

**Learning Experiences of Newcomer Latino Secondary English Learners in the  
Mainstream Classroom**

by  
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## **Dedication**

To all my English learners at public schools in the United States, especially the secondary newcomers, who inspired me to do this study and continue to be the main reason behind my educator's passion and my professional work.

To my inseparable partner and love of my life, my wife Betty Luz, "*Mi Gorda*", who patiently and calmly waited and tenaciously supported me throughout my doctoral work and previous postgraduate studies. "*Te estaré eternamente agradecido.*"

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## **Abstract**

**Background:** Thousands of Latin American secondary school-age immigrants have migrated for decades and continue to arrive to the United States amidst a complex sociopolitical national climate around immigration. Newcomer English learners (ELs) enrolled in public schools and placed in newcomer programs to facilitate their adaptation and acclimation during their first year, commonly transitioned into monolingual English content classrooms where they are expected to academically perform at similar levels of their English monolingual counterparts. This happens despite their still incipient English language skills and lack of second language literacy. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine language learning and social development experiences of recent immigrant Latino ELs enrolled in high school mainstream content courses at a large suburban public school and district in Southeast Texas. **Research Questions:** The research questions framed by an academic language and social development conceptual framework were: Q1: How did Latino newcomer ELs perceive the language instruction received in the core content mainstream classroom? Q2: How did Latino newcomer ELs describe their social interactions with other students at school? Q3: How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) believe that the COVID-19 Pandemic affected their learning? **Methods:** First, a descriptive analysis of Texas mandated TELPAS language proficiency and STAAR/EOC academic content assessments of the district and high school research site was conducted. Results were used to determine levels of language acquisition and content mastery. The research then focused on a qualitative inductive analysis of the learning experiences of second- and third-year Latino newcomer ELs around English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction supports and opportunities

provided to socially interact with other students. This was accomplished through qualitative narrative interviews with newcomer students. The nine high school Latino newcomer ELs participants of the study were enrolled in a newcomer program during their first year of instruction in the United States. The purposive sample of students was interviewed individually. Interviews were transcribed and coded inductively by hand to be analyzed into units of themes and categories. **Findings:** Newcomer ELs in the study in second and third year of enrollment at a public school and placed in a mainstream content classroom lacked adequate social and academic language proficiency skills to socially interact with other students in English. State language assessment scores of TELPAS and core content EOCs, end-of-course exams, have not done justice to this secondary students' academic potential and capacities. Local districts and schools must build on previous literacy, social and cultural assets newcomers already possess to design and implement curriculum and instruction relevant to a highly motivated group of secondary students with self-awareness of what may better work to support their individual needs, aimed at their school success. The participants reported lack of direct English as second language instruction from content teachers. They also shared not having opportunities for social interactions in English at their content classroom. **Conclusion:** Participants' perceptions showed the need of direct English language instruction and social interactions supports in the mainstream content classroom. They also described the second language supports and social exchange opportunities as not facilitated by their mainstream high school core content teachers.

*Keywords:* NSELs: Newcomer Secondary English Learners. ELs: English Learners. TELPAS: Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment Standards.

STAAR: State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. EOCs: End-of-course exams. Mainstream Content Classroom: Classroom where ELs are taught main core content with English monolingual students.



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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Thousands of Latin American immigrants of secondary school age have arrived in the United States during the last few years, despite the nation's controversial socio-political climate around immigration (Venta & Mercado, 2019). The number of immigrant families and unaccompanied youth from Latin American countries that came to the United States between 2015 and 2018 increased by approximately 131% during this three-year period. This steady growth of immigrant families and unaccompanied children during this three-year period has led to a considerable increase in the number of immigrant school children enrolling at the secondary education level (Batalova et al., 2018). The most significant number of secondary school-aged Latino immigrants have come from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (Venta & Mercado, 2019). These three countries, geographically known as the Northern Triangle of Central America, have contributed to the largest group of immigrants arriving at the southern border of the United States in recent years (Batalova et al., 2018). Between 2014 and 2017, approximately 280,000 school-aged immigrants that entered the United States originated from one of these three nations. Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Cuba, among other Caribbean and Latin American countries, have also added to the current pattern of youth immigrants arriving in a family unit or as unaccompanied minors at the secondary age (Batalova et al., 2018; Rodriguez, et al., 2019).

In recent years, large groups of immigrant families and unaccompanied children from different parts of the world have continued to occur despite the highly publicized efforts of federal immigration authorities to stop, detain, and deport. (Batalova et al.,

2018). In addition to the closure of the country's borders due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, such actions have led to a significant decline in the general number of immigrants coming to the United States from or through Mexico between 2010 and 2021. The only exception to this trend was Texas, where the number of non-citizen Mexican nationals increased by approximately 180,000 between 2000 and 2019 (Cuecuecha, et al., 2019).

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) reported that approximately 560,000 family units with school-aged children and approximately 250,000 unaccompanied children and adolescents crossed the United States' southern border between 2014 and 2018 (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2018). Other migration policy reports show that approximately 3.4 million immigrants residing in the United States are from Central American nations (Lesser & Batalova, 2017). This number represents approximately 8% of the total immigrant population in the United States, which is estimated to be at approximately 43 million (Lesser & Batalova, 2017). Of the approximately 3.25 million immigrants who entered the United States between 2010 and 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), 237,000 were between the school ages of 5 to 18 years old.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the population of English learners (ELs) grew from 8.1%, or 3.8 million, in 2000, to 9.5%, or 4.8 million, in 2015 (NCES, 2015). This number represented the fastest growing student population in the nation. The general student growth rate was 3% between the years 2000 and 2015, while the ELs growth rate oscillated around 9%.

In the past three decades, non-native English speakers with limited English proficiency became one of the fastest growing student populations in the United States (NCES, 2018). The number of children and youth born outside of the United States between the ages of 11 and 17 years old grew from approximately 89,000 in 2010 to 142,000 in 2017 (U.S Census Bureau, 2018). The growth represented a significant increase of the recent secondary immigrant population to approximately 53,000 more secondary students; an increment equal to nearly 59% more secondary school-aged students during the reported seven-year period by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2018. However, with the change of immigration practices and regulations, thousands of youth students have been retained in youth immigration centers and shelters located throughout the U.S.-Mexico border to be either deported out of or liberated into the country at a later date (Cuecuecha et al., 2019).

In her article about the increase in recent immigration, Caitlin Dickerson (2017) of *The New York Times* reported that the number of undocumented children retained by immigration authorities at the border increased by 5 times between the summers of 2017 and 2018. A similar phenomenon also happened during the first few months of 2021 (United States Health and Human Services Department [USHHS], 2021). The statistics included in the article showed a considerable increment in the population of youth immigrants, from about 2,400 to 12,800 children between the ages of 5 and 17 years old (Dickerson, 2017). Texas is not excluded from the rapid growth of immigrant children and adolescents in the United States. Texas public schools saw a significant 45.6 % increase in the number of registered immigrant students between the years 2010 and 2017 (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2017a). 80% of the total immigrant students

enrolled in Texas public schools from a foreign country came from Latin America and reported Spanish as their home language. (TEA, 2017a). Texas' EL population has steadily grown during the last thirty years. A record number of approximately 280,000 more students enrolled at public schools from 2007 to 2017, which represented a 38.1% enrollment increment of ELs (TEA, 2017b). Statistics from the same agency indicated that during 2017, the EL population represented 18.9% of total registered students in Texas schools (TEA, 2017b). Therefore, 2 out of every 10 students enrolled at public schools in Texas are ELs.

Among all racial and geographic groups of recently immigrated English learners, RIELs, to the United States, Latino students represent the largest segment of the population in the PreK-12 school system, with 15 million students (NCES, 2018). Approximately 25% of those 15 million Latino students are ELs (Pew Research Center [PRC], 2018). Latino students account for 77.1% of the recent immigrant youth registered at public schools. Four million of those were identified as ELs (NCES, 2018). Of the four million ELs, NCES (2018) 42.7% were enrolled at public secondary schools.

## **Background**

A lack of academic language and literacy skills combined with a limited ability to interact socially with monolingual English students are two factors negatively impacting the academic performance, social development, and learning engagement for newcomers secondary ELs (NSELs) in core content mainstream classrooms. Various scholars (Boyson & Short, 2003; Short & Boyson, 2012; Margary, et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Skully, 2016) studied newcomer students in U.S. secondary schools and identified the conditions surrounding their learning during their first years of



schooling. Facing significant social, cultural, and academic challenges were the conditions NSELs commonly encountered after enrolling in the nation's public schools (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). In addition, the common practice of placing newcomer students at intense ESL instruction programs for a limited time may also affect the ability for NSELs to perform well academically and socially once these NSELs are transitioned into the English-mainstream content classroom. (Boyson & Short, 2003; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Scully, 2016).

NSELs commonly placed at instructional settings where English as a Second Language (ESL) support is either insufficient or inexistent is a major obstacle for this group of students (Genesee et al., 2006; Lyster, 2007; Saunders et al., 2006). It is important to take a closer look at this common learning setting. NSELs at this stage of schooling should be receiving teaching and support on second language and emotional needs as part of their adaptation to a new country, culture, and school system (Short & Boyson, 2012). ELs will adapt to and interact with other students better when adequate social and language supports are provided (Lucas, 1996; Martin et al., 2009).

The inadequate knowledge and skills of ESL are crucial factors affecting RIELs at secondary schools. NSELs continue to lack proper grade-level academic language and literacy capabilities (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). ELs' lower mastery results in state-based standardized tests across different content areas are an unfortunate testament to this problem (Smith-Davis, 2004; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). A direct result of experiencing language and social barriers may become more evident in new English-mainstream learning setting, (Lucas, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). The cause of immersing NSELs into English-only learning environments and of

moving them from one classroom to the next prematurely can be found in state policies that give priority to mainstreaming academic instruction over adequate language and social support. This adds to other historical challenges encountered by newcomer youth. Federal, state, local district, and school policies and initiatives continue to fall short in addressing the real learning needs of secondary newcomers in English-only classrooms, specifically on their necessities to develop a second academic language and literacy.

Among the most common causes of not adequately academically achieving of NSELs are the lack of social and cultural relevant learning experiences incorporated to their learning of content. Mainstream content teachers' lessons do not always take the social and cultural aspects of newcomer ELs into consideration. Doing so can connect the learning of newcomer ELs to their own cultural interests and social backgrounds. This practice may constitute an additional concern and challenge for NSELs (Johnson & Johnson, 2016). Additionally, teachers and peers have many times turned hostile towards NSELs' individual social and learning needs (Brisk, 2012; Short & Boyson, 2012; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012).

NSELs have been commonly facing inadequate and early transitions to English-monolingual classrooms (Boyson & Short, 2003; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2018; & Skully, 2016). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2015) found that most of the NSELs in New York and California had English language skills at the beginner or intermediate proficiency levels after exiting their first year of schooling in the United States. Limited language knowledge and skills were common denominators for ELs learning academically in monolingual high school classes (Suárez-Orozco &

Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Similar results were found by Short & Boyson (2012) after doing a major national study on newcomer programs and schools in the United States.

Adding to the social learning problematic, accountability systems designed with only native English-speaking students in mind, such as state-standardized tests, are among the common educational conditions affecting recent immigrant ELs' abilities to successfully learn and perform at the skill and knowledge levels required by preset state academic performance standards (Christian, 2006). NSELs are expected to pass content-based high school tests after 1 to 3 years of schooling (Christian, 2006). These conditions directly affect NSELs entering mainstream classes to learn and interact socially with monolingual English peers in public schools across the United States. Exemplar scholars facilitated a better understanding of the conditions directly influencing the failure or success of NSELs. Precedent researchers suggested actions and plans to minimize social adaptation and academic challenges commonly found to affect NSELs enrolled in public schools (Carhill & Orozco, 2009; Short & Boyson, 2012). The stated recommendations are still not occurring in most public schools due to a lack of funds, human capital, and resources necessary to implement changes to properly serve ELs.

### **Problem Statement**

Insufficient academic language development, second language literacy, and lack of support or opportunities for social and academic growth in the mainstream content classroom have become an endemic problem for NSELs (Martin et al., 2009; Skully, 2016; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). These disadvantageous learning conditions need to be studied further to better understand NSELs' academic and social development needs in secondary schools. It is necessary to

look at the secondary ELs' individual challenges with learning English and their social exchanges with peers in the mainstream classroom. Deficits of appropriate language acquisition and instruction and the difficulties NSELs experience when socializing with other monolingual peers in the content classroom are critical factors that interfere with ELs' abilities to succeed academically and adapt socially in public schools across many states (McNeely et al., 2017; Skully, 2016; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018).

This qualitative study aimed at expanding the limited empirical research over the problem of lack of direct language instruction, academic supports, and adequate social interactions for NSELs in the mainstream core content classroom. In a study done by a national group of education and health experts at the Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative on research priorities in public education other ways to support the social and school needs of NSELs ranked as a second priority. This growing minority of students was given the second-highest importance among many other social research priorities as well (McNeely et al., 2017). The panel concluded that more studies addressing public policies and local initiatives impacting NSELs' individual needs to overcome language barriers, limited prior education, discrimination, social and health issues, and emotional trauma are still needed for the wellbeing of the almost 2 million NSELs already within the United States. Experts agreed on the need for more research around NSELs in secondary schools and their emotional and social needs after considering that NSELs are confronted with social and family challenges (McNeely et al, p. 126-127, 2017).

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to determine the language and academic supports received by NSELs in their mainstream high school social studies,

science, and mathematics courses from the students' own perspectives and descriptions. The research also aimed at getting to know their language learning and the quality of social interactions with other peers in their mainstream content classroom. The research study examined Latino NSELs enrolled in mainstream courses at a large suburban public high school and district in Texas. The study sought to identify barriers or difficulties individually perceived by NSELs, and how that could help better understand what happens with ELs' learning processes so that additional ways to support them with their social and academic needs could be created.

The selected population for this study were high school Latino NSELs in their second and third years of schooling in the United States. The participants were also enrolled in a newcomer intensive English language program during their first year of school. The study explored different ways Latino NSELs perceived and evaluated language instruction and academic content learning in their mainstream classroom. The second objective was to evaluate their social interactions, which may inhibit or boost their language development and academic performance at school (Skully, 2016; McNeely et al., 2017). It is important to evaluate social interactions because they are essential for the development of youth minds as they directly affect the adaptation process to new learning environments (Szlyk et al., 2020). This research focused on NSELs perceived learning experiences to identify and describe the amount and quality of their social interactions with peers, as this is a required element for their adequate social development in a public-school setting more precisely. In doing so, a better understanding of the importance of academic language and social interactions as necessary components of

academic engagement and performance at school is provided (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) perceive their English as second language instruction and supports received from content teachers in the mainstream classroom?
2. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) describe their social interactions with other English-monolingual students in the mainstream classroom?
3. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) believe that the COVID-19 Pandemic affected their learning?

### **Overview of the Methodology**

#### ***Research Design***

This research was qualitative in its approach. The study used the academic language and social development conceptual framework as fundamental condition for the NSELs' academic and social success at school (Scarcella, 2003; Short & Boyson, 2012; Skully, 2016; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). The study was done using inductive analysis on the personal experiences of newcomer NSELs enrolled in social studies, science, and mathematics in their second and third years of schooling in the United States (Cresswell, 2014).

#### ***Participants***

Nine high school students in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades from a purposive sample of ten NSELs were invited to participate in this research. The purposely sampled group of

Latino NSELS received first-year instruction at an inclusive newcomer program at a middle or high school feeder pattern from a large suburban school district in Southeast Texas. The study was conducted at Grand High School, which is one of about a dozen comprehensive high schools in the Texas Pride Independent School District. Grant High School has historically served one of the largest secondary populations of NSELS in Southeast Texas.

### ***Data Collection***

State, district, school site descriptive TELPAS, and STAAR/EOC (end-of-course) test results were used to obtain a general overview of recent immigrant ELs' English language acquisition levels and academic content mastery. Content knowledge and skills results measured by the STAAR tests and language proficiency ratings measured by Texas TELPAS were both considered for analyzing NSELS' performances. Texas TELPAS results allowed for the examination of language proficiency levels and the percentages of students classified at each level. Texas EOC exam scores showed mastery in three different core content areas: Algebra, Biology, and U.S. History. The individual interviews provided information on the individual perceptions and descriptions of language learning and social interactions in the content classroom. This qualitative analysis study sought to better understand NSELS' individual experiences (Castro-Olivo, Preciado, Sanford & Perry, 2011). The qualitative data collected aided to identify better ways to serve NSELS enrolling at public schools in the United States.

### ***Data Analysis***

The interviews collected gave detailed descriptions of students' perceptions of language, content learning, and social interactions. Common themes facilitated a rich

narrative around the learning and social experiences of the participants after being exposed to a new language and academic content. NSELs have shown to require rich social interactions to become relevant and academically engaged (Walqui, 2000, 2010; Margaly et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Manually coding categories was the first step in the narrative inquiry design data analysis. Whether language instruction and social interactions were happening, and how they were occurring for the sample of the population interviewed, the data was constructed inductively and then systematically analyzed to reveal common categories or patterns. The qualitative analysis resulted in a series of recommendations for federal and state legislators and local district leadership to follow for policy-making decisions that can improve the academic and social supports of NSELs.

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcomes from this study give a better understanding of NSELs' specific needs and of additional ways to help them in their high school content courses. This research can start a necessary discussion about actual ESL and bilingual instruction policies and practices that better serve recent immigrant students enrolled in public schools. This study adds to the insufficient empirical research and lack of descriptive qualitative studies on NSELs in public schools in the United States. The qualitative narrative research design also provides a unique opportunity to discuss and analyze content, ESL instructional delivery, and social supports. The research recommendations and findings support adolescents' hopes of fulfilling their individual and families' dreams of graduating from high school to pursue better social and financial lives in the United States.



## **Limitations**

The purposive sample size of the newcomer EL population constituted a limitation. Only including Latino NSEs and excluding students of other racial/ethnic backgrounds also presented a research limitation. The study did not include Asian, Middle Eastern, European, or African NSEs who are also newcomer youth enrolled in public schools. However, Latinos constitute most students enrolled in Texas, justifying the study's exclusive targeting of the Latino EL students' population.

The impossibility to conduct classroom observations of the students in their English-mainstream classroom constituted a methodology limitation to complement with observation artifacts the narrative findings and the data analysis of the study. This study was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced school closures and restricted physical access to public schools. The safety protocols and guidelines set limitations over the number of students allowed to attend physical or in-person classes at school campuses and required guidelines of social distancing adopted by state and local district authorities at school grounds. Having to follow and abide by mandatory social distancing and being limited to one virtual interview per student impeded the collection of additional qualitative data for the study. Having to do interviews during a limited number of days and after school only also constituted an additional limitation. The access to participants was further restricted because of the circumstance of students having to receive instruction in both virtual and in-person classes. Thousands of students were not receiving conventional physical instruction in content classrooms at the selected research site during the late spring and summer of 2020. The study was implemented during a

short time frame between October 15, 2020 and November 15, 2020, which made contacting the participants for scheduling the interviews a major challenge.

To participate in the study, participants needed parental approval and consent documentation. Initially, collecting these documents became another obstacle because I was not allowed direct access to the pre-qualified 72 high school students meeting the research criteria and was told that I could not contact them directly. Fears of potential immigration consequences felt by the NSELs and their adult legal guardians, when sharing sensitive information during the interviews, created an additional limitation to the study.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 introduces the general background and statement of the problem for Latino NSELs and the challenges they face with language acquisition, academics, and social-emotional needs when immersed in a new school system, society, and culture. Chapter 2 covers the review of the literature for this study and what previous research and theorists have established about second language acquisition, the academic language learning process for second language learners, and the individual social support needs for NSELs at their schools of entry. The components are organized as part of the academic language and social interactions conceptual framework. The determination of the need for the study is part of prior limited scholarly work on learning experiences of NSELs at schools in Texas. The literature review presents the importance of learning second academic language and literacy skills as a predictor of academic engagement. It also discusses the proper social development needed for the social adaptation of non-native English speakers. Considerations about cognitive and social levels of interaction for

NSELs' school learning success are included in the conceptual framework that supports the study. Previous research findings have verified that students' academic and social factors' (have). Implications for the design and implementation of ESL models of instruction are also considered in the review of the literature. Teaching language, supporting social acclimation, and cultural adaptation of NS ELs at public schools with high populations of these students is also generally reviewed. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, the selection process for the sample of the research population, the final research participants, the data collection instrument, and the research inductive analysis procedures used during the narrative interviews. Chapter 4 presents the descriptive language acquisition and proficiency data, as well as the academic achievement data obtained from state TELPAS and STAAR/EOC assessment results. Qualitative findings of the interviews with the participants are also discussed. Chapter 5 contains the qualitative analysis of the findings with leadership implications and specific recommendations to consider for future policy making, around federal and state legislation, to improve the learning and social conditions at public schools of NSELs.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout the present research. The words and expressions are commonly used key terms in PreK-12 public education, specifically when presenting information about ESL, bilingual education, or to refer to immigrant students and native speakers of other languages enrolled at public schools in the United States.

- Academic language – Defined by language development researchers and theorists as the language of school. (Cummins, 1979, 1981a, 1981b; Collier, 1995; Scarcella, 2003).

- Bilingual Language Learning Models – There are different learning models of bilingual education. In Texas, the most common are the bilingual early transition and late transition models used at elementary schools. The early transition aims at moving bilingual students into monolingual classrooms within 2 to 3 years after receiving instruction in ESL classes by monolingual or bilingual teachers. In the late model, students gradually fade into their second language by doing percentage increments of daily instruction in English. ELs usually move out of a bilingual developmental or late transition model by the end of fifth grade.
- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, (CALPS) – This term was coined by Jim Cummins as part of his theory research on second language acquisition and bilingualism. It refers to the academic language skills that take between five to seven years for second language learners to develop (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2000, 2008).
- English as Second Language (ESL).
- English Learner (EL) – The most recent term used to refer to a student learning English as a second language at schools in the United States. Formerly, the term more commonly used by educators and scholars in the past was English Language Learner, or ELL. According to the U.S. Department of Education, an English Learner, (EL) is: “an individual (A) who is aged 3 through 21; (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school; (C) (i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (C) (ii) (I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and (C) (iii) (II) who comes from an environment

where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or (C) (III) (iv) who is migratory, whose native language is not English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may be sufficient to deny the individual (D) (i) the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards; (D) (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (D) (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society (ESEA, as amended by ESSA, Section 8101[20])” (United States Department of Education, , 2016).

- L<sup>1</sup> – The native language, or first language, of a student.
- L<sub>2</sub> – The second language of the student. For the present study on recent immigrant ELs transitioning to mainstream classes, L<sub>2</sub> refers to English as the second language of acquisition (ESL).
- Latino – People who are from, or descended from people from, Latin America.
- LEP – Limited English Proficient refers to students still in need of developing English proficiency skills or whose English language command is still limited.
- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, (BICS) – It is another term from Jim Cummins’ research that refers to social language: Speaking and listening skills. These language skills are high in context, take less developing time, between six months to three years of language exposure at school, and are faster acquired by ELs at school (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2000, 2008).

- Literacy – The ability of a student to speak, listen, read, and write in the target language of learning. Some ELs have previously acquired grade-level literacy in their first language, like Spanish), but are still in need of developing literacy in their second target language of learning. Literacy also refers to the academic abilities of a student to understand and learn content across different school subjects at the required grade-level.
- LPAC – Language Proficiency Placement Committee. In Texas public schools, this committee is responsible for evaluating the English language development progress of any English learner student annually. The committee also makes recommendations about potential additional support required and the learning placement for the entire English learners’ population at any given campus.
- Mainstream classroom – An English-monolingual classroom of core content in secondary school that includes: Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies. These classrooms are where NSELs are placed after leaving the newcomer classroom and after completion of their first year of schooling in the United States.
- Monolingual English only classroom – an English-only high school content course that may not provide ELs with ESL support or opportunities to openly interact with other students as part of their learning.
- Newcomer – a student who has been enrolled at a school in the United States for less than one year.
- Newcomer classroom – A self-contained learning setting where new immigrant students are commonly placed during their first year(s) of instruction in the United States.

- Newcomer Program or Model – An ESL learning setting, or instructional accelerated model, for the teaching of language and for giving socio-cultural and adaptation support to recent immigrant students who are English learners (Boyson & Short, 2003).
- NSELs – Newcomer secondary English Learners.
- Second language literacy – The reading and writing ability of a student in the second language they are learning. For many experts and researchers of language development and literacy (Cummins, 2008; Collier, 1987; Scarcella, 2003), it also includes the knowledge of the new culture. Students coming to the United States with a different first language and culture will eventually need to develop a second academic language and literacy. They would need to do this in every content and context where they apply language or construct a new discourse or dialogue to be able to interact with other students and adults.
- Recent immigrant Latino ELs – Students of Latino origin who have been in the United States for less than six years.
- RIELs – Recently Immigrated English Learners
- STAAR/EOC (End-of-course) – The acronym for the name of the mandated standardized tests in Texas. STAAR means State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness. EOC means end-of-course exam, which is only used for high school grade levels.
- Sheltered ESL Instruction – Given to ESL students in English language arts and reading, commonly in a 90-minute block class. In sheltered English instruction settings, ELs are taught grade-level content using different language techniques

and strategies that make the content accessible to ELs above their first *beginner* level of English proficiency. Sheltered English instruction is commonly used at the secondary levels with recent immigrant students who are still developing English language skills.

- STAAR/EOC (End-of-course) – The acronym for the name of the mandated standardized tests in Texas. STAAR means State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness. EOC means end-of-course exam, which is only used during high school grades.
- Structured English Immersion, SEI – An ESL instructional setting that provides ELs additional support for English language acquisition and learning. Teachings on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are given by specialized ESL-teachers to students who are already placed in an English monolingual classroom.
- TELPAS – The acronym for Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System. It is the proficiency test given in Texas to measure the English proficiency acquisition level of all English learners. ELs start at *Beginner*, pass through *Intermediate* and *Advance*, and finally reach the highest level of proficiency when they score at *Advance High*. The English proficiency levels are given to ELs based on the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The first three areas are measured by computer-based exercises and comprehension tests. The writing proficiency score is given by an ESL/Bilingual certified teacher after holistically rating a collection of narrative and expository writing essays done by the ELs.



## Chapter II

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The literature review on NSELs' learning development and instructional factors focused on two fundamental topics previously researched from different perspectives in education. Direct language instruction supports and social interactions at school were selected as main components of this research. These helped to understand and respond to second academic language development and the social use of a second language as a condition for academic success and social development of NSELs enrolled at public schools in the United States. These two elements of the research, which were priorities presented in the research questions, are required to improve the individual learning experiences of the Latino NSEL research subjects. Both topics helped to better understand the relevance of their learning processes at school. Finding additional ways to provide adequate second language and social supports has been a topic of special interest by previous researchers' quantitative studies on learning experiences and trajectories of NSELs in California and New York (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). However, there is not enough previous scholarly work on this topic in Texas.

Two components, *direct language instruction* and *social interactions*, formed the *conceptual framework* of this study, which guided the qualitative research work done around the importance of adequate second academic language learning supports and social development of NSELs in the high school mainstream classroom. Both concepts directly influenced the academic and social engagement that leads to high academic achievement and success of ESL students at school (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco,

2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). The processes of language development and social adaptation in new learning environments had been previously studied by theorists of second language development as factors directly conditioning the learning of new content by NSELs (Cummins, 2008; Collier, 1995; Duff, 2001; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Szlyk, et al., 2020). The theories of language development are of crucial importance to make decisions around curriculum design and instructional delivery directed at an increasingly immigrant population of RIELs arriving into the country each day (López, 2021; Szlyk et al., 2020).

### **Language and Social Interactions as Interactive Components for Newcomers**

Only a handful of researchers in second language development have examined the conditions required to better promote learning in newcomer adolescent students (Duff, 2001; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012; Skully, 2016; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; López, 2021; Lou, & Noels, 2020; Szlyk et al., 2021). Newcomer social interactions are an essential element to integrally develop language in four domains: Speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Short & Boyson, 2012). Social interactions promote healthy individual learning experiences at school, which allow students to communicate fluently, achieve emotional stability, develop social confidence, and maintain academic engagement in any learning environment (McNeely et al., 2017). These conditions have played an essential role in the language learning, academic content, and social adaptation of NSELs as they adjusted to a new country, culture, and society (Scully, 2016; McNeely et al., 2017). During their first years of schooling in the United States, youth RIELs can also experience individual acclimation and development stages at a new school and community. Their learning and social processes require different layers of academic and

social support systems (Pimentel et al., 2009; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez Orozco, 2015, 2018). Language and social supports happen on multiple fronts and require adequately facilitated interventions by adults that can appropriately teach NSELs (Short & Boyson, 2012; Skully, 2016). The learning and social development processes, intrinsically intertwined, occur simultaneously during the different stages of social, cultural, and academic adaptation. The language instruction and social interactions conceptual framework that guided this study departed from second-language social and academic language acquisition and incorporated the social exchange common skills required of students. Applied components need to consider culturally sensitive and relevant assets as well as identify deficits brought by newcomers to better understand their emotional and social individual needs (Pimentel et al., 2009; Skully, 2016). Instructional considerations and accommodations should result in better support of the learning process for NSELs in the mainstream classroom.

This study treated adequate social interactions and academic language and literacy skills development as root causes for academic content achievement for NSELs. Figure 1 shows each one of the central components interacting with the other factors discussed as required provided conditions. These factors are simultaneously linked to the additional elements that can influence language learning and social development for NSELs. The external elements in Figure 2.1 continuously interact with the two main components and constitute essential topics related to the learning of NSELs. Prior research has shown that this eventually led to establishing second language acquisition theories, or to evaluate and analyze ESL and bilingual learning settings at the elementary and secondary school years.

## **Newcomers' Language Development**

As already highlighted by language development scholars, full social and academic language development is a complex learning process that happens over time. Collier (1995) established that the successful acquisition of a second language for NSELs is part of a socio-cultural process where four major language components interact simultaneously: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Collier (1995) sustained that educators need to provide equal support for any second language learner by paying close attention to the instructional use of all four equally important components; they must be considered and implemented while teaching and learning in the classroom. NSELs use their language, cognitive processes, and social and cultural backgrounds to make sense of their learning. NSELs are at the center of the three major learning components (language, academic, cognitive) in any school setting. RIELs try to interact and relate with each of these components by comparing them to their past and present social and cultural contexts to make sense of what they are being taught. This is extremely important to understand how social and cultural processes play in their new learning environments (Collier, 1995).

Collier (1995) went deeper into his developmental theory of second language acquisition and stated that the absence or deficit of any of the components would constitute a clear disadvantage to the learning opportunities for RIELs. According to Collier's (1995) language development theory, the four components should interact simultaneously and be interrelated (Collier & Thomas, 1989). In school settings, not one single component should be developed at the expense of one or the other two components. These are individually developmental through the child's or adolescent's

language and literacy acquisition processes, as a learning development process that any student will apply through his or her learning path during their elementary and secondary school years (Collier, 1995).

An analysis done through a longitudinal study with 400 immigrants of five different parts of the world (Haiti, China, Central America, Dominican Republic, and Mexico) found that only 12% of the newcomer secondary students developed full academic English language after 3 to 5 years of schooling in the United States (Carhill et al., 2008). Most of the students followed during that study spent an average of 5 to 7 years in formal schooling with direct English language instruction with social-emotional specialized support to achieve full English grade-level commands.

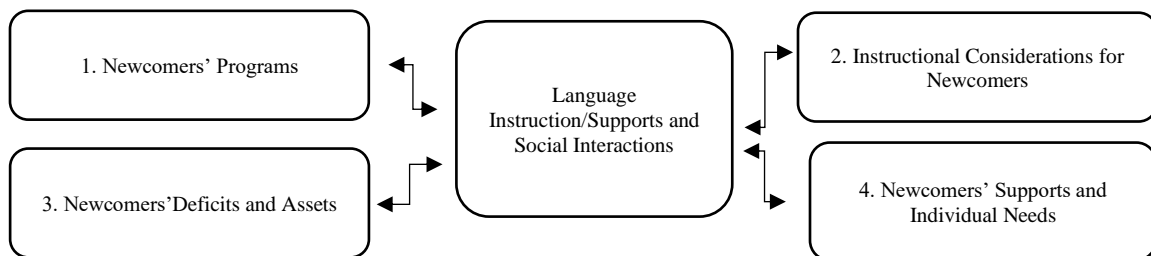
Harklau (1999) and August & Shanahan (2006) adhered to this theory on language development of necessary time for NSELs to master language. They found that even at a strong second language teaching school, ELs needed more time to fully learn and academically perform at the same level as their grade-level English-only learners. The study measured the NSELs proficiency language and academic skills and compared those to the ones of native English-monolingual peers. Only after 4 to 7 years of learning at school and social functioning in English, NSELs finally performed at similar English levels of academic language and literacy as those of their monolingual peers (August & Shanahan, 2006).

### **Newcomers' Social Interactions**

Social interactions need to happen between NSELs and monolingual English students in the mainstream classroom. Social conversations and exchanges between RIELs and their monolingual counterparts are a fundamental indicator of academic

engagement and learning relevance for NSELs in the mainstream classroom (Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). The NSELs' social experiences in this learning environment should be based on individual interests, cultural backgrounds, and affinities, while intentionally incorporating new academic content and literacy (Collier, 1995; Walqui, 2000, Walqui & Van Lier, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). NSELs learn from the use of the new language and content knowledge and skills while working with other English-monolingual peers. As Collier (1995) explained, "the language acquisition process of immigrant students at schools and the social and cultural component that students bring to the new classroom are at the center of cognitive processes, academic language development, and social adaptation at school" (p. 4).

An adequate social and culturally responsive learning environment will positively impact learning for NSELs (Collier, 1995). NSELs need opportunities to practice language and communicate about the new knowledge being acquired (Palincsar et al., 1987; Kagan & McGroarty, 1993). Collaborative times need to be meaningful and purposeful, carefully planned, and embedded in the content lessons. Interactions help secondary recent immigrant ELs develop oral language skills, both listening and speaking, while affirming their learning engagement and academic interest in the content being taught. The collaborative setting needs to provide ELs with consistent opportunities to exchange ideas and express themselves (Walqui & Van Lier, 2010). In an interactive learning environment, the teacher needs to provide opportunities for the autonomy of NSELs' own learning. NSELs have shown to value learning and have felt confident communicating in meaningful ways with monolingual English students (Adger et al., 1995, as cited in Walqui, 2000).

**Figure 1***Conceptual Framework*

During the last three decades, scholars of second language teaching and learning have done research aimed at determining how learning occurs and can be better delivered at different instructional settings for elementary and secondary newcomers. Previous experts studied and analyzed several important aspects covering language acquisition and content learning for students coming into public schools with a different native language than English. NSELs learning and instructional needs should be considered as valuable opportunities to study and understand the language development process and how this may impact academic engagement and social development (Pimentel & Martin, 2009; Short & Byson, 2012).

ESL teaching and learning can be successfully addressed by the design and use of special curriculum, especially with well-trained ESL teachers trained to implement adequate instructional modifications and accommodations to meet NSELs' needs (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009, Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Short & Boyson, 2012; Skully, 2016). Understanding language development and how special learning settings can be designed to accelerate language acquisition, all while still maintaining academic content learning, has led to the consideration and adoption of bilingual and ESL policies at the federal, state, and local levels (Short & Boyson, 2012). As a result, over the last

four decades, many local school districts in the United States have established newcomer programs or schools that better address and serve the learning and instructional needs of NSELs at United States elementary and secondary schools.

Empirical research on what happens to NSELs after being taught in newcomer learning settings, them entering the mainstream content classroom, and exhibiting language and social development needs is limited. To effectively observe this phenomenon, this qualitative study used the conceptual framework of language instruction and social interactions (shown in Figure 1) to focus on two main study components: Adequate academic language development and social interactions. The two conditions were treated and analyzed through the personal individual experiences and perceptions of a group of Latino NSELs as they learned with others in a high school English only content classroom.

### **Newcomer Programs**

NSELs enter public schools during different times throughout the school year and with various needs of support (Short & Boyson, 2012). RIELs come into United States districts and schools with various levels of English proficiency and academic literacy in their first language (Boyson & Short, 2003). The main goal for any NSELs model or classroom has been to facilitate the adaptation and acclimation of newcomer students who are lacking the necessary English language domain to function under regular English instruction (Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Newcomer programs follow an alternative and strategically designed learning model, which addresses the needs of RIELs, and sometimes their families, as they establish themselves in different United States schools (Genesee, 1999; Short, 2002; Short & Boyson, 2003).



The design of newcomer programs can vary in size, financial capacity of the school or district, and administration of resources (Short, 2002).

The newcomer classroom is meant to turn into an intense language acquisition learning setting to facilitate the RIELs the proper cultural adaptation and social acclimation (Hertzberg, 1998; Short & Boyson, 2004). In the United States, newcomer programs have historically been used as learning settings for accelerated language instruction that help build the foundation of the primary social language, or Basic Social Interpersonal Skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1979; 1981). Newcomer programs have been implemented as a preferred learning setting to respond to the needs of teaching English language skills (Short & Boyson, 2012; Skully, 2016).

The first newcomer schools or programs in the United States appeared at the beginning of the 70s (Friedlander, 1991; Short, 2002). The newcomer model of ESL instruction became popular towards the second part of the 90s as a response to the increasing population of immigrant students with limited English language levels (Short & Boyson, 2012). By the 2000s, newcomer programs were becoming more popular and being implemented at urban area public school districts. This was mainly happening in the urban areas of six states that had nearly 70% of the new immigrant population of students in the United States: California, Florida, New York, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Short, 2002). In the last decade, most newcomer programs have focused on serving students at the secondary school level (Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Some school districts in large urban areas have also implemented newcomer models for elementary school children, since they have received a greater number of recent immigrant families coming as

refugees or seeking political asylum (Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Beyond grade level considerations, it is important for a newcomer program to have the ability to adapt and serve the individual needs of a diverse population of incoming immigrant students and their families. (Short & Boyson, 2012; Skully, 2016).

Newcomer schools and programs have had a rapid expansion in the United States. By the end of 2016, there were approximately 112 different newcomer schools in the United States and 60 variations of second language acquisition model designs identified as newcomer programs (Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Texas, one of the six states with a high population of ELs, has become a fertile ground for newcomer schools. Districts have adopted newcomer programs to meet the needs and characteristics of the growing population of students that are arriving from different geographical regions of the world and speaking multiple languages. Although newcomer programs share common characteristics in their curriculum and instructional goals (August & Shanahan, 2006; Short & Boyson, 2012), cautioned that these should be used to avoid utilizing a one-model-fits-all approach (August & Shanahan, 2006). Supporters of newcomer programs have seen these learning alternative options for RIELs as effective intensive teaching and learning English language models (Short, 2002; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Critics, on the contrary, see newcomer programs as learning settings that may retract and delay the process of cultural and social assimilation, or to the *American Way*, for the RIELs, since they see these language programs as segregated learning places (McNeely et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, many districts and schools have opted out of this option to exclusively provide ESL instruction in mainstream content classroom for NSELs (Boyson & Short, 2012). Public schools and districts in states with small populations of NSELs do not offer newcomer programs due to the high costs of their implementation, demands of additional human capital, and the required design of specialized curriculum and resources. Many schools and districts in small cities, towns, and rural areas do not have the capacity needed by newcomer settings (Boyson & Short, 2003).

### ***Purpose of a Newcomer Program***

The primary objective of a newcomer program is tailored to the individual needs of language learning for RIELs. The program's resources should be used by the public school or district to make the most effective English accelerated language acquisition experience for NSELs while still delivering effective content instruction (Short, 2002; Short & Boyson, 2012; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Newcomer programs need to become a natural bridge for academic instruction and content level curriculum to the mainstream classroom, while recent secondary immigrants benefit from the specialized ESL learning environments (Cheng, 1998; Dufresne & Hall, 1997; Freeman et al., 2003; Olsen et al., 2006; Te, 1997).

Another goal of a newcomer program should be to provide social and emotional support to NSELs and their families (Short & Boyson, 2012). Newcomer programs should inform immigrant families about the social and cultural changes and differences between the United States and their countries of origin (Short & Boyson, 2012). Smoother cultural acclimation and local adaptation processes for recent immigrant students to new school systems should also be a priority of newcomer programs. A

newcomer classroom should focus on providing thoughtful instruction. In the short term, newcomer programs need to provide a swift transition when correctly implemented in their curriculum and instructional design (Short & Boyson, 2012).

### ***Benefits of a Newcomer Classroom***

Newcomer classrooms have advantages for the social and cultural adaptation of recently arrived immigrant students (Cheng, 1998; Dufresne & Hall, 1997; Crandall et al., 2002). Newcomer classrooms can provide the students with intensive support for second language acquisition. Genesee (1999), Short (2002), and Short and Boyson (2012), all argued that basic listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills need to be taught in combination with content. This provides the greatest advantage of daily instruction and curriculum NSELs receive in newcomer classrooms. August and Shanahan (2006, 2017) believed in the value of daily language teaching in all forms for RIELs: oral, listening and speaking, and reading and writing skills as part of the adequate newcomer learning settings.

A benefit of schools that provide specialized newcomer instruction or programs is that families experience a welcoming and safe learning classroom environment. The newcomer school helps RIELs navigate the complexities of a new school system, new social norms, a new community, and an unknown culture (Boyson & Short, 2003.). A newcomer program that has integrally functioned at a secondary campus by including NSELs with most of the population to better transition to the mainstream classroom, which aligns with federal expectations of an inclusive learning environment (Belluck, 1995).

### ***The Newcomer Classroom's Limitations***

Despite the great efforts and good intentions of newcomer programs, the limited time NSELs can stay in a newcomer learning setting constitutes a limitation or disadvantage to second language development and academic adaptation (Cummins, 1981; Collier, 1987; Duff, 2001). Only after special language proficiency considerations that are based on language acquisition examinations and dependent on the time of arrival, NSELs may be retained or recommended to stay in the newcomer classroom beyond the first year of schooling in the United States (Boyson & Short, 2003; Skully, 2016). However, placement of RIELs in the newcomer classroom is never extended beyond the second year of schooling (Short & Boyson, 2012; Christensen & Stanat, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008).

Intaking schools have feared being blamed for minority segregation, making it one of the main reasons to avoid retaining NSELs in what could be interpreted as an isolated instructional setting (Skully, 2016). A long stay in a newcomer program could also have a negative impact on the social and academic integration of NSELs with monolingual English students in the mainstream classroom (Faltis & Arias, 2007). Stand-alone newcomer schools were places where “hyper-segregation” occurred for NSELs. Extended times of separate instruction deprived the NSELs from learning with the dominant population of students (Faltis & Arias, 2007, p. 19).

### ***Newcomer Families' Expectations***

Welcoming and involving NSELs' families is necessary to educate and inform second language acquisition and academic literacy with secondary school children at home. This additional factor needs to be considered during the educational support plan

for RIELs (Walqui, 2000). Families of newcomers need to be encouraged and supported in any and many possible ways by school administrators and teachers of their children in the classroom. Schools should have staff that can relate and directly communicate with parents who do not speak English. It is a precondition for parents of RIELs to feel comfortable, build confidence, and be reassured of being understood by educators. The possibility to communicate directly with teachers and other school personnel in their native language helps to build the school community mutual efforts to educate the whole child. Schools and districts providing parents with ESL classes and facilitating additional community-based social services and opportunities directed to support the families of NSELs with their individual needs is another way to for parents to become involved in their children's education.

Most families of NSELs demonstrate high expectations of academic achievement for their newcomer children as they enter the public education system in the United States (Fulgini, 2012; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Local schools' leadership officials, state and local legislators need to propose and implement initiatives that support the social and emotional development needs of the NSELs in their valid aspirations to academically succeed and become active productive citizens of the receiving communities.

### ***Exiting the Newcomer Classroom***

The intensive English as second language specialized instruction only occurs in most newcomer classrooms for a few months or one year (Christensen & Stanat, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Short & Boyson, 2012). After that period, students exit to be enrolled at the mainstream content classroom. This occurs with the new academic year

for the RIELs (Short & Boyson, 2012). The purpose of the rapid transition is to provide full exposure to the grade-level content and curriculum for the NSELs.

However, most NSELs are still functioning at the beginner or intermediate stage of social language proficiency and do not possess the adequate academic language, or literacy skills to fully function at similar levels of the native English speakers (Collier & Thomas, 1989; August & Shanahan, 2017). Therefore, the NSELs will generally struggle with the understanding of content and instruction in the mainstream content classroom (Hamayan & Perlman, 1990; Hakuta et al., 2000).

### **Newcomers' Supports and Individual Needs**

#### ***Acquiring Second Language***

Second language acquisition has been a topic of discussion since Cummins (1979, 1981) developed his theory of second language learning as a process that takes several years for any child at school. Referring to the development of a second language and later during his work about the language of school, Cummins (1981) sustained that any child, depending on the age of exposure, may need anywhere between five to seven years to fully develop a Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS). In his theory of language development for non-native English speakers, Cummins clearly distinguishes between CALPS and social language. Social language refers to the highly context-based language used by any second language learner to communicate using listening and speaking skills as well as non-verbal language. The usually more rapid oral language development on a child or young adolescent, which he called the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) develops faster with the common support of contextual clues and factors.

Cummins (1981) found that BICS generally demanded a shorter period to develop in children and adolescents between one to three years. It made sense since BICS helps a child or adolescent with the more immediate needs of communicating with others and understanding social language interactions. Daily questions and responses with language interactions occur more naturally with BICS and are surrounded by high levels of physical context (Cummins 1979, 1981, 2008). Oral English development is considered by Cummins and other language researchers to be the first stage for ELs to fully develop, understanding that common language occurs sooner than later for second language (L2) learners (Cummins, 1979; Young, 1996; Krashen, 1996; Baker, 1998).

Chamot and O'Malley (1994) defined academic language as the one used for teachers and instructors to create or generate meaning and learning in the classroom. Academic language that starts to teach the school ELs at the secondary level the literacy discourse and subject-based-content. Later, Chamot and O'Malley (1994) understood the complexity of language development to be like the development of Cummins (1981) second language knowledge and understanding of the two parameters mentioned above. Chamot and O'Malley (1994) looked at language development from the perspective of different linguistic levels that evolve over time and practice. Both, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach developed and refined by Chamot and O'Malley (1994) and the Cummins' theory (1981) of social and academic language, advocate for instruction to meet the needs of learning language for ELs based on an integral approach of language teaching and content instruction with specific learning strategies for language acquisition and content learning.



To measure the effectiveness of any English language development program or curriculum for NSELs, it is necessary to understand the theory behind building academic language. Previous research considered the existing language development theories behind children and adolescents' development of second social and academic language (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2008; Collier, 1995; Scarcella, 2003). From the social communications skills supported by non-coded language artifacts, such as gestures, hands signals, and images to the more complex developing of academic language, literary artifacts and the socio-cultural context, all interacting components of the second language development of students. Graphically described, Cummins (1981) language development theory for ELs could be pictured as a dual brain platform of the second language learner, which eventually evolves and develops into full academic proficiency (Cummins, 1981).

Critics of Cummins' (1981) language development theory (McKay & Weinstein-Shr, 1993; Street, 1985, Valdés, 2000) argued that the view of language development under the perspective of social and academic literacy linear progressing pattern had fallen short in its definition. The existence of multiple language literacies could not be observed or defined by a defined linear process. McKay and Weinstein-Shr (1993) strongly believed that defining academic language under a monolithic view of the language used only for literacy purposes was not realistic. Zamel and Spack (1998) added to the discussion of academic language necessarily composed of multiple literacies, such as digital and modern forms of language and expressions. These researchers believed that language could not be only prescribed by academic or school matters. This view was shared and accepted by some language professional organizations in the United States (Valdés, 2000).

Language development, as an exclusive lens of academic school literacy, was not fair and realistic for all humans (Scarcella, 2003). The findings of McKay and Weinstein-Shr (1993), as well as Zamel and Spack (1998), were important to understand language as multiple literacies. When teaching NSELs, these literacies may need to be applied differently during instructional delivery to meet the ways these students learn and assimilate language and content. One important literacy to incorporate to teach second language for NSELs should be technology, which may effectively help the acquisition of a new language when used well (McKay & Weinstein-Shr, 1993).

Following this same line of thinking, a study conducted with 10th grade students in Taiwan found that technology literacy development and the use of different communication technology-based tools can enhance and make the learning of English language at the secondary level very attractive (Yang & Chen, 2007). In their “technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) project”, as part of the initiative for *The Advance English Teaching* in Taiwan, forty-four students participated in six different technology and web-based programs and applications to develop and apply communication skills in English. Although there were concerns regarding the learning methods for passive learners, who required of a more specific and individual guidance, most students benefited from the use of different technology tools to learn English and that required the development of new literacy and skills at the same time English language was being constantly expanded in vocabulary and holistically developed (Yang and Chen, 2007). It was found to be indeed of value to support the development of multiple literacies, many of them technology-based, which made easier the development

of language and literacy skills in a second language for the secondary Taiwanese students.

In his study of learning academic English as a second language, Scarcella (2003) questioned how to promote and deepen the use of English academic language and literacy development in adolescent foreign young learners. Scarcella (2003) considered that the academic English theory of Cummins was not practical and showed academic English development as a choice of either being acquired or not. He believed the binary view of language development defined by two phases, social and academic, as described by Cummins, did not occur exactly in that linear manner. Scarcella (2003), believed that social language continued to develop at any time, even after acceptable levels of academic English in young college students, the subjects of his research. He found that the user of a second language would continue to develop language for a variety of social reasons to continue to improve communication channels with others in different social and academic contexts. Scarcella (2003) estimated the BICS/CALPS language development theory not to be easy or practical to use with students in the classroom, since it did not provide teachers of language with effective tools, specific strategies, or step-by-step processes to teach academic language in the daily learning settings. Scarcella (2003) equally questioned the interpretations of language development as a multiple literacies discourse of other researchers opposed to the Cummins (1981) language development theory. Scarcella (2003) argued that for any student to be academically successful, it was indispensable to acquire academic English, therefore academic English was required to be taught to English learning students before incorporating any other literacies. In his research of academic language as a theoretical framework, Scarcella

(2003) defended the need to teach academic language as a process, where detailed academic English taught had to incorporate the social and cultural contexts of the individual learner's previous experiences and knowledge base. His language literacy development supported what previous language theorist had considered as indispensable to have: Academic rigor, relevance, and engagement with foreign ESL students (Collier, 1995; Short, 2002). Scarcella found the language and content learning for these students as pre-determined by their previous first language literacy, social development, educational experiences, family values, traditions, and native culture. Elements researched by Yosso (2014) and Scarcella (2003) equally gave vital importance to the role of cultural, social, family, and linguistic navigational and aspirational capital assets brought by RIELs.

The perspective of language development and literacy defended by Scarcella (2003) and Yosso and Solórzano (2005) had to occur simultaneously in the four basic domains. As a result of their research findings, second language literacy development could not be longer considered under the exclusive optic of decoding and encoding through reading and writing. Literacy should be observed as part of a cognitive process, which has included multiple forms of communications (August & Hakuta, 1997; Fillmore & Snow, 2000, 2018). Academic English and literacy then had to be conceived as a learning process involving three different elements (knowledge, society, and culture) added to the psychological aspects of the individual EL (Kern, 2000; Scarcella 2003; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005).

Scarcella (2003) concluded that academic English required the interaction of three dimensions: A linguistic area composed by the phonological, lexical, grammatical,

sociolinguistic and discourse components (Scarcella, 2003) and a second cognitive dimension that enabled an EL to differentiate between everyday social and academic language features. He stated that for this dimension were necessary a background knowledge, and the strategic and metalinguistic abilities of the ELs, which would take the student to a higher-order of thinking skills necessary by a language learner to execute everyday academic tasks (Scarcella, 2003). For the third dimensions, Scarcella (2003) stated that any English language learner must acquire psychological, social and cultural features, aligned with those same dimensions of the academic English language, to understand the context and proper uses of appropriate academic or social English language (Scarcella, 2003). Incorporating the teachings of Scarcella (2003) language theory study informed the importance of considering every aspect of academic language learning for newcomer ELs as a complex development process requiring more than the simplistic approach of teaching content and believing that language will be learned by newcomer ELs as part of a simple one step cognitive process. Similar findings plus the necessary incorporation of previous NSELs' individual assets to the language learning process and social development was shared by Yosso and Solórzano (2005).

### ***A Holistic Approach to Language Instruction and Academic Engagement***

Bailey and Heritage (2008) considered the use and development of language proficiency on adolescent ELs based on the contexts of social, cultural, and cognitive interactions. Beyond academic language necessary for NSELs to learn content knowledge skills at school, Bailey and Heritage (2008) stated that without adequate language proficiency, especially on reading and writing, ELs were not successful at school. ELs are confronted according to their view with academic tests and tasks they do not understand

because of language limitations, and not necessarily due to learning impediments or content incomprehension (Bailey & Huang, 2011). NSELs lack proficiency of English at the level of interacting with learning materials and other peers in the mainstream classroom to produce grade level knowledge and discourse. The negatives effects were also transferred to their social-emotional learning dimension, according to their study's findings, as students worked in the mainstream content classroom (Bailey & Huang, 2011).

Martin and Suárez-Orozco (2018) in their longitudinal quantitative study with over 500 RIELs at seven high schools, 5 in the United States and 2 in Sweden, found that the seven secondary campuses with NSELs from different countries set and implemented a series of strategies to welcome and promote a climate of social and cultural acceptance. Students and families were well supported to assimilate through the use of consistent social and cultural knowledge and experiences of adaptation and acclimation to the new local community and school contexts, including the different procedures and systems at the schools and the receiving communities (Martin and Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Similar findings were shared by Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018) who drew from different ethnographic studies about effective ways to engage what they denominated “young-transnationals lives” of NSELs at public schools in the United States.

English language development occurs faster and equips recent immigrant ELs in classrooms when language supports systems are consistently used by teachers (Sapon-Shevin, 2003). Listening deficiencies or speaking with difficulties, or different accents should be welcoming and encouraged by teachers and other peers for the ELs (August & Shanahan 2017; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). Understanding language meaning and social

communications highly supported and easily transmitted promote social interactions between monolingual English students and NSEs, which should be encouraged and occur daily in the mainstream classroom (August & Shanahan 2017; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). With lessons and activities carefully planned, most interactive activities between RIEs and native monolingual English students will produce gains in language proficiency and better understanding of the learning content, as well as understanding the correct context in which information and its meaning are being used (Genesse et al., 2006; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

In this area, most monolingual mainstream teachers, who lack specialized training, have traditionally exhibited deficiencies, as identified by previous studies. In addition, instructing newcomers and not knowing how to implement a collaborative learning environment in the content classroom do not mean only focusing on reading and writing busy work (Krashen & Terrel, 1983). RIEs usually transitioning to the mainstream classroom after their first year of instruction are still at the *Beginner* or *Intermediate* English language proficiency where vocabulary is still very limited, at a rate of around 3,000 to 6,000 words (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Walqui (2000, 2010) sustained that to increase the rigor in pedagogy and make content learning relevant to RIEs at a youth age, the intake of social and cultural interactions is of essence to their learning process. Supported by previous empirical studies and her *Sociocultural Theory*, Walqui (2000, 2010) examined different types of scaffolding, conceived as a structure and a process to promote the academic and language development. Under her ten proposed priorities to design instruction for RIEs, Walqui (2000, 2010) stated that the classroom culture, “fosters the development of a community

of learners, and all students are part of that community” (p. 88). Collier (1995) and Suárez-Orozco et al., (2009) found social interactions and inclusion of students’ individual cultures produced higher academic achievement results with NSELS.

### **Newcomers’ Deficits and Assets**

These two conditions need to be considered and adequately incorporated in the curriculum and instructional design of any secondary mainstream content classroom to properly address the teaching of language instruction to RIELs (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Educators should take into consideration any lack or insufficient English language knowledge and skills and previously interrupted formal schooling due to social or school limitations in the NSELS’ countries of origin (Garcia, 1999). Previous assets and deficits stress the importance of knowing and incorporating the learning experiences NSELS’ prior knowledge and culture. These assets can certainly enrich the learning in the mainstream classroom if properly incorporated in the curriculum and daily lessons (Gonzalez et al., 1995). NSELS’ perception of whether their cultural and academic background assets are being considered and incorporated by mainstream content teachers in the daily instruction helped to respond to the research questions of the study. Instead of seeing NSELS’ differences in cultures and social traditions as a deficit or barrier to adapt to the new community or the learning system, immigrants from any region in the world come with social skills and cultural values, assets for their own learning and that of other students in the classroom(Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). As teachers incorporate the newcomers’ assets into the educational and social development processes and their daily learning (Haynes, 2007), the more academically engaged and motivated that newcomers become.



Considering NSELs previous *social and cultural assets versus the deficits* they may first exhibit, it is critical to make informed decisions about individual language instruction and learning accommodations as they navigate the English mainstream content classroom (Valdés, 2005; Faltis & Arias, 2007).

Not everything is a deficit or a challenge with NSELs arriving to the United States. Recent immigrants coming into public schools at the secondary level bring their own assets that are many times not recognized by teachers and schools. Some of these assets are first language literacy, a rich culture and family values they practice and embrace, as well as their previous and unique personal knowledge and learning experiences (Yosso & Valdés, 2005). Public schools and educators may commonly ignore and not incorporate the recent immigrant secondary students' intrinsic values, knowledge and experiences, as multiple assets ELs bring to their new learning environment (Collier, 1987; Goldenberg 2001; Royer & Carlo, 1991).

Based on the premise of incorporating previous ELs assets to promote more effective learning on NSELs as determine by Yosso (2005), this research aimed at analyzing the problem of lack of adequate language proficiency and social interactions of NSELs in the mainstream content classroom in high school as essential components of failure or success at school. In words of Short and Fitzsimmons (2007), these are fundamental factors directly impacting second language literacy acquisition of adolescent RIELs in public schools across the United States.

### ***The Achievement Gap Versus Educational Debt***

A permanent deficit in the “achievement-gap,” a term called into question, seems to be always attached by educators and policy makers to RIELs' academic achievement

and performance based on state mandated tests. Causes of the “achievement-gap” have been historically analyzed by social researchers on minority communities at public schools as a matter of “educational debt,” (Milner & Lomotey, 2013, p.192-195). This concept has been controversial and ignored by a public education system historically marked by inequity towards students of color and minorities (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Chambers, 2009; Milner & Lomotey, 2013). The problem about academic performance for RIELs must shift from a deficit perspective since its erroneous conception view. It should be fair instead of blaming NSELs for lower standardized tests results, to rather place the blame at the causes. Causes originated by the lack of clear policies and efforts to adequately fund public education for thousands of RIELs entering the United States public schools. For Ladson-Billings (2006), Chambers (2009), and Milner (2013), it is imperative to change the conversation towards the “inputs” rather than the “outputs”, when referring to the public education of RIELS. Many NSELs come without knowledge of the English language and with multiple academic and social needs. It is important to shift the research analysis and public discourse to look at the “deficit” by focusing on what it is not provided to minority students. The RIELs required provisions and resources that are always not available or enough, due in part to the lack of adequate policies and financial resources for local school districts to improve curriculum programs, instructional practices and individual student’s support services. This disparity demonstrates why it is necessary to improve the curriculum and the quality of instruction we are giving to NSELs in Texas and the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007; Chambers, 2009; Milner & Lomotey, 2013).

Ladson-Billings (2006) addressed students of color deficiencies in their educational gains, departing from the popularized and deficit-oriented concept of the “achievement gap,” which constitutes a single research perspective from a deficit perspective of the problem blamed on the supposed persistent inability of Black or Latino students to “academically achieve” (Chambers, 2009). The issue of inadequate academic performance of minority Latino NSELs, for example, must be addressed from the perspective of an accumulated and endemic historical, social, political, and moral debt of public education in the United States. Federal and state policies, curriculum design and instructional delivery have always been designed to meet the needs of a majority White middle and upper socio-economic status population of students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Chambers, 2009). RIELs lower academic performance is a result of insufficient “inputs.” Like Ladson-Billings (2006) argued the “education debt” is a direct consequence of historical insufficient funds and accumulated deficits of resources for students’ minorities in highly populated urban areas of the nation. In a similar approach to her social research, Chambers (2009), highlighted what she called inadequacies of the “receivment gap.” These occur when secondary students are separated and set into different tracks based on quality of curriculum and instructional delivery. Darling-Hammond (2015), added to the arguments of a public educational system with deficits towards minorities by stating that education policies and local school practices need to be funded and specifically targeted to promote and facilitate “opportunity gaps” for minorities of students to finally achieve real equity at public-schools. All these exemplar scholars addressed the issue generally misconceived as a student group deficit on “academic achievement”, by looking at this issue as an opportunity to make drastic changes and improvements to the public

education system. Therefore, as an “opportunity gap” to level the academic playing field for all different socio-economic populations of students in the public-school system, through the implementation of “student-centered practices” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014).

It is a matter of policies and local public districts’ initiatives which need to lead the change in the mindset of state officials, school leaders and teachers. Scholars defending the national “education-debt” of the public school system in the United States with student minorities argued that previous legislation and decisions about the correct curriculum and instruction to students of different social and cultural backgrounds have not really had the necessary effect to produce change and promote equality and equity among all students (Howard & Aleman, 2008; Howard, 2013; Milner IV, 2014).

Chambers (2009) insisted the problem has been a matter of students of color being taught with deficient systems and structures in curriculum and instruction. By changing the focus from the outputs, what students have scored and achieved, to what the public-school system may do for those students, there is a better opportunity to provide students of color with the necessary learning resources and change the way we receive and teach them at public schools. In her study with a group of students at a high school, where tracking practices and other systems separated students by achievement levels, providing students of color with a differentiated quality of education, the conclusions were that the problem was not at the students’ inability to perform at a high levels, but instead, the education levels or “inputs” provided. These inputs were already conceived and programmed to produce lower academic achievement students with lower results on

standardized tests, as a result of the difference in the learning placement for school minority students (Chambers, 2009, p. 426).

Darling-Hammond (2015) also found a significant imprecision in the use of the term “achievement gap,” which relies over the misconception of the supposedly negative connotation of student performance from the only perspective of a student’s “output”, and not considering the real causes of inequity in public schools in the United States. It is when we provide sufficient funding that we will start talking about closing the “opportunity gap”, which will really address the systemic problem around minority students’ performance scores on standardized tests. Why? Because Darling-Hammond et al., (2014) and Darling-Hammond (2015) strongly believed that the United States has been living with the “mantra” of the “achievement gap” by looking at students’ test scores, and not realizing that the problem is a matter of “inequity” in the public education system.

There is an opportunity gap to provide low-income students and minorities with the necessary supports to address the issues that have sustained inadequate learning. Addressing the barriers and issues of funding at the federal and state levels can finally result in providing the levels of support for all students to become successful academic achievers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). Darling-Hammond (2015) strongly believed that given teachers appropriate time and resources for professional development and collaboration, remunerating them to the status of any other high-valued professional for the society such as doctors and engineers, and creating evaluations for teachers that promote consistent professional improvement are some of the “inputs” that may be

labeled as an “opportunity to close the wrongly called “academic achievement-gap” of minority students.

Certainly, a similar approach to teaching and learning of recent immigrant Latino NSELs may become a different way of tackling their individual needs of language development and social integration in the mainstream classroom. An approach capable of providing an opportunity to close de “academic achievement-gap” and provide necessary supports or real deposits of learning resources to the persistent “education debt” we have historically held with ELs at public schools.

For Ladson-Billings (2006) the United States public education system has accumulated a large debt with students of Black and Latino origin. A debt comparable to the national debt that countries contract as they run budgets that every year accumulating running deficits due to the needs of public spending being greater than the annual income or public tax-revenue. For Ladson-Billings (2006) in reference to the work of Wolfe and Haveman (2001) about the “Social and Non-Market Benefits of Education” there is a close relationship between one child’s education and the positive or negative associations with the individual decisions taken by that same child over a life-time. Decisions that will define the effects on his or her own standards and quality of life (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5). The “education debt” is for Ladson-Billings (2006) to be defined by three major components that have directly contributed to the “inequality” and “inequity” in our public-school system, toward students and families of color.

A “historical debt” founded on the principles and social acceptance of certain values around race, class, and gender. Values that determined the adoption and implementation of public-school policies of segregation, unequal access, and disparities

in the distribution of public education resources (Anderson, 1989; Fultz, 1995). During decades and even hundreds of years, public education was reserved to certain people, especially for those of higher social and economic status, the race of past population majority and gender. An “economic debt” where funding for public schools has always been unequal and plagued with inequity.

Ladson-Billings (2006) sustained that there are still pending legal challenges against the federal and state funding education systems, which have reflected in public schools and districts receiving contrasting funds to underserved minority population of students crowded in chronic low-performing, urban school settings, while simultaneously providing resources in excess to suburban systems. For example, more funding public dollars per-pupil formulas to serve a more affluent population of commonly most White students. In words of Ladson-Billings (2006): “So, while the income gap more closely resembles the achievement gap, the wealth disparity better reflects the education debt that I am attempting to describe” (p. 7).

A “sociopolitical debt” where most Black, Latino and Native American students have been denied access or lack representation at the decision-making spheres of power. Legislative agendas that have denied equal rights and access to a democratic public system. Access that has been historically delayed or have very slowly become only partially granted during the last two or three decades of modern politics and policy making at the federal and state levels. Diverse communities that have been denied a voice or representation at the time of adopting and approving federal, state, and local policies that define the social tissue of how the communities will be given their public services.

The “moral debt” is the last component of the “education debt” approach and interpretation of inequality and inequity in the public-school system as defined by Ladson-Billings (2006). A term difficult to explain, which essentially equals to the difference between what should be fair or just to do as a society, and what that same society has ended up doing. In other words, a public education system that should be of equal access and quality for all. An education to provide every single student with the same possibilities and field level to become a successful student and productive citizen after finishing secondary school. But the intentions have been morally distant from the reality of an ideal public education. Today’s public schools are plagued with disparities and unfortunately in many cases incapable of effectively and efficiently supporting the individual needs and the reality of every student at public schools (Noguera et al., 2013).

It is from the perspective of ‘educational debt’ that I believed the approach to the needs of NSELs have been accumulating inequalities and inequity in the public education system of the country. A system that has fallen short to address the needs of adequate language and social development to bring recent immigrant or NSELs at the same level of academic performance to that of their English-monolingual counterparts. On this last premise relies the importance of the implementation and analysis of this study about ways to successfully support NSELs in the secondary mainstream classroom.

Complementing the “inputs” argument as the cause for the differences on academic performance of RI ELs and other minorities, Chambers (2009) and Darling-Hammond (2015), consistently referred to the erroneous approach of looking at the disparities in academic performance as a students’ “academic achievement-gap” in test scores, and instead stressing the importance of considering the systemic underscoring



issue as an “opportunity gap” to do things better for every student and improve what they also defined as the “receivment gap”.

### **Instructional Considerations for Newcomers**

Instructional considerations are necessary when teaching RIELs at the secondary level, as one more interacting element of the conceptual framework. Legislation, local initiatives, and curriculum decisions must be oriented at making learning relevant for RIELs (Irizarry-Walter, 2018). Teaching language to advance proficiency academic levels and build literacy skills should be a priority of the initiatives and instructional practices for NSELs (Irizarry-Walter, 2018; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018) observed the experiences of several New York City secondary schools, which built on a culture-sensitive pedagogy to promote individual interest and belonging to the RIELs from different countries. Most students of the ethnographic study shared how they envision themselves in their past, present and future, always considering and showing special attachment to their previous learned experiences, social and cultural backgrounds. The NSELs “narrated with passion their previous, present and future lives in the United States with special attachment to their transnational origins” (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018, p. 259). Recommendations of a teaching approach for students of other countries and cultures sensitive to their personal past experiences and interests were found as beneficial by the researchers. It made the curriculum relevant and engaging for these special population. Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018) found that “by recognizing and engaging students’ transnational knowledge experiences and attachments,” teachers are incorporating a culture-sensitive pedagogy, which brings authentic academic engagement and better educate students who have a transnational approach to life (p. 257). “Educators

engaging in a culturally sustaining pedagogy better prepared students for a changing globalized world” according to their research findings (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018, p. 257).

The study of Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018) helped to explain what previous studies and researchers, among them Genesee et al. (2006), and Martin & Suárez-Orozco (2018), had found around NSEs low academic achievement. RIEs’ difficulties at school could also be explained when the students disconnected from their interest at academics due to their social-emotional state not being met at the school or mainstream classroom. The hostile social context of the classroom would turn into academic disengagement (Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

Walqui (2000) and her “Access and Engagement” research work explored the different classroom environments RIEs. She found that one of the qualities of a successful classroom for newcomers was the fact that the learning environment provided a safe and respectful stage for any student to speak, read aloud and share information and knowledge, beyond the defects of grammar and pronunciation (Walqui, 2000). Among priorities for teachers to design instruction, Walqui (2000) sustained that NSEs engaged with content in the mainstream classroom would not fear taking language risks or commit mistakes when speaking to others, if the classroom was solidly founded on respect to each other’s mistakes, racial and cultural differences or diversity. Sharing and talking NSEs would benefit from instruction when attention and patience was present, and the monolingual English students and the teacher were providing a safe learning environment for NSEs.

Ten years later, Walqui and Van Lier (2010) found that often in a classroom with NSELs, the level of curriculum and instruction is simplified by teachers. In their study about “Scaffolding Academic Success of Adolescents English Language Learners”, Walqui and Van Lier (2010) found that it would be extremely beneficial if instead of decreasing, teachers would increase the instructional rigor, as part of an instructional scaffold design to academically challenge NSELs. The practice of lowering academic expectations was a decision that only avoided additional support for NSELs in the mainstream classroom, which otherwise would have resulted in authentic RIELs’ engagement and success (Walqui & Van Lier, 2010).

These two scholars found that teaching explicitly academic content while incorporating social cultural expectations and classroom norms were ways to encourage social-interactions and language exchange that fully benefits NSELs, as found by Knight et al. (1985) and Palincsar and Brown (1987). In their work about “Reciprocal Teaching”, Palincsar and Brown (1992) discovered that adults and students who led instruction that involved summarizing, clarifying and extending learning, helped to foster comprehension and implement instructional strategies that supported NSELs in their content classrooms. The instructional practice added voice to the NSELs and allowed them to participate and comfortably interact with the mainstream teacher-adult and other monolingual English peers (Brown, & Palincsar, 2018).

Language development for NSELs is the result of a specially designed and modified instructional delivery process. Teaching this population of students requires of necessary preparation and planning to effectively teach language embedded in the course content delivered in the mainstream classroom. Teachers of NSELs should carefully

prepare and plan specific language learning objectives, in combination with well-designed strategies that will result in the delivering of rigorous content and language instruction (August & Shanahan 2006; Genesee et al., 2006). The instructor's goal should be to challenge the youth RIELs to use their literacy skills acquired in their first language, L<sub>1</sub>, to their needs of developing literacy and content comprehension in their second language, L<sub>2</sub> (Genesee et al., 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2015). The transfer occurs as the NSELs use their previous knowledge and experiences to assimilate new knowledge and build a literacy discourse in a new language (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2015).

Time in combination with teaching academic content allows the RIELs to develop the literacy skills and academic language proficiency to grasp and learn properly required grade level curriculum and content skills. NSELs will be able to perform at similar levels of understanding complex literacy connections and strategies of reading comprehension in their second language. Olson et al. (2017) found that an effective way of reducing gaps in English writing for secondary Latino ELs in grades seven to twelve to considerably improve their testing performance in mandated standardized tests is by teaching them cognitive strategies of reading and writing in their English classes. The work done with ELs in two different tenth grade groups showed that after two years of teaching cognitive approach strategies, the intervened group of ELs improved their reading comprehension and analytical writing. The results showed an 18.4 percent more ELs intervened with the cognitive teaching strategies approach to pass the rigorous Common Core State Standards portion of the test in Language Arts. A total of 87.7 percent tenth grade EL students passed the assessment compared to only 69.3 percent passing the test of the control

group. The study was done in 16 high schools with 95 teachers who were trained for 46 hours during the first year to teach a more academically rigorous approach to reading comprehension and writing.

Although teaching of cognitive literacy practices to improve reading and writing for ELs was a valid recommendation to implement at secondary schools in California, little or none had been done on this respect. Other researchers found a similar result in their additional studies about students exhibiting literacy gaps in their learning. These scholars found using cognitive approach strategies with minority ESL students of low social-economic status to be effective to bring their academic achievement levels (Olson et al., 2017).

The secondary content teacher instruction should be oriented to give attention to the already existent language and academic proficiency of the NSELs. Teachers of RIELs are more effective when they consider focusing on students' possibilities for growth and not their language comprehension or proficiency limitations. At mainstream classrooms, NSELs must receive tools, supports, knowledge and skills that will enable them to become competitive learners inside and outside school (Kim & Suárez-Orozco, 2014). Learning standards and experiences in the classroom should be of high relevance, rich in oral and speaking communications and interactions, which will enable these students to use and acquire new language, literacy discourse, and obtain cognitive and problem-solving skills in the main core subjects of reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies (Valdés et al., 2014).

Instruction delivery and lesson implementation that considers language proficiency levels, as the learning interactions empower NSELs to practice and use

language with the learning of the new content. Aligned with the research findings of Olson et al., (2017), Martin and Suárez-Orozco (2018) defended that NSELs should be allowed to use metacognitive skills to build their own learning. It will help these students to obtain knowledge and process it to serve a specific function to finally decide what to do or how to respond to a question or produce their own new knowledge. Educators of RIELs must incorporate and apply content and language assessments that enables them to constantly address their individual needs of language development and content learning (Haynes, 2007). Additionally, grouping of students should be purposeful and tailored to their content knowledge and language skills, as RIELs used homogeneous and heterogeneous interactions and practiced different levels of language proficiency, content comprehension, when working with their monolingual counterparts (Haynes, 2007; Saunders et al., 2013).

### ***Teachers Can Make a Difference for NSELs***

Teachers have the highest impact on students' learning. NSELs are not exception. Teachers need to be aware of the double their efforts to learn a second language and content made by these students (Collier, 1985). NSELs' language learning process requires of especially trained and certified teachers to effectively support them, since these students do not have many years left before graduating from high school (Howard & Milner, 2014). Paradoxically, teachers properly certified and specially trained to teach NSELs are scarce and have become a major deficit of public schools. The high need to improve NSELs instruction will demand training and professionally developing of thousands of teachers capable of teaching curriculum content and analytical concept skills, while doing direct language instruction (Cortez & Villareal, 2009; Valdés et al.,

2014). Unfortunately, several findings of research studies have shown NSELs struggling with language and academic achievement in their classes, due to lack of support with language comprehension and content (Carhill et al., 2008; Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Faltis & Coulter, 2007). NSELs should be entitled to daily ESL instruction and rigorous consistent language modifications and scaffoldings for every main core class, according to states with bilingual and ESL mandatory legislation (Fry, 2008). Visuals, manipulative, and collaborative settings, among other instructional strategies must be implemented by teachers during instruction for NSELs adequate learning interaction and comprehension of the academic content (Garcia, 1999; Fry, 2008). Instructional grade level and content teams should work together to properly identify and address needs of RIELs in the mainstream classroom (Fry, 2008; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018).

The public-school reality in the United States and Texas is completely different than the legislation and education federal and local authorities envisioned when enacting and adopting new policies and programs. Due to the lack of enough certified and well-trained ESL teachers, a great number of NSELs are immersed in regular English classes with limited support to do tasks and advance adequately with second language acquisition (L2). This common disservice has been happening in NSELs' classrooms across the country and Texas despite the individual needs of additional language and academic support in L2 (Cortez & Villarreal, 2009).

The Texas Bilingual/ESL policies call for ESL instructional programs, where the main goal should be to prepare ELs, beyond grade levels, with integrated L2 acquisition methods, techniques, and strategies for ELs can become proficient learners in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the English language, (Texas Education Agency [TEA],

Chapter §89 BB p.1). Sadly, the primary intention of the law could not be further away from the reality of RIELs. NSELs are commonly rushed into mainstream English-monolingual courses, where the expectation to perform academically and successfully might be taken for granted. As a result, the lack of consistency in the teaching of newcomer ELs, especially with their L2 needs, could result in their inability to learn, and academically perform as high as their English-monolingual partners.

### ***The Mainstream Classroom***

Mainstream classrooms receiving NSELs should become a transitional platform to academic success, with emphasis on individual respect. Their learning should incorporate their previous cultural, social, and family values, while providing a positive path to learning of the American different traditions, society, civic order, and culture (Valdés, 2014; Faltis & Arias, 2007). A common denominator of the literature reviewed about successful ways to reach and teach RIELs underlines the culturally relevant environments accepting and embracing students' cultures of origin, distinctive family values and social contributions (Brisk, 2012; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012). Adopted in the newcomer classroom and some ESL mainstream classrooms, Boyson and Short (2003), Brisk (2012), and Shatz and Wilkinson (2012) all agreed that culturally relevant learning environments become a predictor of academic success for NSELs. Grade level content teachers need to clearly identify and use the previous literacy and academic skills these students may bring to address their needs with first time quality and relevant instruction. Mainstream content teachers should be providing new opportunities for language learning, culture sharing and social exchanges (Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). Explicit language teachings, tutorials, writing supports, and



individual assistance are necessary for NSELs to feel valued and progressively integrated into the mainstream classroom learning environment (Christensen & Stanat, 2007).

NSELs transitioning to the mainstream content classroom need consistent language instruction to overcome their communication and integration barriers, fundamental for proper social interaction with other students and exchange of knowledge and ideas (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). They need to feel fully engaged with their learning experiences to start taking risks and fully participate in the daily learning with content teachers and other peers (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Stanat & Edele, 2015). Continuous language and literacy teaching in English must become regular and consistent components for the NSELs' new learning experiences (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). These learning experiences will help with the socio-cultural adaptation process to the new learning system and assimilation of new knowledge (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). NSELs must feel safe in the classroom to continue building their individual capacity of learning a new language and culture (Gibbons, 2002; Boyson & Short, 2003; Brisk, 2012; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012).

NSEL support on first or native language disappears or becomes insufficient after these students enter the mainstream classroom (Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). After arriving to the United States, Scully (2016) found that RIELs are placed in mainstream classes are many times unfairly treated and viewed with a deficit focused lens. A deficit, meaning that public schools across the country have focused on standardized test results to analyze academic performance of students. An approach set by policies at the federal level as the No Child Left Behind Act McGuinn, (2006), and even Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA, (Act, E. S. S., 2015), have stressed for states the importance of

accountability measures through the implementation of standardized tests to determine levels of learning, knowledge, and skills for every student.

NSELs' prior knowledge and culture should be considered by mainstream content teachers as an asset, instead of seeing it as a deficit or barrier to adapt to the new school system. It is the misconception that immigrants from "third-world countries," a derogatory expression itself, do not bring cultural, social and family values that can add to the enrichment of the learning process (Valdés, 2001; Faltis & Arias, 2007). On her ethnographic research about ELs, Duff (2001) discovered that ELs with high levels of critical thinking in English and appropriate social interactions build appropriate age social discourse, which values their culture and origin. A highly structured and rigorous academic content learning environment, where ELs' contributions are valued, represents the ideal learning setting for NSELs. There lied the importance of implementing a study of RIELs in the mainstream classroom, as they are incorporated into the learning of new content and literacy in a second language.

Duff (2001) argued that a problem occurs when educators ignore what NSELs can bring to the learning environment in the classroom with their social, cultural and background assets. The concern becomes even more disadvantageous when teachers ignore these students may be under-equipped with adequate second academic language and literacy, or the understanding of new social and cultural standards. NSELs have not yet been exposed to the new social and cultural discourse, so they step back and rely on their home-country social and cultural backgrounds to make sense of their new learning. Duff (2001) warned about RIELs being in clear disadvantage after they transitioned to the mainstream classrooms. Educators who accommodate and differentiate instruction

will make a difference on RIELs. Teachers need to pay special attention to NSELs language individual needs and provide the opportunities for these students to continue to develop language and learn content (Szlyk et al., 2020).

Johnson and Johnson (2016) in their study with RIELs placed in elementary bilingual and ESL classes considered teaching RIELs referred to teachers ignoring family culture and social background as a missed opportunity to make learning relevant to ESL and bilingual students. They found this wrong approach as lacking cultural and social awareness and relevance of their diverse students. Johnson and Johnson (2016) defined teaching without cultural and family awareness as a deficit approach by ESL and bilingual teachers. It becomes the main obstacle for building learning over recent immigrant ELs' previous "social and cultural funds of knowledge." The concept of "funds of knowledge" was first investigated by Moll et al. (1992). Funds of knowledge understood as the social and cultural values that immigrant students bring with their families from their countries and communities of origin. Later, it was also supported by other scholars in collaboration with Moll and Gonzalez (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll et al., 2006). These researchers used their ethnographic studies about students of other cultures as a resource that could help guide and prepare teachers of urban and suburban schools, who were regularly confronted with teaching students from a different geographical regions of the world, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and sometimes considered low-income students with a different home language.

The basis of one of the studies consisted in analyzing the two social and cultural environments in which children of Mexican/Latino descent were exposed; the household and the classroom (Moll et al., 1992, 2006; González et al., 1995). The work was

developed over joint ventures between teachers and researchers to analyze these two separate entities, home and classroom, and find ways to incorporate and develop teaching practices and lessons that connected both places with their social and cultural processes and uniqueness for the benefit of the immigrant second language learners. The knowledge RIELs bring with them about their culture, family, home language, previous school and social experiences should be included for the design of relevant instruction in the mainstream content classroom (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 2016).

### ***Newcomers' Double Work and Individual Needs of Support***

NSELs imperatively need to rapidly advance in language acquisition and content mastering to become successful learners in their mainstream content classroom (August & Hakuta, 2005). As they arrive during their secondary school years, NSELs must do a double effort and work, learning a new language and content, to academically catch up to their English-monolingual counterparts (Briones & Tabernero, 2012; Skully, 2016; Martin & Suárez-Orozco; 2016). It is a double effort to master grade level content and achieve while simultaneously learning a second language to set themselves ready to navigate the exigencies of the secondary school years in the United States (Duff, 2001; August & Hakuta, 2005). It becomes a stressful demand for NSELs, especially in high school, to meet the required graduation credits to finish high school on time (De Velasco et al., 2016).

NSELs are confronted with other social and cultural challenges, as they try to adapt to a new learning system (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Iddings, 2005). The challenges are presented by individual needs for adaptation to public schools upon arrival

to the country. RIELs are not prepared to function due to the lack of social and cultural knowledge, on top of their difficulties with academic language skills. These students should be recipient of serious considerations about language learning, curriculum, and content instructional decisions (Duff, 2001; Short & Boyson, 2004, 2012; Skully, 2016). NSELs should be entitled to receive instructional accommodations, social and cultural adaptation supports to the new school settings and society as they enter public schools in the United States (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

Most educators are faced with the challenge of teaching and supporting NSELs with their needs of learning in the mainstream content classroom. The problem is that content teachers do not necessarily know how to provide effective support or authentic opportunities for the learning integration experience of content and language (Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). A matter of educational equity, which clearly suggest RIELs must be effectively addressed to provide the adequate resources and services for these students (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and to avoid the persistent academic deficits on the “inputs” of financial funds, curriculum planning and instructional delivery (Ellis, 1994; Faltis & Coulter, 2007).

In addition, the inadequate learning placement of Latino NSELs may quickly turn into inappropriate teaching and learning, as a constant inequality and inequity towards these students (Irizarry, 2018). Attending school at a large urban districts and schools without the necessary resources for language instruction and other social supports, Latino NSELs can easily fall through the cracks of unfunded schools (González et al., 2003; Irizarry, 2018). The lack of resources in low-income and mostly populated with minorities public schools is evident. It is a matter of schools with high populations of

students who are in poverty and identified as NSELs, most of them from Latino descent. A public system that systematically segregates and treats minority students with unintentional neglect due to their socio-economic status will continue to fail NSELs (Mather & Foxen, 2010). This should not be an acceptable educational practice. Partial or total absence of social and culturally relevant curriculum and instruction resources for newcomers, or inability to hire specialized ESL teachers will necessary reflect on the reality of mainstreaming students in core subject classes before the correct time, and without the adequate language and content supports (Irizarry, 2018).

Precisely on this topic, Valdés et al. (2014) advocated for “effective elements” to be provided at any secondary school with NSELs. Districts and schools should know and learn about immigrant students’ languages, places of origin, cultures, and social traditions. Implementing sensitive hiring practices that include staff members representing cultural similarities of the newcomer youth should be considered. Valdés et al., (2014), found that teachers who encourage secondary high school newcomers to use their native language and develop literacy, will eventually transfer their first literacy knowledge and skills into their content classroom. Support and opportunities for students to be independent learners of and start taking risks as they develop language and literacy skills in English should be fostered.

### ***Newcomers and State Mandated Tests***

Language development levels are still insufficient when RIELs are confronted with standardized tests. Federal and states accountability learning policies have established early testing for all students’ populations, including NSELs (Menken, 2008). Most states have developed academic standards to measure language proficiency and

academic performance for the last two decades as a response to the NCLB signed into law in 2001 and reaffirmed by the ESSA in 2015. The accountability system has been part of federal and states' political and legislative agendas responding to the general perception of having more accountability over public schools. NSELs' language development and proficiency, as well as academic progress have not escaped federal and state accountability systems (Abedi, 2002). NSELs are faced with state mandated assessments in Texas and in every other state. NSELs are with assessments considered by scholars as invalid ways to measure skills and knowledge for this population of students (Abedi, 2002; Saunders et al., 2013; Acosta, et al., 2020).

Summative annual standardized tests are implemented by states based on pre-determined grade level knowledge and skills, which may not reflect the real ability and academic capacity of NSELs (Saunders et al., 2013). Students are expected to demonstrate mastery of certain curriculum and knowledge skills by similar tests to those administered to English native students in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Assessments' results are considered as a factor of promotion or retention for students to the next grade level, or, eventually to be able to graduate from high school. The tests are part of a public education system adopted by legislators to measure and monitor learning at public schools and hold educational agencies accountable. NSELs must take tests measuring their academic achievement and performance on analytical knowledge and skills in different contents and in English despite still exhibiting a clear disadvantage with their English academic language proficiency (Bailey & Huang, 2011). The growing youth population of newcomers has been typically underscored by these unequal and lack of equity high accountability learning practices (August 2002; Saunders

et al., 2013). Early exposure to state-mandated assessments have historically carried negative connotations and effects for newcomer secondary students (Gersten, 1996; Menken, 2008, 2010). The tests results have penalized and stigmatized NSELs as students with *academic-deficits or gaps*, which is not the real picture of the NSELs' academic levels in their native languages (Szlyk et al., 2020). The underperformance is not necessarily their fault (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Gersten, 1996; Menken, 2008, 2010). The lack of proper and continuous language instruction, intervention and additional supports could be seen as the real causes (Collier, 1987, 1995; Short & Boyson, 2004, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2015).

The gap on the tests results of RIELs in public schools in the United States to be a direct product of a “heavily-based accountability education system, mandated and implemented by federal and state education laws with constant higher academic accountability standards” (Brisk, 2012). It is necessary to be cautious about wrongly labeling NSELs as students who underperform, when the truth is that the disadvantages under which these students are set by the public education accountability system is the real cause to this endemic problem Fry (2008). This researcher found that the four major states with larger populations of Latino NSELs: California, New York, Arizona, and Texas, were the most affected by these early common standardized accountability testing measures affecting RIELs.

### **Summary**

Any language development instruction is better than no teaching language at all (Saunders et al., 2013). RIELs at secondary schools are in need to develop listening and



speaking proficiency skills, language dimensions that are usually omitted in daily content instruction. Secondary content teachers' focus on content instructional delivery required by curriculum and measured by content-based academic accountability standardized assessments limits the time for ESL instruction for NSELs.

Language and literacy development researchers and theorists have found that academic English language instruction should be specific for NSELs. English phonetics and patterns of pronunciation; vocabulary and meaning of words; grammatic components covering orthography, semantic and syntactic structures; social and linguistic uses; and the production of an academic discourse need to be incorporated daily into content instruction and differentiated learning strategies for NSELs, according to the academic language framework elaborated by Scarcella (2003). Unfortunately, teachers of content concentrate most of their lesson content to activities that only demand reading and writing skills. English language researchers have recommended daily instruction of language for NSELs in the mainstream classroom to include reading, writing, listening, and speaking opportunities to practice and apply language (Collier, 1995; Scarcella, 2003; Genesse et al., 2006; Szlyk et al., 2020). RIELs need academic and social English instruction to be successful at school. A valid statement during times of higher academic standards and standardized performance tests measuring the learning and progress of all students in public schools.

Different academic and social factors have historically affected the ability for NSELs to develop appropriate language skills and academic English. This research examined the ways Latino NSELs perceived the language and social supports in the mainstream content classroom in high school, after they transitioned from a newcomer

program. The study aimed at giving voices to Latino NSELs to advocate for their additional desperately needed supports to really improve their academic performance and achievement as they finish and graduate from high school.

The literature discussed and contrasted multiple studies about secondary RIELs and theories of second language acquisition and social developmental for ELs. The literature covered the different aspects of a well-designed newcomer classroom or program as an ESL intensive learning setting. Specific considerations about socio-cultural adaptation, second language instruction, and the individual needs of adaptation and support for NSELs were discussed. Experiences and implications discovered by previous scholars about NSELs' transitioning to mainstream classroom were also presented.

The review of the literature covered in-depth aspects previously analyzed about language development, instructional methods, and techniques, as well as social-emotional needs of NSELs. The importance of teaching academic English to this population of students and literacy was equally discussed. Social and cultural relevance of NSELs previous assets in their first language and literacy, as the best predictors of authentic academic and social engagement with other peers were also presented.

The NSELs continuously coming into the country are bringing academic and social needs and challenges for leaders and policy makers. RIELs are going are entering a difficult and controversial immigration environment in the United States. Most NSELs are coming as unaccompanied immigrant minors (UICs) (López, 2021). They are crossing the southern border everyday with inexistent or limited family support. Latino NSELs are coming from rural regions of Latin-American countries, especially from the

Northern Central American Triangle conformed by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, where they may have been exposed to lack of basic social and public services, extreme poverty, and violence, including physical, emotional and psychological abuse. Latino youth are arriving at the United States public schools in the middle of highly charged immigration and racial socio-political contexts. This research brought the voices of NSELs to generate new considerations and recommendations to better support Latino NSELs with language acquisition and social opportunities to academically achieve and adequately interact with other peers. The purposive sampling of Latino NSELs and its narrative qualitative analysis and discussions, with implications for further research, leadership and policies formulation should be heard as a testimonial to indeed understand what needs to be design and proposed to continue with the adoption of national and local effective policies and leadership initiatives to better serve this significant and growing population of students enrolled in United States public schools.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

I describe in this chapter the methodology used to study the individual experiences of RIELs with language acquisition and social interactions in the mainstream English-monolingual content classroom in high school. I used descriptive data of language acquisition and academic performance and readiness, as measured by state assessments of the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) and the State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR/EOC), end-of-the-course content assessment. This data was analyzed to determine language proficiency and academic achievement of NSELs in high school at the large suburban district of interest and research school site. I used a qualitative interview methodology to observe and analyze the NSELs' language proficiency and academic learning in the mainstream classroom. The research implementation placed special attention to language acquisition levels and use of language within the academic contexts of the mainstream classroom, since it is in the monolingual English learning setting where NSELs receive daily grade level instruction. The Latino high school NSELs' targeted by the study shared in their individual dialogues with me their particular descriptions of their social interactions in their mainstream content classroom learning, the second aspect analyzed by this phenomenological research. Students responses helped me as a researcher to elaborate and compose a better picture of content learning, second language supports, and social interactions of this minority population of students, who continue to increasingly grow at public schools in our country.

### **Positionality Statement**

My positionality as a researcher on this subject of study was defined by my previous experience in high school as a former ESL student. I was enrolled during my senior year of high school in a public school in California, where I was mainstreamed in my core content courses without having enough social and much less academic language proficiency. Being an immigrant coming from Colombia, my biggest motivator was to learn English as a second language in a year to a level that I could take the test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) to be eligible for a foreign student visa to enter a junior college in San Diego. I had to do a double effort to learn language, while struggling with the learning of content in English during a time of my life I had no previous knowledge of English. I encountered myself navigating monolingual English courses only with content teachers who did not know how to address an English learner like me in their content courses. The daily struggle became a normal challenge and stress I had to live as a senior student in high school. I believe this individual difficult experience during the long year as a NSEL, where self-motivation and determination were my stronger motivators to academically achieve and learn my second language, helped me to decide as an adult researcher to study the Latino NSELs phenomena of learning in mainstream content courses and determine from their own personal learning experiences the type of language instruction, academic supports and social interactions as they navigate their first years of schooling in the United States. My own lived learning experience somehow became the main reason for me to give a voice to this special population of students, who are unfortunately still underserved or receiving the educational equity required for their academic success and social development as they graduate from high school. Being

cognizant of my subjectivity during the interviews was key to better understand the participants of my study. I provided a safe time and space for them to feel free to express their individual opinions and perceptions as they provided a detailed description of their personal experiences in their narrative stories obtained from the interviews. As a researcher, I strongly believe I was able to successfully relate and analyze their learning experiences with to tell about their daily learning and social interactions at the mainstream content classroom.

## **Methods**

I collected state standardized-tests results and language proficiency data of the district and school research site. I individually interviewed each subject participant of the study with the same set of questions designed as the primary instrument of qualitative data collection. I manually coded the interview data (Saldaña, 2009). I analyzed the data inductively to obtain a series of common themes, categories and codes, which were found in the responses shared by the NSELs about their self-perception and descriptions of the learning experiences in the mainstream classroom (Alhojailan, (2012). The individual interviews to NSELs focused on examining and describing language learning and social interactions of the participants in the core content courses of social studies, math, and science (Byrne, 2001). The interview instrument questions discussed the two central themes of the conceptual language instruction and social interactions framework that I presented as the rationale to implement the qualitative research (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

The qualitative phenomenological narrative of the NSELs' dialogues were the primary mode of data collection, complemented by the general descriptive content

achievement and language proficiency data sources, which I integrated for the triangulation of the inductive analysis of the information (Bhattacharya, 2017). The interview instrument was carefully crafted to conduct the qualitative inquiry to use with NSELs in this study.

### **Research Design**

The qualitative inquiry lens of the study helped to determine and describe the type and quality of social interactions occurring at English-monolingual learning as described by the interview participants. The NSELs' responses helped to have a better understanding about their English language levels of comprehension and use in core content subjects. Social communication and interactions with other peers in high school responded to the second research question of the study. A qualitative narrative methods design (Creswell, 2014) served the purpose of analyzing the narrative and image data obtained from the students' interviews (Appendix 1). I had to choose the single interview qualitative design due to the limitations set by the district and school research site. As a researcher, I was not allowed to conduct classroom observations or to speak to content teachers and adults. This lack of access was set as a condition to approve my research methodology protocol by the district and local high-school site officials. Revealing themes and categories were used as the basic research qualitative inductive analysis of the study. The data analysis resulted in specific codes for the discussion of the problem, findings interpretations and recommendations based on the research purpose. Table 1 shows the themes, categories and codes used for the inductive systematic analysis of the qualitative data.

**Table 1***Themes Categories and Codes*

Themes/Categories	Theme 1 The Newcomer EL as an Individual	Theme 2 Language & Content Learning	Theme 3 NSELs Social Interactions	Theme 4 The COVID-19 Factor
Codes	Self-perception of education	The content teacher's role		
	Self-initiative to learn English	The newcomer Learning Setting	Peers' interactions in the mainstream classroom	How NSELs felt about learning during the pandemic
	Self-motivation The content teacher's role	NSELs' Tutorials & Interventions One more teacher could help us	Times of frustration in the mainstream classroom	Limited technology knowledge & skills
				ESL regression in Latino NSELs

**Research Purpose**

The research analyzed individual perceptions and own experiences of Latino NSELs in their content courses in high school. Other researchers had previously performed rigorous phenomenological interview studies aimed at individual efforts to articulate life experiences of the subjects of research, using semi-structured interviews of their own personal stories inductively analyzed (Bhattacharya, 2017). The participants told and explained their own understanding of the learning process in their content classroom, where learning of content should be happening with the correct amount of exposure to a new language and academic content. Latino NSELs are constantly trying to make connections to prior native language, knowledge and skills with the new targeted language and content, based on their first language literacy (Collier, 1987; Thomas &



Collier, 2002). In the case of this research, the group of Latino NSELs had been previously schooled in Spanish, at public and private schools at their countries of origin. Voices of the participants in a format of in-depth interviews opened possibilities to determine ways to improve the learning instructional delivery and environment for NSELs after they have transitioned to regular English courses in high school.

Qualitative interview studies have been used for decades in social science to give voices to human experiences researched, adding to the scholarly work of better understanding humans' development and growth (Bhattacharya, 2017). Whether retelling personal stories and experiences, qualitative research has gained the attention and support of the social science scholars. Social researchers have empirically used interview studies in the past to find in valuable personal stories, once rigorously analyzed, data with categories and themes that have historically helped to interpret many social phenomena (Sandelowski, 1991; Wertz, 2011).

The stories told by NSELs were interpreted within a specific time and space during their learning in the mainstream classroom. This study must be understood as a source of discovery of personal school stories of a population of high school students, happening in a timeline of personal and valuable learning events. I interpreted the Latino NSELs' stories through the analysis of the data about language and content learning, as well as social interactions. It gave as a result social and culturally sensitive findings and recommendations (Sandelowski, 1991; Kim, 2015).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) perceive their English as second language instruction and supports received from content teachers in the mainstream classroom?
2. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) describe their social interactions with other English-monolingual students in the mainstream classroom?
3. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) believe that the COVID-19 Pandemic affected their learning?

### **Setting and Environment**

NSELs purposive sampling' interviews were done with RIELs attending Grant High School in Southeast Texas. The campus is a large comprehensive high school with a population of approximately 3,400 students. The high school has an ethnic composition as follows: 59 percent of the students are of Hispanic or Latino origin; 19.7 percent are African Americans and White 9.2 percent, while 9.6 percent of the student population is Asian. Two or more races are 1.6 percent of the students, 0.9% are Native Americans and 0.1 percent are Pacific Islanders. Of the total population of the school, 3,112 students, sixty-two-point nine percent (62.9) were identified as Economically Disadvantaged, 8.8 percent were English Learners, the target population of the proposed research, and 8.8 percent of the students were receiving special education services. The mobility rate for the 2017-2018 school year was 14.3 percent. The high school research site received the following Texas designations: Student Achievement, Student Progress, and Closing the Gaps. TEA set a scaled score of 60 or above for a school to receive the Met Standard

designations accountability rating. The school received the following scores in 2018, based on Texas academic ratings: An 82 overall rating score, a student achievement met standard of 82, 81 for school academic progress, and 83 for closing the gaps, among the different student populations. The high-school received five academic term distinction designations on Academic Achievement in English Language Arts (ELA)/Reading, Academic Achievement in Mathematics, Academic Achievement in Science, Academic Achievement in Social Studies and as being on Texas Top 25% of schools closing academic achievement gaps amongst schools in Texas with similar demographics.

The district population of ELs is composed by approximately 18,000 ELs or 15 percent of the total students. A 20 percent, or about 3,500 ELs, are secondary students. Approximately 900 students are newcomer ELs and near 80 percent or 3,000 students are classified as Latinos schooled for less than six years in the United States.

### **Participants**

I narrowed the study to capture the learning experiences of those NSELs in their second and third year of schooling, who are enrolled in mainstream core content courses. A letter of invitation was sent by the district and school officials to the targeted student population of the purposive sample: Mainstreamed NSELs in second and third year of schooling in the United States. I was able to contact the NSELs who accepted the invitation to participate in the study once a parental permission was sent back to the high school by the students willing to take part in the study. Individual interviews were scheduled according to students' availabilities after school. Nine students of the ten I selected and invited to be part of the study conformed the final purposely sample, meeting the criteria set for the qualitative study. The NSELs who accepted the invitation

participated in one Zoom individual interview for approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The nine interviews were done individually using only audio, as set by the district and school site research protocol. During the interview, the NSELs responded to questions about their learning experiences in the mainstream content courses and their individual perspective of social interactions with other monolingual English peers. As a general background and to better define the context of the research and the individual characteristics of the students' participants, the nine students equally shared personal and family information, as well as previous schooling at their countries of origin. The participants were NSELs enrolled in their second and/or third year of schooling in high school in the United States. They were all attending mainstream content courses at their high school.

### ***Purposive Sample***

Table 2 shows the composition of the purposive sampling of students interviewed. The purposely sampled, (Etikan et al., 2015), was used due to the nature of the qualitative study and the aimed population of interest for the implemented research. Latino RIELs who were first enrolled in a public school in the United States in a newcomer intensive language program and who transitioned by the second year of enrollment to the mainstream content classroom. The purposive sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2015) is useful to select students who meet a specific criterion of a qualitative research with a group of participants with common characteristics. In this study, the criteria were defined as for NSELs in their second and third year of instruction in the United States and who have participated in a newcomer program during their first year attending a public school in the country. The nine students were still developing English as a second language and

socially adapting to the new school, as they advance with their academic content courses in high school where they expect to successfully graduate.

**Table 2**

**High School Newcomer Latino ELs Purposive Sample Composition**

Student Name	Sex	Age	Time Living in the U.S.	Country of Origin	Previous Level at Country of Origin	School Level 1 <sup>st</sup> U.S. Year	Favorite School Subject	Self-Perception as Student
Kim	F	14	< 2 years	Honduras	MS	MS	Science & Math	Good Student
Sara	F	15	< 2 years	Honduras	MS	MS	Reading & Science	Average Student
Wilson	M	16	< 2 years	Honduras	MS	HS	Reading	Average Student
Jenny	F	15	< 2 years	Mexico	MS	MS	Math & Science	Good Student
Dalia	F	17	< 2 years	El Salvador	HS	HS	Math & Technology	Good Student
Yuli	F	16	< 2 years	Honduras	MS	MS	Math & Reading	A Struggling Student
Alex	M	14	< 2 years	Colombia	MS	MS	Math	Average Student
Valeria	F	18	< 3 years	Mexico	MS	MS	Math	Struggling Student
Noelia	F	16	< 2 years	Honduras	HS	HS	Math	Good Student

HS: High School

MS: Middle School

### Research Instrument

I implemented semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve open-ended questions. The interviews were framed by the conceptual framework of language instruction or supports in English, and social interactions in the mainstream high school content classroom. Descriptive ELs Texas language development and academic achievement data, combined with the inductive analysis of the qualitative data supported the production of an accurate discussion framed by symbolic interactionism (Bhattacharya, 2017) where the individuals, in this case the Latino NSELs, gave their

own individual interpretation of their learning processes and social exchanges based on their personal learning experiences in the mainstream content classroom. The district provided data for all the students in the district and the research school site. The district contacted students, since they did not approve for me, as a researcher, to directly contact and invite the 72 potential NSELs participants who met the criteria of second- or third-year enrolled students in a public school in the United States, and who participated during their first year of instruction in a newcomer program.

### **Unit of Analysis**

As described, nine NSELs enrolled for the 2020-2021 school year in an English mainstream content course in math, social studies, or science. Subjects were all in their second or third year of schooling and attend a newcomer inclusive program during their first year of school in the United States.

### **Study Participants**

I assigned a pseudonym to the nine Latino NSELs participants of the study to maintain their identities anonymous and keep the necessary research protocol confidentiality with students and minors, as subjects of research. However, the age and other personal description is listed in Table 2. The following is a brief introduction of each participant:

*Kim* came to Texas across the U.S.- Mexico border from Honduras in April 2019. She went to school for just three months in seventh grade, before coming to the United States. Kim came across the border as an unaccompanied immigrant minor (UIC), to meet with her parents, who were already established in Texas. She remembered it took about a month for her journey from Honduras until arriving to the United States. She left

Honduras in March 2019 and crossed the southern border in April 2019. Kim was placed in eighth grade in the newcomer classroom during her first year of schooling, which was more like a few weeks between April and May 2019. Kim had the opportunity to enroll in a summer camp for newcomers with the school district. She was placed in the newcomer program after that summer by LPAC decision, but only completed one semester and two months of learning at the newcomer classroom, since the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly interrupted the 2019-2020 school year. Kim liked to study science and mathematics in her school at her country of origin, where she attended classes in the afternoon, from 12:00 to 6:00 pm. Her teachers in Honduras used to tell her she was a very responsible student.

*Sara* came to the United States from Honduras in February 2019. She came across the southern border with her mother. She came to reunite with her father, who has been residing in the Texas since 2016. Sara considered herself very shy and afraid of speaking aloud, due to the negative experiences in the newcomer classroom during her first year of schooling. There, Sara experienced “bullying” from her classroom peers, when she tried to speak or read aloud in English. Sara only went to school up to sixth grade in Honduras. She was placed in eighth grade after entering school in Southeast Texas. Sara shared she had one very special friend, Julia, who helped her with her emotional and personal difficulties, as well as following instruction and language at school in the United States.

*Wilson* came from Honduras to reunite with his father who had been living in Texas for the last ten years. Wilson came across the border as an UIC and said this was a very difficult experience until he finally arrived at the United States. He is so happy to be living with his father, who suffered a major accident when a drunk driver ran over him while he was working near one of the highways in Southeast Texas. Wilson was doing

eighth grade in a rural village in Honduras and was placed in ninth grade upon his enrollment in high school.

*Jenny* came from Guerrero, Mexico with her mother. She is the youngest of three siblings and only girl. Her two brothers were already in Texas when she arrived in July 2019. Jenny did not have good memories of her time in the newcomer classroom. Jenny said that she experienced “bullying” since other students would pick and laugh at her. Jenny said she was not able to learn too much English during the first year of school in the United States. Sara shared that she was only enrolled for one full semester in eighth grade, before going to high school and started most of her classes in the mainstream classroom. Sara stated she has struggled with language and comprehending content during her lessons in the mainstream classroom. Jenny said she is thankful she has a friend, Daniela, who has helped her with reading and understanding English.

*Dalia* is the youngest of four siblings and only girl. She came from El Salvador with her mother, who went to bring her across the U.S.-Mexico border along with her oldest brother, who is also a RIEL in Grand High School. Dalia’s father stayed in Texas with her two younger brothers, who attend elementary school at Texas Pride Independent School District. Dalia was in ninth grade at her country of origin. She has been in the United States for less than two years since August 2019.

*Yuli* came from Honduras in February 2019. She shared that her experience coming to the United States was extremely difficult. Yuli said that studying in her mainstream courses has been very challenging for her, since she experienced interrupted schooling, after she stopped going to school at her country of origin when she was eleven years old. Yuli did not go to school until she came to the United States, where she was



placed at the newcomer classroom in eighth grade, since she was already fourteen years old. Yuli said she is now sixteen years old and that studying during this last two years has been very difficult for her. Yuli shared that she loved mathematics and learning English. She has had a very special friend since the newcomer classroom from Pakistan. They still have a good relationship and help each other in the two classes they have shared in high school.

*Alex* came from Colombia in South America. Her mother brought him during the summer of 2019. Since then, Alex has attended school during his first year in the newcomer classroom, and for his second year at Grand High School. He liked to play sports, especially soccer and basketball. He believed that practicing sports has helped him to make friends in middle and high school. Alex shared he was very scared during the first week of school of what was going to happen with his studies in the United States. Alex said that now is different. He said he has friends and is doing relatively well at school.

*Valeria* is eighteen years old and she came across the U.S.-Mexico border as an UIC in 2018 to reunite with her family. Valeria shared that all her other family members were already here when she arrived. She has been in schooled in the United States for less than three years. Although she started in ninth grade, and she should be in tenth grade, Valeria said that she spoke to her counselor in high school, who helped her for the school to accept her transcript for completing ninth grade in Mexico. Valeria was immediately promoted to tenth grade. She was a Junior in high school at the time of the research. She found school easier in the United States, as she remembered doing too

much homework in Mexico, where she said the courses were “más difíciles” [more difficult].

*Noelia* is in 11th grade at Grand High School and when she came from Honduras, she was in tenth grade. She was enrolled in the newcomer classroom during her first year of schooling in the United States. Noelia is a very outspoken teenager which has helped her to make friends. She is not afraid of speaking in English, even when other students do not understand her. Noelia shared that if they do not understand what she said, this is not her problem or affects her, although she did acknowledge that during her first months of schooling in Texas Pride ISD she used to cry because her peers could not understand what she was trying to say in English. Noelia arrived from Honduras in March 2019.

### **Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data was generated by the inductive and systematic analysis of the narrative that resulted from the responses of the audio, computer-based, individual interviews on Zoom. The interview study used open-ended and in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of nine Latino NSELs attending Grand High School in their second and third year of schooling in the United States. The purposive sampling of Latino NSELs was a representative group of the larger population of NSELs enrolled at the large suburban Texas Pride Independent School District, one of the largest in Texas. Due to the complexity of the analysis of the research problem, it was necessary to use preliminary language proficiency and academic performance data of the district and school to complement the analysis of the students’ phenomena.

Students’ interviews covered previous country of origin learning experiences, self-perception of school and education, and content learning and social interactions with

peers in the mainstream classroom. The interviews sought to understand the complexities of language acquisition and social interactions with other students, as determinant factors for the academic success for Latino NSELs (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2008; Collier, 1995, Thomas and Collier, 2002; Duff, 2001; Walqui, 2000, 2001, 2010; Scarcella, 2003; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Skully, 2016; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez Orozco, 2018). The descriptive testing data showed specific language and academic areas of concern, growth, and success for secondary RIELs.

The study gathered valuable information during the individual dialogues with the purposive sampling of participants. The study revealed a social, cultural, and academic reality from the individual socio-cultural perspective, values, and beliefs, which brought to the surface NSELs' unmet necessities of language instruction and social interactions with other peers (Bhattacharya, 2017). The Latino NSELs selected responded to twelve open-ended questions (Appendix 1) about individual perceptions of language instruction/supports received by content teachers, and their social exchanges with other peers in the mainstream classroom.

### **Data Analysis**

A key component of the data treatment was to maintain a systematic analysis of the data based on the conceptual language instruction or supports and the social interactions framework presented in the review of the literature. Raw interview data transcribed and coded was transformed into analysis units, exhibiting similarities (Table 1). The common themes were manually coded into categories. The categories produced specific patterns or codes which were analyzed and interpreted based on the narrative responses of the dialogue obtained from the human subjects of the research

(Bhattacharya, 2017). The perception of Latino NSELs about language and academic supports, plus their description of social interactions in the content classroom with English speaking students generated a set of categories and codes, which were inductively analyzed in a systematic manner.

I first transcribed the Spanish responses of the students. Then I translated the transcribed individual interviews to English transcriptions. Once the narrative of the oral responses was done, I started to do the manual coding of the themes and categories that were deducted from the students' responses to the 12 interview questions. Further break down of the themes produced the individual codes used to implement the systematic inductive analysis of the data (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Triangulation of the data was done through the analysis of the newcomers' academic performance achievement, language proficiency, and interview narrative data to correctly converge the information of the three data sources (Creswell, 2017). I utilized the TELPAS data provided to observe the evolution of the language acquisition according to this instrument during the years 2017, 2018, and 2019 for ELs. These set of data was the last released official language proficiency assessment available for the district and high-school research site. I also utilized the academic achievement results of the STAAR/EOC data during the same three-year period available, 2017-2019. It is important to have in mind that not all ELs contained in the STAAR/EOCs data are NSELs. The language and assessment data helped me to analyze the results of NSELs compared to other students' populations who took the same set of standardized mandated state tests: White, African American, Asian, and Latinos. This last sub-group was

composed in its majority by monolingual English students and Latinos who had already exited the bilingual or ESL learning setting at the elementary school level.

By using the descriptive data, I was able to triangulate these two sets of information with the qualitative findings to verify the language proficiency and academic achievement underperformance as NSELs' learning indicators directly related to the themes and categories found through the qualitative analysis of the individual student's interviews data. The systematic analysis of the data allowed to obtain phenomenological interpretations, which could be complemented by future researchers interested in replicating the conceptual academic language instruction/supports and social interactions framework, as the main methodological procedure.

### **Academic Rigor**

Academic rigor was sought by accurate treatment of the descriptive and qualitative data with a systematic inductive analysis. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured by the academic rigor of research: Confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data analysis process and findings were also discussed with the faculty sponsor throughout the course of the study to increase rigor.

### **Limitations**

The impossibility to access students directly was the first limitation found during my research study. District and school authorities had a strict protocol to contact students as well. They contacted students directly not allowing me, as a researcher, to initiate any direct contact and extend a direct invitation to the 72-potential NSELs participants, who met the criteria of second- or third-year enrolled students in a public school in the United States, and who participated during their first year of instruction in a newcomer program.

A second limitation was caused by restrictions set by the district and school authorities for me as a researcher to implement only a single virtual Zoom interview and to record only the participants' voice. I was not allowed to do video conferences recordings during students' interviews.

One interview per research participant and without possibilities to conduct a second interview for additional questions was also a limitation to my research. The extension or clarification on some of the topics discussed during the one and only voice interview on Zoom constituted an additional limitation. This limitation was according to the district authorities necessary to maintain the safety of the students during the time of the research implementation in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another limitation was the impossibility to do classroom observations because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety protocols and recommendations that included no visitors to school campuses adopted by local school district authorities during the academic year 2020-2021 were the main reason for the restricted access to the students' subjects. In general, the limitations to do in-person interviews or have direct access to students, and impossibility to implement focus-groups limited the probability to expand the interviews to other students, of the 72 targeted and identified as meeting the research criteria as research subjects.

This research was initially scheduled to be implemented during summer 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced school closures for the 2019-2020 academic term and the adoption of restricted physical access to students. I could not access any student as a researcher to conduct interviews around May or during the summer of 2020. The implementation of the research was delayed. Students were out of reach by district and

school authorities at home during the isolation days of the pandemic. The impossibility to have access to other potential research participants who otherwise would have participated in the study was a limitation. The study was implemented Fall 2020, which imposed a time limitation. A last limitation, only Latino NSELs in high school participated in the study, excluding other RIELs from other countries at regions of the world different to Latin America.

### **Summary**

I presented the methodology of the qualitative interview research done with NSELs. I hope the personal experiences of Latino NSELs served to inspire and contributed to other social researchers on public education social issues about leadership and public policies that directly impact the wellbeing of one the most vulnerable school populations rapidly increasing in the United States. I hope to sincerely have captured the interest of educators, school administrators, curriculum and instruction designers and any other educational local leader. Also I believed this study may inform legislators at the state and federal levels to make the correct decisions and to continue to advocate and pay the accumulated “educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) we owed to our thousands of RIELs and their immigrant families in the United States. The purpose of this study was to identify and possibly formulate ways to better support Latino RIELs in the mainstream content classroom in high school. Latino NSELs who continue to academically grow in the new reality they face during their secondary school years in the United States.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I first discuss the reality of the recent immigrant Latino youth who participated in this study before moving into the research findings and results. Newcomer Latino secondary ELs, who I will refer to as “NSELS” for brevity throughout this chapter, have increasingly enrolled at public schools throughout the United States during the last seven years. This is due in great part to the increased immigration of family and unaccompanied minors who have arrived through the southern border, especially after 2014 (Keller et al., 2017; Venta & Mercado, 2019). This social phenomenon is explained by the thousands of Central American families and young immigrants (mostly from an area known as the Northern Central American Triangle composed of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador) arriving to different port of entries located across the extensive U.S.-Mexico border (Venta & Mercado, 2019). The minors and their families are usually escaping poverty, violence, land expropriation, drugs and political extremist groups, or territorial wars, amongst many other social, economic, and political causes (Keller et al., 2017; Massey, 2020; Venta & Mercado, 2019). The United States has historically implemented ambitious programs and initiatives to intervene in the social, economic, and political instability of these nations. However, programs, financial aid, and actions have fallen short of changing the permanent flow of youth immigrants arriving from Latin-American countries (Keller et al., 2017; Massey, 2020). A lack of basic social and health services adds to the migration of thousands of Central Americans (Massey, 2020).



The participants of this qualitative study represent the thousands of immigrants who came to the United States with one of their adult legal guardians, or by themselves. Unaccompanied minors or with one or several family members, migrate by foot to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Many of these young Latino immigrants are seeking asylum and have become increasingly more common during the last decade (López & Fernandez, 2020; López, 2021). Through their personal stories, the NSELs study participants shared their many fears and feelings of uncertainty towards their new school system and the strange new culture. They also expressed feelings of hope and optimism for a better and brighter future in the United States.

The students interviewed were still developing second language knowledge and skills. Significantly different social and cultural contexts are now part of their daily routines when compared to previous social and learning settings at schools in their countries of origin. A social and cultural adaptation, which has become more difficult and complex to them because of the COVID-19 pandemic, has completely changed the ways students interact and socially exchange with each other at schools. Students' behaviors have been molded differently over the last year and have been defined by a different set of social norms focused on individual isolation and social distancing as common expectations of behavior.

The students in this study were all originally placed in a newcomer classroom in Texas during their first year of learning, in either eighth or ninth grade. Every participant in this study remembered with certain nostalgia how they were supported and kindly treated by their newcomer teachers. Some of them were placed at a discretionary higher-grade level, based on age instead of on previous years of schooling or the immediate past

grade at their country of origin. The nine students interviewed expressed that although they were initially vulnerable and scared, they rapidly felt welcomed and supported by the teachers in their newcomer classroom. According to the students' stories, both learning the English language and being individually supported were always set as priorities in the newcomer classroom. Teachers and support staff in the newcomer classroom understood the individual needs of the newcomer students and taught them language and content in a way they could understand and learn. However, newcomer learning was scheduled to end by the end of their first year of schooling. At that time, after spring break in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly interrupted their specialized language learning program and supported content instruction.

The participants transitioned to the mainstream content classroom for the 2020-2021 school year. This would have been the second or third year of schooling in the United States for these NSELs. According to their standardized STAAR/EOC and TELPAS results, which I discuss further in the chapter, lack of adequate language and content intervention were common. However, beyond the obstacles from their short time of schooling in the United States, the NSELs expressed their confidence in becoming better and stronger learners every day as they progressed through. NSELs also shared their struggles with language and understanding of content as unanimous findings during the individual dialogue. They continued to develop English skills and learn academic content with difficulties, but they all felt confident of a brighter academic future. The upcoming sections present the findings of the study. The inductive analysis of the relevant data collected identified shared themes or categories, which were discussed and

analyzed by the conceptual language instruction/supports and social interactions framework, once manually coded.

### **Organization of Findings**

Findings are discussed in this chapter using three different main sections. In *Section 1*, I discuss State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course exams (EOC) for the Texas Pride Independent School District and its research school site, Grand High School. The academic performance EOC data is mandated by the state and administered by public schools to all students from third to 11<sup>th</sup> grades. I chose to use STAAR/EOC data because it reflects the different levels of students' academic performance per core or mainstream content course. The data are already classified by students' group or subpopulation, and based on race, ethnicity, and home language. I only presented percentages of students' scores for EOCs divided into four race/ethnicity categories of students and one additional assigned to ELs to facilitate the analysis of the descriptive data, and to maintain the main focus of the analysis through the conceptual framework used as main analytical framework for the discussion of the results.

I also decided to use the students' EOC assessments' results in this section, since the tests are directly aligned with the curriculum and instruction to be taught and learned in the content subjects. In addition, state STARR/EOC evaluations are at the core of the Texas public education's accountability system, which is based on grade-level knowledge and skills that must be appropriately taught by teachers and learned by students. The EOCs are administered at the end of the school year to all high school students enrolled and required to take main content courses in language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics, from ninth to 11<sup>th</sup> grades (TEA, 2017a). The EOC's assessment results

include the purposive sample of students selected for the qualitative interview study. The data present the academic performance of the total district and high school populations on their EOCs. The data show ELs students who took the mandated Texas EOC tests during the 2017, 2018, and 2019 school years. The EOCs are required for any student in the state of Texas to graduate from high school. The STAAR-EOC descriptive data presented for the purpose of this study only include the following mainstream English monolingual high school courses: Algebra I, Biology, and U.S. History.

In *Section 2* I share the Texas English Language Proficiency System, TELPAS, language assessment results for the NSELs students enrolled at the district and research school site. The data will show the proficiency levels of all the total ELs enrolled at the district and research school site. Ratings and proficiency levels in the four language domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing of ELs are presented. The data will show TELPAS results for the EL second- and third-year students tested during the period of 2017 to 2019. The STAAR-EOC and TELPAS 2020 were not considered for the descriptive data of this study. The State mandated assessments were not implemented during the spring of 2020 at public schools in Texas due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced to school closures mandated by the Texas governor.<sup>1</sup>

In *Section 3*, I discuss the main findings based on the inductive analysis of the qualitative data collected from nine virtual interviews performed to a purposive selected sample of high school NSELs. The selected sample of nine Latinos and ELs were enrolled in their second and third year of schooling following the criteria presented in the methodology implemented during the research. The qualitative interview instrument was

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<sup>1</sup> Texas STAAR test requirements waived due to coronavirus outbreak. Texas Tribune, March 16, 2020

aimed at learning about the levels of second language learning and supports, and social interactions with other peers in the mainstream core courses. Through the qualitative data collected, I aimed to identify the academic language and literacy supports received in these courses, as well as the level of social interactions that occurred during the last year of schooling for 2019-2020 and during the first semester of the current 2020-2021 school year.

For the analysis of the data, I observed the descriptive results of NSELs in STAAR and TELPAs. Once the data gave me several conclusions, I used the qualitative categories, themes, and codes of the qualitative data to filter these through the testing and language proficiency factors. A triangulation of the three data sources helped me to do an empirical inductive analysis and determine several assumptions that could be explained based on the descriptive sets of data and the narrative data obtained through the interviews with the participants of the study.

### **Section 1: STAAR/EOC Descriptive Data**

STAAR/EOC results are measured and organized in four different categories or outcomes: *Did not Meet*, *Approaches*, *Meets* and *Masters* grade level (TEA, 2017a). Students scoring at the *Masters* category are “expected to succeed” in the next grade level or course with little or no academic interventions (TEA, 2017a). The students with a score at the *Masters* range are considered students who have developed the ability to think critically well and to apply knowledge and skills in different familiar and non-familiar contexts (TEA, 2017a). Students whose subject test results are at the *Meets* category are likely to succeed at the next grade level course but may need some short-term targeted academic interventions (TEA, 2017a). Students scoring at their

STARR/EOC *Meets* range demonstrate ability to think critically and to apply the tested skills and knowledge, but only within familiar contexts. Students with a score in the *Approaches* range are students expected to succeed at the next grade level course. However, students will only receive planned and consistent targeted interventions that review some of the skills and knowledge objectives studied during the previous school year. These students still need more exposure and practice to the curriculum taught previously (TEA, 2017a). The students at the *Approaches* category have not necessarily demonstrated the ability to think critically and only applied knowledge and skills taught and learned in familiar contexts (TEA, 2017a). Students at the *Did not Meet* category are considered to have failed, and the state recommends for them to retake the course.

### ***STAAR-EOC Algebra I.***

Table 3 shows the last three academic years' EOC Algebra 1 performance results for Texas Pride Independent School District's total population and four groups by race/ethnicity and English learners. Per state assessment data, the category of Latino is also identified as Hispanic. It is also important to note that not all English learners or ELs are Latinos. These students may be identified and classified by federal and state standards as of one or more races/ethnicities. For example, Latino and Black or White Hispanic. One separate category or group is assigned to ELs. Equal organization of the data by students' group will be observed for all the tables included in the descriptive data for STARR/EOC assessment results. African American students will be noted in each table showing the results of the STAAR/EOC assessments as AA or African Americans.

**Table 3***Algebra I – 2017-18-19 STAAR/EOC District Results by Group*

Group	# Tested			Did Not Meet			Approaches %			Meets %			Masters %		
	2017/2018/2019			2017/2018/2019			2017/2018/2019			2017/2018/2019			2017/2018/2019		
TP ISD	9120	9140	9372	7	7	7	93	93	93	71	73	76	45	49	54
White	2281	2237	2267	3	3	3	97	97	97	84	85	87	62	65	69
Asian	833	787	866	1	1	1	99	99	99	91	94	95	77	82	86
AA	1666	1737	1750	11	11	12	89	89	88	59	60	64	26	33	38
Latinos	4083	4076	4184	8	9	8	92	91	92	65	67	72	35	40	46
English Learners	573	589	630	26	25	23	74	75	77	29	35	39	11	14	18

*Note.* TPISD = Texas Pride ISD

Looking at the results of the Algebra I end-of-the-year EOCs, ELs underperformed significantly lower compared to the other population categories. In general, an average of 25% EL students in the district *Did Not Meet* the passing score standards set by the test and failed during the previous three academic terms. A 75% of the ELs averaged a scored at the *Approaches* level of the STAAR test during the three-year-period analyzed. Students who scored at this level, which were the majority of ELs, required planned and consistent targeted interventions, including individual interventions targeting second language development of skills. The interventions were also necessary for ELs to learn content knowledge objectives taught and studied during the previous school year. The interventions are defined by Texas legislation as necessary for ELs to succeed in the upcoming school year (TEA, 2017a).

Although there was a consistent growth in the percentage of students achieving at the *Meets* and *Masters* range in the EOCs for every students' population, the percentage of ELs still showed to be lower than any other sub-group. Significantly lower percentages of ELs scored at the same two ranges, *Meets* and *Masters*, despite the consistent growth in the percentage numbers observed for all the students.

Table 4 exhibits the Algebra 1-EOC percentages of students per score level during the last three years at the research site.

**Table 4**

*Algebra 4 – 2017-18-19 STAAR/EOC Research Site Results by Group*

Group	# Tested 2017/2018/2019			Did Not Meet % 2017/2018/2019			Approaches % 2017/2018/2019			Meets % 2017/2018/2019			Masters % 2017/2018/2019		
Grand High School	577	615	585	15	17	15	85	83	85	48	53	56	18	19	24
White	33	39	37	12	13	8	88	87	92	64	67	62	21	23	38
Asian	21	21	24	10	5	4	90	95	96	67	71	78	43	48	63
AA	134	134	139	18	16	17	82	84	83	42	43	47	10	13	20
Latinos	378	409	365	8	9	8	92	91	92	65	67	72	35	40	46
English Learners	84	95	94	33	32	29	67	68	71	21	29	35	5	8	15

The percentages of students scoring at the different assessment levels were similar for the district. Thirty percent of the ELs, on average, failed the test (*Did not Meet grade level academic standards*), while 70%, on average, of the ELs' scores came back at the *Approaches* level during the three-year period. In apparent correspondence with the district level data, the five student groups, including ELs, showed growth in the percentages of students scoring at the *Meets* and *Masters* levels even though ELs' percentages were considerably lower compared to the other district's student populations. ELs continued to show low academic performance with very small percentages of students (5%, 8%, and 15% respectively) scoring at *Masters* level for the 2017-2019 academic terms.

**STAAR-EOC Biology.**

Table 5 exhibits the EOC Biology test results for all high school students during the last three academic years at Texas Pride Independent School District.



**Table 5***Biology 2017 through 2019 EOC District Results by Group*

Group	# Tested 2017/2018/2019			Did Not Meet % 2017/2018/2019			Approaches % 2017/2018/2019			Meets % 2017/2018/2019			Masters % 2017/2018/2019		
TP ISD	9060	9406	9104	8	7	6	92	93	94	72	74	76	31	35	38
White	2288	2293	2233	3	3	2	97	97	98	88	88	90	50	52	56
Asian	816	847	817	2	2	3	98	98	97	91	92	92	59	66	69
AA	1652	1737	1739	11	11	10	89	89	80	59	63	65	17	20	24
Latinos	4042	4248	3997	11	9	9	89	91	91	64	66	70	20	25	28
English Learners	618	687	701	39	35	30	61	65	70	21	23	27	3	3	6

*Note.* TPISD = Texas Pride ISD

EOC-Biology results for the district showed newcomer ELs scoring at lower levels than their counterparts. During the three years, an average of 35% newcomer ELs did not pass the test, while approximately 66% of these students obtained an *Approaches* result. On average, 25% of ELs met the EOC Biology testing standards, while 4% of them received a *Masters* test report. Table 6 contains the EOC Biology performance results.

**Table 6***Biology 2017 through 2019 STAAR/EOC Research Site Results by Group*

Group	# Tested 2017 / 2018 / 2019			Did Not Meet % 2017 / 2018 / 2019			Approaches % 2017 / 2018 / 2019			Meets % 2017 / 2018 / 2019			Masters % 2017 / 2018 / 2019		
Grand High School	802	869	797	16	12	9	84	88	91	53	60	68	18	21	27
White	74	72	62	15	7	3	85	93	97	69	78	94	36	33	50
Asian	70	72	77	4	4	1	96	96	99	89	90	90	50	63	60
AA	154	163	156	19	15	9	81	85	91	40	55	58	8	17	11
Latinos	488	540	477	17	13	11	83	87	89	50	55	65	14	14	24
English Learners	103	120	121	50	37	28	50	63	72	12	16	26	0	3	4

Similar scores are observed in the data in Table 5. At the high school research site, an average of 37% of the population did not pass the test and 75% of the newcomer ELs scored *Approaches*. ELs who scored at the range of *Meets* on Biology-EOCs showed steady growth, but less than 30% did in 2019 while 20% over the previous two academic years scored at the *Meets* range. None or a minimum percentage of ELs obtained a *Masters* score on their biology EOCs at the research site, based on the last three years of official data.

### ***STARR-EOC U.S. History.***

Table 7 exhibits the U.S. History EOCs percentages of students scoring at the different levels of the state mandated assessment.

***Table 7***

#### ***U.S. History 2017 through 2019 STAAR/EOC District Results by Group***

Group	# Tested 2017/2018/2019			Did Not Meet % 2017/2018/2019			Approaches % 2017/2018/2019			Meets % 2017/2018/2019			Masters % 2017/2018/2019		
TP ISD	8531	8401	8590	3	4	3	97	96	97	83	84	86	55	59	63
White	2399	2220	2163	1	2	2	99	98	99	93	92	94	75	75	80
Asian	775	893	850	2	2	2	98	98	98	93	94	94	73	77	82
AA	1417	1390	1545	6	6	6	94	94	94	74	76	79	41	44	48
Latinos	3521	3659	3766	5	5	3	95	95	97	76	79	83	44	49	55
English Learners	378	441	427	26	27	21	74	73	79	34	35	41	10	10	16

*Note.* TPISD = Texas Pride ISD

Like the other EOC results for Algebra and Biology shown in Tables 3 through 6, ELs underperformed in the last three years of recorded official scores for the Texas EOCs at the district level. Average scores were comparable to the two previous tests discussed. Approximately 25% of the ELs students did not meet the academic essential knowledge

and skills standards. On average, 75% of ELs scored at the *Approaches* range of the test. Results of percentages for students at the *Meets* and *Masters* levels of scores were also similar to the other two EOC tests on Biology and Algebra I. Additionally, 36.6% of EL students scored at the *Meets* level of the assessment, while only 12% scored in the *Masters* range.

Table 8 shows the EOC-U. S. History percentages of students scoring at the different assessment levels as measured by the state tests.

**Table 8**

*U.S. History 2017 through 2019 STAAR/EOC Research Site Results by Group*

Group	# Tested 2017/2018/2019			Did Not Meet % 2017/2018/2019			Approaches % 2017/2018/2019			Meets % 2017/2018/2019			Masters % 2017/2018/2019		
Grand High School	725	715	697	6	5	3	94	95	97	76	79	81	43	47	54
White	68	66	68	6	3	3	94	97	97	90	89	84	69	65	71
Asian	85	69	72	0	0	0	100	100	100	92	94	97	61	71	85
AA	129	134	147	8	6	6	92	94	94	67	75	75	33	42	42
Latinos	424	433	394	6	5	3	94	95	97	73	77	79	37	43	50
English Learners	54	58	52	22	29	28	78	71	72	39	24	31	11	5	12

Observing the U.S.-History EOCs presented in Table 7, it is evident that ELs continued to show lower performing scores on this content test across the board. Approximately 26% of the ELs, about 1 of every 4 students, did not meet academic standards, or failed to pass, for the state's standardized evaluation. Seventy-four percent, on average, of the ELs scored within the *Approaches* range. Very low percentages of ELs achieved at the higher levels of the assessment compared to the other populations. Approximately 31% of newcomer ELs' scores came back at the *Meets* level, while less than 10% of ELs, on average for the three-year testing period, obtained a numeric score within the *Masters* range.

The descriptive data generally showed ELs scoring at much lower levels of STAAR/EOC academic performance than their counterparts. In Algebra I, ELs scored at the *Did not Meet* standards range at much higher percentages: 20% did not pass their summative evaluations at the district level while even a higher percentage of ELs, 30%, failed at the research site. None of the other student populations included in the descriptive data for Algebra I presented such high percentages of students not meeting the accountability assessment standards. In the *Approaches* category, ELs continued to underperform compared to their counterparts included in the descriptive data. A 10% to 20% less of ELs were able to score in this range. The numbers of ELs scoring at the *Meets* testing standards range were not much better. A 25% to 30% of ELs at the district and research site, respectively, showed lower scores within the ideal academic performance passing rate set by the state of Texas.

The ELs' Biology performance on the standardized test is even more critical, showing 30% or more of this population failing the evaluation. Depending on the year observed in Tables 3 and 4, at least 30% of the newcomer ELs *Did not Meet* the standards at the district level, while half in 2017 failed to pass the Biology EOC. The test scores rating also showed fewer ELs, 20% at the district and 30% at the research, scoring at the *Approaches* range. Only 27% of ELs reached the *Meets* performance scoring level, while at least 65% of the other populations reached the *Meets* range. In some cases, 90% of the subgroup scored at Meets higher level of academic performance.

U.S. History was the most critical EOC test showing ELs scoring at much lower levels than their peers classified in other sub-. The district's three-year-data showed that over 20% of ELs failed the U.S. History test. At the research site, pass rates were even

worse. Thirty percent of ELs did not pass the test. The other four population categories only showed single digits of students' percentages who did not meet the testing standards. Although at least 70% of ELs were able to perform at the *Approaches* level on their U.S. History EOCs, this percentage is still low when compared to the other groups who showed consistent percentages of over 90% of its populations with test results at the *Approaches* range. This contrast is observed on both district and campus levels, U.S. History EOC students' percentages by categories. The *Meets* range contained in Tables 5 and 6 show only 30% to 40% of ELs, whether looking at the district or the campus, reaching this higher results range. African Americans had low percentages of students, but still considerably higher than the ELs on this level of state accountability standards.

I presented the descriptive data on the EOCs assessment to have a better understanding of the performance of ELs based on the learning received in the mainstream content courses. The results of the descriptive academic achievement data showed consistent underperformance of ELs on EOCs. It is important to differentiate at this point that not necessarily all secondary ELs are necessarily newcomers in their second and third year of instruction. However, the totality of the ELs are contained in the descriptive ELs data category for the state assessments. The findings still showed measures of state standardized tests as common educational conditions affecting the ability for recent immigrant ELs and other non-newcomer ELs to become successful learners and perform at the skills and knowledge levels required by state pre-set academic performance standards, designed with English native students in mind (Abedi, 2002; Butler & Stevens, 2001).

English monolingual students presented in the data at the district and high school levels showed consistent and acceptable gains in their performance with the annual academic knowledge and skills content evaluations. In contrast, ELs data consistently showed much lower percentages of ELs scoring at the *Meets* and *Masters* brackets of the core content assessments. Causes for ELs' visibly lower academic achievement on state standardized tests might be explained by some of the responses shared by the ELs in this qualitative study, who underlined a common lack of content understanding in the mainstream classroom due to insufficient language (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Short & Boyson, 2012). Language proficiency levels of ELs will be the next set of data I present.

## **Section 2: TELPAS Language Proficiency Descriptive Data**

The TELPAS exam was designed by the state of Texas to measure and keep a record of the English learning levels of students enrolled at the state public schools. It was also implemented by the TEA in 2004 as an instrument to provide data that could identify the individual language learning process and assess the language acquisition of students in the grades K-12 registered at the state public school system (Collier & Huang, 2020). TELPAS is an English as second language assessment test administered to over a million of ELs enrolled in public schools in Texas. The evaluation directly impacts the way ELs instruction is designed and implemented. Curriculum and instructional decisions are made based on TELPAS language proficiency results. Most school districts make decisions with TELPAS data about language plans, funds, programs and needed interventions., which directly affect ESL instructional delivery by public school districts, based on state-developed language acquisition assessments as TELPAS in Texas (Collier & Huang, 2020). The TELPAS language proficiency and development assessment are

administered online by most large public-school districts. Less affluent, small districts, and rural schools in Texas administered the paper version of TELPAS to students. In Texas, ELs also called LEP or ESL students are assessed during early Spring.

TELPAS tests are designed to reveal the different language proficiency levels for every EL student at every language domain. The comprehensive assessment classifies students results in four proficiency categories: *Beginner*, *Intermediate*, *Advance* and *Advance High* (TEA, 2020). *Beginner* ELs result are very limited in academic language skills and are just developing social language at its first stage (TEA, 2020). ELs receiving an *Intermediate* assessment result generally exhibit more social language fluency in familiar contexts, while the academic language is still very limited and requires of consistent interventions and supports in order to comprehend the English language commonly used in learning academic content at school. Therefore, considerate language interventions and supports by specialized ESL teachers and support staff in the classroom must be provided (TEA, 2020). ELs scoring at the *Advanced* TELPAS proficiency level have a high understanding of social language, and have developed some academic language skills and literacy, although still weak. These students, as suggested in the past by previous scholars, will equally require of ESL oriented learning environments with well-structured and consistent language teachings and content support in the monolingual English classroom (Walqui, 2000). ELs scoring *Advanced High* on their TELPAS language assessment are exited from ESL specialized language instruction they should be receiving in their language arts and main core curriculum, to become monitored ESL students for two additional school years with their second language learning skills. These are ELs considered to possess an acceptable level of on grade level academic English,

with minimum language support or additional interventions in the content classroom needed (TEA, 2020).

As mentioned before, TELPAS measures ELs' language knowledge and skills in the four domains of language: Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening refers to the ELs' ability to listen and understand the second language in that mode. Speaking, the capacity and skills for ELs to properly use spoken language with less or more fluency. EL's comprehension of English reading texts through a variety of genres is measured by the Reading segment of TELPAS (TEA, 2020). The last domain, writing, is the only aspect of the Texas language assessment evaluated by an ESL teacher rather than by the state testing services provider. Schools are required by state guidelines to train teachers on how to rate a collection of essays written by a random group of ELs. The writing portion of the language assessment is subjective, based on the teacher's rating score, in a scale of 0 through 4. The teacher as a rater will need to give a score based on domains and indicators received during their specialized holistic rating methodology training. Main reason for the state to have TELPAS writing assessments evolved during the last ten years to become more rigorous for educators to evaluate their EL students. The writing portion of TELPAS measures the ability and skills of ELs writing narrative and expository English texts.

Table 9 shows the TELPAS ELs' district language proficiency results in the four language domains, after being evaluated at the end of their second and third year of enrollment in the Texas public school district. It is important to remember these students were set at a newcomer classroom with accelerated ESL language instruction, especially aimed at developing social language skills, although academic language exposure was



given through reading and writing lessons as well as other core and elective courses at the end of middle school or in their first year at the high school research site.

**Table 9**

*TELPAS Assessment Results – Texas Pride ISD – 2017-2019*

Texas Pride District	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year ELs %			3 <sup>rd</sup> Year ELs %		
<b>Listening</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	3	8	12	0	2	3
Intermediate	21	33	29	6	15	14
Advance	35	35	32	19	44	31
Advance High	42	24	27	74	40	52
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	6	5	9	1	4	5
Intermediate	29	29	33	9	34	31
Advance	38	34	38	27	48	42
Advance High	27	12	21	63	13	22
<b>Reading</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	10	12	17	8	8	9
Intermediate	29	37	24	30	36	33
Advance	36	27	35	40	33	32
Advance High	24	24	35	22	23	26
<b>Writing</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	5	8	7	3	2	4
Intermediate	31	31	33	18	21	24
Advance	40	36	35	39	39	38
Advance High	24	25	25	41	27	35
<b>Composite Score</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	5	3	5	2	0	1
Intermediate	26	33	33	17	21	23
Advance	41	43	39	43	57	49
Advance High	28	21	23	38	22	28

NSELs' language proficiency data observed in Table 9 showed higher percentages of scores in Listening and Speaking skills by the NSELs with a higher number of students scoring at the *Advance* and *Advance High* proficiency levels. This

results reflect what I discussed in the literature about language development: Students learning a second language develop first social language skills, listening and speaking, during their first one to three years of schooling in the United States (Cummins, 1981; Collier, 1995; Collier & Thomas, 1989, Scarcella, 2003). Most second and third year NSELs in the district scored at the *Intermediate* and *Advance* reading and writing proficiency levels. The percentages performance contrast with the social language skills higher number of students scoring at the *Advance High* proficiency indicator. This demonstrates that ELs take a longer time to develop academic language and second literacy as previously presented in the literature (Cummins, 1981, Scarcella, 2003). The composite score showed in the last part of Table 9 is elaborated from the language proficiency ratings of the four domains. The composite rating weights are equal, determined by 25% of each of the language domains. I would like to highlight from the table data that most of the second year NSELs obtained a composite score within the *Intermediate* and *Advance* language proficiency levels. On the other hand, most third year NSELs scored at the *Advance* and *Advance High* language proficiency levels on the summative state assessment.

Table 10 contains the percentages of students scoring at the four proficiency levels per language domain at the high school where the research was implemented. It also exhibits the *Composite* score which reflects a proficiency rating provided in a single overall level of English language of ELs. However, a significant number of NSELs is still using language at the lower levels, of proficiency, *Beginner* and *Intermediate*, as measured by the state assessment.

**Table 10***TELPAS Assessment Results – Grand High School – 2017-2019*

Grand High School	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year ELs %			3 <sup>rd</sup> Year ELs %		
<b>Listening</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	6	20	3	11	6
Intermediate	31	42	24	9	22	35
Advance	37	45	34	19	45	50
Advance High	33	6	22	69	6	9
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	8	6	2	3	3	1
Intermediate	29	15	22	19	22	26
Advance	43	61	49	28	58	32
Advance High	20	18	27	50	17	41
<b>Reading</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	8	6	15	3	3	9
Intermediate	38	43	39	25	36	47
Advance	33	43	32	59	47	29
Advance High	21	9	34	13	14	15
<b>Writing</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	2	9	10	6	0	3
Intermediate	33	31	29	22	14	9
Advance	33	34	49	28	53	65
Advance High	33	26	21	44	33	24
<b>Composite Score</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	2	3	7	3	3	0
Intermediate	33	36	29	19	19	20
Advance	38	48	37	34	61	62
Advance High	27	12	27	44	17	18

Table 10 data shows most of NSELs with *Intermediate* and *Advance* language proficiency after being in a school at the United States for two years, as measured by TELPAS. Greater percentages of NSELs obtained an *Advance* or *Advance High* in their language proficiency levels after three years of schooling, which shows most of them advancing at least one level in their language proficiency skills after one year of learning

at school. However, looking closely at the data, both groups of NSELs showed academic language proficiency mostly at the *Intermediate* and *Advance* levels, based on their Reading and Writing language ratings. ELs oral language listening and speaking components, as measured by TELPAS, defined the foundation for a student's social language development. The data showed significant higher number of NSELs proficiency at these two language domains, with higher percentage of students scoring at the *Advance* and *Advance High* English proficiency levels. The data then reaffirmed the theory of second language development discussed in the literature (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2008), which argues social language skills developing first in second language learners. The data in Table 10 showed social language indicators present at higher levels than those of academic language proficiency. As discussed in the review of the literature Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (Cummins, 2008) are developed first by ELs, as they take more years of schooling and exposure to academic content and direct language instruction for them to develop academic language and literacy skills in English. I will discuss next a summary of the data based on the Texas TELPAS English language proficiency ratings for ELs in second and third year of schooling, as presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Based on the descriptive 2019 TELPAS data, there is the considerable number of ELs still showing beginner and intermediate levels of English proficiency in the four language domains of *listening, speaking, reading, and writing*. In *listening* and *speaking*, social components of language, 40% of second year NSELs enrolled at the district are still showing high levels of skills at the beginner and intermediate levels. An equal percentage of 40% of second year NSELs are also exhibiting the same proficiency levels

for the academic language components of reading and writing. The panorama at the research site is not too different, since 44% and 24% of the newcomer still show *Beginner* and *Intermediate* ratings in their *speaking* and *listening* language domains. For *reading* and *writing* proficiency levels, the numbers are more critical, since 54% of the second year NSELs population showed a reading proficiency level of *Beginner* or *Intermediate* on the language summative evaluation. 39% these students also showed having either *Beginner* or *Intermediate* skills for English writing. A TELPAS composite score, which compiles the average ratings for all the NSELs tested, still shows between 36% and 38% of the second year NSELs, at the campus and district totals respectively, scoring at the two lowest levels of English proficiency, *Beginner* and *Intermediate*, after receiving two years of instruction in a public school in Texas.

Higher percentages of third year NSELs scored at the *Advance* and *Advance High* English levels of proficiency, based on 2019 TELPAS ratings, for the four language domains of *listening*, *speaking*, *reading*, and *writing*. This is a positive outcome observed in the descriptive data. However, still large percentages of NSELs in this group show *Beginner* and *Intermediate* proficiency levels in their second language. The most important numbers to highlight are: 17% of these students still with *Beginner* or *Intermediate* listening skills, while a larger number of them continues to exhibit spoken language deficits, since 36% scored at the *Beginner* or *Intermediate* skills of English-speaking proficiency in the large public-school district, during 2019. A significant percentage of third year NSELs at the research site obtain a rating in 2019 of *Beginner* or *Intermediate* in *listening*, 41% and *speaking*, 27%, respectively. I am still not sure how according to these TELPAS results, some NSELs can speak better than what they can

listen in their second language. The other important figures to take into account, is, one, the very high percentage of NSELs, 56% of them, still scoring at the *Beginner* and *Intermediate* levels of *Reading* proficiency skills, while only 12% obtained a *Writing* rating level of a *Beginner* or *Intermediate* ESL student. Once again, it is quite interesting to interpret these data where students can write better than what they can read in their second language. One possible explanation could be attributed to the fact that *Writing* rating scores are subjectively given by ESL language teachers on campuses, who receive TELPAS training and calibrations every year on how to rate the writing essays and collections submitted by the NSELs.

The three-year period TELPAS data showed inconsistencies in the percentages of NSELs obtaining proficiency levels in the Listening and Speaking language domains. This is observable when comparing to newcomers' percentages of proficiency in Listening and Speaking between their second and third year of schooling in the United States. These inconsistencies may be explained from the possibility that some newcomer students developed more reading and writing skills based on spending more time developing literacy skills on these two domains and less time developing and practicing their English social language with other peers and adults at school. In other words, NSELs after their second and third year of instruction, once immersed in the mainstream classroom, received a heavier component of English language teaching in *Reading* and *Writing* than opportunities to practice and develop their social language skills in the *Listening* and *Speaking* domains.

To determine the importance of language proficiency for NSELs academic success, let us take a look at the data after newcomers have been exposed to more social

and academic language, at the end of their fifth and sixth year of schooling in the United States.

**Table 11**

*TELPAS Assessment Results – Texas Pride ISD – 2017-2019*

Texas Pride District	5 <sup>th</sup> Year ELs %			6 <sup>th</sup> Year ELs %		
<b>Listening</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	4	4	0	1	2
Intermediate	3	26	28	2	21	21
Advance	15	47	44	11	51	46
Advance High	82	23	24	87	28	32
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	5	7	0	6	13
Intermediate	5	29	25	3	31	37
Advance	18	55	40	15	55	39
Advance High	76	12	28	82	7	12
<b>Reading</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	6	4	5	6	4	7
Intermediate	21	25	32	21	25	38
Advance	49	40	33	49	40	39
Advance High	23	31	30	23	31	16
<b>Writing</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	1	1	3	1	1
Intermediate	8	15	15	18	15	12
Advance	32	34	36	39	34	35
Advance High	59	50	48	41	50	52
<b>Composite Score</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	0	0	2	0	0
Intermediate	7	19	21	17	19	26
Advance	44	55	51	43	62	54
Advance High	51	25	27	38	19	19

NSELs seemed to have scored at higher levels of proficiency during the 2017 TELPAS results. More than 85% of the students scored at the *Advance* an *Advance High* levels on the *Listening* and *Speaking* English language domains. Results were not

different for the Reading and Writing sections of the language acquisition tests. In average 80% of the NSELs showed Advance and Advance High levels of proficiency in English. The Composite score reflected more than 90% of the NSELs acquiring levels of Advance and Advance High in their second target language.

**Table 12**

*TELPAS Assessment Results – Grand High School – 2017-2019*

Grand High School	5 <sup>th</sup> Year ELs %			6 <sup>th</sup> Year ELs %		
<b>Listening</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	19	0	0	2	2
Intermediate	0	19	28	0	27	26
Advance	10	44	44	15	59	55
Advance High	90	19	24	85	11	18
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	6	17	0	12	17
Intermediate	10	31	25	1	27	27
Advance	20	50	33	19	54	44
Advance High	70	13	25	80	7	12
<b>Reading</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	10	13	0	6	5	6
Intermediate	10	50	50	28	49	43
Advance	20	13	42	55	41	40
Advance High	70	25	8	11	6	11
<b>Writing</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intermediate	40	38	8	3	6	11
Advance	0	31	58	32	40	48
Advance High	60	31	33	65	54	31
<b>Composite Score</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Beginner	0	0	0	0	1	0
Intermediate	30	44	25	6	22	27
Advance	10	38	42	45	66	57
Advance High	60	19	33	49	12	15



A similar trend is noticed with NSELs at the research site. Between 70 to 75% of the NSELs reached a level of Advance or Advance High in their Composite scored in the four domains of language. This is a clear indication that NSELs required time and language instruction in their English language arts courses to become literate in their second language. However, the data also showed that the equivalent to 2 Or 3 out of 10 NSELs, approximately 20 to 30% in their fifth and sixth year of schooling in the United States, still exhibit needs of language proficiency development in their social and academic language skills (Tables 11 & 12). Even at their fifth and sixth year of schooling, NSELs will still require of instructional accommodations or language direct instruction modifications during their learning at mainstream content courses in high school. Students will still be monitored NSELs in their language development in high school, per Texas LPAC requirements. NSELs will also need to be entitled to additional language supports. However, most of them by the time of their second and third year of schooling in the United States do not have five or much less six years of education in the PK-12 school system. Some of the NSELs will have already graduated from high school even before their fifth or sixth year of public school in the country.

### **Qualitative Data: High-School Newcomer ELs Participants' Perceptions**

NSELs enrolled for the first time are initially assessed for English language knowledge. Lack or minimum English knowledge or proficiency skills will result in a recommendation for placement in the newcomer classroom with specialized accelerated English language curriculum and instruction. By the end of the first year, RIELs transitioned to receive instruction in mainstream content and elective courses, just like any other student at their high school. After doing a systematic analysis of the qualitative

data obtained during the interviews, several themes, categories, and codes were identified to respond to the three main research questions:

1. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) perceive their English as second language instruction and supports received from content teachers in the mainstream classroom?
2. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) describe their social interactions with other English-monolingual students in the mainstream classroom?
3. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) believe that the COVID-19 Pandemic affected their learning?

It was through the narrative of those themes that I decided to discuss the findings, having in mind the conceptual language instruction support and social exchanges framework used to formulate the relevance of this research. The main analysis was centered around the importance of NSELs developing academic language and social skills as necessary factors for academic success (Cummins, 1997; Collier, 1995; Scarcella, 2003; Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014). The analysis of the data was discussed in five general themes: NSELs' self-perception of education, their individual language learning processes, perceptions of language and content instruction, social interactions, and the effects in their learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional categories and codes identified within the main themes were also discussed.

### ***Self-Perceptions of Education***

Despite the challenges and difficulties NSELs experienced as they arrived at a new country and an unknown learning environment, NSELs perceived their possibilities

to receive an education as their most important asset. During their individual learning experiences, the nine study participants expressed valuing school beyond the daily challenges and difficulties they confronted with school during their short time attending public schools in the United States. NSELs stated that they consistently struggled to fully understand instruction delivered by content teachers. Participants seemed to agree that content teachers in high school mainstream courses focused exclusively on teaching subject lessons and do not do any explicit language instruction or follow language accommodations.

The nine high school participants were still developing their second academic language and lack grade level literacy skills in English. However, they were all enrolled in mainstream content high school courses at the time of the study. Overall, NSELs strongly believed that their most important immediate priority and self-responsibility was to do their best at school, and to overcome their own language barriers and learning difficulties to comprehend content.

Related to this idea of NSELs' priorities on school, Sara, a 15-year-old RIEL from Honduras, discussed her perception of school in Honduras versus in the United States saying:

Mi mamá siempre me ha dicho que si vine aquí es porque tengo que echarle ganas y tratar de hacer lo mejor por aprender inglés y obtener buenas calificaciones.<sup>2</sup>

[My mom has always told me that if I came here, it is because I can do it and need to put out my best effort to learn English and obtain good grades at school].

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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I provide all the participants' quotes in Spanish first. I then provide follow the quote with a translation in English within brackets. This was done to share the students' words as authentically as possible.

Similarly, Kim, a 14-year-old from Honduras, shared that her mother told her, “Hay que echarle ganas hija y claro que tú puedes.” [You need to put out your best effort daughter and of course you can]. This type of expression commonly reflects the strong will of many Latino immigrants who believe that with consistent effort and sacrifice any life goal can be achieved. This could be interpreted as NSELs individual, cultural, and familial assets they bring from their countries (Yosso, 2005).

Kim also stated that she enthusiastically woke up and got ready in the morning to go to school:

Siempre era buena estudiante en Honduras. [I was always a good student at school in Honduras and my teachers told me so]. Siempre me esforcé por tener buenas calificaciones. Por lo tanto, yo seguía progresando, aún incluso cuando era difícil de entender a los maestros y practicar independientemente en la clase.

[I also strived to maintain good grades. Therefore, I keep going and making progress, even though it is difficult for me to understand the teachers sometimes and when we need to practice independently in the classroom].

By this statement, Kim clearly showed her strong will to give her best and continue to learn despite the challenges found in the content classroom where she felt supports were not adequate for her individual learning needs.

Sara was in ninth grade and had been in the United States for less than two years. When Sara arrived, she was placed in eighth grade during the 2019-2020 school year due to being 14 years old at the time of arrival. The school placed Sara at the end of middle school, jumping her from sixth to eighth grade, after a prolonged two-year interruption in schooling back in Honduras because of her family’s economic difficulties. Sara stated,

“Me gustaba la escuela y siempre iba hasta que mi familia no pudo mantenerme.” [I loved to go to school but I stopped going to school when my family could not afford it anymore]. Sara said that she was doing well with school, but that she only did up to sixth grade when she was 11 years old. Sara loved school but she admitted that she had struggled trying to understand teachers in her mainstream content classes.

Yuli is a 16-year-old from Honduras. She was the second NSEL interviewed who experienced interrupted schooling in her country of origin. Yuli always enjoyed studying and going to school but said that it had been difficult for her to study in English here. Yuli commented: “Tenía once años y paso un tiempo muy largo hasta que pude venir aquí a los Estados Unidos a vivir con mi mamá. Ahora tengo 16 años.” [I was 11 years old when I did sixth grade in Honduras and that affected me because a long time passed before I was able to come here to live with my mom. I am now 16 years old].

The remaining six participants stated similar individual self-motivation and interests for school, despite their short learning placement in the newcomer classroom, with specialized ESL language and supports for their individual needs of comprehension. As with Sara, Kim and Yuli, age was the most determining factor to be placed at the time of enrolling in a U.S. school, even more so than their previous school grade or level of education at their country of origin.

### ***Self-Motivation and Academic Engagement.***

Self-motivation was studied previously by other scholars who found this component to be useful when trying to teach newcomer students, especially those at the secondary school age (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Lou & Noels, 2020). NSELs need self-motivation to maintain a high engagement when trying to do the double

work of learning language and content (Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012). Academic engagement for NSELs happens as a direct result of the high motivation levels they bring into the mainstream classroom. Beyond the “struggling” and challenges they may face with their daily learning in the mainstream classroom, their high self-motivation directly affects their level of engagement with their new language and content learning (Short & Boyson, 2012). These two elements directly interacted with the language learning and social development conceptual framework presented as the focus of this study. Research participants expressed high levels of engagement at their new schools despite the multiple barriers set by language, and despite not being able to fully understand instruction in the mainstream content classroom. They all enjoyed going to school in their countries and cities of origin, some in Mexico, Central, and South America. Jenny, a 15-year-old from Mexico, Dalia, a 16-year-old from El Salvador, and Alex, a 14-year-old from Colombia, all shared that before coming to the United States, they were attending what they described as very good schools in their countries of origin. For example, Dalia stated:

Yo era buena estudiante en El Salvador y me encantaba estudiar e ir a la escuela. Estuve tres años en una escuela privada y después fui a una pública que era muy buena. En la escuela privada, mis maestros me enseñaban inglés y era una escuela con mucho prestigio.

[I was a good student in El Salvador, and I loved to study and going to school. I was three years in a private school and then went to a public school that was very good. The private school I went in El Salvador had a great prestige of being a good school, and the teachers were very good, and they taught me English].

Dalia shared that she liked school back in El Salvador. She said she enjoyed her school peers and socially interacting with them. The English teacher only taught Dalia in English. Dalia stated that her teacher at the last school she attended in El Salvador never spoke in Spanish in class. She said that the school had special courses or electives students could take every week, which included up to five different shops after school. Dalia stated that she took technology, English, and art in the shops. Dalia considers herself as a self-disciplined and devoted student with high levels of motivation for learning and school. Dalia considered herself as a NSEL who wanted to focus on studying and being successful at school. Her experiences show a different picture of the educational background of NSELs that is often painted in education from a more deficit perspective (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

For Jenny, a 15-year-old from Mexico, school was very important before she came to the United States. She considered herself a good student back in Mexico. Jenny loved to study and going to school. She shared that: “Me gustaba la escuela en mi país, disfrutaba con mis amigos y tenía muchos en México.” [I liked school. I enjoyed sharing with my friends and I had many friends at school in Mexico]. Jenny, like the other eight participants, enjoyed going to school in her country of origin and had peers and friends who she always interacted with socially in her native language. The motivation and engagement of Alex towards school had always been part of his priorities. He said:

Estudié en Colombia en un colegio público e hice hasta séptimo grado. Me gustaba estudiar en Colombia, tenía muchos amigos y era bueno en matemáticas. [I studied in Colombia in a public school. I liked school. I did up to seventh grade. I enjoyed studying in Colombia. I had many friends and I was good in math].

The self-motivation and academic engagement were still present for NSELs as they entered school in Texas. They had special interest to be academically successful at school.

Learning the English language at the proficiency level needed to carry themselves successfully at school and remain academically engaged seems to be one of the common denominators for the study participants. Dalia, a 17-year-old junior in high school from El Salvador, said:

Práctico inglés todos los días. En la clase de “newcomers” no lo usaba mucho.

Casi todos éramos latinos y platicábamos español. Pero empecé a hablarles en inglés poco a poco. Todavía estoy muy motivada en aprender inglés y estudiar en la escuela. Creo que el inglés me va a ayudar muchísimo.

[I practice English every day. When I was in the newcomers’ classroom, I did not use English too much. Most of us were Latinos and spoke Spanish. But when I started meeting other students at school then I started using English with them and speaking to them frequently. I was and still believe I am very motivated to learn English and to study at school. I believe English is going to help me a lot].

NSELs like Dalia seemed to be eager to learn at school and learn English to be successful in life. For Jenny, learning English was part of her greatest motivation and engagement at school. She believed she was doing well at school because she had been making progress with her English language skills and felt she was making progress with her second language. In general, RIELs talked with enthusiasm about their interest in academics and their commitment to be engaged in their high school courses, despite their language



struggles and not yet having fully developed academic literacy in English. A recurrent priority expressed was to learn English well and become more successful in high school.

Quality of education was also important to the NSELs. Two major recurring elements kept reappearing during the data analysis: A strong self-motivation and a positive self-perceived value of education. Both factors were rated as fundamental by all the study participants, as they kept driving the individual conversations around these two necessary aspects for their academic success in high school.

### **Language Learning**

Since arriving to the United States, language learning for the NSEL study participants had mainly occurred in three main learning settings: During the first year or months of instruction in their newcomer classrooms; at their homes or in their own spaces and on their own time; and in the mainstream content classrooms.

#### ***The Newcomer Learning Setting***

As discussed in the literature review, NSELs are usually placed in a newcomer classroom with an intensive ESL language-based learning curriculum and instruction delivery aimed at rapidly transition RIELs to regular mainstream content classrooms (Short & Boyson, 2003, 2012; Skully, 2016). Eight of the study participants were enrolled in a newcomer classroom during their first year of instruction in this country, but this first exposure to learning in the U.S. was suddenly shortened for them by almost one semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic closing schools. The only student who received a full year of learning in the specialized newcomer classroom was Noelia, the 18-year-old from Mexico. For the others, despite the abrupt ending of their first year of schooling, their learning experiences in the United States were very positive for the most part.

Out of the nine participants, six were first enrolled at the middle school level, while the other three initiated in high school. The students felt welcomed and supported in the newcomer classroom with the language and learning content. Under the newcomer learning inclusive program, the students spent at least half of the instructional day learning English as a second language with opportunities to practice their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. When taken to a different classroom for math, science, or social studies taught by a second content teacher, one of the teachers would go to the mainstream content classroom with the NSELs to support them with the language and comprehension of instruction. To receive their elective courses instruction, an in-class support paraprofessional was assigned to the newcomers to assist with language and content instructional needs.

Dalia came in July 2019 from El Salvador. The 17-year-old was first enrolled in the inclusive newcomer program offered at her high school. Dalia remembers her time in the newcomer classroom as a special opportunity to learn while being supported. Dalia said:

Lo hice muy bien porque ese programa me ayudó mucho, me enseñaban con detalles las cosas grandes y pequeñas, preparándome bien para la prepa.

[I did well because that program helped me in a great manner, they taught me with details, large and small topics, preparing me the best they could for high school].

Dalia said that she did very well in the newcomer classroom because the teachers always took the time to explain and deliver the lessons in a slow pace so she could follow and understand. Dalia shared that she felt that the teachers took the time to explain without

rushing. She said this method made it so much easier for them, as ESL students, to understand.

For Wilson, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade newcomer student from Honduras who was placed in ninth grade, the newcomer classroom was a safe place. Teachers taught English and content well. The NSELs also helped each other with empathy and for their common benefit. Wilson shared:

En mis clases del primer año, todos trabajábamos juntos. La maestra nos asignaba en grupos y nos ayudábamos. Cuando alguien sabía algo primero, me ayudaba y si yo lo sabía primero, yo le ayudaba a los demás. Nos ayudábamos unos a otros en la clase de newcomers.

[When I had classes during that first year, we all newcomers worked together. The teacher had us assigned in groups to help each other. When I knew about something first, I helped the others, and when the others knew first, they helped me too. In other words, we helped each other in the newcomer classroom to be able to successfully do the classwork].

Kim, a ninth-grade student at the high school, shared a similar learning experience in the newcomer classroom while at her middle school where she arrived in 2019. Kim said:

Me sentía especial y apoyada. Me enseñaban lenguaje y vocabulario y sentía que mi maestra quería ayudarme y la otra maestra asistente también. Me sentía especial, distinto a las clases regulares aquí en la preparatoria.

[I felt special and supported. I was taught language and vocabulary and I felt the teacher wanted to help me and the teacher assistant as well. I felt I was special,

different to the other classrooms where I have been since my first year here in high school in regular classes].

The newcomer classroom helped RIELs in this study, at least based on their own individual perceptions. Scholars have considered inclusive newcomer ESL programs to be beneficial for the acclimation of new immigrant students as they enter formal schooling in the United States (Short & Boyson, 2012; Crooks et al., 2020). Being grouped by language skill levels, being properly taught with intense ESL instruction, and with scaffolding of curriculum all seem to be effective for their support and language progress (Gersten 1996; Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). The study participants considered that the slow-paced instructional methods used by their teachers during their first year of schooling were extremely helpful.

### ***Self-Initiative to Learn English***

All study participants also felt that teaching ESL should be an instructional obligation for high school teachers. The nine-high school NSELs believed that during their years of learning English in the United States, their own self-initiative to learn English is what has helped the most with developing their new language skills after leaving the newcomer learning environment. This finding is aligned with what previous researchers have identified as lack of continuity in the necessary teaching and learning of a new language for NSELs in the mainstream classroom (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Short, 2002; Iddings, 2005).

Kim, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade student from Honduras, experienced difficulties communicating in English with other peers due to her heavy accent. She said that she has

helped herself by doing simple things on her own, like reading, listening to English radio, and watching television channels in English. Kim shared:

Escucho música en inglés, hablo con mis parientes en inglés y veo televisión en inglés. También leo libros en inglés y trato de familiarizarme con inglés hablado.

Hablo con mis primos. Ellos solo hablan en ingles porque nacieron aquí.

[I listen to English music, speak to my relatives in English and watch English television. I also read books in English and try to familiarize myself with spoken English. I practiced with my cousins and I still do. They are native English speakers and that helps me].

Jenny, the fifteen-year-old from Mexico currently in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, does something similar. Jenny shared:

Yo veo programas de televisión en inglés y trato de escuchar música en inglés tanto como puedo. Siempre estudio en mi recámara y trato de ponerme los audífonos con música en ingles mientras hago mi tarea.

[I watch English TV programs and try to listen to English music as much as I can. I always study in my room and try to wear my headphones with English music while I do my homework].

NSELs did whatever they could, even taking responsibility on their own, for their second language learning needs. Making progress with social language was underlined as important for each participant.

Dalia, the 17-year-old from El Salvador who likes math and technology, believed that English is essential to make academic and social progress at school. She shared, “Estoy muy motivada a aprender inglés como segunda lengua y estudiar en la escuela.” [I

am very motivated to learn English as second language and to study at school.] Similarly, Daniela, the 18-year-old junior who took part in the study, shared: Practico inglés con mi hermano en la casa. En la casa, mi hermano me ayuda a aprender inglés dejándome practicar con él” [I practiced English with my brother at home. At home, my brother helped me to learn more English by allowing me to practice with him.]

Daniela also used the internet to learn and practice more English and to look at images, pictures, and graphics to better understand the new words and how they are used in different contexts. “De esa forma, puedo entender mejor en inglés”. [In that way I can understand more English] Daniela concluded.

The nine recent immigrant high school students agreed that learning English as a second language requires daily actions on their own to improve their abilities to use the language inside and outside the classroom. “Hablo en inglés tanto como pueda.” [I speak in English as much as I can], said Yuli, one of the Salvadoreans in 9th grade at the high school research site. Yuli explained that her and a classmate from Pakistan support each other in class. They spoke in the gym during PE and talked to each other in English. Having trust and being able to build relationships based on respect was another important finding during the dialogues with the NSELs.

### ***The Family Role***

The family has a very important role for NSELs as a primary support system to learn English and continue to be motivated to learn the new language. The participants referred to their families as being fundamental in providing opportunities and adequate space and time to practice and learn English. Participants stated that they regularly communicated in English with other relatives, such as aunts, uncles, and cousins, who

were raised in the United States or for whom English has become their dominant language. Sara commented that she practices English with her family and cousins who already know English and who prefer to speak in English. Sara shared, “Me ha ayudado significativamente a mejorar mi inglés hablado.” [It has helped me significantly to improve my spoken English]. Noelia is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, is 16 years old, and when she came from Honduras, she traveled only with her mother across the border. Her father has been living in the United States during the last 5 years. Noelia stated that her father prefers to speak to her in English. She explained that he tells her that doing so can help her learn how to pronounce words and practice trying to eliminate her accent. David, who arrived from Colombia in January 2019, said that since his first year of school in eighth grade he has tried to speak English to his dad. When he first came from Colombia, he traveled with his mom. His dad has lived in the United States for 15 years, so he knows English. David said that he always tried to speak to his father in English, and his dad has always encouraged him to do so. Alex believed speaking and practicing language with his father has helped him with his listening and speaking skills, as well as to improve on pronouncing words.

Families of the newcomer participants found it important for their child to take part in this study. When I spoke to them about their children’s participation in the research, every Latino legal guardian expressed that it was important to them for their child to be in this study since they considered the education quality of their children a priority. This was a perception that was also sensed through the voices of the Latino NSELs who participated in this qualitative study. The students all expressed being thankful for the constant support of their parents as they navigated the first years of

schooling in the United States. Education is the most important priority that the participants of this study shared as the foundation for their success in this country, their second home.

### ***Language Learning in the Content Classroom***

NSELs strongly agreed that language learning requires additional teacher support and efforts to teach language and vocabulary besides content, and for them to continue developing the four domain language proficiency skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in the content classroom. As previously discussed in the literature, second language developing is key to the learning of RIELs and it takes time beyond one year in a newcomer language specialized classroom (Cummins, 2008; Collier, 1995; Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014; Short & Boyson, 2012; Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). Similar to previous qualitative research, the participant NSELs only received content instruction in the content classroom, but not language instruction (Genesee et al., 2006; Saunders et al., 2006). It is important to remember that newcomers who took part in the research were still developing language proficiency in the four domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as presented in the preliminary TELPAS data assessment results and by previous language development theorists (Cummins, 1981; Collier, 1995). The NSELs shared that most teachers invited them to attend tutorials to review content concepts and to help them better understand the content with a one-on-one instructional approach. However, the participants agreed that none of their content teachers taught language as an integrated component of learning in their main core high school courses. ESL good teaching practices and strategies demand of special training and additional planning and collaborating with specially trained ESL teachers who have developed the necessary



skills to integrate content and language instruction (He & Lin, 2018). Although NSELs who attended the tutorials after school benefited from this common after academic intervention, most NSELs expressed that they perceived this as not being enough for them to academically succeed in their courses by obtaining high grades. This could be explained by previous researchers who considered the approach to biliteracy in the content classroom as a priority to properly teach NSELs (Hopewell, & Escamilla, 2014).

In the mainstream content classroom, language is still developing with or without support (Schleppegrell & O'Hallaron, 2011). All the NSELs included in the qualitative study reported still seeing themselves as developing their English language skills. However, the supports were not sufficient or did not exist according to their individual perspectives. Jenny, a 15-year-old who came from Mexico two years ago when she was still in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, was placed in eighth grade at her first school in Texas. She was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of this study. For Jenny, understanding language in her content classroom had become a major and daily personal struggle. Jenny shared:

Todavía tengo dificultades tratando de entender y aprender todo en la clase. A veces no entiendo mis maestros y ellos no pueden ayudarme porque no saben cómo ayudarme con lenguaje.

[I am having still issues trying to understand and learn everything in class. Many times, I do not understand my teachers and they cannot help me because they do not know how to help me with language].

Language and instruction support in a consistent and daily basis could have helped her to effectively learn content in her mainstream classroom. Unfortunately, per her own

statements about language instruction or help offered by her content teacher, the reality was quite different.

Dalia, who only did a full semester of ninth grade and is now in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, stated:

La clase donde tengo más dificultades tratando de entender es la de química, porque nunca estudie química antes en mi país de origen y todo es nuevo para mí. Además, hay palabras que son muy difíciles para mí de recordar.

[The class I have more difficulties trying to understand is chemistry because I never studied chemistry in my home country before and it is all new to me.

Besides, there are words that are too difficult for me to learn and remember].

This sounded like the concern expressed by Dalia, her junior newcomer school peer.

Yuli, the 16-year-old from Honduras who stopped going to school when she was 11 years old, experienced a major disconnect in her ninth-grade world history content classroom.

Yuli shared:

Historia es muy difícil de entender para mí. Siento que no estoy aprendiendo porque el maestro va muy rápido y las lecciones son de otras culturas que no conozco. Trato de trabajar y entender, pero no puedo porque es muy difícil y el contenido es de culturas que no conozco.

[History, I say it is too difficult for me to understand, like I feel I cannot learn the same in my content class because the teacher goes too fast and the lessons are from other cultures. I do not know anything about and although I try to do my work I cannot and I believe my grades are not that good in World History because I cannot do the work the teacher ask me to do].

For Wilson, a very outspoken RIEL, he never received help in Chemistry from the teacher. He shared that in his opinion, his Chemistry teacher did not really teach. There were times the teacher simply played videos of other countries or movies with subtitles in Spanish to translate what they were talking about in the video. That is the way the teacher helped the NSELs. Although the teacher may have had good intentions about students being able to read in their native Spanish language while watching the video, the embedded ESL instruction needed was not happening. Teachers should prepare and plan lessons for content that adds parallel activities that introduce English vocabulary to allow NSELs to better understand the content (Jaffe-Walters, 2018). Doing so introduces truly meaningful and well-thought ESL activities and strategies (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). ESL teaching was not happening; only content facilitation that was not adequate for NSELs.

Sara also experienced interrupted schooling in her home country. She said that she was struggling in ninth grade with algebra, world geography, and biology. At the time of the study Sara was still not doing well and not getting good grades, per her sharing:

No me está yendo bien porque no entiendo bien. No entiendo geografía universal ni lo que se relaciona con el mundo. No entiendo y es muy duro porque todo lo estoy haciendo en un computador. No entiendo el contenido. En biología estoy mejor porque en Honduras me gustaba la biología, pero en algebra, como en matemáticas me iba mal, no entiendo matemáticas.

[I am not doing well because I do not understand too much. In world geography and what is related to the world I do not understand too much of that either. I do

not know, and it is difficult for me because I am doing everything on the computer, and I do not understand the content well. In biology I am understanding a little more because in Honduras I really like that class and here I am learning about the same, but algebra, since I was doing so bad with math in Honduras, then I am not doing too well I do not understand math].

Most of the study participants pointed out that their teachers had not realized that they were newcomer learners and simply looked at them as another student in their content courses. This caused for the NSELs to not to be treated as ESL students. Previous research had found that educators of RIELs must deliver quality and culturally relevant instruction that provides science, math, and social studies content knowledge, and they must consider the needs of NSELs for developing reasoning and problem-solving skills as they begin to produce an appropriate grade level literacy discourse (Collier, 1995 Carhill et al., 2008; Cammarata & Haley, 2018; Faltis, & Coulter, 2007; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2018). As recommended by Valdés et al. (2014), newcomers need to become autonomous learners who feel valued and become independent thinkers who feel confident to function and interact with other students and their teachers. In the case of the study participants' statements, their general perception is that mainstream teachers may not be delivering language instruction and the support needed by NSELs; the language learning may not seem to be set in place. NSELs' perceptions of their content teachers, per participants statements, are of content instructors who are only willing to teach content and reteach it only if necessary, and through interventions offered to all students as a homogenous approach, such as school tutorials.

### ***Peer Support***

Who is helping NSEs when the teachers are not providing language instruction or properly designed and planned ESL support in the mainstream English-only content courses? The study participants stated they had to ask their peers for help daily to fully understand the language and lessons' content. Noelia, the 16-year-old from Honduras and a junior at the time of the interview in high school, stated that in some occasions, learning language had not been available in some of her content courses. Noelia said that in her chemistry class, there was not a single student who spoke Spanish or who could help her. She preferred not to ask anyone because nobody spoke Spanish and everyone worked individually, and the teacher preferred to keep it that way.

Sara, the 9<sup>th</sup> grader who struggles in her content courses, commented that she traditionally has helped herself in algebra by working closely with one of her peers. Sara mentioned that she asks her peer and friend Angelina to explain the lesson after the teacher gives it, as well as anything else she needs to know for operations to solve the problems. She said her peer does not mind helping her because Angelina is good with algebra and understands well. Sara stated, "Angelina me ayuda paso por paso y me muestra cómo hacerlo." [Angelina helps me step by step and shows me how to do it]. Jenny, who gets easily confused during her geometry class instruction even though she likes geometry, said that she works with a peer to get help. Jenny, a Mexican sophomore in high school, sustained that she really enjoys working with math. However, Jenny has been confused and has not understood what the teacher has explained for most of the time. Jenny said, "me siento horrible, confundida, y desanimada." [I really feel horrible, confused, and discouraged].

The way Alex helped himself understand the teacher in the Algebra classroom was with the help from some of his peers. Alex explained: “Trabajo con otros compañeros. Ellos me ayudan y me explican lo que no entiendo. Me ayudan y me explican las cosas en español” [I work with other peers. They helped me and explain the things to me in Spanish]. Alex stated that this is the only way he could understand. The statements of the NSELs clearly revealed an absence of English direct language instruction and additional content supports; two conditions considered by previous curriculum and instructional scholars of academic language as non-negotiables when it comes to properly teaching ESL students (Schleppegrell & O'Hallaron, 2011).

***Times of Frustration in the Mainstream Classroom.***

Several factors affected learning for newcomers in the content classroom. One of these factors is their fear to speak out or ask questions due to their social language skills still being developed. Seven of the nine students interviewed during the study expressed multiple times of feeling frustrated due to a lack of understanding the language when an adult was trying to address or teach them. Kim said, “No me está yendo bien, se me dificulta comprender el contenido, aunque la maestra explica bien. Creo que es por el inglés. Hay muchas cosas que no entiendo.” [I am not doing well, I am struggling understanding the content, although the teacher explains well. I believe it is because of the language. There were many things I do not understand]. Valerie, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade student with the longest time of schooling in the United States out of all study participants, said:

No entiendo todo lo que los maestros me enseñan. Creo que mis maestros en mis clases de contenido piensan que todos hablamos inglés solamente y que somos de

aquí todos. Los maestros no nos ayudan mucho en las clases de contenido.

Todavía batallo con el inglés y siento que los maestros no me están ayudando.

[I do not understand everything the teachers teach. I think teachers in my content courses believe we are all English speakers and that we are all from here.

Teachers do not help us too much in the content classes. The teachers do not teach language. I still struggle with English and I feel I am not receiving the help I need].

This statement confirmed the common finding of lacking direct language teachings or quality language instruction to fulfill the needs of NSELs who were still developing their English academic language and literacy. ESL students should be given proper accommodations and offer direct English language instruction embedded with content in the mainstream classroom to facilitate learning and to promote authentic academic engagement (Collier, 1995; Walqui, 2000).

Jenny, the sophomore from Mexico, said:

Me da pena decir cualquier cosa en mi clase de Historia Universal y es porque soy así. Entonces, mi compañera se sienta al lado y me empieza a explicar todo y me ensena el significado de las palabras que no entiendo.

[I feel embarrassed to say anything in my World History class and it is because I am like that. Then my peer sits by me and starts explaining everything to me and he teaches me the meaning of the words I do not understand].

The lack of comfort and fear to express herself in English, led Jenny to remain in the silent mode experienced by ESL students (Collies, 1995). NSELs will not speak or practice their English pronunciation skills if they are afraid of being called out or

ridiculed (Scarcella, 2003). These students will prefer to continue to listen or look for another peer who may be able to explain content in their native language. This study findings corroborated this premise.

Wilson, the newcomer in 10<sup>th</sup> grade from Honduras, had this to say about a frustration he experienced in his chemistry classroom:

Este ano tuve un compañero de Vietnam y traté de trabajar con él, pero no pude. Así que trabajé con otro compañero, Juan. El habla español, así que me ayudaba, y nos ayudábamos el uno al otro cuando trabajábamos juntos.

[This year I had a peer from Vietnam, and I tried to work with her, but I could not do it. So, I worked with another peer, Juan. He speaks Spanish, so he helped me, and we helped each other when we worked together].

The experience narrated by Wilson also corroborated the need for NSELs to be confident when trying to understand content and communicate with other peers in the mainstream content classroom (Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018).

Dalia found a common need of supporting each other with this peer. They both developed an emotional attachment that led to build a social relationship where both students helped each other as they learned a new language and how to learn a new content. Mutual cultural respect and awareness about their reality helped them to build a relationship on trust and mutual support (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Dalia, stated:

Un día, el maestro no fue a la escuela y nos tocó un maestro sustituto. Él nos dio instrucciones y yo no le entendí nada. Me quede callada y puse mi cabeza en el pupitre y a él no le gusto y me decía todo el tiempo que hiciera mi trabajo en



clase. Pero no pude porque no sabía qué hacer. No me sentía cómoda haciéndole preguntas hasta que le dije que no le entendía ni papa de lo que dijo o necesitaba hacer yo.

[One day, the teacher did not go to school and we had a substitute, and he gave us instructions about what to do and I did not understand. I just stayed quiet and put my head down on the desk and he did not like it and kept telling me to do the work, but I couldn't because I did not know what to do. I did not feel comfortable asking him questions either and I became very stressed until I told him that I did not understand anything he said and what we needed to do].

When addressing NSELs, schools and teachers should plan in case there is a need to assign a substitute teacher to a group of RIELs. The substitute teacher must be informed of any class or course where he or she may encounter students who do not speak English as their primary language. Proper lesson plans and detailed instructions should have been provided. Sometimes, redirection of NSELs to a teacher who can better support them while their assigned teacher is absent needs to be considered as an option to continue to properly serve NSELs in their mainstream content classrooms (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014).

Kim talked about a frustrating experience she had during her first day in world history. Kim shared,

Estaba trabajando en unas preguntas. Cuando me tocó el turno de responder una pregunta del maestro, no pude contestar porque me puse nerviosa y no pude hablar en inglés.

[I was working on some questions. When it was my turn to answer a question from the teacher, I did not respond because I became nervous and I could not speak in English.”

This example showed the lack of proficiency in English that second and third year of schooling NSEs commonly encounter as they found themselves unable to function in their second language (Faltis & Culter, 2007).

### ***NSEs’ Tutorials and Interventions***

Latino NSEs said content teachers only provided one-on-one interventions during after-school tutorials. However, participants agreed that this type of support only helped them to better understand content, but it did not meet their needs of language instruction. They shared that some content teachers sometimes provided visuals, images, videos, and other resources in the content taught during the lesson for them to review.

Alex stated that:

Le digo al maestro que use otras palabras que pueda entender. El maestro de biología enseña bien y si no entiendo algo, él se regresa y me lo explica de nuevo en las tutorías. El maestro de biología usa a veces videos y puedo entender mejor con esos videos los temas que estamos aprendiendo y trabajando en la clase.

[I ask the teacher to use different words that I can understand. The biology teacher teaches well and if I do not understand something, he goes back and explains it over again to me during tutorials. The biology teacher uses sometimes videos and I can better understand with those videos about the themes we are learning and working in class].

For Yuli, doing hands-on activities and labs in her biology class helped her to understand better. She liked science, the labs, and the experiments. She understood more when she could see graphs, visuals, and pictures that could help her understand and do things hands-on. Her comment was directly related to what previous studies and national evaluation reports on best instructional practices with NSELs insisted on as necessary to properly teach them. Classrooms where NSELs are taught need to have multiple visuals, prints, anchor charts, and any other hands-on instructional and learning resources (Boyson & Short, 2003, Brisk, 2012; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012). Social and culturally diverse instructional resources and materials need to be equally considered when teaching students from different countries and regions of the world. These have been defined by previous researchers as direct ways to promote authentic academic engagement for the NSELs to feel like they are valued and being included in the content classroom (Moll et al., 1992, 2006; González et al., 1995).

### ***The Content Teachers' Role***

Content teachers seemed to have limitations in addressing the needs of teaching language. This might be explained by either the lack of appropriate specialized training to teach ESL students (Haynes, 2007), proper implementation of the training received, or the stress produced by the pressure public educators received by standardized tests results, as the ultimate standard that evaluates their teaching performance (Valdes, et al., 2014). The participants agreed upon the need for content teachers to make additional efforts to get to know newcomers as students with specific English language literacy needs. NSELs bring their own cultural and social assets to share. Yet it seemed from the student perspective, that content teachers were not tapping into this information to

incorporate their assets to their learning of a second language and literacy in their content classrooms (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Based on the information shared by students, it would be helpful if high school instructors should consider different ways to reach out to this population of students by showing that they care for them and are willing to support their additional needs for learning. However, educators will also need permanent ESL instructional delivery and strategies support and not simply a one-time training. It is necessary the constant coaching by curriculum planners and instructional specialists to elevate their instructional delivery skills to the level of teaching simultaneously content and language, which will benefit not only NSELs in their mainstream content classroom, but also their English monolingual students (Bailey, et al., 2008). As discussed by previous studies, successful ways to reach and teach NSELs involves culturally relevant environments, accepting their cultures of origin, and embracing distinctive family and social values (Brisk, 2012; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012; Crooks, 2020).

Noelia, one of the junior students from Honduras, shared that her chemistry teacher spoke and explained way too fast. Noelia believed that the teacher did not teach her well. She said that the teacher uploaded everything online for students learning virtually due to the pandemic, even if they were attending in-person classes at school. The chemistry teacher did not teach or explain to students what to do nor the new lesson's vocabulary to learn, which is especially helpful for the NSELs. Noelia said, "...él no enseña; él nos dice que veamos los videos que él sube y que hagamos las actividades que necesitamos hacer." [...he just does not teach a lesson; he just tells us to watch the uploaded videos and do the activities we need to do]. NSELs' teachers should try to reach this population of students so they can fully engage in learning the academic

content. Valeria shared that her teachers should take the time to get to know each student and be able to help the students individually, like her ESL language arts teacher did.

Explicit language teachings, tutorials, writing supports, and individual assistance are necessary for the RIELs to feel valued and progressively integrated into the mainstream classroom learning environment (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). Continuous language and literacy teaching in English must become a regular and consistent component for the NSEL (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). Learning experiences where they are fully included will facilitate the socio-cultural adaptation process to the new learning environments and assimilation of new knowledge (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). NSELs need to feel safe in the classroom to build individual capacity of learning a new language and content (Gibbons, 2002; Brisk, 2012; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012; Stanat & Edele, 2014).

***One More Teacher Could Help Us.***

The nine students found the need of an additional adult as a second teacher important to support them with their individual daily learning needs. Comparable to the learning supports they received in the newcomers' classroom, NSELs believed a second adult to support them with content comprehension and language could be very effective to support their language and academic development. Kim, one of the freshman students at the high school research site, stated that, "...otro maestro(a) [another teacher] could help us." From their experiences, she and the other participants learned that another teacher could be helpful with their language and content comprehension needs. Kim said: "Deberían tener otro adulto o maestra en esas clases de contenido para ayudarnos con lenguaje o hacer que los maestros de contenido enseñen más lenguaje en inglés."

[They should have another adult or teacher in those content classes to support us with the language or have the content teachers teach us more language]. Sara remembered how a teacher assistant would help her in the newcomer's classroom when she did not understand. She said that, "Deberíamos tener otro adulto o maestro en esas clases de contenido para ayudarnos a aprender inglés" [We should have another adult or teacher in those content classes to support us with the learning of English language]. Wilson, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade student who shared about the way he used several of his peers to help him understand, stated:

Los maestros de contenido explican la materia bien, pero a veces yo no lo entiendo porque es muy difícil sin entender todas las palabras, lo que estamos leyendo o haciendo en la clase.

[Content teachers explain the content well but sometimes I do not understand it because it is very difficult without understanding all the words and what we are reading or doing in the classroom].

The NSELs' suggestion of having another adult in the content classes to support them was considered as a possibility for them to receive their required support with language learning and content instruction comprehension simultaneously. Dalia stated,

Creo que deberían tener más maestros bilingües que nos pudieran ayudar porque ellos nos podrían explicar ciertas cosas a nosotros en español mientras estamos todavía aprendiendo y desarrollando nuestro nuevo lenguaje en inglés.

[I believe they should have more bilingual teachers who could help us because they could explain certain things to us in Spanish while we are still developing and learning our new language in English].

School officials at the district and school administrative levels should provide teachers with proper training to teach NSELs in the classroom. They should also guide them in their curriculum implementation and lesson planning so that the needs of language and content-integrated instruction are properly met (He & Lin, 2018). As previously discussed in the literature review, Valdés et al. (2014) advocated for what he called the most “effective elements” to provide any NSELs students with adequate content and language instruction in the mainstream content classroom. Districts and schools should know and learn about RIELs’ languages, places of origin, cultures, and social traditions. Implementing diverse hiring practices that include staff members representing cultural similarities of the newcomer youth should be considered (Gibbons, 2002; Valdés et al., 2014). Teachers should provide NSELs with needed language instruction included in their content instruction, seamlessly integrating ESL language teachings (He & Lin, 2018). Support and opportunities for students to be independent learners and start taking risks as they develop language and literacy skills in English should be fostered in every content lesson (Valdés et al., 2014).

### **NSELs’ Social Interactions**

Social interactions are necessary for NSELs to develop social language skills and what Cummins (1981, 2008) defined as BICS. However, not all teachers and school personnel seem to understand that it is through the promotion of opportunities for students to communicate and use social language that NSELs will develop their social language skills proficiently (Margary, et al., 2009). Opportunities for NSELs to hold meaningful conversations in the second target language in and outside the classroom to learn the language should be facilitated (Knight et al., 1985; Margary et al., 2009).

NSEs need to practice language and communicate about new knowledge being learned, as any other English monolingual student would do (Palincsar et al., 1987; Kagan & McGroarty, 1993).

The RIELs interviewed expressed that they felt more comfortable interacting with Spanish-speaking peers, even if for those peers' Spanish was not their primary language. Some of the students also said that they do not mind having social interactions with English monolingual students in the mainstream classroom. A small number of them stated that they preferred not to have any social interactions with native English speakers in their content classroom or school since they felt that they could not freely express their real emotions or naturally be themselves. As said by Kim and Yuli, "...en español siento que puedo decir o que deseo decir y ser entendida completamente." [In Spanish I can feel I can say what I need to say and be understood completely]. Noelia, the 16-year-old in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, said the following after being asked about the way she interacts with other peers at school:

Prefiero interactuar en español. La mayoría de mis compañeros son Latinos y hablan español. Les hablo en español, pero si ellos me hablan en inglés, entonces les hablo en inglés. Prefiero hablarle a los que hablan español porque los que hablan solo en inglés, cuando les hablo, a veces no me entienden como pronuncio las palabras y se cansan y se van. Estoy bien con eso. No les hablo más y ya.

[I prefer to interact with peers in Spanish. Most of my peers are Latinos and they speak Spanish. If they speak to me in Spanish, I speak in Spanish to them but if they speak to me in English then I speak to them in English. But I prefer to speak to the ones who speak Spanish because sometimes the ones who I speak in



English, they do not understand how I say things and they get tired of me and leave. I am okay with that. I just do not speak to them anymore].

Dalia, a 16-year-old in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, was the only participant who admitted having learned English at her country of origin, El Salvador, and said that she used both English and Spanish. Sara, one of the other 9<sup>th</sup> grade study participants, shared:

Bien, la mayoría de mis amigos hablan español. Les pido que hablemos en inglés para que podamos practicar. Les hablo en inglés, pero a veces mezclo las palabras en inglés y español al mismo tiempo. Mis amigos me entienden y yo les entiendo todo, aunque a veces se me hace difícil la pronunciación y hablando correctamente.

[Well, most of my friends speak Spanish although I tell them to only speak in English so we all can practice. I speak to them in English but sometimes I mixed words in Spanish and English at the same time. My friends understand me, and I understand everything they say although I have difficulties with pronunciation and speaking correctly].

NSEL participants believed their social interactions with other students were extremely important and have helped them to grow as students, facilitated their comprehension of the content being learned, and helped them to develop their second language. This is extremely important for the academic engagement and self-motivation of NSELs as they continue to navigate their high school courses in mainstream classrooms (Stanat & Edele, 2015).

### *Peers' Interactions in the Newcomer Classroom*

Seven of the newcomer students had positive peer interactions in the newcomer classroom during their first year of school in the United States. The exception were two students who described being picked on or bothered by other peers, and who were emotionally affected by those also NSELs' unacceptable actions. Although the newcomer classroom was a place where Sara and Jenny both felt supported in by their teachers, some of their peers rudely laughed at them as they tried to participate, and practice spoken language in the newcomer classroom. Jenny, one of the ninth-grade students, said that she did not do well with her second language development because some students "bullied" her about her accent (Ee, & Gándara, 2020). She shared that she was not able to respond and participate in class because she was not sure how to pronounce words in English correctly, so she preferred to stay quiet. Sara, shared a similar negative learning experience in the newcomer classroom (Szlyk et al., 2020):

No me fue tan bien en mi primer año en la escuela en los Estados Unidos. En la escuela intermedia donde llegue hablábamos más español que inglés. Era porque los compañeros eran Latinos y hablaban también más español que inglés.

[I did not do as well at my first school in the United States. At the middle school I arrived here, we spoke more Spanish than English and it was because most of my peers were Latinos and they also spoke Spanish more than English].

Sara said that in the newcomer classroom she did not practice too much English.

Therefore, she did not have a possibility to learn English well. Some peers picked on her because she could not pronounce some English words well. Sara shared that she had

many boys who used to laugh at her and picked on her. She said that she remembered having to go speak to the school counselor many times.

The controversial climate and extreme discourse against Latino immigrants coming from Central American countries has generated a discourse of rejection and hate toward them by other racial and ethnic majority groups in public schools (Szlyk et al., 2020). It is important to remember that these are human beings simply trying to find basic living guarantees and a safe place to live away from extreme violence and absence of human dignity. Unfortunately, sometimes this negative climate makes its way into the classroom and can affect the experiences of NSELs.

A hostile environment towards immigrants has been establishing in public schools due to the perceived need to enforce harsh immigration laws and close the borders. This is a social phenomenon most observed in suburban or rural areas and campuses with a higher percentage of White students and a minority of immigrants (Ee & Gándara, 2020). This perception was shared by some of the study participants. Some NSELs shared feeling rejected on some occasions by other student populations, especially those in their mainstream classroom who seemed to ignore their presence or simply did not take the time to get to know them or interact socially. Other participants expressed feeling afraid to try their developing social language skills because of the potential social rejection from other monolingual English peers.

However, Sara and Jenny recalled having at least one or two other peers in the newcomer classroom who they became close friends with, and with whom they still hold a close relationship with at their high school. Sara shared during her interview how a friendship that started in her first year of schooling remains: “Tenia una amiga, Angelina,

quien fue muy querida conmigo y no se por que. Había también otros estudiantes de México, quienes me trataban bien, con respeto.” [I had a friend, Angelina, who was very nice to me and I do not know why. There were also other students that were from Mexico, who treated me well, with respect].

For the other seven NSELs who took part in the interview, the relationships they had in the newcomer classroom were very important because they all collaborated and supported each other. Alex, now in ninth grade, recalled his social interactions during his first year of school being mostly in Spanish in the newcomer classroom, but being in English with other peers in other classes. Alex said that helped him learn new vocabulary and added: “No conocía a nadie, como estudiante nuevo. A medida que paso el tiempo, conocí mejor la escuela, los maestros, las clases y los compañeros.” [I did not know anyone, like any new student. As the year progressed, I got to know better the school, teachers, classes, and peers]. Alex stated he never felt restrained from speaking to someone he did not know. Similar experiences were shared by the other NSEL participants about their social interactions in the newcomer classroom during their first year at school. Wilson stated most of his peers were Latinos. They were from several nationalities and others from different parts of the world. Wilson recalled that the Latinos were from Central and South America, and Mexico.

Jenny stated that it had been difficult for her to interact with other students, even beyond the newcomers’ classroom from their first year of schooling, especially if they did not speak or understand Spanish. This was a common denominator for five of the other Latino NSEL participants.

No le hablaba a nadie excepto a mi amiga Juliana durante mi primer año en la escuela en los Estados Unidos. Me daba pena de hablar en inglés a mis otros compañeros en la clase.

[I did not speak with anyone except my friend Juliana during my first school year here in the United States. I felt embarrassed to talk in English to my other peers in class.]

For the participants, social interactions were always important, although not necessarily in English. On the contrary, they felt more comfortable interacting socially and academically at school in Spanish because they considered this was the language for them to truly express themselves. Spanish is the language to build relationships based on trust developed by NSELs (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008).

**Relationships Are About Trust.** For NSELs, using their native language builds trust and helps with a true understanding and knowledge of their peers. NSELs found communicating in Spanish easier and more suitable for them to build relationships with at school. Most of them reported that they limited their communications and social interactions with other peers due to their language proficiency deficits. For them, relationships were based on trust and respect, which they found as the most important reason to continue using their native language when socially interacting at school and in their mainstream content classroom.

**Latinos' Cultural Affinity.** Latino NSELs also highlighted cultural affinity to be a factor that influenced their preference to communicate with other Latino students, even if they were born and raised in the United States and only spoke English. NSELs perceived other Latinos as capable of understanding them in Spanish, even if they did not

speak the language. In some cases, some of the RIELs were more familiar and friendly towards them since they saw them as able to better understand and share their culture. For NSELs, it is important to feel valued and that their culture and backgrounds are somehow represented in their new learning environment by other peers, teachers, or in general at their school (Genesee et al., 2006). NSELs need to be and feel socially and culturally accepted, be able to function academically, and be capable of managing and behaving correctly in the new learning setting (Scully, 2016). This probably explained why the newcomer students felt more comfortable sharing with other Latino students who could easily understand their emotions and needs of communication in their native language (Feinberg, 2000).

**The Promotion of Social Interactions.** Most of the NSELs considered that teachers and other adults at school should promote social interactions amongst them and other English-speaking students, especially in class. The NSELs believed that teachers should provide more ways to have them work with a partner or in small groups, instead of individually or in whole classroom settings, as was more typical in the content classes. “Infortunadamente, los maestros no se tomaron el tiempo de ayudarnos a hacer relaciones.” [Unfortunately, teachers did not take the time to help us make relationships], stated some of the students interviewed. Dalia shared:

Creo que nos deberían presentar a algunos de los estudiantes que solo hablan inglés, quienes nos podrían ayudar con la escuela y así promover relaciones con esos estudiantes, como un programa de compañerismo de idioma.

[I think we should be introduced to some English-speaking students, who can help us with the school, and promote relationships with those students. Like a language pal-program].

Jenny said that teachers should help to promote relationships in the content classes in high school. She said that teachers should allow students with opportunities to interact and get to know each other. Jenny said that according to her experience in high school so far, this does not happen.

Jenny believed the school could help NSELs be better integrated with students who only spoke English in her content classes. She suggested that teachers promote social-based learning activities and interactions with the students who only speak English so that NSELs could learn and improve their pronunciation and other language skills. Noelia stated, “Los maestros deberían ayudarnos a hacer amigos en sus clases dejándonos actuar más y trabajar más con otros estudiantes.” [Teachers should help us to make friends in their classes by letting us interact and work more with other students].

Sara added that, “...los maestros deberían promover el uso de hablar inglés en clase más y ayudarnos a tener conversaciones con otros estudiantes en clase y usar inglés hablado.” [...teachers should promote the use of spoken English in class more and help us to have conversations with other students in class and use the spoken language].

Social interactions were of fundamental importance for the NSELs who participated in the study. Social exchanges should be incorporated regularly and consistently in the mainstream content classroom with opportunities for students to share and learn from each other. NSELs needed to feel welcomed and safe in their new learning environments inside and outside the classroom. Feeling like they were an integral part of

the learning environment was based on their opportunities to socially interact with other peers (August & Shanahan., 2017). Collaborative times should be meaningful and purposeful, carefully planned, and embedded in the content lessons. Those interactions helped secondary RIELs develop oral language skills while affirming their learning engagement and academic interest in the content being taught (August & Shanahan, 2017; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

### **The COVID-19 Factor**

NSELs had to adapt to a new social, culture and school system. However, the participants of this study never imagined when they arrived in 2018 or 2019, that the beginning of 2020 would change their understanding of schooling completely. The COVID-19 global pandemic made national, state, and local school officials order the closing of all the schools to avoid further spread of the COVID-19 virus. For NSELs, the closing of schools presented another challenge for them to navigate in a new learning setting. The pandemic also brought their individual supports and learning accommodations for language development and content learning to a complete halt.

### ***How NSELs Felt About Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic?***

All the participants in the study agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted their language and content learning at school. The students who took part in the study in November 2020 did not return to in-person classes after the middle of March 2020. They were instructed to work online and do their work until the end of the school year at the end of May 2020. Lessons, assigned content activities, and assessments were delivered by teachers through Google educational tools and applications. Their schools did not open after Spring Break. For the 2020-2021 academic term, most students started



the school year in a virtual instructional mode, and NSELs were not exception. Sara, who was attending eighth grade at that time, shared:

Creo que COVID no me dejo aprender inglés de la forma que yo debería haber aprendido si hubiera estado en la escuela en clases personales casi por dos semestres. Solo hice un semestre complete en el 2019 y para la segunda parte del año escolar llego la pandemia y nos mandaron para la casa a aprender de manera virtual y después vinieron las vacaciones de verano y no pude ir a la escuela.

[I believe COVID did not allow me to learn English as I should have if I had been going to school to in person classes and for almost two semesters. I only did a full semester in 2019 and for the second part of that school year then the pandemic came, and they sent us home for virtual learning and then it was summer break, and I could not attend school].

Recent national surveys, reports, and state studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed the regression of students expected academic growth to be anywhere from six months to two years when compared to students attending in person classes. This is especially true for those students in need of special accommodations, interventions, and specialized instructional supports, such as NSELs (Dorn et al., 2021).

### ***Limited Technology Knowledge and Skills***

For some of the RIELs, a technology device was not an option. They lacked the knowledge or skills on how to use these electronic devices or to access the applications and emails. It became a major impediment for them to study. Wilson, who was in a ninth-grade newcomer classroom then, stated:

Cuando cerraron las escuelas y no podíamos ir a la escuela, fue muy difícil aprender por una computadora. Aprender en línea no es lo mismo, es muy difícil. Teníamos que hacer todo en la computadora, no era lo mismo y no había maestro a quien preguntarle.

[When they closed the schools, and we could not go to school, it was very difficult learning through a computer. Learning online is not the same, it is very difficult. We had to do everything on the computer, and it is not the same, and there was no teacher to ask].

To communicate or ask for help from the teacher was impossible for NSELs and their parents because most teachers did not speak Spanish. Therefore, the understanding was minimal, or the communication was broken, or it was simply impossible. Noelia, was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade receiving specialized language instruction, shared:

Cuando aprendíamos virtualmente desde la casa durante el comienzo del año, el maestro me llamaba y no le podía entender lo que decía en el teléfono. También tuve muchos problemas usando mi computadora. No estaba acostumbrada a usar tecnología en mi escuela en mi país, así que esto era nuevo para mí y encima los programas y las aplicaciones, no sabía que era eso. No sabía cómo usar las aplicaciones y la computadora bien. Solo entendía algunas cosas y no era capaz de hacer las asignaturas correctamente.

[When we were learning virtually from home during the beginning of this year, the teacher would call me, and I could not understand what she was saying over the phone. I also had many issues using the computer. I was not used to technology at my school in my home country, so this was new to me and on top of

that the programs and applications, I did not know what that was. I did not know how to use the applications and the computer well. I just understood only somethings and I was not able to do the learning assignments correctly].

Yuli, who was still in middle school attending the newcomer program during her first year of schooling in the United States, shared that COVID-19 just made learning more difficult for her. The worst outcome of the pandemic was that for her, learning on her own became extremely difficult. Virtual learning also did not help too much. After she returned from online classes to in-person instruction, she stated that no one was supposed to speak or be close to each other. For Yuli,

El distanciamiento social lo hizo más difícil para mí para poder practicar inglés. Incluso para preguntar preguntas simples, o para trabajar con otro compañero, como antes.’ [Social distancing made it more difficult for me to practice language, to ask simple questions, or even try to work with another peer. “Interactuar en una computadora no me ayudo”, ella creyó, “...y me ayudo menos no poderme comunicar con otros compañeros y los maestros.” [Interacting through a computer in virtual classes did not help me, she believed, and it helped even less with having communications with other peers and the teachers].

Although weekly paper packages were delivered to the students with lessons and activities at the beginning of the pandemic to keep up with school, NSELs did not do well since they could not understand the content or do the required work without the teacher’s guidance and support. Students failed to even communicate with teachers. Participants said it was impossible for them to reach out to their teachers due to the language barrier and the bilingual support staff to assist them with their communications with teachers and

the school. Most teachers used emails and text messages to communicate with the students and their parents. Dalia, who was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and had been in school for less than a year at the time the pandemic started, shared, “...hizo el aprendizaje mas difícil.” [It just made learning more difficult]. “No podíamos interactuar con los maestros y otros estudiantes y eso me impidió practicar inglés.” [We could not interact with teachers and other students and that held me back from practicing English]. The nine newcomer students said they did the best they could by working on the weekly paper packages they were given at their school.

For some of the NSELs, a technology device was not an option. In other cases, the knowledge on how to access the applications and emails correctly from their cell phones was another impediment. Wilson stated:

Cuando cerraron las escuelas, y no podíamos ir a la escuela, fue muy difícil aprender por una computadora. Aprender ‘online’ no es lo mismo, es muy difícil. Teníamos que hacer todo en la computadora y no es lo mismo, no había un maestro a quien preguntarle.

[When they closed the schools, and we could not go to school, it was very difficult learning through a computer. Learning online is not the same, it is very difficult. We had to do everything on the computer, and it is not the same, there was no teacher to ask].

For NSELs and their parents to communicate or ask teachers for help was impossible because most teachers did not speak Spanish.

Some of the RIELs did not have a computer or a laptop to work from home. Some of them said they did not have access to the internet at their place of residence. Valeria commented:

Fue difícil aprender desde la casa. No podíamos hablar con los maestros. No podía recibir ayuda cuando la necesitaba. [It was difficult to learn from home. We could not speak to our teachers. I could not ask for help when I needed it.]

The students felt that even after they started the new 2020-2021 school year, not knowing how to use the laptop assigned by the district to access virtual live instruction was still a major obstacle to their learning. All the students that took part in the study went back to in-person classes after the first six weeks, or grading cycle, which was when the district allowed students to switch from online to in-person instruction. However, even then, the strict social distancing protocols and being in classes where teachers had to teach virtual and physically present students simultaneously made the lessons more difficult to follow. This all diminished the possibility for the NSELs to ask questions or get individual support in the content classroom. Kim said:

Creo que la pandemia redujo la cantidad de tiempo que nos podían enseñar los maestros. Cuando el maestro trabaja con nosotros en el salón, los que están en la computadora tienen preguntas y el maestro se demora más respondiendo a sus preguntas y viceversa. Y cuando el maestro le está poniendo atención a un estudiante en la computadora, entonces no nos está poniendo atención a nosotros, los que estamos en el salón y al maestro le toma más tiempo ponerle atención a algunas preguntas de los estudiantes.

[I believe it reduced the amount of time we can be taught by the teachers. When the teacher is working with us in class, the ones on the computer have questions and the teachers takes a longer time before responding to their questions or vice versa, and when the teacher is paying attention to a student on the computer, then is not paying attention to the us, the ones in the classroom and then the teacher takes more time to pay attention to some of the questions from the students].

This situation was a direct consequence of the hybrid models some local schools and districts in Texas and across the nation decided to implement to allow some NSELs to return to physical classes, while those who felt safer learning from home on a computer could do it through technology-based teaching and learning platforms (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). This unique and inadequate learning setting was further complicated and interrupted by other responsibilities faced by some of these students, like having to provide care for their younger siblings also forced to remain home for the pandemic, as shared by some of the participants in the interviews.

### ***English Second Language Regression in Latino NSELs***

NSELs believed that most of the English language knowledge and skills they had acquired during their first year of schooling in the newcomer classroom, and even during the second year of schooling in the mainstream classroom, was lost. They blamed the lack of social interactions and impossibility to interact with other adults and students at school due to the pandemic. They also presented not being able to ask their teachers questions, being imposed to individual virtual learning settings, and the required social distancing from other peers all as causes for their language loss. These factors limited the

possibilities to practice and learn a new language for the RIELs. In her statement about the topic, Jenny, one of the ninth-grade participants, said:

Siento que me devolví con mi proceso de aprender lenguaje. Perdí la mayoría de mi inglés que aprendí en el salón de los “newcomers” durante mi primer año en la escuela en los Estados Unidos.

[I feel I went backwards with my language learning process. I lost most of the English language I learned in the newcomer’s classroom during my first school year in the United States].

Kim, another freshman at the high school research site, seemed to agree. She said that:

COVID-19 ha retrasado mi proceso de aprender inglés. Creo que ha acortado la manera en que las clases están siendo enseñadas durante la pandemia y que me está tomando más tiempo aprender inglés.

[COVID has delayed my English learning process. I believe the time has shortened by the way classes are being taught during the pandemic and that is taking me longer to learn English].

Yuli, another ninth-grade student from Honduras, believed that:

La pandemia me desacelero en mi aprendizaje de lenguaje. Me sentí atascada con mi inglés. No pude practicar inglés como lenguaje, así que no progrese con mi inglés.

[The pandemic slowed me down in my language learning. I just feel I got stuck with my English language learning. I feel that I could not practice the English language, so it was like not progressing with my English learning].

Sara, another freshman, was not able to learn English as fast she could have learned it in person, and it has made her go back and forget many things she learned before COVID-19. Valerie, one of the junior NSELs interviewed, stated that she could not get to know more students, make new friends, or practice her English. She felt as if she did not learn anything during the time the school shutdown in 2020. She shared that she could not get help from her teachers nor try to speak to other students. The nine NSELs interviewed expressed in different ways that they felt like they had regressed in their English language learning process or had lost valuable face-to-face learning time with teachers due to the pandemic. The only benefit some of the participants highlighted about remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was the development of new technology and computer skills that they had to learn to incorporate in their daily instructional delivery, per teachers and schools' expectations.

### **Summary of Qualitative Findings**

The most relevant themes obtained from the inductive analysis of the narrative data allowed me to respond to the main questions around the learning experiences shared by the NSELs during their individual interviews. In response to the first research question, Latino NSELs perceived English as second language instruction and ESL supports in their mainstream content classrooms as inexistent or insufficient. The participants of the study described content teachers focusing on teaching content as their priority, and in most cases not using any time for instructional delivery to address the NSELs' needs of language instruction. This need is still being exhibited by these population of students, based on the descriptive STAAR/EOC and TELPAS data, and mentioned by their different testimonies given during the individual interviews.



As far as individual supports received, these were mostly given by their own mainstream content course peers or provided by teachers during after-school tutorials. However, these additional supports were exclusively for addressing content objectives due to lack of comprehension, or for reviewing content missed during the regular first-time lesson instruction. None of the participants reported direct language instruction planned or designed for them as ESL withing the curriculum or content lessons, or any other language supports received in math, science, and social studies.

In reference to the second question about the Latino NSELs perception of social interactions, the participants described social interactions with other students in the mainstream high school content classroom as limited by their still developing social English language skills and proficiency levels, especially in the listening and speaking domains. The nine participants shared different individual experiences about the way they had been developing social relationships, but mainly with other Spanish speakers raised and born in the United States. The participants expressed feeling more comfortable and confident when holding social interactions with peers at school in Spanish, as well as for building new relationships with new students.

In Chapter 5, I discussed some the most relevant findings in the qualitative data based on the conceptual language instruction/supports and social interactions framework, and the different components discussed during the review of the literature. In the next chapter, I also spoke to what I consider to be the main contributions of this study. I provided some recommendations and suggestions for what future research should consider in further studying the various learning needs of NSELs, and the individual supports that might improve the quality of content instruction in the mainstream

classroom in public high schools. When thinking about Latino NSEs, educational leaders and educators need leadership initiatives, actions, policies, and legislation that help and addresses the needs of this students' population. Developing adequate social and academic language proficiency skills that will prepare NSEs to become high academic achievers and performers at school. Implications about ways to lead and implement necessary federal and state policies, local plans, and initiatives were covered as part of the discussions and general recommendations for this study. It is critical to remember that this is a significantly growing population of students who will continue to enter our mainstream classrooms across the country during many years or decades to come.

## **Chapter V**

### **Interpretation and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

NSELs enrolled in an inclusive newcomer program at a large comprehensive suburban high school in Texas received help with their adaptation to a new country, culture and school, during the first year of instruction in the United States (Short & Boyson, 2012). The specialized curriculum implemented consisted of accelerated English language instruction with individual supports in every core content subject (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). After the first year in the newcomers' classroom, NSELs transitioned to mainstream English only content courses with the start of the second year of schooling in the United States.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn from the individual learning experiences of a selected group of Latino NSELs in the mainstream classroom. Specifically, the study boarded their individual perceptions about English language instruction and supports received by their content teachers. The interview study also inquired about the students' descriptions of social interactions with other students in the mainstream content learning environment. This study relevance relied on the insufficient empiric research about the topic. Learning from the direct testimonials of this special population of students was an important first step to determine recommendations for federal and state legislators, when considering programs and initiatives to better support this special population. Local district and school authorities should look at these recommendations and the described implications to make instructional decisions that

could effectively lead to better meet their individual learning and social needs. This study added to the discussion around the needs to adequately support and better serve NSELs academically and socially in public schools, who should always be treated with dignity, respect, and equity.

### **Research Question**

The two main research questions were:

1. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) perceive their English as second language instruction and supports received from content teachers in the mainstream classroom?
2. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) describe their social interactions with other English-monolingual students in the mainstream classroom?
3. How do newcomer secondary Latino ELs (NSELs) believe that the COVID-19 Pandemic affected their learning?

### **Methodology**

I first looked at the last three years descriptive data of state academic assessment results, which continue to show a general underperformance of NSELs measured by end-of-the- year Texas EOC exams. The research equally considered the latest three years of descriptive data for English language proficiency TELPAS assessments covering the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing for the district and the school research site. The interview instrument of the qualitative methodology was aimed at examining with a purposive sample of nine Latino NSELs enrolled in high school,

their learning in the mainstream classroom and their social interactions with other monolingual English peers.

The research conceptual language instruction/support and social exchanges framework presented in the literature was used for the analysis of the findings. These two components had been defined by previous scholars as crucial factors for the academic success of NSELs in the learning environments at school (Collier, 1995; Thomas and Collier, 1996; Duff, 2001; Walqui 2000, 2010). The first component, academic language, is indispensable to build second language literacy for RIELs, and represents an imperative condition to achieve grade level academic performance in an English high school core course. Language instruction and development of academic English literacy skills for NSELs constitute non-negotiables of best daily instructional practices for ESL students' academic success (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2008; Collier, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). The second component of social interactions was determined in previous research work around NSELs as required for their second language social development at school, with direct impact in their second language development, as studied forty years ago by Cummins (1979, 1981) in his theory of second language development. A language theory confirmed as fundamental for the proper social adaptation and development of RIELs to new learning and cultural environments by Collier (1995), and other second language scholars (Stant & Edele, 2014; Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018).

In the review of the literature the two main components of adequate language acquisition and social development of NSELs were complemented by additional peer-reviewed scholars, who had studied other related elements, as directly influencing the

learning and language progression of NSELs enrolled at different schools in the United States. A first topic discussed the implementation of newcomer schools or programs inside the districts or schools, mainly aimed at accelerating language instruction and social language proficiency for NSELs during their first year of schooling. An approach initially well-intentioned but falling short of addressing the real needs of emerging English learners who should be encouraged to keep their bilingualism, based on their first language asset. However, rather treated as an addition to their learning and acquisition of a second language literacy, building from the strengths of their first literacy in Spanish (Flores & Rosa, 2019).

A second element touched on the importance of incorporating into the daily learning process for NSELs, their previous assets, understood as their first literacy in their native language, family and social values, and cultural heritage and origins (Kibler et al., 2015; Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). It is important to mention at this point that, unfortunately, it has been very common for educators across public schools in the United States to exhibit a deficit approach to second language learners, based on home language, geographical origin, or different culture (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Chambers, 2009). An approach called by recent research in the importance of embracing bilingualism, instead of, for example, seeing school minorities bilingualism as a challenge or a handicap for the society who wants everyone functioning in one language and does not recognize the other languages as additions to the capacity of the students (Christian et al., 1990; August & Hakuta, 2005; Flores & Rosa, 2019).

A third factor, the planning and setting of priorities around language supports and academic engagement for ESL students was also discussed in the literature behind the

implemented research. Teachers must have high expectations about newcomer students (Carhill et al., 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2019). Professional development and teams of language support and content teachers need to strategically design curriculum and plan effective lessons for ELs (Walqui, 2000; Gibbons, 2002; Rosa & Nelson, 2019).

Collaborative work among teachers of NSELs will positively add to the proper content academic learning and language development of the newcomer youth (Cammarata & Haley, 2018). A fourth topic discussed in the conceptual framework presented in the review of the literature gravitated around the necessary instructional considerations for the appropriate design of secondary language curriculum and content instruction, as fundamental conditions to properly teach NSELs in elementary and secondary school levels, as they become familiar and learn to navigate a completely new and unknown school, language, culture, and social reality. Instructional considerations to take strategic decisions around curriculum design and modified or scaffolded instruction is of primary importance when thinking about teaching and learning of NSELs (Schleppegrell & O'Hallaron, 2011; Short & Boyson, 2012; Rosa & Nelson, 2019).

## **Discussion of Results**

There are several relevant findings I discuss from the analysis of the previous three years of state mandated assessment with the NSELs' STAAR/EOC academic performance results and TELPAS proficiency ratings. A separate and special discussion addresses the qualitative data findings.

### ***Standardized Tests Continue to Show the Incomplete Picture***

A first important finding and conclusion did not come as a surprise. EOC data continued to show NSELs as one of the groups, amongst the general population of

students in high school, to perform at lower levels (Acosta, et al., 2020). Although major initiatives and efforts have been implemented by public schools across the United States to teach accelerated language to RIELs enrolled in summer and regular school year inclusive newcomer programs (Short & Boyson, 2012; López et al., 2015; Scully, 2016). NSELs being measured by standardized assessment are in clear disadvantage when compared to their English monolingual counterparts. NSELs in their second and third year of schooling in the United States are still developing academic language at the *Beginner*, *Intermediate*, and *Advance* levels, which directly reflected in the lower academic achievement scores in their core content learning, since they lack in most cases lexical, semantic, and cognitive levels of English (Bailey & Huang, 2011).

I would claim that a main cause for lower levels of academic achievement of the NSELs, was the fact that NSELs interviewed stated not being taught language in the content classroom (Bleakley & Chin, 2010). Previous researchers who implemented studies around instructional needs of NSELs have always argued that not teaching explicit language embedded in the content lessons is simply ignoring the needs of language learning required by newcomers (Collier, 1995; Feinberg, 2000; Short & Boyson, 2012). NSELs should be entitled to specially designed and modified instruction that includes learning objectives, as set by Texas state expectations of ESL compliance. There is a need to lead a different approach when trying to effectively address the education for newcomer youth in large urban and suburban schools (Rosa & Nelson, 2019). Testing students with inadequate measures of state mandated tests and evaluating their academic achievement based on a test that does not truly assess the emergent ESL student is a practice that needs to be revised and evaluated by local school and district



leaders to advocate for other ways to measure NSELs, instead of continue to wrongly label them as “failures” (Schmeisser, 2020). School leaders and curriculum developers should promote spaces and practices for integrating the newcomer students to fulfill their academic, cultural, and social dimensions as diverse students coming from different society structures and distinctive cultures (Mayes 2020). Districts need to create and form multicultural departments to extend social and academic support services to newcomers and their families, but not limiting themselves to English courses or classes for parents of RIELs or traditional interventions for these students (Bleakley, 2010; Goldenberg, et al., 2001; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2012).

I would argue that results of NSELs persistently underperforming in the EOCs assessments in high school on standardized tests in Texas, as well as other states, has negatively influenced and fed into the misconception of NSELs “deficits” perception, instead of acknowledging the previous academic strengths they bring from their previous schooling in their first language from their countries of origin. These state mandated tests are aimed at measuring knowledge and skills in content subjects of social studies, science or math courses with tests that have been previously argued as not appropriately adjusted to measure NSELs’ real knowledge and skills (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Schmeisser, 2020). What could be interpreted as a lack of mastery in NSELs, rather responds to these students not having the proper English proficiency to exhibit literacy skills required by the content assessment. The essential knowledge and skills the test measured could be easily misinterpreted by lack of adequate academic language, enough vocabulary of even academic context of RIELs, and not necessarily due to lack of understanding of contents or skills being measure by the test questions (Schmeisser, 2020). When thinking about

Latino NSELS, education leaders and curriculum developers should address this population of students as not having much time to adequately develop social and academic language proficiency skills in English to better prepare them as high academic achievers and performers on their school's academics, before graduating from high school (Echavarria & Graves, 2007). It is a race against the clock and language, besides the hurdles set by standardized tests that unfairly assess RIELs (Acosta, et al., 2020).

### ***Content Teachers Should Teach ESL***

High school content teachers were mainly focused in teaching content, according to the NSELS participants of this study. RIELs felt content teachers are not slowing down to try to reach them and teach them well, at a needed level of language understanding. Much less NSELS believed that their high school content instructors were taking the time to get to know them, as if these students were invisible most in the mainstream classroom. According to the qualitative data highlighted by the participants, teachers assumed NSELS in their high school content courses are in equal conditions or possess a similar toolkit of knowledge and skills to their monolingual English counterparts. The teachers many times have believed they can learn new content in their classrooms, without providing any individual learning or language accommodation, or instructional supports embedded with the lesson. This assumption about every student being ready to learn and perform with content beyond individual considerations, including NSELS, simply ignored what Bailey and Heritage (2008) found about the needs of NSELS to use and learn language for different purposes and contexts in school settings. NSELS must be exposed to learning experiences outside the classroom, in social contexts, and in the

different learning settings for academic purposes, which was also corroborated by other scholars (Moll, et al., 2006).

Participants did not formally receive language accommodations or modified instruction when being introduced to the lessons in the core subjects of mathematics, science, or social studies. At least these were the NSELS' perception shared in their responses. I would bring special attention to the fact that the participants stated as the only classroom-level help they received was from other classroom bilingual speaking peers. This is inappropriate as the only resource for any NSEL to be adequately supported with his or her needs of learning in the mainstream classroom, during first-time of instruction. Although the students did mention the opportunity to attend after-school tutorials as a common intervention, none of the research participants commented about content teachers providing language teachings or any other additional interventions during regular classroom instruction.

This is a teaching practice negatively impacting NSELS' possibilities to learn and practice English language. It is also major missed opportunity to properly intervene, support and reach out to the NSELS' individual language and content differentiation and required accommodation for their learning needs. Consistency in directly pre-planned and taught language instruction is required for NSELS to overcome any disadvantage with understanding content, was a reiterative theme noticed throughout the qualitative data shared by the participants of the study.

Lack of formal ESL instructional delivery may be interpreted as a learning integration barrier for NSELS, which impedes the adequate academic engagement and exchange of knowledge and ideas being learned in the content classroom with other peers

and adults (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). The incorporation of language instruction is necessary for NSELs to feel authentically engaged with their learning and to further take risks to fully associate with their learning in the content courses (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Stanat & Edele, 2015). Continuous language and literacy teaching in English must become a regular expectation in the classroom where NSELs are enrolled (Christensen & Stanat, 2007). The content teacher's role is crucial for the proper language development of the NSELs. Also, for NSELs possibilities to academically perform and obtain higher achieving scores in accountability measures, as the STAAR/EOCs that evaluate their summative learning in high school courses. Let us not forget these passing assessment scores are required from NSELs to move to the next grade and graduate from high school (TEAa, 2017).

I would like to caution that although content teachers did not teach language in their mainstream classroom, per the NSELs shared perception, there are several factors that could have affected their capacity to do this. First, collaborative work with other peers was certainly restricted before the school year started in the fall of 2021. Required socially distancing and other measures taken by school districts could have certainly kept content teachers unable to collaborate as they had in the past, with other teachers. A panic mode and general isolation of adults in the school buildings, who were forced to stay home or collaborate only through video conferences made it difficult for teachers to hold more detailed planning and collaboration sessions as they did in the past. This is an assumption based on the difficulties experienced during the pandemic. Insufficient common planning and collaboration certainly reflected in the difficulties to design and implement curriculum through exclusive virtual or electronic means.

### ***Another Teacher***

Besides the need for content teachers to teach language and provide accommodations, an interesting finding after analyzing the data of the interviews was what participants suggested as an alternative for them to receive better English language and content supports in the mainstream content classroom. For NSEs a second adult, another teacher or paraprofessional, could help to assist newcomers. The statement did not come as a surprise to me as a researcher, after the participants shared that they had been previously exposed to a second adult teaching and supporting during their first year of schooling the newcomer classroom. However, it is necessary to point out that these students' common statement did reflect and demonstrated a self-awareness of their educational needs that should be recognized by schools and districts (Stanat & Edele, 2015; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Co-teaching models for teaching students with special or individual needs have been a common practice for students classified as special education students. Students in need of individual attention or specific accommodations and provisions can benefit from an additional teacher co-teaching with the main content teacher in the classroom. Previous research has found co-teaching or a second teacher supporting instruction in the classroom for students with special needs to be positive and beneficial to boost literacy in the classroom with struggling students (Murawski & Lee Swanson, 2001). It is commonly known as in-class-support teaching and it is set in place by education agencies to comply with the individual education plans of special education students (Murawski & Lee Swanson, 2001).

NSELs should be treated as a group that requires additional support and perhaps the one that an extra adult could provide in the classroom could make a significant difference building language and literacy skills in their second language. Some of the indicators of slow progress in developing social and academic English language should be a strong indicator that what content teachers have been doing with NSELs in the mainstream content classroom is not working. Not being able to comprehend the full content of a lesson in a mainstream classroom should be a strong argument to consider the needs of a second adult to support NSELs with language and content in the mainstream classroom. Good intentions to teach the content and reach with some traditional interventions of after-school tutorials for an extra hour after school may not be enough for these students' academic needs of language and content learning (Umansky et al., 2020). I do not want to throw the guilt on high school teachers, but they should be professionally developed to build the capacity to become ESL instructors to better support high school NSELs from diverse backgrounds and with different language and literacy skills and levels of proficiency (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). Especially in a district with more than 60% of the population is composed by Latino students, teachers should be constantly train and professionally developed to meet the individual learning needs of NSELs.

### ***TELPAS Is Not Being Used as a Formative Tool***

One more important finding or conclusion of my study is that, based on the descriptive language proficiency data, a large percentage of NSELs, in most cases over 40% of them, are still exhibiting social and academic language skills at the *Beginner* and the *Intermediate* levels of English proficiency, even after being placed in an intensive

language curriculum-based, such as the newcomer program during their first year of schooling in the United States, and with a major emphasis in teaching accelerated English language. More concerning is the fact that after being enrolled during two or three years in a well-established comprehensive secondary public school, RIELs still strongly perceive their language skills as weak or limited, a common statement found in the research participants' statements.

In addition, proficiency levels of language domain and the descriptive indicators of NSELs' language acquisition knowledge and skills do not seem to be utilized to make formative curriculum and instructional decisions to provide accommodations with language supports oriented towards the NSELs, or at least that is what I conclude from the participants' interviews' responses, that when directly asked, they did not mention any language instruction or support happening in the mainstream content classroom. After NSELs transitioned to the mainstream content classroom in high school, the specific language instruction and offering of additional supports should be happening based on collaborative decision-making process by administrators and teachers (Genesee et al., 2006; Stanat & Edele, 2014). Local districts school boards, superintendents, and school principals should be responsible for the wellbeing and the best educational offer of the growing population of NSELs. Their proactivity on finding better quality of curriculum and instruction for RIELs should consequently consider the input from their own families and educational advocates, or experts' recommendations about what else can be done to better teach NSELs, thousands of them at the last grades before graduating from high school, and in need of the best possible knowledge and skills set that can be provided by public schools (Umansky et al., 2020).

### ***Positive Perception About Education and School***

In contrast to the conclusions already discussed, there are some positive findings as well. The first is the extremely positive self-perception of NSELs about education and their public school. NSELs considered and valued the education they received in their previous countries as well as the opportunity to learn and grow as English learners in a public school in the United States. Beyond the individual needs of additional academic and language supports, NSELs perceived somewhat is missing in the mainstream content classroom. These students referred to every challenge and obstacle shared during the interviews as part of their daily learning experiences and a potential opportunity to learn and grow. During their responses, the newcomer participants assigned a great value to their opportunity to be educated in this country. NSELs considered this experience to have future direct implications over their possibilities to be successful learners and productive young adults as they graduate from high school. The students expressed they valued the quality of education received in the past at their countries of origin and now at their large suburban high school in Southeast Texas. Every participant shared in one way or another a related experience where they talked about their gratefulness for the quality of instruction received by their school district in the newcomer classroom upon their first arrival as immigrant secondary students to this country. All the students appeared to be very appreciative of the individual attention and supports received while learning a new school, social and cultural environments, during their first year of instruction in a newcomer's program. This has been corroborated by previous studies done around the importance of providing recently arrived immigrant youth with the opportunity to



participate in a summer or a more formally structured all-year-around newcomer program (Stanat & Edele, 2015; López & Fernández 2020).

In their responses, the participants felt supported by adequate second language teaching and provided instructional accommodations and differentiations to address their individual needs of learning a new language with a proper learning pace for them to develop social and academic skills in the targeted English language. Feeling welcomed, safe, and able to trust in the middle of an easily related classroom context was very important for the NSELs interviewed. Their learning experiences during their first year of schooling placed in the newcomer classroom reflected some of their cultural background and previous social, community and family traditions. These were some of the elements mentioned as common components of their daily lessons and learning environment in the newcomer classroom, during their first year of schooling in the United States.

### ***Building on NSELs' Self-Motivation***

Based on the two aspects mentioned of high value of education and a strong positive perception of the school role to better themselves, NSELs seemed to drive themselves as strong learners, full of self-motivation. Listening to their voices around the experiences shared during this qualitative study, NSELs shared a strong self-learning motivation, which translated for them in high academic engagement (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). A strong will to learn beyond the barriers of the second language. Perhaps because of the many obstacles youth immigrants had to overcome to cross the South border of the United States with Mexico, like in the case of two of the participants in this study, NSELs developed a strong resilience in their will to learn and succeed in high school (Crooks et al., 2020).

Previous scholars have studied about self-motivation and academic engagement of NSELs (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Lou & Noels, 2020). Unfortunately, many times public schools and educators may commonly ignore and fail to incorporate the recent immigrant secondary students' intrinsic values, knowledge and experiences, as multiple assets they bring to their new learning environment (Sparks & Reese 2013; Royer & Carlo, 1991; Lou & Noels, 2020). When NSELs maintain high levels of self-motivation towards their studies, academic engagement, and their strong will to succeed, as intrinsic assets they bring into the content classroom in high school. Many Latino NSELs will do whatever they can on their own to overcome their difficulties and barriers with understanding content due to lower academic language or lack of grade level literacy skills (Kim & Suarez-Orozco, 2014).

### **Social Interactions**

Latino NSELs were looking for opportunities to socially interact with other students in the mainstream classroom but teachers never facilitated any social exchanges. One of the reasons was the social disruptive conditions and effects on students' interactions caused by the pandemic (Williams, 2020). However, teachers and other adults at school are simply not realizing or ignoring they need help when trying to use English to communicate with others. This is a relevant conclusion after looking at the qualitative data and drawing from their still low English proficiency levels in the two social language domains: *Listening* and *Speaking* of the descriptive data of this research (Tables 8 and 9). Beyond the newcomer classroom, Latino RIELs stated that mainstream content teachers in high school are not providing them with consistent opportunities to get to know other students or peers in their classes. This does not only deprive NSELs

from practicing social language skills and developing their proficiency in English, but also contradicts what other experts in social development for students whose primary language is not English recommend as necessary for the proper development of oral or social language skills by newcomers at schools (Stanat & Edele, 2015; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2018).

Some of the participants suggested that teachers and other adults at school could develop integration activities for them to get to know other students and take risks using their second language. They believed it would be better than instead of isolate them to protect them and nurture them in the newcomers classroom during their first year of schooling, if they were taken to other classrooms where teachers and adults could develop some especially designed and purposeful activities for them to get to know other students, primarily English only speakers, This way NSELs believed they could talk try to talk about themselves and their home countries' traditions and cultural expressions. Previous scholars who studied the needs for proper social supports and academic engagement of RIELs have recommended social exchanges with other students as necessary to fulfill their emotional and social developmental needs (Stanat & Edele, 2014; He & Lin, 2018). NSELs have needs of literacy at the academic and social levels for in-school activities and outside school (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Adults at school, especially teachers, should provide opportunities for them to interact and acquire social literacy, besides of acquiring language skills. These opportunities would translate in better possibilities for them to feel valued and to build self-trust. Essential qualities that NSELs need to experience when learning at different settings, in the mainstream content classroom, and at other spaces around school (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Even beyond, districts are already training teachers and staff in emotional intelligence and social supports training. Several theoretical frameworks have seen the light during the last years advocating for the importance of teaching the emotional individual to self-regulate and developed better behaviors and social skills that eventually will lead to the formation of the adolescent as a successful learner (Goldman & Pellegrino, 2015). Social skills are taught and need to be acquired for the adolescent student. Social skills that include building relationships with other students, communicating effectively with others, working collaboratively, and managing common differences or conflicts with other students (De Velasco et al., 2016).

### ***Latino NSELs' Social Language***

Complementing the previous conclusion discussed, it is important to look at a second aspect observed in the qualitative data describing NSELs social interactions in high school. NSELs in the study stated that they preferred to communicate and have social relationships in Spanish. This can be explained from the descriptive data where almost half of the NSELs are still at the *Beginner* and *Intermediate* levels of the *Listening* and *Speaking* language domains. RIELs are not different to any other student in secondary school. Previous scholars have argued that literacy starts with social language or oral language (Carhill et al., 2008). Classroom discourse is not just the one produced through read and written means in notebooks and essays. NSELs need to develop their repertoire among all the language domains and listening and speaking should be incorporated to the learning language skills they must practice developing English proficiency in the mainstream content classroom (Lou & Noels, 2020). However, the fact Latino NSELs revealed as not having the opportunity to practice and develop their

English oral language skills is making them to orally communicate in Spanish rather than in English. This they said is especially true when confronted with their needs to build new relationships and meet their emotional needs of socialization with other peers. Let us also pay attention to the reality of some of the public schools in Texas and other states, where most of the students enrolled are Latinos, a condition confirmed by the participants and the descriptive data. Latino students were the ethnic majority at the district and home campus where this study took place.

Another way to analyze this finding is by understanding that social relationships are at the center of their needs of youth immigrants to socially form and develop as any other adolescent born and raised in the United States. NSELs support themselves in the social and cultural assets they possess to manage their individual and personal learning social need and find support when needed with their experiences (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). NSELs search for social exchanges in the secondary content classroom, even if they are not provided with the opportunities to share with other students (Valdes, 2000; Faltis & Arias, 2007). Consequently, it is natural for NSELs to establish social interactions and relationships supporting themselves in what they already know, their native language (Spanish), social traditions and cultural similarities, which seems to be what they encountered and shared as a commonality with other Latino students born in the United States. (Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018).

Depending on their priorities, usually set at learning English at school first, NSELs may develop social exchanges and eventually build relationships with students of other world geographical regions, cultures, and speakers of a third unknown language. The cause for the affinity to start the social exchange with a student from Asia or another

region of the world might be determined by the common factor of being immigrant newcomers with the same necessity to learn English and be academically successful. This may explain the information shared by two of the research participants who mentioned having a friendship with a student from the other countries, Pakistan or Vietnam to recall two of the participants' stories, and who spoke different languages, but shared some personal qualities and priorities that lead to both students to study and build a social relationship with these students. NSELs will look for opportunities of social interactions with other students to hold meaningful conversations in the second target language, as part of their essential need of collaborating with others to learn content and practice language (Knight et al., 1985). NSELs will look for opportunities to practice language and communicate with others about the new knowledge being acquired, especially the one related to their second language, in this case English (Palincsar et al., 1987; Kagan & McGroarty, 1993). However, these two participants of the study were the exception to the rule, since most NSELs shared as their preferred social interacting language to be Spanish. They perceived their native language as the one they could express themselves more authentically and for them to be able to understand each other better, make new friends, and build reciprocal trust, a basic condition of a true relationship (Szlyk et al., 2020).

### ***Bullying of NSELs***

Two of the students shared during their interviews to have experienced being picked on or targeted by other students, including NSELs in the newcomer classroom (Szlyk et al., 2020; Crooks et al., 2020). The occasions for this misbehavior to occur was manifested when the two female students tried to speak or communicate in English. These

negative experiences that could be described as forms of “bullying” need to be carefully considered by educators and adults in charge of the education of NSELs. Misbehaviors targeted at apprentices of a new language by other peers require immediate attention and intervention to address and stop the inappropriate behavior and its negative consequences. This certainly adds to the high emotional charge or pressure that RIELs experience as they enter public schools in this country (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). NSELs need social and emotional supports, during their first year in the newcomer classroom. Most teachers specialized in this type of curriculum and learning environment are aware of this need (Short & Boyson, 2004). But when a newcomer student experiences additional stressful, any sign of retraction or lack of participation and academic engagement in the newcomer classroom needs to be scrutinized and given the necessary attention for swift and proper intervention (Cordova & Suarez-Orozco, 2014).

### **NSELs and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

During time this research was implemented, between October and November of 2020, I decided to incorporate a final question to the interview protocol. The question simply asked about the ways the COVID-19 pandemic with its multiple implications had affected each one of the newcomer students who participated in the research. In general, all the participants felt that the greatest impact COVID-19 had over their education was the interruption of their formal schooling at the school campus. The findings discussed in this section were unprecedented.

The ways the pandemic impacted their studies were similar. All the students agreed on what they described as feeling stalled or having regressed in their ability to use English as a second language. Some of the participants said that they had lost what they

had hardly gained while they were in their newcomer classroom during their first year of schooling in the United States, which happened to be the time when unfortunately the pandemic started, around Spring 2020 (Williams, 2020; Dorn et al., 2020). Some students shared the impossibility to be exposed to learn new vocabulary and grammar, or the impossibility to be taught new vocabulary as it daily happened at school for them to be “pushed back” instead of making progress learning their new language, English. Other study participants mentioned not being able to share and learn with their peers as a major obstacle for them to practice English and continue to develop their second language skills. For others, they considered as they had lost vocabulary or feeling forced to exclusively use their home language to communicate with their parents and relatives at home, during the prolonged time of social isolation. It is important to highlight at this point that NSELs as any other student were forced to stay home and do their best to keep up with work without the proper support of their teachers due to the school mandated closures and having to finish their previous school year during the pandemic, studying at home with inexistent or limited support from their teachers.

After starting their new school year during the Fall semester of 2020, some of the participants of the study did not go back to school to in person classes. Afraid of the possibility to contract the COVID-19 virus, parents, and students themselves felt it was more important to safeguard their physical integrity than take any unnecessary risks of contracting the virus if they return to school. This became another hurdle for the NSELs, since some students did not have the computer knowledge or technology skills to navigate virtual classes. Most NSELs received technology hardware such as laptops given by their school district. However, the online instructional mode forced some of



these students to use their own technology tools, even if this only meant using a mobile or cell phone. By the time the research took place, towards the end of October and part of November 2020, all the study participants had returned to in person instruction at school.

The gap produced in their learning had already occurred. Missing face-to-face learning with their teachers had a negative impact, especially when the language apprentices are mostly socially exposed and individually using only their native language. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the adequate in person schooling and the opportunities for NSELs social interactions. Some of the study participants revealed spending times by themselves in isolation, as their single parents or both parents had to work during their pandemic, leaving them with their own responsibility to get their education while trying to learn how to navigate a computer to learn online.

Initial research reports about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students schooling pointed out one major finding: All students experienced what they described as learning loss and English proficiency language regression (Dorn et al., 2020). Recent studies produced at the end of 2020 are already finding this new problematic, which will need to be addressed with equity to make up for knowledge and skills not fully and adequately taught (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Williams, 2020; Dorn et al., 2020). It is equally important to review the inexistence of a quality language learning program to address the needs of language learning and second literacy skills development by NSEL during the pandemic (Williams, 2020; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). An initial report published by the Center of Applied Linguistics (CAL) and published in February 2021, showed school districts at different states reporting impossibility to properly provide linguistic accommodations and learning supports for NSELs through online learning

instructional methods. Initial reports from 79 school districts in California found these were not able to provide appropriate ESL accommodations for NSELs during the closures of the schools (Williams, 2020). In their work, “*COVID-19 and student learning in the United States; The hurt could last a lifetime*”, Dorn et al. (2020) found that the absence of school in person instruction could have heightened the lack of newcomers to receive adequate language and academic interventions and social supports, including their families. By recreating three different statistical scenarios defined as, *average online instructional mode*, *low quality virtual learning*, and *no school instruction at all*, which were the three scenarios caused by temporary or permanent school closures, Dorn et al. (2020) estimated that depending on the scenario, students lose between three to twelve months of in-school instruction that NSELs could have received through in-person instruction provided and delivered directly at school. NSELs did not receive instruction and their needed language and instruction individual supports (Dorn et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to take this into consideration as schools and districts evaluate how to support their NSELs long-term after the pandemic to address the additional needs due to this disruption in their schooling that was beyond their control.

### **Analysis of Findings through the Conceptual Framework’s Lens**

The two main components of adequate language acquisition and social development of NSELs were analyzed and intertwined with the other related elements, which directly influenced the learning and language progression of NSELs enrolled at different schools in the United States. In reference to the first element of the benefits of having a newcomer classroom as beneficial for RILS, the qualitative findings do corroborate the positive impacts of the implementation of newcomer schools or programs

inside the districts or schools, as learning settings of comfort for NSELs newcomers in need of initial adjustment and acclimation to a new country and a school system.

Accelerating language instruction and social language proficiency for NSELs during their first year of schooling was a factor perceived by the NSELs participants of the study.

The second element about the importance of incorporating the NSELs previous assets into the daily learning process is an action that needs to be adopted by public educators, public schools and districts with great influx and enrollment of NSELs. NSELs perceived that their previous first literacy in their native language, family, social values, and cultural heritage are of fundamental importance in their acquisition of a new language and the understanding of content (Kibler et al., 2015; Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). Unfortunately, based on the study's findings through the dialogues with the Latino NSELs, this seems to be still a deficit in the approach of the secondary teachers to their second language learners, found as a commonality in the research participants' responses (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Chambers, 2009). An approach found in previous research in the importance of embracing bilingualism, instead of, for example, seeing NSELs as school minorities, and bilingualism as a challenge for the society continues to fail to recognize other cultures, languages and traditions of NSELs as a capacity and knowledge asset of these students (Christian et al., 1990; August & Hakuta, 2005; Flores & Rosa, 2019).

The study findings and analysis of the data clearly called for the necessary teachers' collaborative and consistent planning and setting of priorities around language supports and academic engagement for NSELs in the mainstream classroom. Teachers must have high expectations about newcomer students (Carhill et al., 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2019). Curriculum planners, instruction specialists and in general, public school

and districts administrators and leaders need to provide teachers with adequate and consistent professional development to facilitate language and content learning, and content teachers with a thoughtfully designed curriculum, so that teacher may plan effective lessons for NSELs (Walqui, 2000; Gibbons, 2002; Rosa & Nelson, 2019).

Collaborative work among teachers of NSELs will positively add to the proper content academic learning and language development of the newcomer youth (Cammarata & Haley, 2018). A fourth topic discussed in the conceptual framework and that I presented in the review of the literature. This study findings still showed as necessary to always design and tailor instructional delivery with the specific instructional considerations of secondary language learning, as fundamental condition to properly teach NSELs in elementary and secondary school levels. This will facilitate the English learner the process of becoming familiar and learning to navigate a completely new and unknown school, language, culture, and society. Instructional considerations to take strategic decisions around curriculum design and modified or scaffolded instruction is of primary importance when thinking about teaching and learning of NSELs (Schleppegrell & O'Hallaron, 2011; Short & Boyson, 2012; Rosa & Nelson, 2019).

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations may be deducted from this qualitative research about NSELs' learning experiences. A major recommendation is based on the qualitative inductive analysis of the data and a close observation to the descriptive achievement and proficiency data. NSELs need to continue to be main recipients of academic language instruction and social supports. Additional considerations need to include the following possibilities: Use the state required academic and language proficiency testing results

more as formative assessments to determine where to intervene with NSELs to specifically target the learning gaps. Mainstream content teachers need to take the time to collaborate with ESL especially trained language are teachers at the high school level to determine the individual language instruction needs of this minority population of students. Many mainstream content teachers are trying hard to reach to their ESL students, but schools and districts need to provide those educators with better professional development and trainings for them to address the individual learning needs of language parallel to curriculum content in their classes (Cortez & Villarreal, 2006;Kibler, 2014, 2015). This requirement is even more relevant today, after a year of instructional losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators, schools, and districts should collect more frequently language proficiency assessment to make decisions and guide needs of curriculum and instruction objectives addressed to help and continue to boost the language acquisition of NSELs in the high school mainstream classroom.

Teachers of content of mathematics, science and social studies cannot continue to what seems to be a *tacit or adopted neglect* of the reality of some of the students they serve. At least, this is the way it seems to be perceived by the students in this study about content teachers addressing curriculum content but ignoring their language instruction. English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) must be implemented by teachers of NSELs at public schools in Texas. These need to be contained and embedded with the curriculum and instruction especially designed to meet the needs of any EL in PK-12<sup>th</sup> in the state. Texas Education Code, Chapter 74, (TEC, 2019) requires any district and school to have content teachers in the 9-12<sup>th</sup> grades to deliver and teach ELPS, as part of the mandated course's instructional delivery (TEC, §74.4. English Language Proficiency

Standards). However, in practice, this does not seem to be happening in every mainstream content classroom. The teaching of language to develop greater proficiency in the four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, will require of consistent and daily opportunities for NSELs to use language with peers in the mainstream classroom.

Content teachers should not only provide language instruction based on the required ESL objectives but also promote the social exchanges of students, incorporated as part of the lessons' activities in the classroom. It is understandable that in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety protocols of social distancing and online learning instructional methods have taken away the possibilities for students to work collaboratively in close physical proximity. However, during the occasions permitted, teachers should implement small group work to expose NSEL students to other peers and as a result to foster social and academic forms of communication between NSELs and English monolingual students (Stanat & Edele, 2015).

When designing and planning instruction, NSELs' mainstream content teachers should work collaboratively with ESL trained teachers or instruction specialists and coaches available at most secondary schools to get to know their NSELs and build learning on the assets they bring as they are enrolled in mainstream content courses (Shin, 2007). Most of the participants interviewed for the study have a very positive self-perception of their previous learning experiences, knowledge, skills, and individual capacity to do mathematics, science, and social studies. However, not taking the time to *slow-down* in the lesson implementations, as recalled by Dalia, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade student from El Salvador, and shared in similar manner by Valeria and Noelia, the two 11<sup>th</sup> grade

NSELs from Mexico and Honduras respectively, the content teachers' fast pace delivering instruction is not allowing them to include language learning objectives during the lessons, and more importantly get to know the many times *invisible* ESL students in their core content high school classes (Lindholm-Leary, 2015).

ESL strategies must be of imperative implementation for NSELs in high school. Some of the participants in this research understood that teachers are overwhelmed by the way instruction had to be conducted in the content classroom during the pandemic, in most cases. The simultaneous teaching actions with online and in person learners was a major challenge for most public educators. A double responsibility for teachers with the same resources they had before the pandemic, except for the technology platform to connect students directly to their classroom computers. However, the scenario made it more relevant than before to plan and implement instruction for NSELs to support them best with their academic path in mainstream content courses, to simultaneously address the proficiency language and core content knowledge and skills gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Williams, 2020; Dorn et al., 2020).

The self-initiative and high motivation of the NSELs, as shared by the participants of this study, should be an important factor to be considered by educators, school, and administrators to think about other ways to better support RIELs with their academic and social development needs. Efforts must address the need to maintaining the self-motivation and high academic engagement these students are exhibiting in the mainstream classroom, despite the barriers and obstacles exposed and discussed in the findings of this empirical qualitative research (Martin & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). Perhaps, by given additional opportunities for interventions to address NSELs' needs of social and

academic language development, such as after-school ESL clubs or by incorporating technology resources, more time could be spent by these students in sharing and learning language. It is necessary to incorporate online social activities for NSELs to participate and enjoy with other peers, while at home after school or on the weekends. As already suggested by other researchers, online resources can be used to complement instruction and learning individual needs for NSELs. It is also an optimal tool to promote engagement and family participation on the recent immigrant families, as they support their children with their English and academic content learning needs at home (Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020).

A last recommendation has to do with the perceived need of NSELs about getting the support from a second teacher in the content classroom. Students said that based on their past learning experiences in the newcomer classroom, where a second adult was always there to support them with language and content comprehension needs, a similar resource should be considered for them, especially while still developing language proficiency, which was the case for the second and third year NSELs, who participated in the study. Instruction delivery and lesson implementation that considers language proficiency levels and incorporate all possible resources available to best support NSELs in the content learning environments, will facilitate learning interactions that will empower RIELs to practice and use language and feel free and safe to interact with the new learning contents and concepts (Stanat & Edele, 2014). District leaders and curriculum planners should find a way to coordinate more efforts for a smoother and more adequate transition of language acquisition and content learning from the newcomer classroom to the mainstream content classroom in high school.



This could better respond to the NSELs call to be given more consideration to try to better support their parallel needs of learning language and content in the mainstream classroom. Perhaps, schools and districts should reflect upon the need for a proper ESL training and continuous professional development of their content teachers who teach NSELs in their classroom, to adequately incorporate language instruction as part of their daily teachings of content.

The major obstacle to these recommendations is that required additional resources to adequately support language learning and content instructions on NSELs will demand of local public districts and schools initiatives more funds to properly finance those extra resources, such as a second adult in the classroom. The extra teacher or para-professional supporting NSELs or co-teaching language and content will demand of special training in ESL teaching and learning. Of course, more funding for schools will also be needed to properly staff the mainstream classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Such decisions and training of human capital and resources will logically mean more budget strings allocated to this special school population. Unfortunately, NSELs have been treated historically by leaders in schools and districts with limited funds and resources (He & Lin, 2018). Districts and schools cannot simply afford to support extra plans and initiatives with limited and already stretched monies, since these are directly attached to federal and states allocations with specific destinations to run public schools (Martínez & Spikes, 2020).

### **Summary Statement**

In summary, the included listed recommendations of this study are not intended to be an exhaustive list to improve the quality of learning experiences for NSELs. However,

these can certainly be implemented to better support and reach recent immigrant adolescent students with their individual needs of academic language learning, biliteracy construction and social development in the mainstream content classroom. These recommendations are equally aimed at generating special considerations for the reflection of legislators, local district authorities, and public educators about the imperative actions to continue working in the improvement of the learning environments and the quality of public education offered to RIELs, as they continue to enter in significant increasing numbers our public schools in the United States. I also hope to have contributed with the findings and recommendations of this research study to the discussion of what needs to be considered when addressing the perpetual “educational debt,” of the public school system in the United States with NSELs (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso, 2014). The discussion is centered around leadership decisions framed by desperately needed state and federal public education policies. Leadership actions and plans, and initiatives, which properly funded must provide the required resources and human capital to truly address adequate NSELs. Especially those already enrolled by the thousands in districts and schools across the United States from Latino descent (Olivares, 2020).

Findings of this study about the learning experiences of Latino NSELs corroborate what I presented in chapter two as conditions for their school success in the mainstream classroom: The need for every component of language instruction, supports and social interactions conceptual framework. First, language learning requires daily instruction and learning for and by NSELs (Short & Boyson, 2012). Language development takes time for NSELs to develop their second language literacy (Cummins, 2008; Scarcella, 2003). Second and third year NSELs cannot be expected to academically

perform at higher levels of achievement, without additional supports of language and content instruction in the monolingual English only content courses (Faltis & Coulter, 2007). Social interactions directly affect the social language development of NSELs in the mainstream classroom (Filmore & Snow, 2000; Wong, 2000; Christensen, & Stanat, 2007).

## **Implications for Practice and Recommendations**

### **Public Policies and Implications**

At the time of this empirical qualitative study's analysis, interpretations, and recommendations, there was a major discussion at the national stage, during the beginning of the president Biden's administration, of the number of unaccompanied immigrant children (UICs) entering the extensive Southern border of the country with Mexico. According to official numbers from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there were 4,021 referred and under care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) by January 31, 2021 (HHS, 2021). The ORR is the federal government entity in charge of the management of unaccompanied minors who cross the border seeking refuge or asylum in the United States. According to this program's official reports, 72% of the children were in the age bracket of 14 to 17 years old, same age of school students in high school (HHS, 2021). Most of the unaccompanied minors came from the Central American northern triangle countries: Guatemala with 46%, Honduras with 25%, and El Salvador with 14% and other Latin-American countries represented with 8% (HHS, March 2021). These number are interesting when comparing them with the composition of the purposive sample of participants of this qualitative study in percentages: 56% from Honduras, 22% from Mexico, and 22% from El Salvador and Colombia.

The policies and local initiative efforts must be duplicated to address what previous scholars have found to be, and I would have to adhere, as the *endemic education debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner & Lomotey, 2013), with students of color, and especially NSELs. National and state legislators should consider policies that facilitate the implementation of additional instructional and social programs to support newcomer youth ELs academic success. Thousands of these students are crossing the border every day and will eventually need to be incorporated into our public-school system (López, 2021). Immediate future state and local policies, complemented by district and school initiatives will require of a more *holistic and comprehensive approach* to address the real individual needs of NSELs, at times when hundreds continue to enroll daily at public schools and districts in the country as UICs (López, 2021).

### **Leadership Implications**

### **Practice Implications**

Local districts and schools should be considering the creation of interdisciplinary teams to properly identify and cater to the individual needs of secondary NSELs. Many districts and public schools are simply addressing a component of teaching in a separate block language through limited number of ESL instructors who serve multi-level groups of NSELs. This is not adequate when considering that RIELs need real supports in the mainstream content classroom with language acquisition, instruction comprehension and content achievement. The interdisciplinary approach must also design content curriculum in the mainstream classroom that facilitates the social interactions of NSELs with the other students, monolingual or bilingual is not the point. The target should be generating adequate spaces, instructional delivery and learning experiences that include rather than

exclude the emotional and social needs of NSELs (Margary et al., 2009). Being passionate and compassionate about RIELs is the key (Lou, & Noels, 2020).

Local district boards and administrators at public schools should incorporate daily wrap-around social services to properly support the RIELs and their families. Having sporadic presence of some resources that are also provided to other students' populations is not enough (López, 2021). Funding decisions must be made to properly fund additional human resources or to contract outsource services that can effectively bridge the offering of a quality curriculum and instruction with the "right mindset" about NSELs' real needs of social and academic supports (Olivares, 2020). Teachers and paraprofessionals cannot simply provide enough to meet their multiple needs of support.

High-school teachers should collaborate preparing and delivering instruction to teach language along with content in the mainstream classroom (Genesee et al., 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2015). Districts and school leaders should start considering adding permanent services for NSELs to improve language instruction and social support needs. Training teachers intensively on how effectively teach second language skills, embedded with the content instructional delivery should be a high school priority.

There is an apparent "school-wide accepted disconnect" with the reality of NSELs. These are not students to look with the mentality of "pobrecitos" [poor children]. Enough of this has been going on for more than four decades in public education (Callahan et al., 2020). School leaders and administrators need to start acknowledging the assets these students are bringing to their educational agencies, and start building from these, and not simply assimilating culturally and socially, because it is better to teach the *American way* (Callahan et al., 2020). Educators should embrace their origins, previous

societal structures, traditions, and cultures. Let us incorporate their first language and academic literacy in Spanish and start there, instead of trying to ignore and commence with a mistaken “deficit” mindset and educational approach of erroneously defined as “achievement gaps.” Let us instead start working with a positive and *building on previous assets* approach with these students. They already bring knowledge, skills, valuable learning experiences and rich family traditions and culture to the mainstream classroom.

From the leadership perspective, I see it is a matter of *educational debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and a *moral duty* to start working in providing better learning experiences for NSELs at schools. The best that we can give them in the mainstream classroom. Thousands of NSELs are already here in our middle and high schools. Thousands more are yet to come and enter our secondary schools. NSELs, especially those in high school mainstream courses, are running “*una carrera contra el tiempo*” [a race against time]. Against NSELs’ own limited time and what they have to learn and should receive in high school to be workforce or career ready. NSEL are, like any other high school student pursuing their dreams of getting in a college or being productive citizens with their vocations, knowledge and skills. NSELs have the right to fulfill their own individual *American Dream* (López, 2021; Olivares, 2020).

## **Implications for Further Research**

### **Research Implications**

The qualitative study presented opens the possibilities to the necessity to implement future research to continue to identify additional problems and to propose ways to address them as it refers to the needs of youth immigrant students. The aspects of academic language, biliteracy and social development are in need of more qualitative and

quantitative research to measure other implications of continuing to fail addressing with policies and well-funded initiatives the needs of a minority of students that will demand of additional efforts to better serve them under the limited time they have to learn and incorporate their second language with their goals of successfully achieving academics to graduate from high school.

I strongly believe my research findings made resonance of previous studies that have helped to identified instructional and social needs of RIELs from the perspective of *what else can we do* to teach them language and content so they can master knowledge and skills. Most researchers have focused on the educators' actions and others in the evaluation of ESL programs or models or the educational practices. The importance of this research relied in the voices of the students, around their own learning experiences in mainstream core content classrooms. This study added to the limited scholarly knowledge about a special population of minority and at-risk students, enrolled in high schools all over the United States.

A large-scale quantitative study or a mixed-methods research could still capture the newcomer secondary voices in public schools to a larger scale. These should also be considered by a body of social researchers, who could collaboratively work at the states with larger population of NSELs. Most research in bilingual and ESL programs, practices and students has been done with elementary students and educators (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2018). There have been previous efforts to evaluate summer and year-long newcomer school programs (Short & Boyson, 2012; Lopez 2019). Given the major influx of UICs at secondary school age who may be enrolling in schools, more research around the needs of NSELs will help to the scholarly knowledge and hopefully to the

consideration by legislators and the federal and state government to pass and implement policies aligned with the individual educational and social needs of these youth population (Lopez, 2015).

### **Limitations**

I experienced several limitations during the implementation of this qualitative narrative study in its design, such as the impossibility to access students directly. District and school authorities had a strict protocol to contact students. They contacted students directly not allowing me to directly invite the 72-total population of NSELs meeting the criteria of second- or third-year enrolled students in a public school in the United States.

Another limitation was caused by another restriction set by the district and school authorities for me to only implement virtual Zoom voice interviews. One per participant and without possibilities to conduct a second interview for additional questions, the extension or clarification on some of the topics discussed during the one and only voice interviews on Zoom. This limitation was according to the district authorities necessary to maintain the safety of the students during the time of the research implementation in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third limitation was the impossibility to do classroom observations also due to the COVID-19 pandemic safety protocols and recommendations that included no visitors on school campuses and that were adopted by the local school district for the academic year 2020-2021. In general, the limitations to do in-person interviews, to have direct access to the students, or not been able to implement focused-groups interviews, limited the possibilities to expand the research to other students, of the 72 totally pre-



qualified and identified as potential subjects, who could have finally become participants of the purposive sample used for this qualitative interview research.

Additional limitations to the study were set by the impossibility to interview ESL and mainstream content teachers to gain their perspective of their NSELs language and content learning. Also, the impossibility to do classroom observations limited my capacity as a qualitative researcher to capture live snapshots of instructional delivery and learning in the mainstream classroom at the research site. These data would have given probably additional elements of analysis and enriched the discussion during the inductive qualitative analysis of the findings.

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## Appendix A

### Student Interview Script

#### Introduction

Thank you for accepting the invitation. During the interview we will talk about different topics related to your educational experiences as a recent immigrant Latino secondary student and English learner at your different classes. During this opportunity we will talk about your experiences in your *subject* (mathematics, social studies, science) classroom. I would like to remind you that what is discussed during this interview will be used only for academic purposes as part of a dissertation study and will not have any implication over your academic standing as a student at your actual school and district. This interview is composed by (12) questions with possibilities of formulating additional inquiries, as the dialogue of our interview develops. The responses to the interview question are confidential and will not be shared with the school or school officials, except in a general form as part of the results, analysis, findings and recommendations of the present study. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Let us now begin our interview.

#### Questions

1. Tell me a little more about yourself and your family.
2. Tell me about your previous learning experiences at your country of origin (Name of the country, previous school, etc.)
3. When did you come to the United States and what do you recall from coming to this country and your first-time entering school in this country?
4. Tell me about your learning experiences, learning and social with other peers, during the first year of school in the newcomer classroom.
5. What was your previous knowledge of English before starting school in the United States? Please explain.
6. How do you believe you are doing with your English language learning in your content classes?
7. How difficult or not difficult is for you to follow the instruction in your content classes? Why? Let us talk about each course you are taking in mathematics, science and social studies.
8. How do you receive help with language instruction to help you develop English language proficiency in your content classes? If yes, how does your teacher help you with your language understanding needs? We can talk about each one in order.

9. How do you communicate or interact with other students?
10. Tell me about a time when you had difficulties or felt frustrated when learning in your content courses or classes.
11. Tell me about a time when you had difficulties or had difficulties communicating and working with other students at your content classes?
12. How do you believe you could be better helped to learn or improve your English language and be able to learn more in your content classroom (classes)?

## Appendix B

### IRB Protocol - Memo

#### APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

July 14, 2020

Jose Lopez jeloopez11@uh.edu

Dear Jose Lopez: On June 29, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission: Type of Review: Initial Study Title of Study: Learning Experiences of Newcomer Latino Secondary English Learners.

Investigator: Jose Lopez IRB ID: STUDY00002378 Funding/ Proposed Funding: Name: Unfunded Award ID: Award Title: IND, IDE, or HDE: None Documents Reviewed:

• Student Interview English, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.); • Cover Letter Mail Parent Consent Form Spanish, Category: Other; • Newcomer Students Assent Form Spanish, Category: Consent Form; • HRP - 502 Parental Permission Form Spanish, Category: Consent Form; • Translation Assurance 2, Category: Translation Assurance; • HRP - 502 Parental Permission Form, Category: Consent Form; • Newcomer Adult Student Consent Form Spanish, Category: Consent Form; • Learning Experiences of Newcomer Latino Secondary ELs, Category: IRB Protocol; • Newcomer Adult Student Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Cover Letter Mail Parent Consent Form English, Category: Other; • Newcomer Students Assent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Phone Call Script Spanish, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Phone Call Script English, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Student Interview Spanish, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);

Review Category: Exempt Committee Name: Noncommitte review IRB Coordinator: Maria Martinez The IRB approved the study on July 14, 2020;

☐ A letter of cooperation from -Texas Large School District- will be submitted to the IRB via a modification prior to research initiation. As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

☐ Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects) ☐ Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others ☐ Study Closure Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab. In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. Sincerely, Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office University of Houston, Division of Research 713 743 9204 cphs@central.uh.edu

<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

**Appendix C**

**District Research Protocol Approval - Memo**

Permission Granted by Texas Large School District to Interview Students

To: Jose Lopez

Date: September 29, 2020

(Complete Memo Available upon Request)