to tell their experiences.

In this CCAE study, I participated not only as the researcher but as a participant in this study. My experiences as an international graduate student in two master's programs and one doctoral program in the South of the United States enriched this study. I reflected on my position as an international Latinx student to contribute to the understanding of international education and culturally diverse students, and ILS in the United States. Two graduate ILS participated in this study and were also collaborators of the narrative, through their *testimonios* and reflections on their experiences. I used shared *testimonios* and follow-up conversations to co-construct our position. The study presented limitations for its methodology and my role as a collaborator and researcher in the study; however, I documented my decision-making process, subjectivity, and influence with memos and metamemos to ensure trustworthiness. This CCAE study represents an original contribution to literature as it gave voice to a group of ILS residing in the United States.

Chapter II

Literature Review

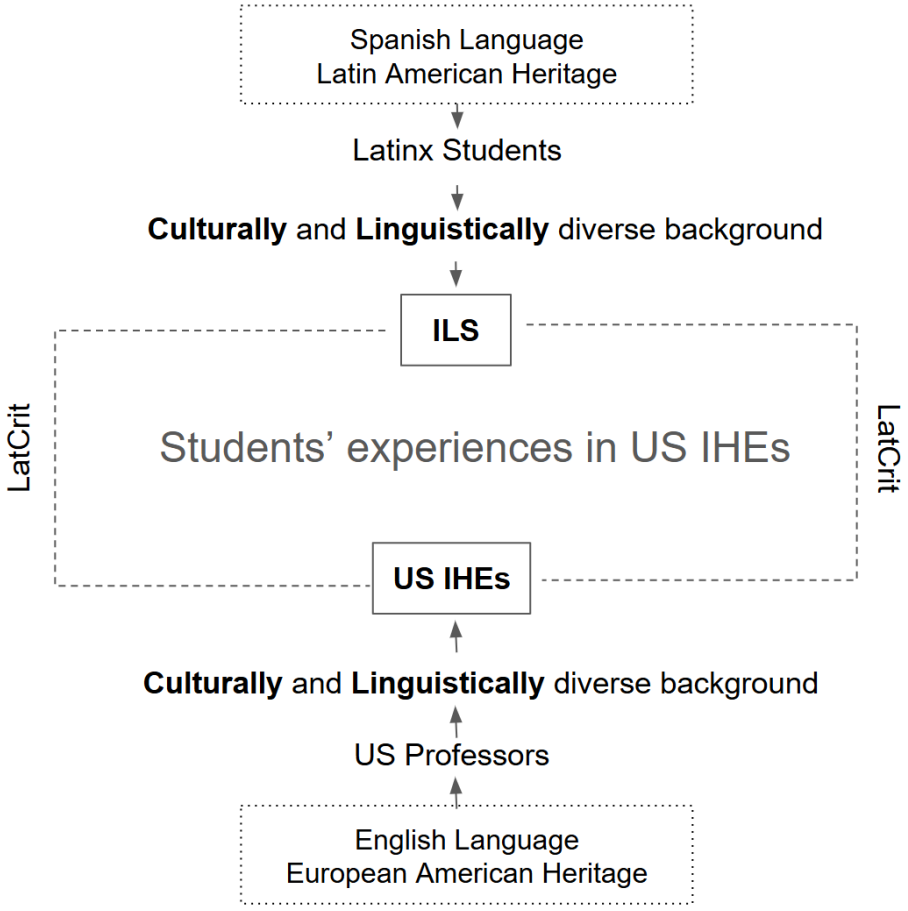
The population of the United States is diverse in terms of both physical and cultural characteristics. Based on these characteristics, the U.S. population is categorized into groups that, based on the 2020 U.S. Census, include “Hispanic, White, non-Hispanic; Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic; American Indian and Alaska Native alone, non-Hispanic; Asian alone, non-Hispanic; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic; Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic; and Multiracial, non-Hispanic” (Jensen, 2021). This racial separation is associated with social issues. Historically, the people in the *White* category have dominated the nation's power structure, resulting in the underrepresentation of diverse population groups. People of color, non-White people, have historically been affected by this scenario with discrimination and institutional racism.

The U.S. system of racial classification also impacts students who come to the United States for purposes of higher education. Non-White IS frequently encounter negative experiences such as harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions. Several studies expose that IS’ academic performance and emotional states are impacted by racist experiences. Besides, the underrepresentation of people of color among U.S. university

professors has impacted IS. I used a theoretical framework that addresses racial matters to explain IS' experiences for this present study.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework



Note. This conceptual framework comprises aspects of ILS' experiences. The arrows refer to the correlation between elements. The oval figure implies the elements that LatCrit incorporates.

Latinx in the United States

In this study, I used the term *Latinx* as explained by Salinas and Lozano (2021) a term that is used to identify Latinos and Latinas, crosses boundaries of languages, and

"interlocks with race and gender" (p. 259). Latinx occupied a significant part of the U.S. territory as Spanish and French settlers established colonies before the U.S. expansion. During its independence, the United States only had 13 colonies on the east side of its current area; the U.S. Midwest area belonged to France and the West coast was part of Mexican territory. The United States purchased Louisiana from France in 1803 and purchased Florida from Spain in 1819. As a result of the 1846–1848 war between Mexico and the United States, Mexico ceded 55% of its national territory to the United States, which resulted in the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah. The population of these lands, Latinx indigenous descendants, remained in these territories despite efforts to dispel them from these lands.

Despite the historical background of the Latinx population in the United States, Latinx have endured discrimination. Labels used to refer to Latinx connote outsider origins. In the United States, the term *Hispanic* was introduced in the 1970 American Census to refer to people with cultural and linguistic characteristics of old Hispania (Spain). Yet, the term *Hispanic* has been associated with negative stereotypes such as unintelligent immigrants and/or criminals (Valdeón, 2013). The term *Latin American* was coined to distinguish people from Spanish and Portuguese America. Torres Caicedo, a Colombian historian, devised this term in 1856 to differentiate the American territories of Latin-Romance cultural and linguistic background from the Anglo-Saxon side. Lewis and Wigen quoted that "by the 1960s, in North American academic parlance, Latin America was a shorthand way to refer to everything south of the Rio Grande [US-Mexico border]" (Valdeón, 2013, p. 117). Hence, these historical events favored the impression of Latinx as *aliens* or *foreigners* in the United States.

Deficit View of Latinx

Valencia (2010) explained that deficit-view promoters suggest that people of color have biological and cultural deficiencies that result in their inability to comply with social standards. Deficit view critics use these assertions to explain social inequality. From colonial times, White men proclaimed to be civilized and referred to indigenous and Africans as uncivilized and primitive savages (Emdin, 2017). Valencia (2010) suggested that some scientists supported a racial hierarchy based on the eugenic movement, which supported policies such as school segregation, banning of interracial marriages, and/or remediating educational services. Deficit view positions indicate that something is inherently wrong with people of color, which perpetuates societal stereotypes and myths (Martinez et al., 2014).

As an example, the language of instruction in the U.S. educational system nurtures a deficit view. Over 300 hundred languages are used by the U.S. population, and the United States does not have one single official national language. Nonetheless, English is considered the only official language of instruction throughout the nation. Spanish speakers who do not master the English language receive ESL services to enhance their language development and progress in their academic performances. With this systemic doctrine, the educational system disregards multilingualism and associates a monolingual structure with academic success. Zamudio et al. (2011) presented how the U.S. educational system shows oppression through the language of instruction:

> English-only language instruction sends the message to whites that their language and, by extension, their culture, is more valuable and superior to that of others. They come to see their English proficiency as a natural state

> of affairs that also legitimates a distinct advantage. Their social status is high because their language status is high. Their language and culture are further institutionalized by teachers (the majority of whom only speak English), by curriculum materials, and by standardized assessments that are in English-only. Their parents were never punished for speaking English-only and thus have positive experiences with schools on which to build. (p. 61)

Students who do not master the English language have more academic challenges than English native speakers (Banjong, 2015). Valencia (2010) argued that deficit viewers reject divergent non-Eurocentric expressions with a Eurocentric cultural imposition over a diverse population in the U.S. educational system.

Other examples of deficit views in the educational system occur in IHEs. The underrepresentation of Latinx educators in IHE settings influences CLD perceptions (Suriel et al., 2017). Despite the number of Latinx students in IHEs, Latinx educators occupy few teaching positions and undergo discriminatory actions in regard to accents, merits, origins, and race (Omiteru et al., 2018; Suriel et al., 2017). Ninety percent of international faculty interviewed by Omiteru et al. (2018) reported a lack of tolerance and support from local colleagues and administrators. Omiteru et al. (2018) described that the scarcity of diverse educative staff expanded the deficit thinking to the student population who, for example, associated their low grades with their professors' culturally and linguistically diverse characteristics. The lack of diverse representation in academic settings perpetuates stereotypes. Martinez (2016) described how his physical characteristics and last name of Latin origin implied foreign connections to other

colleagues although he is a U.S. educator, U.S. scholar, and U.S.-born citizen. A cultural disconnection and underrepresentation of diverse staff in educational settings affect other educational community members' perceptions.

Even though the U.S. school system banned school segregation more than 70 years ago, this problem persists. The *Mendez vs Westminster School District of Orange County* case in 1947 and the *Brown vs Board of Education* case in 1954 denoted initial steps to end the segregation of students in the United States; nonetheless, some scholars believe that forms of apartheid persist between students of color and White students. For example, Latinx and Black students are segregated in low-budget schools and are reported to obtain lower achievement scores than White students (Howard, 2019). "Latinx college students maintain the lowest college graduation rates in comparison to all other racial groups" (Howard, 2019; Pérez Huber et al., 2015). In 2014, only 15% of Latinx in their 20s had a four-year degree compared to more than 45% of White people in this age range (Krogstad, 2016). The number of Latinxs in IHEs has increased over the past years; for example, the number of Colombian IS has increased by 12.6% from 2021 to 2022 ("Annual Release: International Students," 2024); however, this percentage is still lower compared to White students in U.S. IHEs. Another example of this apartheid concerns budget allocations. Schools with predominately Black and Latinx students paid their educators less than schools with predominantly White students (Howard, 2019). Howard (2019) and Valencia (2010) agreed that this discrepancy of economic allocation fosters low academic achievement, making it a self-fulfilling prediction of a continuous deficit view.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Language is a manifestation of culture (Kramsch, 1998), so language and culture share a connection. On the one hand, culture is social programming shared among individuals within the same community; it is a *software of the mind*, as Hofstede et al. (2010) defined it. Spencer-Oatey (2012) stated that culture influences people's behaviors and interpretations but does not foretell actions and reactions from people. Yet, people use their cultural structure to interpret and evaluate others' actions (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). On the other hand, language is a communicative system that community members learn through interaction. Culture shapes language, and language evolves with social interaction (Corbett, 2003; Jackson, 2014; Kramsch, 1998); but the language changes and adapts to communication characteristics, creating variants within the same linguistic community (Corbett, 2003; Jackson, 2014; Kramsch, 1998). Latinx students share Spanish as their native language, but Latinx individuals have multiple variants and cultural distinctions. International students may considerably differ from each other; even though many researchers address this population with a monolithic approach (George Mwangi et al., 2018), generalizing across a group of diverse individuals.

International students are CLD, which refers to students with a language and culture that differ from the educational context mainstream (Ralabate & Nelson, 2017). Even though this term typically refers to foreign students, local students such as Black people or Mexican Americans meet the CLD category as well (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2019; Ralabate & Nelson, 2017). In the United States, students typically have diverse cultural backgrounds, and they require the acknowledgment of their culture to support their learning process (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2019; Ralabate & Nelson, 2017). Students

learn from their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) as the learning process occurs with the association between new information and their background (Howard, 2019; Ralabate & Nelson, 2017).

Cultural diversity attracts IS to IHEs in the United States (Shapiro et al., 2014). Multiple researchers assert that IS provide cultural gains and global perspectives to college societies and local peers (Choudaha, 2018; Shapiro et al., 2014) and remark upon the importance of understanding CLD students. However, CLDs from non-European roots such as Latin America, Asia, and Africa face greater challenges than IS from European cultures and/or English-speaking countries (Lee & Rice, 2007; Postel, 2020).

International Students in the United States

IHEs in the United States have been a top destination for IS since the 1800s (Ballakrishnen & Silver, 2019; Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Gennaro, 2009; Lee et al., 2019). By 2018, more than one million IS attended colleges and universities across the United States, resulting in 39 billion dollars of profit from tuition income (Ammigan, 2019; Choudaha, 2018; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018; Shapiro et al., 2014). However, even though IS provide cultural and economic revenues to universities across the nation (Choudaha, 2018), a notable and increasing decline in student enrollment has occurred over a few years, affecting the country with billions of dollars and thousands of jobs lost. Gluckman (2018) explained that this decline in enrollment results from increased tuition costs, global educational competition, and current government administrative policies. Other researchers added that a lack of understanding of this population's experiences affects how professors approach them (Senyshyn, 2019). Anderson (2020), the executive

director of the National Foundation for American Policy, shared the following with Forbes:

> Responding colleges and universities report that 49% of new international students are in the United States and 51% of new international students are enrolled online outside the United States in Fall 2020. As a result, and not surprisingly, responding colleges and universities report that *new enrollment of international students physically in the United States declined by 72%* (Anderson, 2020, para. 3).

International students enroll in IHEs in the United States for their high-quality standards, innovative thinking emphasis, and practical professional experiences (Urban & Palmer, 2016). Tang et al. (2018) found that college students from China valued the academic rigor of IHEs in the United States as a motivator to enroll. Other IS expect to study in the United States to socialize and practice English with local students (Ammigan, 2019). However, current research indicates that IS' lived experiences do not meet these expectations (Banjong, 2015; Qi et al., 2018; Yao, 2016). This study contributes to the research literature about IS as the collaborators expressed their initial expectations about studying in an IHE in the United States.

Collier and Hernandez (2016) examined how universities support IS through their websites and concluded that this support needs some improvement. With a sample of 14 websites from the top 20 universities hosting IS, Collier and Hernandez (2016) concluded that school services concentrated on regulatory and business services (RBS) rather than content and cultural programming (CPS), which refers to students' academic and social needs. They suggested that universities seemed to worry more about RBS services,

focused on IS' legal status, rather than on IS' academic progress. The researchers agreed that other studies have suggested that universities approach IS based on an economic focus. Nonetheless, the researchers recognized that some services, such as ESL services, academic writing tutors, and mental support centers help IS. This positive suggestion connects with Burel et al. (2019) who described that library services offered to IS positively impacted students. Although Collier and Hernandez (2016) did not deny the CPS services' influence, they indicated that IS require more attention to overcome cultural and academic challenges (Qi et al., 2018).

Academic Experiences

Numerous studies have discussed the academic problems IS face because of differences in the language of instruction and cultural discrepancies. For example, Elturki et al. (2019) and Wu et al. (2015) stated that IS' experiences with academic writing, the language of instruction, and expectations of classroom participation resulted in numerous academic issues. For example, Chinese students indicated that the professors' speech rates make lectures hard to understand, which puts them at a disadvantage for participating in group sessions (Tang et al., 2018). Moreover, cultural discrepancies in classroom participation principles affect students' participation because class management styles and educational values differ (Kuo, 2011).

Language of Instruction. Elturki et al. (2019) explored IS' experiences and concluded that they suffered sociocultural and academic challenges when attending universities in the United States. Students at Washington State University participated in a longitudinal study with a needs analysis survey, interviews, and a follow-up survey. Elturki et al. (2019) found that students expected to improve their English skills while

studying in the United States, but they continued to experience problems with understanding lectures and assignments. Furthermore, these researchers noticed that IS battled with plagiarism rules, classroom discussions, and understanding instructors' speeches. Elturki et al. acknowledged the importance of adapting curriculum plans for the students and suggested examining the services to support them better.

When IS are highly proficient in English, they perform better academically (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Martirosyan et al. (2015) noted a positive effect between the English proficiency level and the grade point average (GPA) scores with "[F(2, 45) = 4.03, p = .025, partial η2 = .152]" (p. 66). On the other hand, when IS struggle with the English language, they struggle with academic work. In a study with 349 IS from diverse countries, Banjong (2015) found that low English language proficiency had a negative correlation of r ¬= -.46 with academic success. Both studies' findings reinforced that IS' English language skills directly affect academic performance.

Kuo (2011) examined the difficulties IS face with the language of instruction. Kuo (2011) revealed that listening comprehension and oral performance represented significant challenges for NNESs. In addition, Kuo concluded that linguistic accents represented a challenge for both professors and students. Wu et al. (2015) indicated that low language proficiency correlates with students' anxiety, affecting their academic and social performances. Wu et al. suggested extra support to motivate students' participation. These studies contribute to understanding the linguistic experiences IS from non-English speaking countries encounter in the United States.

Even though most universities require a high English test score to register for their programs, students commonly face English language problems in academic and local

settings despite their initial English language scores (Liu et al., 2019; Nara et al., 2015). Duru and Poyrazli (2011) explained that students' English proficiency levels are connected with social discrimination and academic success. Most IS in IHEs are English learners, and low proficiency levels in English (L2) significantly affect their academic and social lives (Martirosyan et al., 2015).

Classroom Participation. *Student participation* is a cultural activity that depends on cultural values and conditions in the educational setting. Tang et al. (2018) revealed that Chinese students and U.S. students sometimes disagree on their participation values because, in U.S. culture, people publicly discuss their opinions, while most Chinese students consider this practice a disobedient act. In their study with IS from China, Tang et al. reported that oral participation is dissimilar in both contexts; one participant shared that "[U.S. students] learn by discussion between themselves… not like us [Chinese students]" (p. 159). Wu et al. (2015) added that Chinese students perceived the speaking interaction with professors as an interruption, something Asian students tend to avoid. Wu et al. said that many Chinese students feel disturbed when local students openly and continuously talk without raising their hands while other students are still speaking. Even though numerous teaching practices do not consider students' cultural backgrounds (Tang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015), Shapiro et al. (2014) insisted that working with IS requires understanding cultural differences among education systems.

In her book, *The Culture Map*, Meyer (2014) depicted cultural differences among national clusters on a linear scale. Meyer's analysis referred to the dimensions of culture to explain cultural differences according to Hofstede et al. (2010). Meyer (2014) described communication discrepancies among people of different cultures and divided

them into two groups: high- and low-context cultures. People in high-context cultures tend to use non-verbal clues to convey and support linguistic messages, while people in low-context cultures rely primarily on verbal utterances and written texts to communicate their messages. Meyer placed the U.S. people cluster at the very extreme of low-context cultures, explicating their verbal communication style in detail. On the contrary, Meyer (2014) placed the Chinese cultural cluster under high-context cultures, which explains their low verbal communication style. Meyer placed Latin American clusters towards the high-context side. Besides, Meyer described how different the United States cluster is from other countries regarding hierarchical power and connected it to communication styles at schools. Based on Meyer's scales analysis, I inferred that IS from high-context and hierarchical cultures significantly differ from U.S. students and professors. I also inferred that these communicative and interaction differences alter the educational conversation between teachers and students, which Gay (2018) discussed in multicultural education.

The unawareness of cultural practices negatively affects students' educational processes (Liu et al., 2019). Even though most IS are some of the brightest students in their home countries, language and cultural barriers lead them to feel confused and anxious (Kuo, 2011). In addition, Kuo (2011) stated that some U.S. peers related cultural and linguistic barriers with cognitive constraints in their foreign classmates. Kuo affirmed that IS realized these opinions about them, and that generated negative anxiety when performing academically. Liu et al. (2019) added that limited linguistic capital augments anxiety and confusion. Liu et al. explained that NNESs engaged less in activities that

prompted cognitive and literacy skills because these students' circumstances were not included in instructional plans.

Academic Rigor. Different studies have indicated that IS struggle with academic workloads and demand, also referred to as academic rigor (Ravichandran et al., 2017). Academic rigor is defined as the “course workload demands and expectations for course learning in the form of cognitive challenge” (Culver et al., 2021, p. 1141). Ravichandran et al. (2017) found that many IS considered U.S. universities' academic rigor to be higher than in their home countries. Some students expressed difficulties with the high demands of U.S. education (Ravichandran et al., 2017). In another study, Tang et al. (2018) showed that Chinese students had similar opinions about U.S. universities' rigor because they considered China's academic rigor to be lower. Despite the academic demands, Tang et al. (2018) indicated that IS valued this academic rigor as a reason to attend U.S. IHEs and suggested that further research should compare local and international educational systems' rigor.

Academic Writing. In higher educational research, scholars have targeted academic writing matters for their role in higher education. Ravichandran et al. (2017) found that low English language proficiency prevents students from writing correctly because previous structures influence their academic performance. Cennetkuşu (2017) revealed that professors recognized these students' difficulties and described their writing ability as mostly "poor" or ordinary. International students struggled with academic

writing norms and often used cultural rituals from their home countries to interact with professors and address instructional content differently (Cennetkuşu, 2017).

Furthermore, student participants gauged their writing ability in their native language (L1) more positively than in English, their target language (L2). Cennetkuşu (2017) affirmed that IS occasionally use their L1 as a tool to advance in writing in their L2, but differences among languages prevail. Other researchers suggested that factors such as academic rigor, contrastive rhetoric, and professors' feedback affected academic writing skills in international skills (Ravichandran et al., 2017). Eldaba and Isbell (2018) reported that one of their study's participants was a highly skillful writer in her L1 (Persian); however, her anxiety and negative feelings increased during her time as an IS, and she developed a second writing identity that did not benefit her school performance.

Contrastive Rhetoric. Other researchers examined the structures of academic writing with a contrastive rhetoric (CR) perspective. As noted in Connor et al. (2008), Kaplan (1966) introduced CR after analyzing the structure of hundreds of essays by students from different language backgrounds. Kaplan's contributions to CR served as a graphical model to describe English learners' writing structures (Connor et al., 2008). Quinn (2012) explained that "contrastive rhetoric studies the writing of second language learners to understand how it is affected by their first language and culture" (p. 31). Quinn explained, for example, that Western writers carry the responsibility for developing comprehensive texts, while Eastern writers assume that the reader is responsible for understanding the text information. Quinn's statement connects with

Meyer's (2014) explanation of high-context and low-context cultures' communication styles.

Gennaro (2009) contrasted the writing skills of English learners who had studied exclusively in the United States (G 1.5) with IS who had been living in the United States for less than two years. With a sample of 97 essays, the researcher calculated (a) grammatical control, (b) cohesive control, (c) rhetorical control, (d) sociolinguistic control, and (e) content control. In this study, all correlations between the elements of writing and the participants were significant at the 0.001 level. Gennaro found that G 1.5 learners performed better than IS in rhetorical control and IS performed better than G 1.5 students in sociolinguistic control. The researcher noticed that G 1.5 students wrote extended essays with higher English proficiency, and IS wrote their essays with a higher academic writing level. Gennaro did not find differences in the other elements of writing, such as grammar or syntax. These studies revealed that IS utilize other structures based on their L1, which can negatively affect academic writing in English.

Professors' Feedback with Academic Writing. Other researchers have revealed negative perceptions of the feedback that IS received from professors and the effects on their academic writing process (Cennetkuşu, 2017; Elturki et al., 2019). Participants in different research studies valued instructors' comments on writing assignments as partial, ambiguous, or nonexistent (Cennetkuşu, 2017; Ravichandran et al., 2017) as the feedback ignored the comprehensive comments regarding the English language (L2) difficulties. One participant in Cennetkuşu's (2017) study confirmed prior feedback expectations as he/she commented that "I never actually got that specific feedback … it was just overall feedback. Sometimes it wasn't [feedback] at all … it was just the mark or the point off.

Sometimes it was in a handwritten [handwriting style] that I even didn't understand" (p. 775). Other participants suggested that feedback should address not only plagiarism and American Psychological Association (APA) norms but also the development of ideas and linguistic errors (Eldaba & Isbell, 2018). Cennetkuşu (2017) suggested that professors' feedback should involve linguistic elements, detailed comments, constant communication, and encouragement as IS considered feedback essential for developing writing skills.

In Ravichandran et al.'s (2017) study, IS evaluated NNES professors' feedback closer to what they expected as these professors' feedback included comments on concept development and English language usage. Although IS reported positive perceptions toward professors, participants stated that professors provided very "generous" feedback as they allowed students' writing errors (Ravichandran et al., 2017). Nonetheless, Cennetkuşu (2017) stated that professors rated their feedback as comprehensive and based on academic guidelines. Cennetkuşu (2017) also reported that 49.12% of the students believed professors' feedback was helpful, and 28.07% of students considered their feedback unsatisfactory. Wu et al. (2015) asserted that IS had positive perceptions of their professors, but students and instructors opposed cultural, linguistic, and educational approaches that affected their interactions.

Social Challenges

Several studies affirm that IS suffer challenges that include discrimination (Koo et al., 2021), negative stereotypes, language proficiency limitations, cultural clashes, isolation, loneliness, stress, and anxiety (Wu et al., 2015). For example, Qi et al. (2018) stated that "several value dimensions between China and the United States, such as

collectivism/individualism, power distance, and long-/short-term orientation" (p. 238) make the acculturation process difficult. In addition, IS from Arab countries experience stereotyped aggression for their religion and cultural practices, which hinders interaction with U.S. peers (Rabia & Karkouti, 2017). Besides, IS from African countries experience racism because of physical similarities with Black people (Asantea et al., 2016; George Mwangi et al., 2018). In this way, IS are challenged by racist and discriminatory actions (Koo et al., 2021).

Cultural differences result in isolation and stress (Yao, 2016; Wu et al., 2015). Ra and Trusty (2017) conducted a multiple regression analysis with a sample of 232 East Asian IS, and they found that social support impacts the levels of acculturative stress. According to Ra and Trusty (2017), there is a relationship between an individual's acculturation level and acculturative stress, which affects the adjustment to a host society. Poyrazli and Isaiah (2018) found a positive correlation between acculturation and academic performance. Banjong (2015) suggested that IS who lived in solitude had little social interaction or felt depressed tended to lose focus on their academic responsibilities and had poor school outcomes.

A similar study reinforced Elturki et al.'s (2019) research with similar findings on the struggles of IS in the U.S. educational system. Wu et al. (2015) interviewed ten students representing China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico who attended a southern U.S. university. The researchers coded the data and organized it according to themes such as academic, cultural, and social struggles; strategies to solve difficulties; and recommendations. Wu et al. discovered that language and culture barriers produced anxiety and stress in IS, causing academic difficulties. Wu et al. indicated that many

participants considered U.S. English the main challenge, even if they studied this language for years. Cultural differences resulted in isolation and stress that affected their academic performance. Wu et al. indicated that IS commonly struggle with English as the language of instruction, classroom participation cultures, and academic writing rigor.

Theoretical Framework

I decided to use a critical theoretical framework for several reasons. First, this research addressed students like me who are historically marginalized and underrepresented. Latinx in the United States have struggled with problems of nativism (Perez-Huber, 2010), language, legal status, and other types of discrimination. As the collaborators and I shared similar backgrounds, such as Spanish as our mother language, English as the language of instruction was one of the major focuses of this study. Therefore, I needed a theoretical framework that allowed me to view our unique experiences from an alternative perspective that considered culturally and linguistically diverse positions. Because my intention with this research comes from a critical perspective to question my experiences, I decided to use a critical theoretical framework based on critical race theory and Latino critical theory.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The critical race theory (CRT) has its foundations in legal critical studies (CLS). CRT theorists study the implications of race in various parts of our society. They address how the concept of race perpetuates inequality and maintains a system of power that affects people of color. This theory is critical for this study because it challenges the perspectives of students who are regularly marginalized.

Even though the human race is a debatable concept, the human race idea is present in our societies. Human races only exist in a cultural and societal sense rather than in a biological sense, and the effort of racializing people has the purpose of dominating people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Valencia, 2010). Many scholars suggest that the organization and classification of people into racial hierarchies result in inequality (Valencia, 2010).

Critical Race Theory comes from critical legal studies, and it pertains to explaining acts of inequality that promote racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) recognized that, with racism, "(a) One group deems itself superior to all others, (b) the group that is superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior, and (c) racism benefits the superior group while negatively affecting other racial and/or ethnic groups" (p. 24). In the educational field, CRT theorists endorse the idea that U.S. educational practices affect students of color as they reflect values of the White majority and reject diversity.

During his lecture at Case Western Reserve University in 2018, the Kenyan anthropologist Isahaa Nengo explained that phenotypic and genotypic differences in humans do not determine behaviors at a biological level. Nengo further related that phenotypic characteristics related to *racial* differences such as skin color, hair, or skin complexion are not substantial for determining humans' intellect or cultural expressions. Instead, the degree of genetic similarities among people with phenotypical differences indicates that all humans are part of a single race: the human race. He explained that less than 7% of the variation between humans refers to genetic differences, and this minimal degree of phenotypic discrepancy does not divide humans into races. Nengo illustrated

how racial preconceptions can lead to distortion of facts with an example that involved his Dutch Russian wife (White) and their Kenyan son (Mixed) at a store. He related that a random person may replicate a learned genetic disconnection by looking at his wife and son and disconnecting a genetic fact.

> If my wife is walking with my son in the store and people are looking at her and looking at her son, they are going to assume that she is more close related to some white random guy in the store than she is to her what? Her own son. Because they are just focusing on what? On skin color; but, skin color doesn't predict, doesn't tell you what's going on inside. You and I know that genetically she is closer to our own son than to a selected random white guy in the store. (Case Western Reserve University, 2018, 46:45)

The difference between races has been linked to a form of scientific racism that seeks to support the superiority of the White race (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Valencia, 2010). This theory of alleged superiority has perpetuated social inequality. Although Nengo explained that races do not exist due to a small percentage of phenotypic differences among people, eugenic scientists agree and explain differences between races up to a behavioral scale. Racist scientists use deficit thinking to defend the superiority of a social group (Valencia, 2010). Valencia (2010) warned that these erroneous statements influence social policies and maintain social inequality. Eugenics research findings are highly criticized for being a pseudoscience used to support racist claims.

Yao et al. (2019) used the CRT framework and analyzed the impact of structural systems on IS. These researchers found literature on educational factors that maintain

racist practices such as meritocracy and convergence of interests. Yao et al. (2019) discovered how African students cope with the racist experiences Black people have in the United States. Yao et al. (2019) concluded that the cultural norms of White Americans affected IS from non-European countries. Moreover, Yao et al. discussed that most research studies focus on students' challenges rather than their root causes based on racism. Therefore, Yao et al. argued that CRT contributes to understanding the fundamentals of racist issues for improving IS experiences. In educational matters, CRT also informs the intersection of layers of subordination based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality (Taylor et al., 2016).

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit)

The Latino Critical Race theory (LatCrit) refers to "an overarching framework that examines the intersectionality of race, class, and gender while also acknowledging the unique forms of subordination within the Latina/o community based on immigration status, language, phenotype, and ethnicity" (Perez, 2010, p. xxi). Latinx students suffer microaggressions in educational settings (Smith et al., 2023). Within the LatCrit framework, researchers concentrate on explaining the discrimination that Latinx experience in U.S. society. LatCrit has its roots in CLS and CRT. Latinx experience aggression such as *profiling* with stereotypes of criminal acts, illegal status, educational neglect, uncontrolled birth rates, or tax beneficiaries. Nonetheless, Latinx undergo other problems apart from the historical binary conflict between Whites and Blacks, such as discrimination for linguistic differences such as an accent, and further regarding migration status and nativism (Howard, 2019). Even though CRT and LatCrit share similar tenets such as *testimonios*, counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), and

interest convergence, LatCrit concentrates on particular circumstances that only Latinx face.

The LatCrit and CRT theoretical perspectives contribute to this study because they reveal how Latinx students of color experience challenges directly related to their ethnic/racial status. Numerous researchers reported that educational practices in the United States benefit a single predominant group and marginalize students of color (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016). Gay (2018) claimed that the U.S. educational system challenges students of color with inequitable circumstances, which puts them at a disadvantage in relation to White students. The U.S. educational system perpetuates the marginalization of students of color with practices that reflect an imposition of power (Taylor et al, 2016).

Summary

I am attracted to learning about culture in education because the English language is a cultural expression, and the English language is my professional field. The existing literature on IS has revealed that these students have academic and cultural struggles. For example, Tang et al. (2018) found that academic writing and the language of instruction are the most common problems among IS. However, as most researchers in international education address students from China, India, and Korea, I observed a gap in the literature of Is who are not represented, such as Latinx IS. Despite the economic and cultural profits that IS bring to the United States, this population has not received enough research attention (Shapiro et al., 2014). Critical race theorists state that this lack of interest in understanding culturally diverse students has to do with the general inattention toward minorities in the United States. Cultural race theorists have posited that social

inequality perpetuates the segregation of students of color (Gay, 2018; Howard, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016), and researchers have reported that IS experience racism (Asantea et al., 2016; George-Mwangi et al., 2018). The existing literature on IS has shown that these experiences and lack of understanding affect their academic performance.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative Research

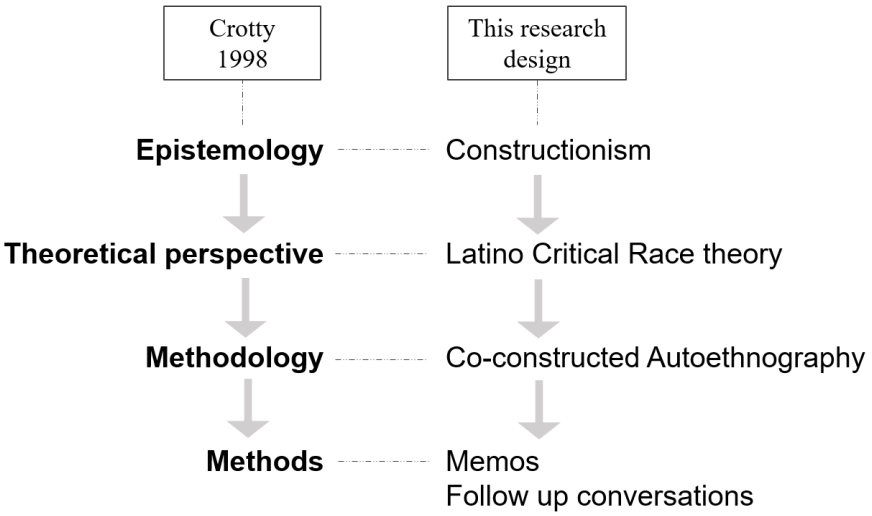
Scientific inquiry is about testing claims with evidence, using various methods (Patton, 2015), and addressing them from philosophical and theoretical perspectives (Crotty, 1998). The epistemological stances to explain reality give the foundation to test and explore claims (Crotty, 1998). Foundationalist epistemologies such as positivism, empiricism, and objectivism suggest that world phenomena occur independently from human understanding, which disturbs subjective interpretation (Patton, 2015). By contrast, the constructivism and constructionism paradigms refer to reality as a product of human thinking. Constructivist researchers are "epistemologically subjectivist … as the qualitative inquirer is also engaged in social construction as opposed to objectivity depicting reality" (Patton, 2015, p. 122). For constructivist researchers, elements such as cultural backgrounds define how people make meaning, relate to context, and/or follow processes (Maxwell, 2013).

The discrepancy between quantitative and qualitative research methods results in contrasting ways to study phenomena. Social researchers claim that understanding social phenomena incorporates the interaction between the phenomena and the researcher. Thus, the researcher is the main instrument to collect and analyze data. Efforts to detach human subjectivity from the study to offer an objective truth are known as positivism (Patton, 2015). Quantitative researchers regularly use terms such as validity, reliability, generalizability, or credibility. In contrast, qualitative researchers speak of an

understating of reality truth that it is directly affected by humans' subjectivity. Therefore, qualitative researchers recognize that human interaction with the subject of study is not only inevitable but necessary.

Figure 3

Research Design Elements



Note. Adapted from Crotty (1998). Crotty depicted how the elements of the design inform each other in Figure 1 of his book *Foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. The arrows show how each element of the study deductively results from a position.

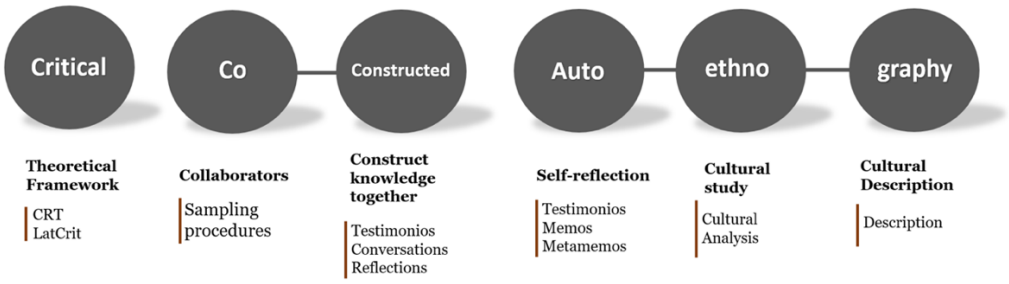
I organized this study with a design that connected the research elements with consistency (See figure 3). First, the epistemological stance for this study was constructionism as I considered reality a product of human agreements at an individual and group level. Second, this study had a critical viewpoint, and I addressed it from a LatCrit perspective. This theoretical framework directed my assumptions on this study's social phenomenon. Third, I used a CCAE (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Suriel et al.,

2017) methodology for collecting and analyzing data. This methodology choice is related to this study's epistemological stance and theoretical perspective because CCAE is situated within critical studies and used as a tool for social change (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012). This research study's design connected to my study purpose and allowed me to answer the research questions.

Critical Co-Constructed Autoethnography

Figure 4

Critical Co-Constructed Autoethnography



Note: Figure 4 illustrates the components of this co-constructed autoethnography with a morphological division of the research methodological name and the connections with the research design.

"Autoethnography involves locating a meaningful phenomenon of interest and considering a critical reflexive approach to thinking and writing" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 17). This autoethnographic study allowed me to tell my story and reflect on it as a researcher and a member of a minority population (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Autoethnographers consider stories to be an essential element of research because "theory and story share a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 89). Moreover, Adams et al. (2015) contended that "our identities, experiences, and stories are

intertwined with the identities, experiences, and stories of others" (p. 95). Therefore, I approached this study with the critical co-constructed methodological subgenre of autoethnography, which refers to the engagement of deep reflections between various participants towards their positions and experiences with the phenomenon of study from an analytical approach (Adams et al., 2015; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). The critical nature of this study came from the analysis of the researcher's interaction with a system of power (Suriel et al., 2017), with “critical consciousness to examine power, privilege, and positionality” (Gabriel et al., 2015, p. 30). This CCAE study is connected to CLS, CRT, and critical pedagogy (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012; Hughes & Willink, 2015; Suriel et al., 2017).

The autoethnography research methodology recognizes the researcher as the subject of the study rather than an external agent of the research (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Although autoethnographers participate as subjects and instruments of this type of study, they conduct research with scientific rigor (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Opponents of autoethnography studies suggest this methodology is subjective due to the researcher’s role as the instrument and subject of study, and first-person voice narration (Hughes et al., 2012). Yet, autoethnographers recognize that their position influences the research study (Hughes & Pennington, 2017), and they carry out their research with the rigor of “AERA’s [American Educational Research Association] standards for reporting empirical research” (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 217). Therefore, an autoethnographer does not found their research in bias, but rather, they use "personal experience and subjectivity in designing their research" as the foundation to understand social phenomena (Adams et al., 2015, p. 26).

As an autoethnographer, I acknowledge that my experiences, knowledge, and understanding of the phenomenon of study influenced my research. Freire (2018) asserted that denying the subjectivity of the explanation of social realities is conceived as a “world without people” (p.50), and he stated that “world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in a constant interaction” (p. 50). Maxwell (2013) and Ravitch and Riggan (2017) explained that separating the researcher from their bias is impractical as the researcher brings conceptual notions from theories and experiences, which influences decisions in the research design. Researchers make decisions based on their understanding of the phenomenon, and they approach it, measure it, or interpret it based on that conceptual framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

Social researchers approach research differently from researchers of other sciences (Adams et al., 2015). Adams et al. (2015) claimed that considering findings to generalize to a population comes from a positivist stance that looks to describe, explain, and predict phenomena. However, Adams et al. (2015) asserted that variables such as culture influence people's experiences, and they make the generalization of findings problematic in social studies. Adams et al. (2015) warned that "although we might be able to make educated guesses about cultural patterns and practices, we can never *predict* what other people might think, say, or do" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 9). Therefore, social researchers do not aim to generalize their research findings to explain social phenomena; instead, the social researcher reports their positionality to provide an understanding of the phenomena at the individual level.

Setting

This CCAE methodology allowed me to consider my experiences from a reflective position (Cann, & DeMeulenaere, 2012). The collaborators and I shared the experience of studying in an IHE in the Southeast of the United States. Hence, this study setting related to the research goal of understanding our experience of studying in this region. There are two main reasons to set this study in IHEs in the Southeast of the United States. First, several historical events regarding racism occurred in the South of the United States such as the Jim Crow or the Brown vs Board of Education case. Events of this magnitude indicated discrimination for minority groups such as Latinx. Therefore, with this study, I wanted to provide an original contribution to "solidarity among marginalized groups as well as across difference, inspiring those in spaces of privilege to be allies in social justice work" (Cann, & DeMeulenaere, 2012, p. 147). The critical nature of this study allowed me to reflect on a system of power from my position as an IS.

The second reason for the setting of this study is that the two collaborators, Mary and Claudia (pseudonyms), and I completed our studies as IS at an IHE in the South of the United States. We completed graduate courses both online and on campus. The student body of the program regularly had Latinx students, and the master's program attracted several ESL teachers. In addition, I included my experiences as a student in two other graduate programs in two other IHEs in the South of the United States.

Collaborators

I was part of this study as a collaborator, data collection instrument, subject of study, and researcher. However, I included two more people to serve as collaborators to

co-construct our understanding of being an international Latinx student in an IHE in the United States.

> Autoethnographers invite participants [Collaborators] and readers/audiences to engage in an unfolding story of identities, experiences, and worlds, to creatively work through-together-what these experiences show, tell, and can mean; they treat research as a socially-and-relationally *conscious* act, and attempt to cultivate reciprocal relationships with their participants, readers, and audiences. (Adams et al., 2015, p. 34)

Table 1

Characteristics of Collaborators

Characteristics of Collaborators

Collaborators	Country of Origin	Age	Gender	Languages	Occupation	Graduate Degree
Myself	Colombia	35-40	Male	Spanish(L1) English(L2)	School Admin	Masters' in ESL Masters' in MSA Ed. D. In Curriculum and Instruction
Claudia	Colombia	30-35	Female	Spanish(L1) English(L2)	Teacher	Masters' in ESL
Mary	Colombia	25-30	Female	Spanish(L1) English(L2)	Teacher	Masters' in ESL

This CCAE study included two collaborators to co-construct the data to answer the research questions. The collaborators and I, as a sample, were considered *purposeful sampling* (qualitative term) or *non-probabilistic sampling* (quantitative term), which served as information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) explained, "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues… [which] yields

in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p. 264). Because my research goal was to explore the experiences of students who had similar conditions to mine (see Table 1), the criteria for selecting collaborators included:

- Graduate students of Latinx backgrounds
- Undergraduate program completed in a Latin American IHE
- K-12 education completed in Latin *America*
- Graduate program completed in an IHE in the Southeast of the United States
- Native Spanish speakers who learned English as a foreign language

These criteria referred to Gennaro's (2009) definition of IS as those "who have achieved advanced [undergraduate] degrees in their first languages (L1s) and who intend to return to their home countries… [They] attend[ed] institutions of higher education in an L2 after having completed high school in their home countries" (p. 534). For richer cases, I preferred to include collaborators who had taught English as a foreign or second language as their English development experiences differed from those who learned it in an English-speaking environment (Gennaro, 2009). I also purposely included two female collaborators to consider concerns of intersectionality with Latinx male/female identities in a predominant Eurocentric academic context (Suriel et al., 2017). These collaborators represented information-rich cases and gave strength to the study.

Sampling Procedures

Because a study can use more than one sampling strategy (Patton, 2015), I used criterion-based and snowball sampling strategies for this study. A qualitative study does not include results to generalize in a population but information about particular cases;

therefore, a purposeful sample provides information-rich cases necessary for responding to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Assuming that IS are not a monolithic group (George Mwangi et al., 2018), I addressed collaborators with specific attributes to represent information-rich cases. This study's research questions and problem statement required criterion-based sampling.

First, I approached the collaborators with a snowball sampling strategy. I communicated with the students who met the criteria and represented a rich source of information. Finally, I extended a formal invitation to participate in the study. To create rapport, I provided the option to communicate in Spanish or English and to compensate them for their participation with a $50 Amazon card after completing the data collection process. The collaborators of this study agreed and contributed their knowledge and experiences to this research.

I had a connection with each collaborator at a personal level, and that allowed us to have productive and constant conversations. Our connections allowed us to communicate promptly when it was necessary, as we shared a similar background and position within U.S. society due to our Latinx roots. This CCAE study allowed us to come together and collaborate in a safe space where “we have settled on critical co-constructed autoethnography... acknowledging that friendship plays an important role in our data collection and writing process” (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012, p. 150). This collaborative work is similar to the study by Suriel et al. (2017) where collaborators came together in a *safe colored space* to critically examine their experiences as college faculty of color in a Southern U.S. educational setting. We followed principles of research rigor and ethical procedures to ensure trustworthiness and credibility.

Ethical Procedures

I requested approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Valdosta State University to include the collaborators in this study. I began the purposive sampling strategy once the IRB approved my request. To apply the principle of *respect for persons* explained in the Belmont Report from the US Department of Health and Human services, I provided the collaborators with the details of the study, such as the abstract, methodology for collecting and analyzing data, and the rights to stop their participation if they chose. I read the consent agreement with the collaborators. I communicated that their identity would be protected with pseudonyms, and I would remove any information that could connect them with this study. The collaborators and I always had access to the data during the collecting data process, and they were able to add, delete, or comment on the data. I conducted this study with careful attention to prevent any harm that the collaborators and I might suffer due to their participation in this study.

When we met, I saved the collecting methods notes in formats that contain the following information:

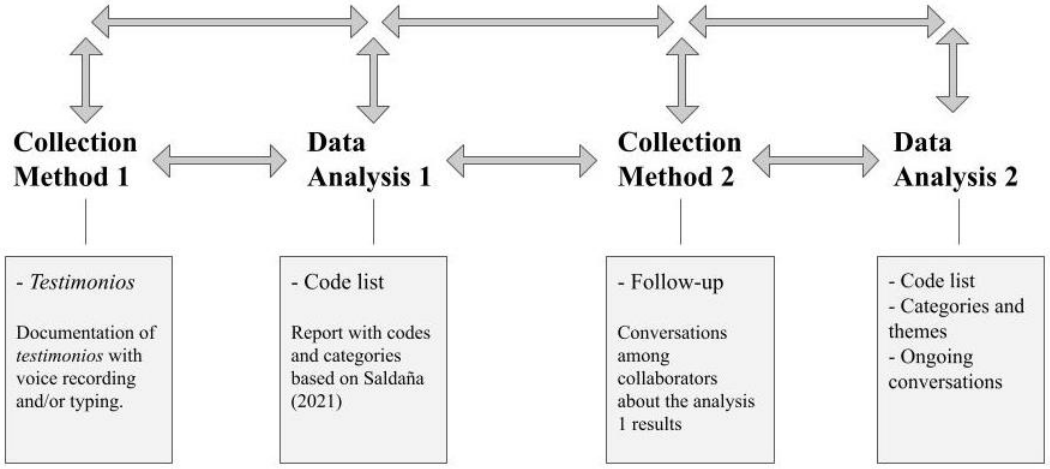
- Time and place of data collection
- Participant's pseudonym
- Researcher's name
- Data collection method with audio-recording techniques
- Language selection: Based on the collaborators' choice between English or Spanish
- Environmental details
- Participant's rights

- Observations

Data Collection Methods

Figure 5

Data Collection and Analysis Process



Note. This figure contains the data collection and data analysis mechanics. The double-headed arrows represent the relationship between the data collection and data analysis. The unidirectional arrow on the right indicates the findings that were finally reported.

I collected data using reflective journals and in-depth follow-up conversations in a continuing process (See figure 4). The collaborators and I had the option of choosing the language of preference for communicating with the researcher and documenting data. This language decision decreased anxiety and created rapport between the researcher and the collaborators (Seidman, 2019). Besides, allowing collaborators to use their heritage language allowed me to better understand the conversations because we, the researcher and collaborators, engaged in meaningful conversations to co-construct knowledge using the first language's cultural values.

My familiarity with the collaborators made our conversations natural. Each participant expressed that they felt comfortable sharing their points of view, experiences,

and opinions with me. Our connection also allowed for fast and ready communication when needed. While everyone expressed their pride in my work, we all strictly adhered to research protocols and ethical guidelines.

Data Collection Method 1

The first collecting method was *testimonios* in reflective journals. The collaborators and I documented our *testimonios* describing thoughts, feelings, and stories about being ILS learning at an IHE in the Southern United States. *Testimonios* (Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Obiakor & Martinez, 2016; Urrieta & Villenas, 2013) are a powerful tool to promote consciousness through narratives that are "consistent with the long Latin American genre in sharing spiritual narratives aimed at raising critical consciousness" (Suriel et al., 2017, p.3). The collaborators and I used reflective journals with detailed reflections on our experiences as IS, using a protocol that assisted in maintaining the study focus (See Appendix A). We revised the responses numerous times to examine our contributions. We responded to each research question at least three times to document as many details as possible. I provided three options to document the reflective journals to facilitate the collaborators' spontaneity, comfort, and practicality.

The collaborators and I had three different options to document our *testimonios*. The first option to document our *testimonios* was through a voice recording app on a mobile phone such as *Voice Memos*. Voice Memos is an Apple voice recording app for IOS cellphones. This documentation choice allowed us to record voice memos in high quality and share the files in MP4 format. Voice Memos automatically recorded the time and location of the recording and reduced background noise and reverberation. The app's privacy policies protect the data from other users. The collaborators and I were

expected to listen to the recordings before sharing them to avoid inaccuracies in our *testimonios*. The collaborators and I uploaded as many recordings as possible in a password-code file that only the participant and I had access to separately. The collaborators and I might add, delete, or modify our responses at any time during the research process with a follow up or notification to me as the researcher. The collaborators and I decided to take this option to document our *testimonios*. I transcribed the recordings and translated them using the Dictation Speech-to-Text app.

The second option to document our *testimonios* was through a dictation app such as *Dictation Speech-to-Text* app. Dictation Speech-to-Text is an app that transcribes and translates live speech and voice recordings in high quality. Christian Neubauer created this app, and it is compatible with IOS cellphones. This dictation cellphone app allowed us to transcribe our *testimonios* automatically in high quality as we spoke. The app's privacy policies protect the data from other users. The collaborators and I proofread our transcriptions to avoid inaccuracies in the *testimonios.* This proofreading action helped with the analysis of and reflection on the *testimonios*. The collaborators and I uploaded the transcriptions in a password-code file that only we had access to. The collaborators and I used this file to type the *testimonios* if we needed. The collaborators and I might add, delete, or modify the transcripts at any time during the research process with a notification of any editing.

The third option to document our *testimonios* was a hand-written journal. We did not use this option. This choice would have allowed the collaborators and me to write our *testimonios* wherever and whenever we chose to do it. The collaborators and I were expected to proofread the written documents to avoid inaccuracies in our *testimonios*.

This proofreading action would have helped with the analysis and reflection of our *testimonios*. I would have collected the journal writings periodically and uploaded them digitally in a shared password-code file that only the participant and I could access. The collaborators and I might have added, deleted, or modified the transcripts at any time during the research process with a notification of any edits in their journal entries.

Data Collection Method 2

The second collecting method referred to follow-up conversations. These follow-up conversations were between each collaborator and me, and we discussed the first cycle of data coding findings of the *testimonios*. This collecting method corresponded to this study design (See figure 4). Before any conversation, I read the follow-up protocol to guarantee that the collaborators understood their rights in the study (See Appendix B). I met with each collaborator and shared the documents resulting from the data analysis of the *testimonios* in a list of the codes, categories, and themes (Saldaña, 2016). We discussed the journals' data analysis based on Saldaña's (2016) second-cycle coding method, and we wrote memos to expose subjectivity in the decision-making process. Finally, we conducted follow-up conversations to assemble the data (Hughes & Pennington, 2017) and co-construct knowledge.

To facilitate the collaborators' spontaneity, comfortability, and practicality, I provided options to conduct the follow-up conversations. One option was face-to-face meetings at a time and location convenient for the collaborators and me. Another option was meeting virtually through Microsoft Teams or Zoom video-call platforms. We decided to take the second option and to complete a video call using the Zoom platform. I recorded the meetings with each collaborator's consent using the recording-voice app for

IOS cellphones Voice Memos to guarantee the meeting documentation. I took notes and shared those notes with the collaborators. I conducted one meeting in Spanish per the participant's request and one meeting in English per the participant's request. I transcribed both meetings and translated the meetings that were carried out in Spanish using Dictation Speech-to-Text app. This app automatically transcribed and translated live speech and voice recordings in high quality, and it provided privacy policies to protect data confidentiality. I sent the transcriptions in English to both collaborators to double-check the transcribed information. The collaborators had the right to change, modify, or edit the transcriptions. The collaborators agreed with the transcriptions and did not suggest any change.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began when I designed the research study (Saldaña, 2016). I engaged in continuous data analysis by connecting the literature, *testimonios*, and research goals. As the coding methods were unique to the study (Patton, 2016), I followed Saldaña's (2016) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* to select the best data analysis methods. The coding methods addressed the epistemological and ontological nature of research questions (Saldaña, 2016, p. 69). I analyzed the data employing memos and cycles of coding data.

I documented my reflections about the data collection and analysis process on memos. Saldaña (2016) shared that memos are the fundamental analysis as memos connect data, codes, categories, research questions, and literature. Maxwell (2013) further explained that memos refer to "serious reflections, analysis, and self-critique… in a systematic, retrievable form… accessed for future examination" (p. 40). In these memos,

I documented my decision-making process and data reflections, exposed my subjectivity during the data analysis, and saved them in a password-code file. I read the memos and wrote metamemos (Saldaña, 2016), which were reflections on the reflective memos (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

I carried out Saldaña's (2016) cycles of coding data with both data sets. I decoded patterns that showed "action and consistency in humans affairs as documented in data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 6). I began the initial coding process by dividing the data units into *stanzas* or segments to facilitate the analysis. I made marginalia and stanzas with InVivo coding, and I used theoretical categories based on previous research when the emerging data indicated a connection with previous research findings. Finally, I documented the codes that resulted from the data analysis in a codebook, and I added them to the appendix section of this research to guarantee transparency (Saldaña, 2016). For this analysis, I initially used the MAXQDA software and manual coding strategies. However, due to the complexity of this software, I handwrote the analysis on printed copies.

During the follow-up conversations, I shared with the collaborators the results of the data analysis from the *testimonios* (See figure 4). I presented the findings in the codebook that helped us evaluate our experiences to construct the concepts together. We wrote two types of memos during this process. The first memos individually documented the subjectivity of each participant during the data analysis process. The collaborators and I wrote the second set of memos together to explain our decision-making process during the analysis of the journal analysis outcomes. We used a splitter method, which is a method to analyze the data by dividing them into “codable moments” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 24).

Credibility

I wrote and provided memos and metamemos to expose my opinions and decision-making process when using these collecting methods. I offered my assistance to each collaborator who needed technical support to use the apps to document their *testimonios*. I used data triangulation, which refers to combining different data sources to obtain better information from different perspectives (Patton, 2015). The data triangulation added credibility to the study as themes could be established by different sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Similarly, data *assemblage* allowed me to "provide multiple perspectives" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 61). In addition, this study's credibility was addressed with the analysis cycles resulting in information-rich cases.

Limitations and Trustworthiness

First, this study presented limitations regarding literature support. The lack of information about IS, especially about ILS, limited the study design decisions based on previous research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Most of the existing research approaches IS as a monolithic group, ignoring the differences among individuals in this category. This study presented a similar limitation because I addressed ILS as a single cultural group. I used collaborators with similar Latinx background characteristics (see Table 1) but not identical backgrounds. To ensure trustworthiness, I engaged in continuous reflective writing or memos (Maxwell, 2013) to expose my bias in my conceptual framework. The memos documented my decision-analysis process based on the existing research literature. The other collaborators' *testimonios* and participation during the data analysis added trustworthiness to the data. I indicated that, in this study, I did not aim to generalize its findings, and I disclosed differences among the ILS population.

Furthermore, I continued searching for literature of emerging conversations that could contribute to the study.

Second, this study presented limitations regarding my participation in the study. My role as the researcher, instrument, and subject of the study constituted a potential bias that threatened the study. Because the nature of the autoethnography approach is a reflective study of the self in relation to one's culture, I brought assumptions to this study based on my experiences as an LIS. My cultural connection and relationship with the collaborators may have influenced the data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the data translation from Spanish to the English language could also present limitations for lexical-semantic problems. To ensure trustworthiness in the methodological part of the study, I documented the decision-making process in memos and consulted the collaborators to ensure accuracy.

To minimize my influence on the collaborators' contributions, I incorporated their *testimonios* to report their experiences without my participation. During the data collection and analysis, I wrote memos to explain the decision-making processes individually and collectively. I translated and shared the transcripts with the collaborators to check the information they wanted to share. All the collaborators were bilingual, so I used member checking to validate the data. The collaborators had access to the data to add, delete, or comment at any time. I created a codebook and shared my data analysis process with the collaborators to validate the analysis.

Summary

My ontological and epistemological stances led me to design this qualitative study. I used a CRT framework to examine the experiences of ILS in the United States. I

used a CCAE methodology that allowed me to participate as a researcher, participant, and subject of study. This methodology allowed me to use the collaborators' *testimonios*, which are stories or accounts of personal experiences. We, the collaborators, told our stories in our own words, and I did not conduct interviews to avoid enclosing their answers to let us openly tell our stories. We documented our stories and conversations in Spanish and English. After coding the *testimonios* and identifying categories, I met with the collaborators to discuss codes and co-construct knowledge.

I reflected on my positionality as the researcher and addressed how my roles influenced the study. I was aware that my participation roles influenced the study, so I addressed them by exposing my biases and reflecting on my research. Overall, the study found that the CCAE methodology was an effective way to collect data on the experiences of ILS in the United States.

Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter contains the data analysis from the *testimonios* and the collaborators' conversations with me. It provides a synopsis of the procedure for collecting and analyzing data. Then, the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis are presented. All themes emerged from the data analysis. As an ILS in the United States, I was curious to know how ILS collectively felt about studying in the United States with English as the language of instruction. Because of ILS' diversity in terms of culture, I was curious to learn about our experiences working with professors from backgrounds other than our own. The collaborators, Claudia and Mary, and I presented our lived experiences as ILS at IHEs in the United States. We shared our *testimonios* and carried out subsequent conversations based on the analysis of the *testimonios*. We saved our *testimonios* in a shared file that only the collaborators and I could access. I coded these data and compiled a list of codes to share in our subsequent conversations. I shared the codes with the collaborators, and we talked about this information. I took notes and transcribed our conversations and completed a second coding cycle with notes and conversation transcripts. From the data analysis, two large themes emerged. The collaborators and I worked together to make sure the analysis results were accurate.

One of the central themes that emerged from the analysis of the *testimonios* and subsequent conversations with the collaborators was that we all experienced unfavorable feelings when speaking in class and writing essays in English, which impacted our respective performance and self-concepts. I used quotes that one of the collaborators or I said during the *testimonios* or the conversations to capture the collective experience. The first central theme was that *Language difficulties led to a lack of confidence, self-doubt, and frustration.* This theme refers to negative emotions the collaborators felt in connection with language difficulties. These negative emotions affected our language performance when using the English language.

Three subthemes made up this first central theme. One subtheme was lack of confidence when using English. In this subtheme, we explained that speaking in English was difficult, and it affected our confidence, especially when participating in class. There were factors such as misusing terms or mispronouncing words that confused professors and classmates and made us doubt our speaking abilities. Another subtheme for this first central theme was self-doubt of own English skills. Our experiences primarily stemmed from a lack of English vocabulary and a lack of practice with culturally specific ways of academic writing in English. Also, the need to have our writings approved by an English native speaker made us doubt our abilities to write. A similar subtheme was frustration regarding language difficulties. We described negative emotions such as frustration and insecurity resulting from struggles with the language of instruction. We talked about how we started to doubt our abilities because of having trouble with the English language. Even a sense of inferiority arose when we compared our linguistic performance with English native speakers. A second central theme also emerged from the analysis of the

testimonios and subsequent conversations with the collaborators. The quotes used to describe the second central theme and subthemes captured the collective experience. This second theme centered around contrasting expectations ILS had of professors. Three subthemes emerged from the second central theme. One subtheme was instructional methods with applicability. Our professors focused on advancing through the course content and having graded assignments to show for the time spent in class. These professors demanded an applicability of knowledge versus a theoretical approach. Another subtheme was a perceived lack of academic rigor when grading and providing feedback. We expressed doubts regarding the academic rigor demanded of the students' work despite our positive opinions about professors' flexibility and expertise. We agreed that our professors did not demand hard work and assessments were not difficult; our difficulties mostly revolved around L2 problems. Mary, however, shared a strong point of reflection in her *testimonios* that helped us understand our professors' perspectives on academic rigor and our expectations for academic rigor. A similar subtheme was a distant student-professor *relationship.* We noticed that professors did not develop a close relationship with the students. Creating a personal bond was not part of their focus and we expected that type of connection. However, we reflected on our positionality toward the relationships between professors and students and found cultural differences. Overall, we positively rated professors for their professionalism and preparation for their classes and characterized them as kind and decent people for their flexibility when working with students from various backgrounds. I presented the analysis of the *testimonios* and conversations with the other collaborators for each research question. Our words were used to title each subtheme, and each quote captured the emerging theme and the three

collaborators' thoughts. Next, I introduce the emergent themes that resulted from the data analysis.

Theme 1: "Language difficulties led to a lack of confidence, self-doubt, and frustration"

Analysis of the *testimonios* collectively suggested that we experienced negative emotions due to our experiences with English as the language of instruction. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines a negative emotion as "an unpleasant, often disruptive, emotional reaction designed to express a negative effect," and APA adds that a "Negative emotion is not conducive to progress toward obtaining one's goals" (American Psychological Association, n.d). The collaborators and I experienced unpleasant, disruptive emotions that affected our academic goals. We experienced a lack of confidence when participating in classes where English was the language of instruction. Our *testimonios* indicated that we struggled with receptive language skills, such as listening and reading, and expressive language skills, such as speaking and writing. The analysis of the *testimonios* and conversations revealed that we had more significant challenges with expressive language skills than with our receptive language skills. We shared that using the English language in classroom activities generated frustration, doubt, and disappointment in our language skills. Claudia observed, "I realized that those [personal and academic] expectations that I had were not going to be possible, not because I didn't want to, but because my abilities (with the English language) were limited; so, it was totally different, and I felt very sad, very disappointed." The three of us revealed that these negative emotions prevented us from

performing at the level that we expected during our graduate studies. Claudia's description of her emotions described what Mary and I felt as well.

After analyzing the *testimonios* and the notes and scripts from the conversation, a central theme emerged, concerning language difficulties that triggered negative emotions. Language and emotions are linked (Caldwell-Harris, 2014), and this relationship is strong for students who speak a second language (Yu, 2022). Most of the research on emotions developed by English language learners is centered on negative emotions, such as language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). According to MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), students who speak English as their second language frequently become stuck during class activities and are unable to recall what they want to say, which adversely affected their learning and distracts them from the content. These learners go through a range of negative emotions, including anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019), fear, tension, shame, burnout, anger, and boredom while engaging in a complex cognitive activity with rich emotional experiences (Owaidah, 2024).

In recent years, research on the emotions that second-language learners experience has shifted to a positive physiological perspective. Researchers, for instance, stated that some English learners used these negative feelings to motivate themselves and get through the challenges. However, using a second language caused emotions that often impacted students' achievements (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Moreover, the factor of students' personalities further determined how or if everyone was able to overcome these challenges. The relationship between students and teachers, the setting of the classroom, and language proficiency were all associated with language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Next, I introduce the three subthemes that made up the central theme

to illustrate the negative emotions resulting from the struggles we experienced using the English language.

Subtheme 1: Lack of confidence in language use: "Speaking in English was hard, and it broke my confidence to speak in front of others." Our struggles while expressing ourselves in the English language resulted in frustration. I learned Spanish as my heritage language but learned English in my undergraduate program when I was in my early 20s. Four years after my college graduation, I moved to the United States to teach ESL in an elementary school. In my first year in the United States, I enrolled in a master's program for teaching ESL, and after completing this program, I enrolled in a doctoral program in education; four years later, I enrolled in a master program in school administration. My classes were online and on campus. I felt excited and grateful for the opportunities to study in the United States, and I considered these experiences intense learning opportunities.

My experience as a student using English as the language of instruction was harder than I had expected. I had practiced English speaking skills for many years and my goal was always to sound like a native US English speaker. However, I realized that I had too much to learn when I started my classes in the United States; I felt the pressure and the struggle to keep up with in-class conversations at the same level as my native English-speaking peers.

I experienced internal pressure to keep up with the class discussions, which affected my confidence to participate in class. This challenge went beyond a mere lack of words to express myself. According to Jackson (2014), in her book *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*, communication involves gestures and other

nonverbal means of communication. Both senders and receivers of information need to be able to decode words and nonverbal symbols correctly or else conversation could become difficult. When one or more speakers are uncomfortable with academic English, the potential for confusion and stress rises. Despite my efforts to master academic language, these struggles affected me, especially in terms of confidence. During my reflections, recording my *testimonios*, I expressed that,

> I found it very difficult to participate. At times, I simply felt strange jumping in (sic) the conversations that we were having. I did not want to be rude. I had to prepare my response to participate, so when I was ready, I raise (sic) my hand; but, by the time I was given the chance to speak, my classmates had said what I had prepared to say, and that was frustrating because I had to improvise and improvising my responses in English was hard!

I was aware of my English-speaking struggles, such as a foreign accent and limited vocabulary. I accepted that my accent could confuse my professors and classmates. To help my professors and classmates tried to paraphrase what I had said. However, these actions only made me more uncomfortable and less confident.

I suspected that the way I pronounced and used words could be confusing for my professors and native-speaking classmates. I noticed that professors were very descriptive when they spoke, but I seemed to leave words in the air. I was not specific about them. Regularly, after I felt confident to say something in class, I was let down when I heard my professors or classmates asking questions or following up to understand what I had just said. They usually said, “I’m not sure if I understood exactly what you are asking but

…"; or "I believe what you are asking is …"; or "I'm not sure if I'm getting you right." They did so with good intentions, to double check my ideas, but it was frustrating, and I felt annoyed at my lack of clarity. I usually thought, "If my professors, who pay attention to me, get lost with my words, I can't imagine how confused my classmates got with what I say."

Claudia also recognized that, since English is not her native language, using it as the language of instruction could be a challenge for her as a student. Claudia is from Colombia and speaks Spanish as her native language. She learned English during her undergraduate program, and she migrated to the United States to teach Spanish. She wanted to better use her knowledge of pedagogical practices and her language teaching background. A year after she moved, she enrolled in a master's program at a southern US college. She stated that she was happy about having this experience. Claudia attended on-campus and online classes.

Claudia shared that her initial expectations were to improve her English language skills to a native level, using the U.S. English language dialect as her reference. She had a sense of English fluency and the challenges she could face as an IS. Claudia said,

> I was aware that I was not from the United States. I was a foreign student, and my mother tongue [heritage language] was not English. I speak Spanish, so I knew that I had to improve my English language level to sound more fluid or look better in class. The challenge of speaking better included using proper grammar, accurate idioms, and good syntax. Even though the goal is to sound like a U.S. English native (sic) speak, which is impossible, I was ok as long as I could say (sic) communicate my

> thoughts. I do not care about whether I have an accent; I do not think that matters as long as I am understandable.

Claudia started developing negative emotions when she felt she was not performing at the expected level. Like me, Claudia was aware that she had a disadvantage in the vocabulary she used in comparison to her native-speaking peers. She recognized her communication skills as problematic; therefore, Claudia did not feel confident when speaking in English to her professors and classmates.

> I felt I was stuck when I tried to say some things [to participate in class] because I did not know the exact word that I had to use, so I ended up saying something a bit different or just with my idea altered. That was hard because it broke my confidence to speak in front of others [classmates and professors]. At times, I preferred not to say anything [in class] that simply screwing it up in public [In front of her classmates and professors].

As Claudia reflected on her struggles, she identified differences in the way Spanish and English language speakers structured the information. She noticed differences in the communication style between native speakers of these two languages that went beyond linguistic features. She realized that effective communication transcends linguistic features and includes cultural elements. She accepted that her first language and cultural background were different from the US culture, and that helped her developed pride of her Latinx identity. Despite her understanding of the informational structure and language barriers, she felt affected by her limited ability to verbally express what she wanted to say.

> Sometimes I tried to express my thoughts, but I was aware [U.S. native English language speakers] express themselves in a different way. Their way at times differs with the way I was taught English. It was difficult to escape from the way I express or organize my ideas in my native language.

Mary was also born and raised in Colombia. Mary learned Spanish as her heritage language and she learned English during her undergraduate program at college in Colombia. Mary migrated to the United States to teach Spanish at an elementary school. One year after she arrived, she enrolled in a Southern U.S. college to complete her master's program. Mary's expectations to enroll in a US master's program were to learn about her subject matter and improve her English language skills. As Mary was an English and Spanish language teacher, she had professional skills in language acquisition. Mary was aware of her linguistic characteristics when she spoke in English, such as a foreign accent and lack of vocabulary. Mary believed that her Spanish-language accent when she spoke in English could affect her communication skills and confuse her professors and peers. Mary shared that,

> My experience as a student who spoke in a second language with their professors was somehow troubling. I was not sure if I was saying things right or if I was saying something completely different. I wanted to express my ideas with clarity and ease, but expressing myself was a heck of a challenge. I felt sometimes I was made fun of for the way I said things; but I also know that it could have been my impression out of frustration.

Mary said that her experiences with English as the language of instruction created frustration and made her feel less confident in her language skills. However, she recognized her Latinx identity with the Spanish language features and felt proud despite of her challenges in using the English language as the language of instruction. Mary stated,

> Before I came to the United States, I thought I could speak English without any problem; but, when I started my classes here, I realized I had too much to learn. It was hard! I felt not confident to clearly communicate with others. I am proud to be Colombian, and I embrace my accent as part of my identity; I know I will never sound like [U.S. native English language speakers] do, and I don't want to; but I know that my accent can be confusing sometimes; I know it, especially when I was asked to repeat what I was trying to say to clarify my messages.

Mary admitted that she struggled particularly with English vocabulary. She was aware that sometimes she did not know the correct terms to make herself understandable to others. And yet the words she used could determine how accurately she could convey a message to classmates and professors. Mary related,

> I think the most difficult part was to think about the vocabulary. I had to reflect on the kind of words I wanted to use to sound proper and that fit the context of the conversation. I had to think ahead of the words I could say, so I could participate; however, if I were in class, and someone else said what I was preparing to say, it shut me down because I could not simply

improvise to express my thoughts. I believe this struggle prevented me from being more fluent when I spoke in English.

Claudia, Mary, and I expressed concerns about our expressive language skills in our graduate programs, where English was the primary language of instruction. The language's structure made it hard to express ourselves, especially during more spontaneous classroom discussions. Collectively, we agreed that, because of our accents and limited vocabulary, our professors and peers frequently misunderstood what we meant to say.

Subtheme 2: Self-doubt of own English skills: "I started doubting myself, about what I knew and what I had learned." We agreed that academic writing in English was a challenge. We found academic writing guidelines to be problematic because our ideas did not flow in English as they did in Spanish. We stated that cultural features were reflected in the way we wrote. Because we are culturally and linguistically diverse from our peers and professors, we had to find native English speakers to proofread our work. We usually found ourselves overthinking and proofreading more than we used to in our heritage language. That made us doubt our skills. The presentation of information in English differed from the way we presented information back home, which affected how we perceived our writing performance.

Claudia, for example, acknowledged that she encountered numerous difficulties when composing academic papers in English. Although she was aware that writing was an academic skill, she found it more challenging due to her struggles with the English language. She claimed that in her home country, her writing abilities were positively valued. Her undergraduate classmates praised her for writing in a U.S. native English

speaker way, and her undergraduate professors recognized that she stood out for writing academically well. However, she felt less skilled than her classmates while studying in the United States, which affected her self-confidence and self-assurance to write in English. Claudia said:

> I believe the highest challenge for me in college was writing. When I had to write, sometimes I felt I simply couldn't. I used to begin writing my papers, but after writing two sentences or lines, I did not know what to say! I felt I couldn't express myself appropriately. I knew what I wanted to say but not how to put it on paper. I could have a whole idea in my head, but I started writing, my idea was considerably reduced to a few sentences. I know it was a process, but it took me a while to know what to do which was to have an idea y develop that idea in a concise way. When I was in my home country, I received compliments from my classmates for my writing skills. They used to say I was very good at writing in English because I wrote my papers like a U.S. English native speaker, they said. I simply knew I had to use shorter sentences, and more periods than commas. In Spanish, we expand our thoughts when we write, but in English, we have to go straight to the point.

For Claudia, writing in English was a more straightforward way of expression. Claudia considered writing in U.S. English to be more concise and direct than writing in other English-speaking countries. To overcome writing difficulties, Claudia described different methods that she employed to mimic the U.S. style of academic writing. She

affirmed, however, that because she was not a part of US culture, she was limited in her ability to write well. She stated that,

> Even when I knew what the expectation was when writing in English, I doubted about my writing skills when I compared my work with other classmates. I felt like mine were not as good as theirs. I tried really hard to make them look like a native of the language had written it, but it was impossible. I simply could not feel confident to write as I expected to do.

In a similar way, I admitted that I found writing to be a difficult skill to master. Initially, I was convinced I could complete my writing assignments without extreme difficulties because I already had experience writing academic papers in English. However, I felt constrained by my lack of academic cultural competence, so I compared writing with a clash of cultural expressions. In my *testimonios*, I referenced my difficulties writing academic assignments and some of the methods I used to tackle them:

> Writing was challenging. Even though writing is one of my favorite things to do, writing school papers is hard. I believe what makes it so difficult is the flow of ideas. I can think and write fast in Spanish. I can't do it in English. I normally find myself overthinking about how to better express every sentence to make it academically correct. I normally repeat terms, and that makes my writing very basic; when I compare my writings with my classmates, mine looked like if I were a high schooler and not a graduate student.

I reflected on my ability to write in both English and Spanish. My academic setbacks while I was a student in the United States led to negative perceptions of my

Spanish writing. I believed that my native language hindered my academic ability, so I developed strategies to lessen the impact of this language interference. I was aware of how challenging it was to separate my writing expression from my cultural background. One of my professors confirmed my negative perception with a comment she made on one of my papers. I reflected on my experiences and thought,

> I got used to writing the way [U.S. native English language speakers] write: straight forward and short. I learned that we, Spanish speakers, adorn our writings because we add 'unnecessary' details to our texts. At least, that is what a US professor told me at least twice. I write academic papers the best way possible, but I usually feel limited by words and structures that keep me from 'sounding' native or natural. But getting rid of information to make it more precise sometimes makes no sense.

I acknowledged that writing in academic English took time and was difficult. I compared how long it took me and my classmates to read and write, and I believed I had to put in twice as much effort to achieve the same outcome. Figuring out how to make the document culturally appropriate was part of that time-consuming task, and I occasionally struggled to finish it. Therefore, I used to ask a U.S. English native speaker to proofread my work.

I reflected that,

> I had to rewrite and proofread my essays more than normal. Writing a few paragraphs with graduate quality took me a while. Moreover, the guidelines for academic writing made it even more difficult. I had to follow the American Psychological Association (APA) Manual, and it was

> hard to be especially precise and concise. I believe the way we [Latinx students] develop the information differs from the way [U.S. native English language speakers] present their information. That made writing academic papers very complicated.
>
> Apart from writing academic documents, I had to seek assistance from other [U.S. native English language speakers] to read what I have done; I know that I may write and not develop my ideas with the intentions I meant to. So, I had to ask native speakers to proofread my writings and that felt like I needed to be approved with what I was saying. I felt frustrated. If I were writing in Spanish, I could have simply written and proofread my texts myself, but in English, there are meanings and connotations that escape from my understanding.

Similarly, Mary acknowledged that she was aware of how challenging English writing was for her. She acknowledged that the way she expressed herself when writing in English was different from when she wrote in Spanish. She discussed writing techniques she employed in English, which were similar to those discussed by the other collaborators. Mary explained how culture affects writing and how, as a person from a diverse cultural background, she will always find it difficult to write an academic paper in English. Mary said,

> I was not sure about my writing skill. I had to ask a [English language] native [Speaker] to check what I was saying, like approving not only my word choice, but my idea. I always felt like I couldn't do it by myself because I thought I had to be checked and approved. When I write in

> Spanish, I am sure of what and how I am saying my thoughts; but in English, I simply doubt about my skill. Writing in English is not that simple.
>
> In the United States, you have to be simple when you write. You have to go straight to the point, and that was a challenge for me. I had to erase phrases and words. Writing in Spanish and English is different. I thought I was going to express myself in the same way, but that's not the case. I have to be direct because [U.S. native English language speakers] are direct.

Mary made the connection between U.S. culture and U.S. academic writing style. She explained that U.S. native English language speakers are straightforward, which people from her Colombian culture might interpret negatively. She argued that the way people within a culture present information reveals something about their cultural characteristics. She was aware of the challenges she would face when writing in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner because she was neither a native speaker of English nor a member of the U.S. community. She also needed a native speaker of U.S. English to edit and proofread her writings. She related,

> We can perceive them [U.S. people] like rude, but they are not; they just do not care about words that we care about. For us, they are simple, and their language is straightforward and honest, and their writing reflects how they are. We talk around and they don't. For us, it is like they do not need details to develop an idea. But, in the end, we are different people who use the language to communicate differently. That's also the reason why I

> asked a friend of mine, a U.S. English native speaker, to proofread my writings.

To summarize, we, as ILS, expressed a lack of confidence when using the English language as the language of instruction. This study data revealed that we had more challenges with expressive language skills, such as speaking and writing skills, than with receptive skills, such as listening and reading. We had difficulties mainly with vocabulary, language structure, and fluency. We agreed that we felt limited in expressing ourselves, and that affected our confidence to communicate assertively. We also recognized that US students and professors had different communication approaches that went beyond our language skills.

Subtheme 3: Frustration regarding language difficulties: "I felt frustrated and disappointed with myself." As students, we were required to use English in the classroom. We indicated that we experience negative emotions while speaking and writing in English. We admitted that we felt a certain degree of disappointment in ourselves. We felt that our English proficiency was lower than that of our native English-speaking graduate student peers.

Claudia acknowledged how emotionally strained she felt because of her language barriers. Her lack of confidence in speaking or writing in English caused her self-esteem to decline. Despite the length of her stay in the country, she felt constrained. Claudia also mentioned that she preferred to stay quiet in class rather than actively participate because she had trouble expressing herself.

> I felt disappointed because of the way I was writing. I compared my writings with my classmates' work, and they were far better than mine. I

> tried very hard to do my best in every writing assignment that I had, but I felt it was not getting any better. My self-esteem was affected because I did not notice the progress I was expecting. I felt unconfident and I got blocked, which affected me to move ahead with my work as I expected. I felt very limited, and that made me feel sad and disappointed. I questioned myself because I had been here for a few years and I am still making basic mistakes; I knew that if I spoke, I was going to screw it up; so, I rather presented myself with a low profile. I felt disappointed for not meeting the expectations.

I became irate because I was unable to express myself how I desired. Due to my language difficulties, I felt I could not live up to the demands placed on me as a student. Rather than the content of my thoughts, which could have been a crucial contribution, I was more worried about how I could speak to the class. I was therefore disappointed. I reflected,

> I felt frustrated because there were many thoughts I wanted to share, but I felt I could not do it; when I did, I felt that I was more concerned about finding the right terms to express them that at the end created some sort of disappointment. In class, sometimes they were speaking, and I didn't even say a word of what was being discussed. I felt disappointed at myself for not standing out, showing engagement, meeting the expectations of being a good student.

Mary described how she began to doubt her abilities due to her difficulties with English. She was concerned how much time she might need to finish her degree while overcoming those difficulties. Mary stated,

> I have felt frustrated for the difficulties I had with the English language. Especially, when I have to talk. The fact that I felt I was improving in other areas, but I felt I was not advancing with my speaking was frustrating and disappointing for me. My [English] language struggles made me question myself. I knew that this experience was going to be hard. I did not know how I was going to be able to live here using English all the time. I was highly concerned. I struggled with words and sentences, which I ended up doubting about my real skills with the English language.

In conclusion, we reported our feelings, which showed we had a variety of negative emotions for using English as the sole language to express all that we were learning. We acknowledged our frustration at not being able to express ourselves as clearly as we would have liked. We felt discouraged about our English language development when compared to our classmates' writing and speaking abilities.

Theme 2: Contrasting Expectations of ILS from Professors

We observed that our professors were very professional and well-prepared for their classes. We -----had high expectations for professors because of how well-regarded the U.S. educational system was globally presented. In our *testimonios* and discussions, we expressed feeling excited when we enrolled in a higher education program in the United States due to its reputable educational programs. We shared the dream-like feeling of being in a U.S. classroom with professors when we started our graduate programs. I

had high expectations for what I was going to learn when I came to the United States. Claudia also said that she could not believe she was studying in the United States because she had dreamed of completing a master's degree in this country. Mary explained that studying at a U.S. IHE made her proud. We expected these graduate classes to be opportunities for intensive interaction with professors and learning experiences. We knew professors represented U.S. culture, so we had certain expectations of their instructional practices. Our *testimonios* and conversations showed that, during our programs, we maintained positive opinions about professors, especially regarding their applicable instructional approach, their flexibility, patience, and professional character.

Subtheme 1: Instructional methods with applicability: "Professors focus on what needs to be done and how to apply it." Claudia, Mary, and I had positive opinions about our professors' instructional approaches. We found them to be responsive and their teaching practices to have real-life applications. Mary described professors as practical and good people. Mary viewed professors as flexible professionals as they worked with students from diverse backgrounds on multiple occasions. Mary also said that professors were practical in their instruction because they connected the class activities with applicable purposes. They were patient. Their teaching approach seemed to foster our confidence in our educational path. Mary stated**,**

> They used a lot of technological platforms, and they wanted to help us. If I needed to meet them, they were responsive to meet online or in person. They prompted us to learn more, read more, and inquire more; they provided the resources I needed to learn. They provide the materials and resources. The professors had all the materials and resources and that

> made them organized. They facilitated my learning and expected me to explore, find info by myself, and go beyond.

Mary shared that professors were flexible, and they gave her multiple opportunities to submit assignments. She said that professors cared about her background, and they had a great experience working with diverse students. In her reflections, Mary shared that the lack of resources and educational opportunities in her country influenced the flexibility and academic rigor she experienced from her home country's professors. Mary shared,

> In Colombia, studying in college is a privilege, you may only have one opportunity and that's it. Your grade will be down if you do not comply with what's expected. We don't have the resources, so we got to earn the spot we have in college. In contrast, in the United States, professors provide a lot of opportunities to fix a grade and submit work, like please do it! Because [In the United States] professors and students have resources, the focus is no longer a grade but to make sure you graduate.

I agreed with Mary. I admired the focus of my professors' teaching strategies, which emphasized to the practical use of my knowledge in their lessons. I believe these instructional methods addressed a higher intellectual skill. Besides, their activities were designed to awaken my interest and to apply new knowledge to real-life situations. This type of instructional method was beneficial for me because my professors considered my background when designing lessons. I shared with the other collaborators,

> Professors focus on what needs to be done and how to apply it. They do not go around the bush and accept what you have to offer. They graded the

> assignments based on my effort more than knowledge. You must apply what you know. In my country, professors made you read materials and then they asked for every single detail. Here, professors asked to apply the information to something you know or work on; it's like practice; it's like a plan; it's practical, that's how I perceive it.

Claudia shared a similar opinion. She expressed positive experiences with professors. She praised their materials and how well-prepared they were for their classes and their roles. Also, she appreciated how open they were to assist her when as needed. Claudia affirmed,

> My professors were great. They were super organized and well prepared. The materials they chose were excellent. If I needed my professors, I could email them, and they responded right away. They graded the assignments very quickly. The professors are patient and considerate, especially because they knew I was not from here, and they knew I was an English learner.

We agreed that professors' character demonstrates support for our educational processes. We found their characters to be flexible and encouraging. Our professors were open to communication and available to assist. Furthermore, our professors organized their academic work with practical applications, so we could use our backgrounds to learn. Our professors were approachable and cognizant of our conditions and situations as IS.

Subtheme 2: Lack of academic rigor when grading providing feedback: "I expected more academic rigor." Academic rigor is defined as the workload demand and

the level of higher thinking skills (Culver et al., 2021). Despite our views on the adaptability and readiness of our professors, we questioned their rigor in terms of how demanding their evaluation of our work proved to be and their feedback. We agreed that our professors were not rigorous with grading and providing feedback. We shared that our professors were particularly demanding in reading materials but not when grading assignments or evaluations. We felt that our professors easily assigned high grades for work that was, in our opinion, lacking in theoretical detail. Claudia, for example, mentioned that her professors assigned her good grades for any work. She said they did not provide clear criteria for her grades or thorough feedback for her work. Claudia said:

> I expected more academic rigorousness [from professors] .... There were some professors who did not offer any type of feedback, just like 'You *did great*!' And I did not have that type of feedback in my undergraduate program in my country. At times, [In my U.S. IHE], I got a hundred on an assignment, and the kind of feedback I received was like, *are you serious?* [I asked myself]. I did not understand how I got to that grade. There was a professor in particular who lowered my grade for misusing an acronym and I did not understand why. Sometimes I had to talk to my classmates to understand the reason for my grade because the feedback was not clear. I was not going to ask the professors because they knew more than I did.

Claudia believed her professors here assigned her high grades in part because she was an IS and an English language learner. Claudia appreciated that they treated her with kindness and consideration for being an IS. She assumed the nature of the master's degree program was a factor in her professors' evaluation decisions as her program

normally included students of other languages and cultures. Besides, Claudia admitted her professors' concentration was not to teach ESL, so they might not expect to offer feedback on her English proficiency.

Despite her concerns about the evaluation and feedback experiences, Claudia preferred studying in the United States to studying in Colombia. She noticed a difference in demand for schoolwork. She claimed that Colombian professors had a more rigorous grading system, and sometimes, they imposed an excessive academic load. She explained that Colombian professors seemed to make efforts to retain students in their programs, which was demoralizing for her. Nonetheless, Claudia did not like the simplicity of her professors' grading habits, and she claimed that "Ellos [U.S professors] regalan todo." Claudia implied that they were quite lenient with their grading.

Similarly, I felt that studying in the United States was not very difficult in terms of academic school demands. I think that studying in the United States was easy for me, especially because professors were "*madres para calificar,"* a Colombian expression, which means that they, professors, were too considerate to grade schoolwork. I shared:

> I believe studying in the US is easy because they are so considerate to grade our assignments because you get between [academic score of] 90 and 100 for everything and the feedback is nothing to be worried about. It's not that specific and their feedback is superficial.

As a college student in my home country, I frequently questioned my professors to learn how grades were calculated. However, I did not want to, nor did I have to, question my professors about my grades because they were good enough; I did not want to risk them and get them reduced.

> Here in the United States, I got 98 and I was like, is it worth asking for only two points? And the feedback notes I had were random comments. I decided not to ask because I knew my work had more errors, and I did not want to uncover them to lower my grade.

However, I had a professor from an African country who provided the type of feedback that I was expecting—detailed and focused on my language skills. I did not receive feedback from local professors about language features such as grammar or syntax. The only professor who provided this type of guidance was my African professor. She was very detailed in her comments, and she gave the feedback that I was used to and expected.

However, Mary reflected on the academic rigor of her Colombian professors and concluded that the Colombian professors' academic rigor could relate to the scarcity of resources and educational possibilities. She related,

> It's not easier to study [in a U.S. IHE] …I understand that college experiences are different in both countries, you know? [We] have to deal with different things…different languages, different cultures and different styles of lives; that's why the systems are different. I don't wanna say easier or harder, you know? In the United States, professors have to consider a lot of things. It's also challenging for them… so, they want to give you opportunities like *just do it*! because they have the resources to get your graduation, you know? In Colombia, professors give you one opportunity to complete an assignment and that's it. Your grade will be down if you don't submit it. We don't have the resources, so we have to

> earn the spot, the opportunity we have in college because there are not many. In the United States, professors provide a lot of opportunities to fix the grade and submit the work, like *please do it*! Because they have resources, and the focus is no longer a grade but to get you graduated.

Mary reflected on where our criticism of the professor's grading and feedback habits originated. Mary shared that the reflective nature of this CCAE research made her prejudices and biases evident. She discovered that the many different cultural manifestations in the United States required people to work together to comprehend, collaborate, and accept each other. Mary added,

> To work with someone in the United States requires [one] to face cultural facts where someone acts and completes things in a way, and I may do it differently; the idea is to support each other despite those barriers. Sometimes, we might consider professors mediocre, but we must be in their shoes to understand them. However, I recognized that it is difficult because we have rooted Colombian beliefs, and that counts and creates bias before analyzing in detail.

Our experiences with grading and feedback contrasted with our experiences in our home country. Back home, our schoolwork was evaluated more strictly, which we regarded as rigorous. In our U.S. IHE graduate programs, we normally obtained high grades with less effort, and the evaluation portion did not represent a challenge. Our professors provided feedback, but it was vague, and it did not pertain to linguistic features.

Subtheme 3: A distant student-professor relationship: "Being distant is part of their culture, but they are good too." The collaborators and I reflected on the lack of socialization between professors and their students. We considered socialization an essential component of building student-professor relationships. We, however, held the opinion that our professors did not behave and think the same way our Latinx professors did. Professors put up a clear barrier to prevent students from crossing personal boundaries. As Mary explained, "we [Colombian professors and students] relate like friends and equals," which fostered a closer relationship between students and professors. Therefore, we expected more socializing opportunities with professors, but they did not happen. Mary added:

> They can be like…. you know this is what it is and that's the homework, that's the activity; that is it. Sometimes you expect to be like, *hey teacher, how are you*? *Bla bla bla*… having a conversation with them…in Colombia, we are different. There are some different rules, like, we [professors and teachers] become friends with the students like my coworker. Here [in the United States] we have to keep the distance; [professors] are gonna be helping you, but they're going to keep the distance... There are some professors who can be more open with you… but most of them are going to put like a barrier like, [I am] here, you are [there]; you're the student and I'm the professor; there are rules for how you are going to communicate with the professors to not to go too close with them.

Mary expressed that she previously thought that professors were not interested in forming a bond with the students or did not care about her as a person. Mary acknowledged that professors made efforts to connect with her, but the ways to communicate were formal. She had previously expected a more personal style of communication. Mary commented,

> [Professors] responded; they are very clear…like, I want to let you know as soon as possible… very responsive and fast but… oh my God; all the time through emails, emails, emails; sometimes, I have to talk to the teachers, hear the voice … sometimes I wanted to talk face to face with the teacher. They would rather have an email... A call would be very close and personal for them.
>
> At times, I felt that I was going too far with my attempts to interact with professors. I understood that professors kept their distance to avoid uncomfortable misunderstandings and unprofessional issues.

My connection with professors and communication needed to remain formal, which I defined as distant. When I reflected on my experiences, I thought:

> I wondered if my actions were ever taken as insensitive like I was a 'mala persona' [bad person]; with time, though, I learned that this was a U.S. societal code… on several; occasions I felt like I was offending or distressing [U.S. native English language speakers] with everything I did or said. It was a pain to try to connect with them .... I feel like they are always cautious with the way they treat each other, so they do not cross boundaries of complex areas that can be interpreted as racist, sexist, nativist, etc., as the U.S. society has many problems of this caliber.

I admitted that I found the interactions with my professors to be rude at times, and I thought some of my professors were arrogant when I responded in a defensive manner.

> I have noticed arrogant actions from professors for the way they treat students, and I have reacted in a defensive way that they might not have expected….they have apologized as they expressed their intention was not to make me feel bad … they are very formal and distant….the connection with gringos [U.S. people] is very empty in general and that doesn't help if you want to practice speaking in English because I hardly socialize with them.

Mary reflected that professors have a different culture. She stated that "*being distant is part of the culture, but they are good too*." Mary also linked this professors' culture with their academic writing style.

> No way, in English [In the United States], they don't care; they just like [to] go to the point and tell me what it is; that's it! but we are like more… oh we gotta do it that way… they are direct. Sometimes we take it [the way professors act and communicate] like they are rude, [or that] they are mean. But they're not mean; that is the way they are here. I have been learning that … they don't want to say anything to you, the way they speak to you… it's like they don't care, they don't say hello to you, like… they're mad or what? No, that's it, they are simple, like distant people. We are warm. They're not friendly and that's why the writing paper has to be like this.

Mary considered her positionality in relation to the professors' culture. She believed that her professors set boundaries to keep students out of their personal realm to prevent misunderstandings and professional issues. However, she claimed that her cultural background in student/professor relationships from her home country biased her opinions towards her professors. Mary admitted that she needed to be more sensitive to cultural differences.

> [Professors] are honest. I think like they're honest. I feel like sometimes we don't like that. I have been hearing my friends sometimes saying things like: [A professor] has been mean, he doesn't know how to say this, you know? I said he doesn't think that way, I meant we are different, we're [from] different countries [with] different languages. At the end, we have a communication, that's it! [we need to] try to understand our culture we're in a [to] understand this I got and that's it. You got to be honest. I've learned that you go to the point, be honest and that's it. Don't give [professors] details. They don't care."

Claudia limited what she shared as her professors were very formal and respectful. She expressed that their culture made them different, and she felt she could not judge how they were.

We agreed that our professors' teaching methods were helpful because they demanded that we apply our knowledge in their lessons. We were accustomed to a memory-based instructional methods, not to this application approach, which we considered more effective. We also praised how accommodating professors were to our unique needs as IS. On the other hand, we critiqued our professors' level of rigor towards

academic work. We believed that they had too much leeway with their grading. Additionally, our student/professor relationship seemed distant and formal; we were not used to this social approach with professors. We acknowledged that culture impacted our view of relationships and instructional strategies.

Conclusions

This study explored the experiences of LIS in the United States, focusing on English as the language of instruction and the experiences of LIS with professors. The data revealed that ILS experienced difficulties due to language barriers resulting in lack of confidence, self-doubt, and frustration which led to negative emotions in all of us. . These data also showed that ILS had different expectations with professors placing more emphasis on language usage and academic rigor when assigning grades and providing feedback. Compared to Colombian professors, in our experience, U.S. professors focused more on applicability than relationship-building. Nonetheless, the overall opinions towards professors were positive due to their instructional methods and professionalism.

This study's findings supported previous literature findings on IS that revealed challenges regarding academic writing and professors' feedback. Other studies had shown that IS regularly contrasted expectations with their actual experiences that professors lacked rigorous grading and feedback practices. Nonetheless, these findings also contrast with other studies' findings regarding IS feeling favorably towards professors. This study's findings highlight cultural differences between ILS and professors, including communication styles. The findings also revealed that ILS found strategies to overcome and understand linguistic and cultural challenges to adapt to the U.S. academic environment and its expectations.

Chapter V

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

I feel blessed and fortunate to have studied in three graduate programs in the south of the United States. Education is my professional field, and I feel steered by U.S. cultural standards. I never looked to be shaped by U.S. sociocultural models, but I have been immersed in these ideals since growing up in Colombia. As a graduate student, I found a passion for understanding my experiences and views of the U.S. educational system from my Latinx perspective. Unfortunately, I learned that some of my experiences were predetermined due to my Latinx heritage and that I, as an ILS, could be a victim of a structured oppression due to my race and language. Critical Race Theory and LatCrit offered me a perspective that would explain the experiences of people like me in the United States. When I started reading about IS, I did not find enough literature that addressed ILS. The literature on IS addressed this diverse population from a monolithic perspective and ignored the differences among us. I found literature on Latinx students but not on ILS specifically. Therefore, I saw the need to carry out a study that was an original contribution to the empirical literature on ILS.

This chapter offers an analysis of the findings and answers to the research questions with a review of the methodology. I include a summary of the study findings associated with the research questions. This summary starts with an overview of this CCAE study and an analysis of the findings from a LatCrit and CRT perspective; the tenets I used from this theoretical framework are a master narrative, the deficit mindset (Valencia, 2010), and cultural responsiveness literature. Finally, I disclose the limitations that I encountered while conducting this research and provide recommendations for future researchers when conducting a similar study. Especially, I include recommendations for ILS who strive to break a hurtful narrative against Latinx and to keep up the work for a more equitable society.

Summary of Findings

A CCAE approach allowed me to address these experiences as it aligned with my ontological and epistemological stances and let me explore the experiences of ILS when seeking a graduate degree at IHEs in the United States. This CCAE further gave me opportunity to include two ILS contributors who acted as collaborators and had been exposed to similar experiences. I understood that this qualitative study does not contribute results that can be generalized to a population (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015), but it provides essential information about ILS in U.S. IHEs. The two collaborators and I worked together to bring meaning to our experiences in order to find answers to the study's research questions.

The collaborators and I shared and discussed our *testimonios* based on the lived experiences as ILS at IHEs in the United States. We primarily discussed our experiences with the English language as the language of instruction and our perceptions towards

professors' methodologies. We carried out conversations based on a first analysis of these *testimonios* that I completed following Saldaña (2016). I coded these data and shared the outcomes with the collaborators. Our subsequent conversations provided more data that I coded in a second data analysis cycle. The data analysis revealed two central themes and subthemes that I connected with the two research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of ILS learning at an IHE in the Southeast of the United States with English as the language of instruction?

A central theme emerged from the data analysis: we experienced language difficulties leading to a lack of confidence, self-doubt, and frustration. This theme had three subthemes: (1) *Lack of confidence when using English: "Speaking in English was hard, and it broke my confidence to speak in front of others"*; (2) self-doubt of own English skills: *"I started doubting about myself, about what I knew and what I had learned"*; and (3) frustration resulting from language difficulties: *"I felt frustrated and disappointed with myself."* All the experiences described in these themes collectively led the collaborators and me to have negative emotions.

We revealed that adapting to English as the language of instruction was challenging, especially when it came to abilities or language production such as speaking and writing. These findings connect with previous literature on IS from countries other than Latin America. The collaborators and I agreed that expressing ourselves naturally was a challenge despite having a high proficiency level in the English language and having met the language requirements of the U.S. IHEs. The challenges were so frustrating that we even sometimes expressed a sense of inferiority and blamed our heritage language (L1) interference when we expressed ourselves in English. Writing was

the most challenging skill. We were aware that writing at a graduate level was demanding, but we were also aware of other obstacles we encountered that local students did not have to overcome. Our L1 characteristics and cultural communication cues were present when we communicated in L2, and that created issues for our speaking and writing skills.

We developed negative emotions towards the utilization of English as the language of instruction. Theorists in both CRT and LatCrit have posited a form of disadvantage for students who are not English-language native speakers. As the standard language reflects a U.S. English dialect used by U.S. White people, LIS linguistic characteristics vary from this standard. Historically, the Latinx U.S. population had encountered discrimination in relation to their language background and English proficiency. This discrimination has also been associated with low levels of intellectual capacity (Hernandez et al., 2017). We agreed that we felt a responsibility to adhere to this language standard, which may have led to feelings of frustration, disappointment, and inferiority, or even feelings of shame (Suriel et al., 2017). IS experience negative emotions when trying to meet the language expectations in spite of the studies that expose this problem (Eldaba & Isbell, 2018).

Research Question 2: What are ILS' perceptions about the instructional methodologies of professors?

Another central theme emerged from the data analysis: the Collaborators and I had contrasting expectations of U.S. professors from Colombian professors. This theme had three sub-themes: (1) Instructional methods with applicability: *"Professors focused on what needed to be done and how to apply it";* (2) lack of academic rigor when grading

and providing feedback: *"We expected more academic rigor";* and (3) a distant student-professor relationship: *"Being distant is part of the [professors] culture, but they are good too."*

The data analysis revealed that we held positive opinions towards our professors regarding their instructional methods. The findings revealed that we considered our U.S. professors to focus more on applicability in their instructional methods than Colombia professors. We contrasted U.S. professors and Colombian professors in terms of how they related to their students and their focus in their teaching methods. Although we had expectations that contrasted with our experiences in our undergraduate programs in Colombia, the findings indicated that we had favorable perceptions of our professors in our graduate programs in the United States.

The findings suggested that we associated professors' instructional applicability practices with their personal traits. We shared that professors focused on making sure we had their work completed rather than on work details. The collaborators and I considered that professors did not particularly have an interest in bonding with their students on a personal level, and we felt that we needed that connection. We even labeled their relationship with us as distant. However, in our experience, we accepted that their focus was on the completion of work rather than building personal bonds, and that this student-professor relationship was the result of professional expectations regarding student-professor relationship in U.S. IHEs. Above all, we agreed that professors' professional and respectful demeanor was admirable.

Analysis of the Findings from a LatCrit and CRT Perspective

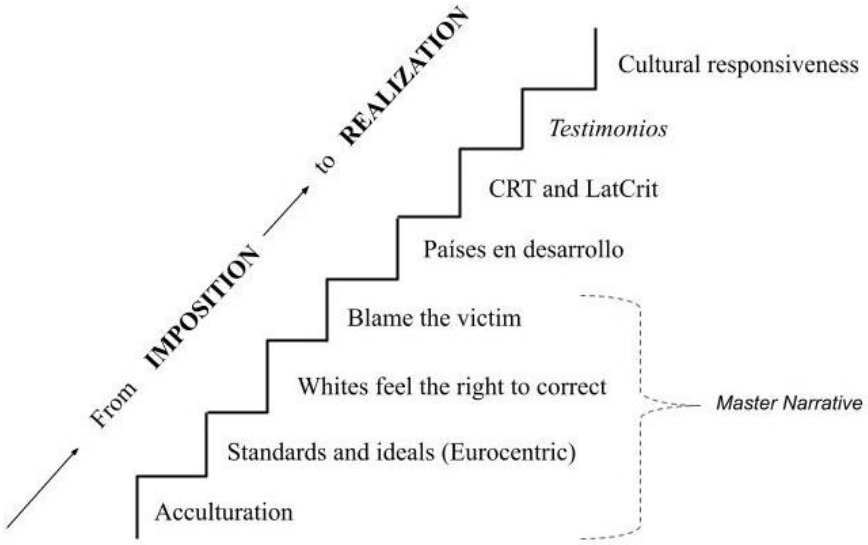
When I reflect on the study's findings considering the current literature on IS literature and this CCAE study's theoretical framework, I noticed a linear path from imposition to realization (Freire, 2018) (see figure 5). I see an acculturation process in which the collaborators and I attempted to meet eurocentric (White) standards (Lund, 2010). On our quest to meet these ideals, we blamed ourselves, especially when we felt the need to meet the standards of their language. ILS inherit this blame because they are not part of the circle of power.

> English-only language instruction sends the message to whites that their language and, by extension, their culture, is more valuable and superior to that of others. They come to see their English proficiency as a natural state of affairs that also legitimates a distinct advantage. Their social status is high because their language status is high. Their language and culture are further institutionalized by teachers (the majority of whom only speak English), by curriculum materials, and by standardized assessments that are in English-only. Their parents were never punished for speaking English-only and thus have positive experiences with schools on which to build. (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 61)

We were taught to believe in a master narrative that defies our logic. But, with this critical study, we were able to critically examine a power structure and expose our positions. We shared and used our *testimonios* to question a master narrative and to reach a state of realization. A noticeable benefit of reaching a state of realization in our professional field fits with cultural responsiveness.

Figure 6

Path from imposition to realization



Note. This figure contains a linear path from imposition to realization. Each step denotes a stage of development. This graphic illustrates my reasoning for the critical analysis of the study findings. The unidirectional arrow indicates an ascending direction to realization.

The Master Narrative in Latinx Students

A historical and continuous master narrative that explains discrimination and power structures is one of the tenets of CRT. A European conquerors' narrative perspective offers a justification for the current and past conditions of people of color. This master narrative told me that Latin America was discovered and introduced to civilization. It told me that Europeans *claimed* the Latin American territories and started the so-called *paises en desarrollo,* or developing countries. This master narrative invaded my mind and set sociocultural standards that obscured who I was.

The collaborators and I argued the master narrative's effects with comments that demonstrated our need to meet academic standards that we were not used to. Claudia

said, “I have practiced the English-speaking skill for many years, and my goal was always to sound like a U.S. English native speaker does.” She further shared that sounding like a U.S. English native speaker was her ideal for speaking this foreign language. Mary was praised by other Colombian classmates for her writing skills as she wrote in an U.S. English native speaker way. Deviations from that language standard created a perception that her language performance was poor. For example, my White professors described me and other Spanish native writers as people who adorned academic writing. The deviations from the U.S. standards even made us question whether we sounded *natural* for not sounding like a U.S. English native speaker.

This master narrative influences people of color's perceptions of their own backgrounds. This narrative spread with an acculturation process of European cultures and languages such as Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and/or Portuguese throughout Latin America. For centuries, indigenous people and Africans in Latin America had to attend schools to learn European languages and to learn to behave with new standards; for centuries, native languages and non-European cultures were narrated as savage and primitive (Emdin, 2017). Now, I am a product of that European civilization that continues to use European-centered standards for me.

People in Latin America regularly corelate knowing the English language with life progress. The master narrative implicitly communicated to my loved ones that learning English is a synonym of intelligence, development, or prestige. “¿Sabes inglés? Te va a ir muy bien en la vida mijo.”—“Do you know English? *You will be a successful man in your life, my son.”* These words were repeated to me multiple times by family

members and friends who cared about my future and knew that I was in college to become an ESL teacher.

English language teaching is mandatory in k-12 and higher education in Latin America. The White U.S. English dialect is normally considered the most ideal standard (Lund, 2010). The other standard is the White British English language dialect. As language and culture intertwined, these standards promoted a desire in me to become and own that culture. The master narrative supported that White European artifacts such as language and culture were optimal models to follow. The White culture has three main areas which are: "the privileged positioning of White American values, the pervasiveness of English as the dominant language, and the assumption of assimilation and acculturation of foreign students" (Yao et al., 2019, p. 44). This narrative influenced how I perceived my roots and molded my career affairs.

Blaming the victim and self-victimizing. Valencia (2010) explained that deficit-mindset promoters advocate that people of color have biological and cultural deficiencies that result in difficulty in meeting sociocultural standards. This standpoint blames the victim and lays the responsibility of discrimination on those who suffer it. *Blaming the victim* is one of the precepts of the deficit mindset. For example, claiming that the fault lies with people of color turns the blame on the victims of racism.

Unfortunately, the collaborators and I evidenced self-blaming views. We shared statements about our struggles with mastering the English language that showed we felt inferior. The collaborators and I expressed a weakness, and we blamed our varied linguistic backgrounds from our heritage language. As Claudia expressed,

> I speak Spanish, so I knew that I had to improve my English language level to sound more fluid or look better in class ... I noticed that they [professors and classmates] were very descriptive when they spoke, but I seemed to leave words in the air. On top of that, I knew that the way I pronounced and used words could be confusing for my professors or native-speaking classmates.

Freire (2018) explained that victimization is perpetuated by the oppressor and eventually believed by the oppressed, to the point that the oppressed feels it is their fault that they are oppressed. We blamed ourselves for struggling with Spanish as our heritage language in an English-language-only instructional setting. The collaborators and I considered our native language a barrier rather than an advantage to our academic success. As I shared in my *testimonio,* I had to reflect on the kind of words I wanted to use to sound proper and that fit the context of the conversation; I did not feel confident to clearly communicate with others.

We admitted we struggled with a lack of English-language mastery as we encountered it as the language of instruction, and that made us feel negatively about ourselves. We did not feel we met the expectations due to a language barrier we hit during our graduate work. Claudia related, “I realized that those [personal and academic] expectations that I had were not going to be possible, not because I didn’t want to, but because my abilities with the English language...; so, I felt very sad, very disappointed.” She also explained, “Speaking in English was hard, and it broke my confidence to speak in front of others.” We reported feeling frustrated, doubtful, and disappointed about our language abilities when we had to use the English language in class activities. Language

and emotions have a connection (Lindquist, 2021). We lived that frustration and blamed our Spanish language heritage.

Our *testimonios* revealed pressure and a preoccupation with conforming to U.S. norms and expectations and not being able to meet them. Latinx students in the United States deal with microaggressions and discrimination against their cultural features. We developed negative opinions of our own culture due our accents and communication styles. Even though neither the collaborators nor I experienced academic failure despite our language struggles, our difficulties and lack of participation in English language activities might have reinforced stereotypes of Latinos' lack of academic intelligence in our peers. We questioned and lost our identities as we compared ourselves to a standard that did not reflect who we are. Suriel (2016) explained, "Upon entering cultural domains, as they exist in the host country, the immigrant negotiates cultural significance and re-identification in an effort to effectively navigate his/her surroundings" (p. 117). Freire (2018) explained that when the oppressed person's or people's mindset mirrors the oppressor, he/she loses him/herself in that journey. Several factors pressured us to overcome our English language struggles and to develop skills that were extraneous to our own culture.

Whites Feel the Right to Correct

Critical researchers have documented that White people feel the right to correct and speak on behalf of people of color. Our *testimonios* revealed similar consentless right from English native speakers when they spoke on our behalf. Even when the collaborators agreed to other people speaking on their behalf, these actions affected us

negatively. Nonetheless, the behaviors that we experienced did not only pertain to White people but to English-language native speakers from different ethnicities.

Due to our struggles with communicating effectively in the English language, other people stepped up to rephrase or accommodate what we may have intended to say. "I wanted to express my ideas with clarity and ease, but expressing myself was a heck of a challenge," Claudia said, and further, "I tried really hard to make them look like a native of the language had written it [her essays], but it was impossible." We recognized that native speakers had good intentions when they intervened for us; nonetheless, knowing this did not decrease the negative feelings these actions produced.

We usually asked other native speakers to proofread our writing to make sure our assignments sounded proper. We asked native speakers to proofread texts such as essays, emails, or phone text messages. Even though we admitted this strategy helped us, we also observed that it felt as if somebody had to approve what we wanted to say. I shared in my *testimonio* that "I had to ask native speakers to proofread my writings and that felt like I needed to be approved with what I was saying." Some edits did not feel personal for the collaborators because they would not use expressions English native speakers used. I wrote further,

> In the United States, you have to be simple when you write. You have to go straight to the point, and that was a challenge for me. I had to erase phrases and words. Writing in Spanish and English is different. I thought I was going to express myself in the same way, but that's not the case. I have to be direct because [U.S. native English language speakers] are direct.

The collaborators recognized English native speakers communicated differently, not only with the translation of words, but also with what they would say to be proper. I was aware that I was not from the United States. I was a foreign student, and my heritage language was not English. I expressed that many times I would say things proofreaders suggested to say. I noticed that professors were very descriptive when they spoke, but I seemed to leave words in the air. However, the collaborators and I understood that the teachers expected native speaker's way of writing. Mary added, "their language is straightforward and honest, and their writing reflects how they are." I also described another form of correction that made me uncomfortable. On several occasions, I said something, and another native speaker paraphrased what I said to help me. Even though this could have been an act of partnership, it made me feel uncomfortable as I didn't expect to be corrected.

From imposed to realization (the pedagogy of the oppressed). Our awareness of our experiences came with reflection over time within the U.S. environment and as we reflected on the reasons for our experiences. Freire (2018) explained that education is meant to free the minds of those who have lived in the realms of repression by questioning and owning the humanization of their actions. We expressed an understanding of our identities and an acceptance of ourselves in identifying our positionality within U.S. society.

Mary, for example, expressed that she understood that her background was different from the mainstream, and it was impossible to reach U.S. people's expectations of us, and she did not want to reach them either because she embraced who she was. She stated, "I am proud to be Colombian, and I embrace my accent as part of my identity; I

know I will never sound like [U.S. native English language speakers] do, and I don't want to; but I know that my accent can be confusing sometimes." She also recognized how different she was from the people around her and declared that was okay. Even though she knew that these differences could mean challenges to overcome, she stated,

> Even though the goal is to sound like a U.S. English native speaker (sic) speak, which is impossible, I was ok as long as I could say (sic) communicate my thoughts. I do not care about whether I have an accent; I do not think that matters as long as I am understandable.

Cultural Responsiveness

Diverse students benefit from culturally responsive teaching methods. However, the very definition of diversity suggests there is a standard or mainstream and a deviation from it. Responsiveness is implied when diversification points are acknowledged, and Critical Race theorists suggest that U.S. educational settings have responded to Whites, the mainstream, which has led to the rejection of multiple languages and cultures within the U.S. society, and standardized views to assess them affect students of color. This study reflected positive and negative effects attributed to the cultural differences between Latinx and U.S. higher education settings.

First, our experiences with professors' instructional methodologies benefited our performance. We believed that our professors considered our funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) with the application of our backgrounds to teach. Meyer (2014) discussed how the development of information differed between cultural clusters, with Latinx people gravitating toward theoretical arguments and people from the U.S. culture using an application-based approach. The results of this study contrasted with results of

other studies where IS in the United States disliked professors' instructional methodologies.

Nonetheless, the study's findings supported the results of previous studies, particularly those of Cennetkuşu (2017) and Ravichandran et al. (2017). According to Cennetkuşu (2017) and Ravichandran et al. (2017), foreign students observed professors' feedback was either nonexistent, ambiguous, or of mediocre quality. We noticed that the feedback from professors was ambiguous or nearly nonexistent. Participants in studies by Cennetkuşu (2017) and Ravichandran et al. (2017) reported feeling worried about their evaluations' feedback. Similarly, we asserted that we were unable to benefit from their feedback and that we had to look for other ways to get it. We came to the conclusion that professors' academic rigor when assigning "generous" grades and providing brief assessments (Cennetkuşu, 2017) was in question. Even though we were not satisfied with the feedback, we agreed with Wu et al. (2015) on our positive perceptions of professors' work.

Third, we experienced cultural conflicts when establishing a professor-student connection with our professors. Cultural factors influence communication styles and relationship codes such as proxemics, verbal and nonverbal cues, societal roles, etc. (Hofstede et al., 2010; Meyer, 2014). The degrees of individualism and collectivism among Latinx and U.S. people influence formality codes (Meyer, 2014). Gonzalez (2019) added that Latinx people expand family role values in educational contexts; this argument is supported with viewpoints from *Familismo* in which family values permeate the sphere of education (Desmond & Lopez, 2009). Cultural backgrounds therefore had an impact on how professor-student relationships were interpreted. Consequently, perceptions of

professor-student relationships were influenced by cultural factors. We also realized that many of our cultural beliefs transcended boundaries that were penalized in U.S. educational settings. For years, Latino scholars have advocated for traits that are part of our culture and that are attacked in forms of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Despite a few unfavorable experiences, we, the collaborators in this study, agreed that we appreciated the professors' teaching approaches. Our professors' cultural sensitivity and application of knowledge funds (Gonzalez et al., 2005) in their lessons enriched our experiences. Cultural dimensions affect viewpoints of relationships and methodological practices. Our analysis raised the possibility of a connection between our previous Latinx professors' expectations for academic performance and local financial states. The relationship between the economic conditions of educational environments could represent an important area for future research. I concluded that White professors have academic relationship habits different from Latinx students. This is an area worth studying more thoroughly.

This study's findings highlighted cultural differences between ILS and professors, including communication styles. The findings revealed that ILS found strategies to overcome and understand linguistic and cultural challenges to adapt to the U.S. academic environment and expectations. However, CRT and LatCrit theorists have suggested that the need for ILS to adapt may originate from a deficit mindset as the responsibility of adaptation falls under the students' responsibility rather than the educational system. The instructive design does not fall under the learners' responsibility, but the professors and/or curriculum designers must account for learners' assessment to provide appropriate instruction (Dick et al., 2015). Also, CRT and LatCrit views suggest that LIS alignment

with a White European standard results in frustration and feelings of inferiority affecting their educational life. The lack of acknowledgment of responsibility supports a master narrative that perpetuates negative stereotypes toward Latinx students.

Limitations of the Study

I faced limitations during the completion of this study as I acted as a researcher, collaborator, and subject of the study simultaneously. I understood that the purpose for this study was not and would not be to generalize its findings. Positivist researchers posit that research must address an obsolete truth regardless of people's positions by controlling their influence over the research design (Maxwell, 2013). Considering this aspect, this study faced validity threats that can be divided into *research bias* and *reactivity* (Maxwell, 2013). Nonetheless, I used a research methodology that allowed me to embrace that subjectivity and consider it essential in the research study (Adams et al., 2014; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). This CCAE allowed me to acknowledge my biases and make them a subject of study. Adams et al. (2014) stated, "Rather than silence or disguise personal reasons that lead us to choose our research projects, autoethnographers make use of personal experiences and subjectivity in designing their research" (p. 26).

Research bias: Maxwell (2013) referred to r*esearch bias* as the influence of the researcher's subjectivity on the data selection to fit their study. I recognize that my overlapping roles as researcher, collaborator, and subject of study influenced the data collection and analysis process in this study. I used my own experiences as a reference to analyze the collaborators' experiences and used the coding of my own *testimonios* to reference the coding of the collaborators' *testimonios*. Moreover, my translations of their *testimonios* and scripts posed a validity threat due to my language proficiency struggles.

Besides, the lack of a literature review and the scope of the study could have limited this study's understanding of the phenomenon. The literature I cited may not pertain particularly to me or the collaborators. Most of the literature cited in this study addressed IS from perspectives other than the Latinx experience. Therefore, the lack of empirical studies and the monolithic approach to ILS limited the theoretical background based on which I interpreted this study's findings.

I was aware of these limitations, so I approached them with a collective effort. I addressed these limitations with Maxwell's (2013) recommendations for addressing validity threats such as intensive, long-term involvement, rich data, respondent validation, searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, and triangulation. Also, although the literature did not address ILS in particular, I used previous literature on IS to draw conclusions and complete the analysis. This strategy works like a type of *assemblage* (Hughes & Pennington, 2017) for readers who required a peer-reviewed support (p. 27).

I included the collaborators in an ongoing conversation of the data analysis. I shared and discussed the coding process and opened it up to changes based on the collaborators' perspectives (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012). I completed a first coding cycle using my *testimonios* list and previous literature to guide the data analysis. I carried out this analysis multiple times. Our conversations were scripted to serve as the second data set for the second round of data analysis. The translations of the scripts from Spanish to English were shared with the collaborators and opened up to edits. The results of the second analysis cycle were shared as well. The collaborators had the opportunity to add to or edit the data at any point during the two cycles of analysis.

Reactivity: Maxwell (2013) referred to *Reactivity* as "the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied" (p. 124). My overlapping roles as researcher, collaborator, and subject of study influenced the data collection and analysis process. Even though the purpose of this study was to offer findings that pertain solely to the people who participated in this study and not to the ILS population in general, one may see a validity threat regarding the sample size and procedure. Positivists consider that a randomized sample is the most ideal type of sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) because it allows for a probability that individuals from the target population are selected for accurate inferential statistics (Ary et al., 2019). I used a non-probabilistic sampling, which could have affected the sample representation of the ILS population in the United States. This study only included 3 ILS from Colombia. Besides, the sample size was not representative of the ILS population. Further, my connection with the collaborators could have posed a validity threat to my influence on their collaboration with the data analysis.

I was aware of these limitations, so I approached them based on recommendations for addressing this threat based on Maxwell (2013) and Hughes and Pennington (2017). I used strategies, not to contain my biases and subjectivity, but to expose them and make use of them. Hughes and Pennington (2017) claimed, "Questioning and unveiling the self is at the heart of critical autoethnography work" (p. 9). For example, I created reflection memos to expose my subjectivity and to be aware of it. I reflected on this subjectivity in metamemos. Besides, I included the collaborators in the revision and editing of any information during the collection and analysis processes of this study. Despite these limitations, the study had meaningful outcomes. The collaborators expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this study. They expressed that sharing their experiences

and perspectives offered them a better understanding of their personal experiences as graduate students and those of Latinx representatives in the United States. This study also exposed the need for more research on the experiences of ILS in the United States.

Future Considerations and Recommendations

The literature gap on ILS in the United States is a fact. I strongly encourage researchers to address ILS in the United States as this population is growing and merits attention. Studies of this nature can inform IHEs to create plans to better serve and support ILS. Institutions' current efforts of supporting IS focus on maintaining their legal status to ensure they do not overstay in the country after their students' status expires. But IS experience academic and social-emotional factors that are part of any graduate student's experience. The collaborators and I attested that, in the process of studying in a graduate program in a U.S. IHE, we victimized ourselves when we struggled with the language of instruction. We blamed ourselves and our heritage language. Maybe changing the academic structure of IHEs to be more supportive of ILS with appropriate services and resources can help ILS overcome linguistic struggles and prevent this victimization.

My recommendations for future researchers involve addressing academic and cultural issues for ILS while they are enrolled in a U.S. IHE. For example, as ILS have a different L1 or heritage language from most U.S. local students, linguistic features and academic practices should receive research attention. This study's findings were similar to other studies' results that revealed that (A) (L)IS consider their professors' feedback for writing assignments "poor" or even "non-existing"; (B) (L)IS struggle with participation practices; and (C) (L)IS have contrasting opinions about U.S. professors'

academic rigor when compared to professors from Colombia. It would be interesting to study the differences in academic rigor when assigning grades and providing feedback across international educational systems. This study's findings suggest a need for research on factors that lead to negative emotions for ILS while they are enrolled in a U.S. IHE. I also encourage researchers to concentrate on ILS' expectations of relationships between students and professors.

Another recommendation for future research on ILS is to explore the collaboration of other participants with other characteristics. Future research on ILS can explore the collaboration of other participants from other Latinx backgrounds, ethnicities, and genders. It will be interesting to explore possible aspects of intersectionality. It would also be interesting to learn if ILS who come from different economic backgrounds and who study in other educational fields have similar struggles as those shared in this study. In addition, it is possible that ILS shared similar experiences to other IS whose heritage language is not English. Future studies can explore linguistic and cultural experiences of IS from other countries whose heritage language is not English and compare them with ILS.

My last recommendations involve professors. The collaborators and I formed certain perceptions of graduate program professors in U.S. IHEs. Our experiences with professors in Colombia occurred at an undergraduate level. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the differences between the U.S. IHE system and the Colombian education system at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and explore students' perceptions of them. The collaborators and I mainly had professors who were White and U.S. English native speakers. It would be interesting to see what the experiences would

be with professors from different backgrounds and other heritage languages. Also, many of our professors had experiences working with diverse populations. It would be interesting to compare the experiences with professors who have not taught Latinx students before. A recommendation based on this is that professors can develop more rapport with ILS to assist their learning process and decrease negative emotions for cultural and language struggles

Conclusions

The ILS population represents an important group of IS in the United States. I am part of this group, and it was a dream for me to study at an IHE in the United States. It is a dream that a lot of foreigners share because the United States is the top global destination for IS. Despite college services being available for IS, these are not adequately equipped to fully serve IS. Previous literature on IS revealed that students encountered academic and social problems, and a lot of these issues involve language and cultural differences along with social injustices. Previous literature has exposed that non-European IS seemed to suffer more struggles in U.S. IHEs than those who come from Europe. IS even encounter racism. Latinx have been historically marginalized in the United States surrounding differences of language, countries of origin, birthrates, perceived intellectual capacity, etc. This is why I found it necessary to learn about Latinx students like me who completed a graduate program in the U.S. I wanted to analyze my and other students' experiences from a critical view. The main focus was our language and culture. I focused on our experiences with English as the language of instruction and the experiences with professors.

This study revealed that we primarily encountered difficulties with the language of instruction in U.S. IHEs. Most of the struggles we exposed where concentrated on expressing ourselves eloquently using the English language. Despite the support of ESL classes or writing tutoring, expressing ourselves eloquently seemed to be a challenge. Expressing what we know with accuracy by speaking or writing was hard, and I do not think our US professors had strategies to minimize these struggles. However, this study revealed, despite a few challenges with feedback and class participation examples, we mostly had positive experiences and opinions towards our professors. This study informs prospective and current ILS of my experiences as well as my collaborators to help them prepare. This study also informs IHEs how ILS should be supported and served, and it informs Professors which strategies we appreciated, which ones we found difficult, and what expectations we had. Therefore, I want to advise: A) ILS to be prepared for the language challenges that can come across despite meeting the English language admission requirements; B) professors to be aware of how their behavior may be interpreted by students from other cultures, especially for the educational impact they have; and C) IHEs to provide more comprehensive support for ILS beyond meeting their legal students' status.

I found it fruitful to have used CRT and LatCrit theories to approach this study. CRT offers essential views of the educational system from critical standpoints, and LatCrit narrows these views to situations that only Latinx normally encounter. I felt it was essential to see my experiences, thoughts, and opinions from a critical perspective as this approach challenged me to think more deeply, away from nativism or beyond mere language barriers. Completing this critical research made me believe for a moment that I

was becoming “hypersensitive” to racially based actions that occur on a daily basis; then, I learned that CRT and LatCrit opened my eyes to perceive such tensions and problems. I feel honored because this research study contributes to the work toward a more equitable educational experiences in a world of multicultural people.

I also feel fortunate to have used a co-constructed autoethnography research methodology, which allowed us to study a more in-depth view of the roots of the problems ILS experience. Completing an autoethnography is not an easy task. The amount of work that I put into analyzing myself had a cost as it revealed unpleasant reasons why I became an English teacher. It made me question my passion for teaching the English language that I had since I was a kid. However. I think it was worth revealing and understanding myself, and there is no shame in that. If I wanted to learn about myself, this autoethnography served its purpose. Having added two collaborators to this research provided a mirror and contrast to what I believed. So, this methodology fit the goals of my research, and I encourage other researchers to use this methodology for future social research (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012). The reflexivity factor of this methodology is simply powerful.

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Appendix A

Testimonios Protocol

Phase 1

Description: This protocol serves as a guide for participants to document their *testimonios*. You may use the Voice Memos App, Dictate, or type in Word. Each prompt is connected with a research question to keep the focus of the study without limiting participants' answers.

Follow these recommendations:

- Start your documentation with information of location, date, weather conditions, device used, or general information.
- Use any language you feel comfortable with.
- Mention something personal before answering one the prompts questions (Optional).
- Focus on one prompt per memo.
- Document as much as possible.
- Share experiences, feelings, ideas, thoughts, emotions, actions, or examples that can relate to your answer. It is okay to deviate from the topic. Feel free to document your thoughts.
- Go back to the prompt you are addressing to refocus your answer.
- Stop documenting when you feel comfortable to do so.
- **Before closing the app, save your document**. Use the file that the researcher shared with you.
- Choose the prompts in any order you want. Address each prompt at least 2 times.
- Revise your audio or text and edit or inform the researcher about the changes you want to make.

Central question: What are your experiences as a Latin@ student in an institution of higher education in the United States?

Prompt 1: What are your experiences with the English language as the language of instruction in the United States? You might think of experiences that involve writing essays, reading material, speaking in class with your instructor or classmates, listening to your instructor, listening to audio material, completing assignments, etc., or other aspects that involve your life as a student with the English language that are not mentioned here.

Prompt 2: What are your opinions, perceptions, or experiences about the teaching practices of your U.S. professors? You might think of experiences that involve your instructor(s) explaining a subject, providing feedback, grading

schoolwork, carrying out the class, interacting with students, etc., or other aspects not mentioned here.

Prompt 3: What are your opinions, perceptions, or experiences when you compare your experiences studying in the United States versus studying in your home country? You might think of comparisons of experiences that involve your classes, professors, classmates, materials, social interaction, language, etc., or others not mentioned here.

Prompt 4: How much were/were not your initial expectations met about studying in the United States? You might think of your expectations regarding your classes, professors, classmates, materials, social interactions, language, etc., or other aspects not mentioned.

Protocolo para los *Testimonios* (Spanish Version)

Pregunta Central 1: Cuenta como son sus experiencias como un(a) estudiante Latin@ en una institución de educación superior en los Estados Unidos?

Punto 1: Hable de sus experiencias con el idioma inglés como el idioma usado en las clases en los Estados Unidos. Puede abordar experiencias que incluyan escribir ensayos, leer material, hablar en clase con su profesor o compañeros, escuchar a su profesor, escuchar material en audio, realizar las tareas, etc., u otros aspectos de su vida estudiantil con el idioma inglés que no están mencionados aquí.

Punto 2: ¿Cuáles son opiniones, percepciones o experiencias sobre las prácticas de enseñanza de sus profesores estadounidenses? Puede incluir experiencias que incluyan como su profesor explica un tema, ofrece retroalimentación, califica los trabajos, lleva a cabo la clase, interactúa con los estudiantes, etcétera, u otros aspectos no mencionados aquí.

Punto 3: ¿Cuáles son sus opiniones percepciones o experiencias cuando compara sus experiencias al estudiar en los Estados Unidos con las de estudiar en su país natal? Puede abordar comparaciones de experiencias con relación a sus clases, profesores, compañeros de clase, materiales, interacciones sociales, lenguaje, etcétera, u otros aspectos no mencionados.

Punto 4: ¿Qué tanto se cumplieron o no se cumplieron sus expectativas iniciales de venir a estudiar a los Estados Unidos? Puede incluir las expectativas con relación a las clases, profesores, compañeros de clase, materiales, interacciones sociales, lenguaje, etcétera, u otros aspectos no mencionados.

Appendix B

Follow-Up Conversations Protocol

Phase 2

Description: This protocol serves as a guide for participants to document their participation and for reminding the participants their rights in this study.

You are being asked to participate in a follow-up conversation as part of a research study entitled ***"Experiences of Latinx International Students When Studying in an Institution of Higher Education in the Southeast of the United States,"*** which is being conducted by ***Andres F. Restrepo,*** a ***graduate student*** at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to ***explore the experiences of international students who come from Latin America from a critical perspective by reflect on those experiences individually and collectively***.

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about ***international students in the United States***. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately ***1.5 hours.*** The follow-up conversations will be audio recorded in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the audio files will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the follow-up conversation will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to ***Andres F. Restrepo*** at ***afrestrepo@valdosta.edu***. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix C

IRB Form

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

For the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04290-2022 **Responsible Researcher(s):** Andres Restrepo

Supervising Faculty: Dr. James Martinez

Project Title: *Experiences of Latinx International Students When Studying in an Institution of Higher Education in the Southeast of the United States.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of the research study, all collected data (e.g. data set, name lists, email lists, payment log, etc.) must be securely maintained and accessible only by the researcher(s) for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*
- *Pseudonym lists and corresponding name lists must be kept in separate, secure files.*
- *Qualtrics platform settings must allow participants to skip questions and/or not provide answers. The settings must prohibit the collection of IP addresses.*
- *VSU's Participant Payment Log must be securely maintained and up to date at all times. Each participant who receives a gift card must sign upon receipt of the card.*
- *Exempt guidelines **permit** recording interviews for the purpose of creating an accurate transcript. Recordings must be deleted immediately upon creation of the transcript. Participant recorded testimonies, must be deleted upon creation of the transcript.*
- *Exempt guidelines **prohibit** the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings.*
- *The research consent statement must be read aloud to participants at the start of each interview session, and documented in the transcript.*

☒ ***If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.***