

THE CHANGING FACE OF EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVES ON
DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND STUDENT ACHEIVEMENT IN TEXAS
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Changing Face of Education: Perspectives on Demographic Change and Student Achievement in Texas Public Schools

ABSTRACT

Background/Problem

Rapidly changing demographics tend to cause Texas public schools to become more diverse than ever before (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Students of various nationalities, races, and ethnic origins bring different worldviews and experiences to the classroom. Educators must find pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies to effectively deliver instruction that will prepare students for post-secondary challenges (Saphier, 2017). Minority and under-represented students have struggled to achieve success equal to that of their Anglo peers (Texas Education Agency, 2017). As demographic shifts unfold, the minority becomes the majority, which could inevitably widen the achievement gap if schools are unable to transition successfully from antiquated instructional practices to proven approaches that will improve outcomes. Specifically, the Hispanic population in Texas is on pace to become a majority in some geographic regions and to become a larger part of the entire student population in the public-school system (Lucio, 2014). Hispanic students struggle in school because of socioeconomic factors and language barriers; however, considering the disparities that exist among minority groups in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), these are not the only challenges students face (Parker, 2018). Examination of the teacher's perspective regarding the challenges of successfully educating the growing Hispanic population in Texas public schools has revealed important information about the needs that exist and areas in which educators feel

under-supported in their efforts to move the needle on success for students who are preparing for college and careers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to uncover the perspectives, attitudes, and feelings of secondary educators who work in grades 9 and 10 and are responsible for delivering instruction and leadership in schools with large Hispanic populations. The study was guided by the following research question: What are educators' perceptions regarding the best teaching practices for Hispanic students?

Methods

A qualitative phenomenological approach guided this study, which seeks to explore the lived-experiences of educators serving Hispanic students in Texas Public Schools. The selected method is optimal because it allows the researcher to collect rich and thick descriptions of shared experiences that exist among teachers working with a specific population (Creswell, 2012). Utilizing one-to-one, in-depth interviews, the researcher had the opportunity to follow an interview protocol of semi-structured questions that left room for follow-up. Creswell (2012) explains that the sample size in qualitative research is relatively small to allow deep investigation. Utilizing convenience sampling, this study elicited participation from three suburban teachers from a suburban school district. The participants were teachers in the subject area of English. Next, a focus group was conducted to generate validity and member checking that helped add credibility and trustworthiness. Triangulation is a process whereby accuracy is enhanced through the utilization of multiple data sources (Creswell, 2018). This study relied on one-to-one in-depth interviews and a focus-

group interview to add validity to the methodological approaches selected to explore the study questions under consideration. The researcher sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following IRB approval, participant recruitment began. Once participants had been identified, the researcher invited the selected candidates to participate in the study. Individuals willing to participate in the study were made aware of their rights and privacy considerations and were asked to sign an informed-consent form. After informed consent was granted, the researcher conducted interviews and transcribed data prior to the analysis and development of findings and conclusions.

Findings

Results from the study have provided valuable information that can be used to better understand the needs of our Hispanic populations. Analysis of the data has allowed the researcher to uncover six themes: (1) Relationships are critical to building trust, (2) language barriers create difficulty in instruction, (3) students need more diverse educators, (4) preconceived notions compromise instruction, (5) resources are not adequate, and (6) work load takes away critical time. Each of these themes presents unique information regarding how all students' needs can be better met. The results of this study lead to further recommendations about how students can be better served.

Conclusion

This study adds to the body of knowledge about closing the achievement gap and transforming teaching methods to meet student needs. Students are the future, and the quality of education they receive will have long-term economic, social, and

political implications (McGlynn, 2010). Schools must engage in critical examination of their practices to meet the demand of changing demographics. The voice of teachers must be a key source of data that drives the decision-making process regarding strategies, curriculum, funding, and the overall design of the educational system. Informing policy about education should result from understanding the experiences of teachers in the classroom who spend time in the instructional setting with students on a daily basis.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Hispanic students in the United States (U.S.) have significantly lower life prospects due to lack of academic achievement in comparison to their better-educated peers. Systemic issues contribute to the inability of the U.S. education system to respond adequately to the needs of diverse learners. In the ever-changing global economy, students must obtain a college degree or other technical training if they are to be employed in the workforce at a living wage. Students who lack a college degree or a specialized skill set are at a striking economic disadvantage (Briggs, 2012). The underachievement of minority students in the U.S. has social, economic, and political implications that threaten the future prosperity of the country as a whole (Thomas, 2011; Vescio, 2016).

The U.S. is one of the most developed countries in the world, yet education systems are struggling to meet the rapidly changing needs of a diverse student population; in a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. students trailed an average of 29 other countries in reading, mathematics, and science literacy (National Center for Education Statistics , 2016). As the U.S. population diversifies, so do the schools within it. Students of different nationalities, races, and ethnicities attend schools in which educators face the challenge of connecting and engaging them in instruction and activities that are conducive to academic success. Hispanic and African-American students make up more than half of the student population in Texas public schools (Texas Education Agency, 2017). According to the TEA (2017, p. 7), the total population of Texas

public-school students was 5,299,728. Of this number, Hispanic students made up a little over 53% or 2,827,847 total students. Low graduation and dropout rates in Texas public schools indicate that the education system struggles to meet the needs of diverse learners. Statistics show that thousands more minority students drop out each year in comparison to all other ethnic groups (Texas Education Agency, 2017). In the class of 2016 alone, dropout rates were astonishing among minority populations, but three populations stood out in particular: African-American, American Indian, and Hispanic populations (Texas Education Agency, 2017). African-American students had the highest dropout rate at 9.1%, while American Indian and Hispanic were not far behind and with 7.6% and 7.5%, respectively (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Hispanics are the fastest growing population and are on pace to be the leading ethnic group by 2043 (Lucio, 2014).

In Texas, there are over a million bilingual or English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students. Relative to the entire student population, the total student population is 5,359,127 which makes up nearly 19% (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The ESL students are faced with many challenges in the classroom, which may be one of the factors which contributes to such high dropout rates. According to Liu (2015), one of the challenges faced by ESL students is misalignment between teaching and learning styles and the amount of free time students spend with other native-speaking students, thus limiting their exposure to English. Another challenge that has emerged over the years is Hispanic parental involvement; the parents have a positive view of the system of education, but often have little education themselves, thus limiting their ability to aid the students in their work (Pitts, 2012).

Parker (2018) found that there were two other major connections to the achievement gap between Hispanic students and their non-Hispanic counterparts. The first thing discovered is the impact that family socioeconomic status has on student success in school. When a family struggled financially, the student's educational attainment did as well. This plays such a large role for Hispanics living in Texas because the average annual income of a non-Hispanic, White Texas resident is roughly \$39,000, while the income of Hispanics is on average \$22,000 (Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, 2018). Parker (2018) continued by stating that Hispanic families who are within the lowest 25% income bracket are seven times more likely to drop out and not finish school.

The second connection Parker (2018) discovered has to do with the difficulties students faced if they were not efficient with the language being used in the classroom, which is typically English. Underachievement of Hispanic students is an issue for Texas public schools and the students that make up the population, because Texas shares the longest border with Mexico of any other state within the U.S. The Texas-Mexico border covers a distance of 1,254 miles, according to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT, 2018). In addition to U.S. citizens of diverse backgrounds, during the 2016-2017 school year alone, there was a total of 106,714 registered immigrant students, 65,137 of whom were Hispanic (Texas Education Agency, 2017). With many immigrants coming directly from a non-English speaking country, the probability that they will require assistance increases twofold (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). The concern is not over a student's national origin but rather with how to properly educate struggling

minorities. Though steps have been taken in the right direction when supporting minority students, the ever-changing political landscape makes sustainability difficult (Gandara & Rumberger, 2009).

Connection to the Study

This critical-action research project aligns with a passion to empower teachers to inspire students through responsive pedagogy and educational practices. Mills (2018) explains that the aim of action research is liberation through knowledge. Improving approaches to instruction and understanding of its impact will ultimately improve the lives of students and the ability of schools to respond to complex needs.

Service in education provides personal experience with working in several school districts that have very diverse populations. In each of the school districts, there was one thing in common: The ethnic makeup of the teacher population was not representative of the ethnic makeup of the student population. This in itself is not considered a problem, but another trend that continued to present itself is the poor academic success of students both in the classroom and on state exams.

One personal passion is education and helping others reach their full potential. Time spent in various school districts has led to strong professional relationships with other educators, students, and community members. As these relationships grew, it became more apparent that the problem was not a lack of desire to learn, but that there was a deeper underlying issue preventing students from realizing their full potential.

Past and present relationships and experiences in these school districts have peaked interest regarding what can or should be done to better educate Hispanic

students. By examining the perspectives of educators directly responsible for preparing students for academic success, we have achieved a better understanding that has provided new insights into what teachers need to make the most of the opportunity to change the way we instruct, encourage, and inspire students.

Statement of the Problem

Rapid demographic changes are creating the most diverse student populations ever, and schools are faced with the challenge of developing high-fidelity teaching practices that are responsive to the needs of the populations they serve (Saphier, 2017). Student-success measures among Hispanic students lag in comparison to their Anglo counterparts and other minority sub-populations (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The problem is that, as demographics continue to change and the Hispanic population grows, the opportunity gap will continue to widen unless attempts are made to understand it better, as will the perspectives of educators who have the ultimate responsibility for implementing changes to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Problem Background (Rationale)

Individually, the Hispanic population in Texas is growing faster than any other racial or ethnic group, but it also presents the most staggering rates of educational attainment and achievement (Texas Demographic Center, 2017). A report from the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (Combs, 2014) explained that, “Texas has a young and growing population. This could either be a liability or an asset” (p. 4).

The critical nature of responsive teaching practices that improve outcomes for minority students in public schools across America has far-reaching implications for the country (Vescio, 2016). The risks are profoundly rooted and affect the nation's ability to grow economically and socially (McGlynn, 2010). Moreover, Hispanic youth have not fully benefitted from the system of education because of a systemic lack of reform aimed at cultural understanding and knowledge for the changing population (Kuykendall, 2009). Leading in all categories of underachievement, Hispanic and other minority students are at significant risk; yet, based on projections for demographic change, they are as much the foundation for the future as anyone, if not more so (Gilroy, 2011).

Research Questions

The following research question identifies the overarching area of inquiry that has helped to guide this study and has provided a foundation for connecting teacher perspectives with existing literature and theory surrounding the topic of the gap in achievement between white and Hispanic students in Texas.

RQ1: What are educators' perceptions regarding best teaching practices for minority students?

As opposed to quantitative research, this qualitative research design requires that the researcher pose research questions rather than objectives or hypotheses. The purpose of the overarching research question is to guide the study in uncovering meaningful information. It is also important to pose the question as a general issue so as to not limit the views of the participants (Creswell J. W., 2014).

Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap—*Achievement gap* refers to “any persistent or significant disparity in the academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as White students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy —“Addressing the cultural differences between teachers and students”(Emdin, 2016, p. 10).

English as a Second Language (ESL) -*ESL* is defined as teaching the English language to an individual whose primary language is not English and who lives in a country in which the primary language is English (Koptur, 2017).

Minority—For the purpose of this study, the term *minority* is defined as “a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment” (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Teaching Strategy—For the purpose of this study, the term *teaching strategy* is defined as“ the structure, system, methods, techniques, procedures and processes that a teacher uses during instruction“ (Northwest Missouri State University, 2019).

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology in its exploration of perspectives from teachers who are actively involved in teaching students of different ethnicities, backgrounds, and walks of life. Qualitative research is ideal for exploring the experiences of people’s lives and has great potential for making change (Merriam, 2014). Utilizing a grounded-theory approach, this qualitative study seeks to generate

new knowledge when “the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action, or an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants“ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 82).

Ultimately, in the process of grounded theory, the researcher collects, gathers, and analyzes data through various data-collection methods. The data-collection process is not limited to one specific method, but it can be done by interviewing participants with open-ended questions and by studying pre-existing texts. The researcher must attempt to avoid bias and focus on the data only (Creswell, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is provided by sociocultural theory. The theory originated with Vygotsky, a psychologist, and suggests that children learn through various opportunities such as social interaction and cultural context (Scott and Palincsar, 2018). As stated previously, one of the challenges to educating Hispanic students is the inability to effectively communicate and understand the English language (Parker, 2018). As Rezaee (2011) has stated, in order for English language learners to experience success with the language, they must be given adequate opportunities to learn through social settings.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it gives insight to the lived experiences of the teachers who have the responsibility of educating a diverse student population. It also proved valuable in contributing to the body of knowledge on teacher perspectives of educating an ever-changing student body and their achievement.

It is vital to examine educational problems from the teachers' perspective to understand what can be done to meet the needs of Hispanic students. At what point do teachers stop assuming that students do not want to learn and start asking how they can help them learn? Hispanic students in Texas public schools are underperforming compared to their peers, but as Cairo (2012) has described it, it is a problem that stretches well across the U.S.

Schools in Texas, and other high-growth states, might be able to use the information provided here to better serve their students and improve outcomes. The data collected through this study may prove to be beneficial for optimizing the success of all of our students—especially those who are underserved and disadvantaged by an antiquated system of education.

Limitations of the Study

This study of teachers' perspectives on demographic change and quality of education was limited to one region of Texas. Though certain measures were put in place to maximize dependability and credibility, other investigators with their own participants may discover different results or findings.

Another limitation of the study has to do with the willingness of individuals to participate. Some individuals who elected not to participate in the study could have had different perspectives, ideas, and experiences that could lead to different conclusions, which might ultimately have led to a different result or theory.

A third limitation of this study is that it considers only teachers' perspectives of their experiences. The summary of the results could have been different if I had opted to use the perspectives of all the parties involved in the education process.

Finally, the location of the study could have been a limitation in the sense that participants in a rural area may have offered different answers to questions than their urban counterparts. Depending on the location of the participants and the settings in which they have worked, the alignment of answers and beliefs could be different.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed the accuracy of the data used from the Texas Education Agency to detail the challenges Hispanic students face in Texas public schools. I also assumed that all participants of the study were honest and forthright about their experiences as educators. All of the statistics and supporting material from various sites, articles, and organizations was assumed to be correct and accurate.

Summary

Hispanic students in Texas public schools have faced and continue to face challenges in the classroom. These challenges are apparent to educators, researchers, policy makers, and the community. By examining the perspectives of the teachers, a better understanding was made possible of the greatest challenges Hispanic populations face.

Organization of the Study

This manuscript contains five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, connects with the literature, and provides a statement of the problem. It also discusses the problem background, identifies research questions, defines terms, characterizes the methodology, and presents the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 offers a review of literature. It explores existing research on the impact of demographic change and student success. Chapter 3 functions to educate the reader regarding the

methodological approach used in the study. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine educators' perceptions of strategies that may contribute to improved outcomes for minority students. This chapter examines six areas of literature necessary for understanding the challenges and opportunities that exist in relation to advancing student success for the growing population of diverse students entering the Texas system of public education. The themes that emerge include the following: (a) brief history of research on student achievement, (b) achievement gaps among minority students, (c) demographic change in the U.S. and Texas relating to the makeup of Texas schools, (d) strategies for teaching diverse students, (e) the history of challenges for teaching minority students, and (f) improvements in teaching Hispanic students in Texas and the United States. This literature review offers a succinct presentation of information essential to understanding existing research surrounding the topic of minority student success in Texas public schools and related strategies and best practices that may hold promise for continuous growth and the development of teaching.

Brief History of Student Achievement

Educational access and achievement are global topics of conversation within both education, policy, and economic circles. The Program for International Student

Assessment (PISA) administers a measure of student academic abilities every three years in relation to the status of education. It covers the topic from a global perspective. The participants of the assessment are 15 years old and, in the last measure, a total of 65 different countries participated. Measurements are taken for several topics, including mathematics, science, and reading literacy (Jackson and Kiersz, 2016). The United States has fallen behind other developed countries in various key performance indicators (KPIs), which creates an urgent need for change (Willis, 2015). This chapter presents a succinct compilation of important information taken from existing research surrounding the topics of student achievement, the achievement gap, and current data that was produced by leading organizations seeking to implement real change when it comes to advancing education in the United States.

Education reform is a consistent topic of discourse among government agencies with authority and oversight regarding tertiary education. Reauthorization of the sweeping Bush-era legislation known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was initiated in 2015 when Barack Obama was elected to serve as President of the United States. The reauthorization was dubbed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Darlong-Hammond and a team of researchers have explained that ESSA provides a pathway for states to overhaul policies to move toward more equitable systems that allow more flexibility to meet the unique needs of 21st century learners. Today's learners are much different from their forbearers in the American system of public primary and secondary education.

The findings of the 2016 study from PISA reveals where some countries are lacking in education, which countries are ahead of the rest, and which areas deserve specific focus on main measurable gains. Moreover, the study reveals that Shanghai China, Singapore, and Hong Kong were the three top performers in every category. Importantly, the results of the measures showed that the U.S. trailed 29 other countries in mathematics, 22 in science literacy, and 19 other countries in reading literacy. These are indications that more research should be done on what these three countries are doing different to consistently out perform all other countries.

Achievement Gaps

In the United States, congress mandates an annual report that presents assessment and statistics entitled *The Condition of Education*. This summary of the most recent data about education in America helps policy makers monitor the progress of the nation's complex systems of education and training. The 2017 iteration of the report presents 50 measures that review everything from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary education. The comprehensive analysis paints a picture for policy makers who are responsible for the development of new laws and for the reauthorization of existing regulations that guide the direction of education. This analysis affects almost every entity that is working to educate students and to provide relevant academic programs that will meet the needs of our fast-changing society and hard-to-reach populations. Next, the report examines multi-level data sets including provisions for persons with disabilities; gaps in achievement based on race and socioeconomic status, and other important metrics that help us understand the multitude of variables that must be considered in the decision-making process. While

the report is published annually, certain measures are carried out from year to year which allow for longitudinal exploration (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) releases several reports which detail the number of students in Texas public schools by race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. It also produces reports on annual dropout rates, secondary completion, and advanced placement within the public schools of Texas. Reviewing the most recent data from the TEA about achievement among sub-populations in the Texas school system reveals telling information about the direction of education and opportunity across the state (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

Lee (2016) exposes the underachievement problems in the United States in his book, *The Anatomy of Achievement Gaps*, thereby underscoring the need for critical exploration of the challenges and barriers that have plagued the American system of education. Some of the challenges include immigration, rapid social changes in our knowledge-based economy, globalization, and technological advancements. These suggest that the United States has abandoned the idea that education is the driver of economic growth and social mobility. Interestingly, Lee (2016) goes on to state that the field of educational research, in spite of progress in research that has unintentionally created a narrow cohort that lacks the necessary interdisciplinary resulting in inconsistent data and missed opportunities for collaboration that could attribute to solutions for complex problems like the achievement gap.

The national response to the critical need for improvement has resulted in P-16 initiatives aimed to increase student performance, which is a national movement

that seeks to align curriculum and instruction at the K-12 level with the standards of colleges and universities and employers. Specifically, a national benchmark for standards was developed through the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSO), but the standards are considerably higher than what most states have required. Implementing real instructional changes based on what may be viewed as unrealistic measures adds to an already complex problem. This problem suffers from lack of congruency based on the autonomy states have to design and implement curricular and instructional requirements (Lee, 2016).

National Center for Education Statistics (2011), using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) on mathematics and reading, reviewed the differences between Hispanic students and Caucasian students between 1990 and 2009. The two decades of information explain the performance of each of the identified populations. Data also tested for White non-ELL students and Hispanic non-ELL students. Mathematics achievement gaps between White and Hispanic students between 1990 and 2009 were consistently around 20 points, with the low being 19 and the high being 26 in the year 2000. Strikingly, the disparity in mathematics scores was on average around 30 points different with a low of 24 and a high of 31 in the year 2000. These nationally normed scores derive from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics.

Something that all of the reports make clear is that minority populations of African-American, Hispanic, and Native-American students consistently present the lowest academic performance and highest dropout rates but also make up the largest percentage of our student population. Specific details about why minority students

lead the population in underachievement has far reaching implications for the country that permeate any one individual or community. While educational researchers have missed opportunities for interdisciplinary integration, their data and reports nonetheless make important contributions to the literature that may still help inform policy, improve practice, and ultimately lead to positive change (Lee, 2016).

Demographic Change in the U.S. and Texas Relating to the Makeup of Texas Schools

Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney (2009) recognize that, by the year 2030, a large percentage of the retired population will be made up of White baby-boomers. Also, by the year 2030, a large proportion of the U.S. population will be made up of minorities. There is no problem with the make-up of the population, but there is a problem with the academic success of these current students. The authors suggest that if there is a desire to keep the country productive and economically stable, there must be a change in our educational settings. The minority students must experience a lift in their academic achievements so that they may become productive workers and engaged citizens who can take charge of caring for retirees.

With Hispanic students making up more than 20% of the nation's student population, Gandara and Rumberger (2009) have claimed that there is and will continue to be a need for better support and resources for these students. They continue on to explain how the ever-changing landscape in Washington D.C. causes inconsistencies with funding for ELL/ESL students and confusion regarding the direction that should be taken to address these issues. However, they found that, when comparing the success rates of Texas and California in the ability to transition EL

students to fluent English status, that Texas was much quicker and more successful than California.

As our nation grows, so does the academic gap between the Hispanic and Anglo students (Saphier, 2017). It has been shown that students of color attending school in a high poverty area have more than doubled in recent years. Saphier (2017) continues to argue that appropriate methods are vital to the success of these students. Teachers are hesitant to explain what has been successful for them in their own teachings for fear that they will offend other teachers. Saphier (2017) has said that it is not being about who is wrong and who is right but rather how can we educate the students the best.

As the article continues, Saphier states that over 50% of the U.S. student population is of color. This is important because our teachers must become more culturally proficient. When these teachers use more culturally proficient procedures in their classrooms, the students will feel as though they have a place in the classroom and will therefore have more confidence to learn.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there will be a 77 percent increase in the Hispanic population and less than a one-percent increase in the White population by the year 2020 (McGlynn, 2010). This indicates that one of the most undereducated populations in the U.S. will make up the largest population growth in terms of raw numbers.

History of Challenges for Teaching Minority Students

According to Liu (2015), ESL students face many challenges when becoming acclimated to an academic environment with which they are not familiar. One of the

challenges they face with this transition stems from their continued use of their primary language. When they have problems with their schoolwork, they tend to ask for advice and help from their native-speaking counterparts rather than asking the teacher or other non-native speaking peers. When they do this, it limits their exposure to the secondary language, thus making it harder to learn.

Liu also found that students coming from their native countries are used to different teaching styles compared to that of their secondary country. To add to this, the delivery of the lesson or material is in the secondary language, so there are large amounts of material that they do not understand. Another challenge is that the students may have different learning styles; the language barrier makes this especially complex.

One of the leading ESL and ELL populations in Texas is the Hispanic population (Texas Education Agency, 2017). With this in mind, Pitts (2012) detailed some of the reasons why this population struggles in primarily English-speaking public schools in the U.S. One of the findings of the study suggests that these parents are not involved with their child's education starting at an early age because of the parents' limited education and English proficiency. Ultimately, if they do not understand the language themselves, they are not able to help their children.

Pitts (2012) continues by saying that parenting styles comprise another major factor in the success of the students in school. A total of three parenting styles was listed: the permissive, the authoritarian, and the authoritative. Each of the different styles has been shown to develop certain traits, habits, and attitudes in children. When parents use either the permissive or authoritarian styles, students tend to exhibit

defiant, stubborn, and rebellious behaviors. On the other hand, when the authoritative approach is used, children exhibit more responsibility, greater social maturity, and have greater academic success.

When Barack Obama became the 44th President of the United States, there was speculation that the country no longer had racial issues and could now be considered a “post-racial” society (McGlynn, 2010). McGlynn (2010) addresses the fact that, though the U.S. did in fact have its first ever African-American President, the country did not experience any fewer racial injustices.

After Obama was elected in 2008, several racist comments and cartoons were shared via e-mail, Facebook, and other media sources from individuals who held an elected position (McGlynn, 2010). These racial injustices continue into education and the workforce, with major gaps between Hispanic and African-American individuals and their White counterparts. In education, enrollment in and completion of higher education has risen among Hispanic students, but the achievement gap between Hispanics and White students has continued to grow.

McGlynn (2010) says that, once out of school, the disparities do not stop. Research has shown that Hispanic individuals have earned significantly less income than their White counterparts for the same positions. Ultimately, the study shows that minorities with the same experience and education levels as their White counterparts were not being given the same treatment.

Two gaps have been made very clear: the opportunity gap and the achievement gap. However, one other gap that should be focused on: the funding gap (Verstegen, 2015). As it pertains to achievement and opportunity, when a school

district surrounds an area of wealth, that wealth is ultimately funneled into the district, thereby giving the students more resources with which to be successful (e.g., smaller class sizes, quality teachers, support systems and programs, and instructional materials). With money comes opportunity; with opportunity comes achievement. Thus, it is a domino effect.

Free education is provided to all students within the U.S., but there are still major issues that arise when looking at the quality of the education. The quality of education some students receive in comparison to others is largely decided by the amount of funding they receive (Jackson, Johnson and Persico, 2015). Studies show that students who attend schools that are located in low- to no-poverty areas are more likely to graduate high school, attend college, and attain a college degree. Funding plays a vital role in the success of students and in providing them with the same opportunities their wealthier counterparts have.

Strategies for Teaching Diverse Students

Vescio (2016) talks about the importance of building relationships and focusing on relevance and responsibility to promote equality and equity in the classrooms. Vescio (2016) continues to talk about culturally responsive teaching practices and the effect they have on the diverse student population that make up our classrooms. Integrating these practices into a classroom opens the door to more engaging lessons and more responsive students. Vescio continues to talk about the importance of knowing one's children, their families, and the community they come from so that the students feel safe and cared for. Only after children feel safe and

cared for will they be willing to put their faith in a teacher to guide them to where they need to be.

Relevance is another area that Vescio (2016) has said is vital to the success of the student. In a classroom with very racially and economically diverse students, it is important to connect the curriculum to the experiences of the students. Doing this allows the students to relate a topic they do not necessarily understand to something they know very well. Vescio ends the article by describing the responsibility teachers have to be persistent in discovering new ways for their students to learn and grow. It is the teacher's responsibility to mold the curriculum to the student, not the student to the curriculum.

Kuykendall (2009) makes reference to the under-achievement of our Hispanic students in the U.S. One reason for the under-achievement is the students' belief that they are continuously declining over the years in the classroom. It is predicted that these populations of students will go from a minority to the majority by the year 2040, yet most of teaching practices in the classroom across the nation support the learning style of White students who are not economically disadvantaged. Kuykendall (2009) suggests that these teaching strategies can be linked to the lack of success enjoyed by our Hispanic students.

Kuykendall (2009) continues to say that, to meet the needs of all of our students, diversity education must become a norm. Building relationships, making connections, building the confidence of the students, taking bias out of the classroom, and many more steps must be taken to show improvement in these students' lives.

The absence of diversity in gifted education reveals the full extent of underachievement among minority students and their ability to equitably access programs intended for high-achieving students. Most minority students attend schools in which resources are lacking, instruction is sub-par, and the importance of education is missing from the dialogue about what makes a person successful. Socioeconomic status plays a crippling role in the ability of schools and communities to provide students with the same opportunities as their counterparts in more affluent neighborhoods. Such issues as stereotyping, negative expectations, and cultural differences have continued to challenge our educational system's ability to respond to the rapidly changing demographics of a country standing at the crossroads of globalization, immigration, technological advancement, and political uncertainty.

Moreover, the ever-changing political landscape consistently focused on education reform misses the mark in most instances because a lack of consistent metrics requires schools to make meaningful assessments and evaluations of the student learning necessary for the implementation of instructional and curricular change that would render long-lasting positive outcomes for students, teachers, and communities alike. Reclaiming the American dream requires that a fair chance at prosperity be given to all students through learning, growth, and the development of skills required to join a highly advanced workforce shaped by a 21st century economy and an always-connected world. African-American, Hispanic, Native, Alaskan, low-socioeconomic status, rural, and other under-served populations must become foci of the planning process of educators who are aware of the effects of educational

injustices and our lack of ability to respond to the unique needs of each learner (Grantham, 2011).

Data from the Office of Civil Rights reveals the sad reality that underrepresentation, racism, and inequality are consistent themes which have compromised the ability of the American education system to meet the needs of all learners, both historically and presently but hopefully not in the future (Ford, Scott, Moore and Amos, 2013).

The achievement gap within our elementary and secondary schools has been widely discussed over the past two decades. One gap that remains on the backburner of these conversations is the opportunity gap. While the two gaps have different names, they go hand in hand with the academic success of our students. Simply put, though not all students attend college, this does not mean that all students should not be prepared to go to college. Learning is a task which is not easily assessable by students; they learn only when they are given the opportunity to learn. The more students are denied the opportunity to learn, the further the gap in their achievement grows (Carter and Welner, 2013).

Putnam (2015) has claimed that the opportunity gap is not something that begins in school but is rather something that begins at home. Depending on the success of parents, children will either be provided with opportunities for good schools, early childhood opportunities, good community support, and even money to invest in academic resources, or not. If they are born into homes that cannot afford to send them to early childhood programs, they will live in areas that send them to less-than-average schools and have communities that are filled with crime and other

negative influences. An example of how money influences the opportunity gap can be seen in the fact that students who have high test scores but are from poor backgrounds are more likely to drop out of college than students who have low test scores who are from rich families (Putnam, 2015).

Environmental factors outside the schools are also important to consider in the conversation about student success outcomes. Putnam (2015) illuminates the idea that student success is the responsibility of more than just school personnel. Families and other community institutions play a vital role in supporting students and helping them realize their full potential.

There is no one perfect way to eliminate or even minimize the opportunity gap for students; however, research has uncovered two core practices that have been shown to help in the process (LaCour, York, Welner, Valladares, and Kelley, 2017): *broadening and enriching learning opportunities* and *creating and maintaining a healthy school culture*.

The broadening and enriching of learning opportunities can be accomplished in various ways. LaCour et al. (2017) suggest that all students should be given the opportunity to learn and study a rich assortment of subjects. Not only should they be given access to these subjects, but the opportunity for them to study at advanced levels should not be withheld. Many rural and poverty-stricken schools are not given access to these advanced-level courses due to their lack of resources. The authors found that, when all students were placed in these courses and given the extra support they needed to be successful in more rigorous courses, school enrollment went up and the achievement gap narrowed.

The second core practice found in this study—creating and maintaining a healthy school culture—focuses on academic, social, and emotional development (LeCour et al., 2017). All students should be able to study in an environment in which they feel supported and safe and where conflicts are handled fairly and in a productive manner. Statistics show that when African-American and White students commit the same infraction, the African-American students are three to four times more likely to be suspended or expelled. LeCour et al. (2017) suggest that less exclusionary discipline and more restorative justice be used to provide all students with the same amount of exposure to the curriculum. In a New York High School, when these practices were implemented, suspension rates dropped from 11.7% to just 4.75% in just five years. In that same time, expulsion rates dropped from 0.47% to just 0.07%.

Examining Hispanic Student Achievement

Parker, Segovia, and Tap (2016) reviewed the literature and found that achievement for Hispanic students has been closely related to several areas including the following: gender roles, generational status, and use of language in the southeastern United States. Zoda, Slate and Combs (2011) reported that Hispanic students within Texas who attended large schools were more successful on state reading and writing exams than Hispanic students who attended small schools. It is important to note that the results from Zoda, Slate and Combs (2011) do not align with results from other related studies. Clear delineation of the differences that exist in outcomes based on the size and categorization of schools compels further inquiry into the variables that exist for minority student success. Understanding the specific

elements and best-practices that allow students to make measurable progress may lead to increased collaboration and sharing of knowledge that results in improved outcomes.

Ortiz, Valerio and Lopez (2012) discovered that Hispanic students have had high rates of attrition within higher-education settings. Rates of attrition and numbers of high-school dropouts have increased continuously over the years, thereby allowing the Hispanic population to surpass the Black population and further widening the gap with the White population.

Egalite, Kisida and Winters (2015) conducted a study examining the impact of same-race teachers on the success of the students. For African-American, White, and Asian-American students, the results were positive and showed an increase in the success of the students. As for Hispanic students, they experienced a negative impact when being taught by a teacher of the same race. The authors did note that it is important to take into consideration the fact that it is difficult to accurately examine the results for the Hispanic population due to the large population of Hispanics and the origins of the race, as Hispanics originate from populations in Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, etc.

Hispanic student achievement is critical to the overall success of the Texas public school system because Hispanic students will command such a large percentage of the overall student population and will ultimately be the majority. Furthermore, the current minority status of students with diverse backgrounds in comparison with the historically larger Anglo population requires the examination of support systems for any sub-population that is the minority in comparison to the

whole. Schools must be equipped with professionals, standards, and operating procedures that provide all students with the professional instruction and academic support they need to continue their development and receive interventions where cognitive delay or other concerns exists in relation to life outcomes and trajectories.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is both a philosophical stance in education and a social movement. By exposing the relationship between nature and cultural implications, issues of human interaction that affect the capacity for delivering and acquiring knowledge are explored through a lens of politics that is making the case for delineation between teaching and social justice. While many consider teaching and learning to be the linchpins of equality, critical pedagogy advances the belief that emancipation is inherently independent of the educational process. Therefore, the ability to connect with students and build meaningful relationships is devoid of any overarching responsibility to deliver instruction about any particular curriculum. In fact, the ability to contend with the implicit bias that one person may have against another who is different becomes ever more important in the school setting. Considering social justice as an independent construct illuminates the overarching importance of culturally responsive teaching. Educators must first accept the humanity common to themselves and students.

The book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1968 by Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire, promoted the study of social class as a heuristic. The reflective nature of his approach led Freire to explore the political implications of daily life with students and work. Focusing on adult education, the early work advanced a broad approach to

teaching that encouraged students to consider personal experiences as part of the learning process. This anti-authoritarian approach focused on educational experiences that are liberating to allow students to move beyond their current social status to realize the power of knowledge as the foundation of change and progress. A concise definition of critical pedagogy is as follows:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (*Empowering Education*, 129)

Proponents of critical pedagogy discount the practical nature of educator-training programs as too rigid, calling into question the lack of emphasis of the bias that individuals may bring to the classroom. They suggest that teacher-training programs should examine ideological assumptions, values and beliefs. Students may be from a variety of backgrounds and linguistic-minority groups that make them politically, socially, or economically marginalized. Accounting for the many factors that affect a student's background is as much social as it is theoretical. The practical nature of educator-preparation programs leaves little room for discussion of the backgrounds teachers have in comparison to those of the students they teach.

Giroux (2011) explains that critical pedagogy is about taking education from a simple act of training to earn a higher way to a more sociocultural interaction aimed at helping a person advance knowledge and wisdom. Gaining a deeper understanding of the world and the relationship between the interrelated factors that make up the human experience liberates the mind and emancipates a person, thereby

giving him or her more control over his or her own trajectory. By drawing attention to the human need for knowledge, power, and desire, the result of this pedagogical approach leads to individuals who are able to 1) participate in the democratic process of government, 2) value justice and the idea of shared values, and 3) have human interactions that are gained through social agency. The impetus of critical-education approaches is to prepare students to engage meaningfully in and with the world around them with a broader focus than a trade or area of expertise. Providing greater meaning to the life experience and exposing the struggles that exist among groups for power, authority, and social class or status provide context for history as evidence of the need for justice (McLaren, 2015).

Empowering educators to move beyond a predetermined curriculum and consider the specific people, places, communities, and events which shape the lives of students in a particular geographic area is the nature of critical pedagogy. Applicable to any subject, this approach to teaching provides a mechanism whereby educators can be responsive to the needs of diverse learners and make information more attractive and relatable. Without dismissing the cultural norms and beliefs a particular community may hold, the critical approach utilizes the power of reflection and assessment to lead students through inquiry about the intersection of social issues with core knowledge and the shaping of beliefs, values, morals, and ethics (Giroux, 2011).

By insisting that preparing students to respond to larger global challenges requires a different approach to education than that which is required by businesses and corporations, thought leaders like Paulo Freire, C. Wright Mills, Hannah Arendt,

and Cornelius Castoriadis have contributed to the movement towards a more socially conscious approach to instruction (McLaren, 2015).

As an essential element of knowledge about the role of education in society and its place in relation to the social, political, economic, and moral platitudes of every individual's life, critical pedagogy exists as a framework with which to progress a more just and inclusive society. The notion that schools exist as social institutions whereby students engage in interactions that shape their self-understandings, what role they play in the world, and how they can increase their own agency is a realization not fully embraced which affects the policies and regulations that support teacher development, training, and certification (Freire, 2018).

Critical pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, and culturally relevant education are all strategies that build authenticity into instruction to empower students and to encourage them towards more successful futures, thereby preparing students to impart change personally and in the communities that they live. Close examination of the personal backgrounds that students bring to the classroom and the beliefs that teachers have about students allows for dialogue about effective approaches to curriculum design and the delivery of instruction (White, Cooper and Mackey, 2014). The combination of strategies that improve effectiveness includes a combination of related theories, methods, and approaches. Each inform different levels of the process but work together to create a complete system of support.

Consider the chart below based on the aforementioned literature.

Theory	Method	Approach
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Critical Pedagogy	Teaching Philosophy	Willingness to examine and assess personal beliefs, values, and bias
Culturally Relevant Teaching	Teaching Strategy	Implementation of lesson plans that engage students and provide context through cultural relevance
Culturally Relevant Education	Curriculum Design	Recognition of the importance of student's personal experiences in the teaching process with intentional curriculum decisions to make information relatable

Conclusion

In conclusion, recognition of existing literature and consideration of the scholarly contributions that surround the conversation about student achievement in Hispanic populations is a foundation for uncovering meaningful information through the examination of teacher perspectives. This literature review has revealed important information about the current work and historical nature of the study of Hispanic students who are matriculating in Texas schools. Understanding the critical nature of demographic change and the relationship it has with the economic, social, and emotional well-being of students based on teacher beliefs is essential. In many of the

aforementioned instances, the existing literature has confirmed prior work and, in some cases, has challenged the findings and assumptions of others based on methodology, population, location, or other variables. Nonetheless, this endeavor has provided important information that builds the case for the further exploration of teachers' perceptions regarding teaching practices that contribute to the long-term success of Hispanic students in Texas public schools.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, grounded-theory study seeks to investigate the effects of culturally responsive teaching practices on closing the opportunity gap to enhance student achievement among Hispanic and at-risk students in Texas schools. By exploring the teachers' perspective, this study could improve practices relating to much-needed changes in instructional strategies and curricular alignment to meet the needs of a fast-changing student population that is the direct result of the rapid demographic changes characteristic of the state of Texas and other parts of the United States that are realizing major population growth. The following research question guides this study and provides the central focus: (1) What are educators' perceptions regarding teaching practices relating to Hispanic students? Importantly, this study adds valuable insights about the beliefs and dispositions of teachers in an effort to develop preparation programs that can more adequately prepare pre-service teachers for the task of effectively teaching students who come from many different walks of life.

This study looks deep into various state and national reports that present data about achievement gaps between sub-populations. In an effort to examine teacher perspectives in hopes of making meaningful connections between the attitudes and outlooks of teachers and the affects these have on their ability to meet the needs of students or at least enter the instructional setting without a feeling of defeat before they even make an effort to teach students and provide them with an opportunity to learn.

Qualitative Research Design

Using a defined methodological plan allowed me to uncover information relating to the study. Following all aspects of ethics and confidentiality allowed me to protect the identity of participants and the data collected through the study. Upon completion of the required proposal and after receiving program and university approvals, the data collection and analysis phases of the study commenced.

Creswell (2013) suggests that one of the primary purposes of educational research is the search for solutions. Adding new information to the existing literature about a given topic or issues of concern helps test theory, develop and expand ideas, and ultimately improve our ability to provide students with a quality education. Most of all, qualitative research allows for rich and thick descriptions to be made of the lived experience of human beings who are on the front lines of the work that researchers are interested in exploring and subsequently improving through best practices and better approaches to the work involved in the process of teaching and learning.

Next, research is important for policy makers who are responsible for developing and implementing laws and regulations that govern schools and measure the success and failure of systems of education. In fact, that same body holds the important task of overseeing funding for schools and producing guidelines for educational professionals who are seeking the credentials required to work as a teacher. Specifically, the federal government in the United States designates schools with a large number of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as Title I schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). According to

the U.S. Department of Education, the purpose of the Title I School designation is “to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.” Making important provisions for schools which serve a large population of at-risk students remains an important part of the larger goal of improving educational outcomes and leveling the playing field at the post-secondary level.

Population

The population for this study was comprised of three experienced teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience in a Title I Urban School. The racial make-up of children in Texas who attend federally designated Title I schools is depicted in the chart below.

Race	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
American Indian or Alaskan	16,382	19,034	14,471	19,065	13,198	12,919	14,180
Asian or Pacific Islander	57,042	66,506	81,156	83,948	80,759	77,619	81,479
Black	462,848	492,562	493,434	482,672	477,644	481,010	490,582
Hispanic	1,737,426	1,988,528	2,129,161	1,115,675	2,145,453	2,171,756	2,216,218
Bi-Racial	N/A	N/A	53,014	53,449	53,437	50,746	54,888
White	767,526	727,133	719,404	701,290	690,827	703,717	711,477

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Participants

Participants in this study were all secondary-level Texas teachers with current state certifications in the area of English language arts who have had experience in instruction and/or administration. They took part in one-to-one, in-depth interviews to provide their own perspectives about the challenges and opportunities of instruction with students from diverse backgrounds who may also come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants also participated in a focus group to allow for more conversation between all participants.

Data Collection

Creswell (2013) explains that open-ended questions are used in the qualitative interviewing process to allow participants to express themselves with potential hindrance from the interviewer when the questions are more specific. In an effort to collect detailed information, the researcher asked follow-up questions based on responses provided by the interviewee while responding to an initial open-ended question. Following the one-to-one interviews, a focus group interview was performed to maintain triangulation. Triangulation in research is vital to checking the reliability and validity of the collected data (Creswell, 2012). The researcher informed participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. Each interview took place in a private, comforting location chosen by the interviewees, thus giving them the opportunity to speak freely without fear of interruptions.

Study Sample and Instrumentation

The participants for this study included three teachers serving in an Urban Texas Public School District with diverse students from a variety of backgrounds that considered categories like medium household income, and ethnic origin or cultural background. While each of the categories are important factors that affect the student's perspective, selection of the site for the recruitment of participants was based on broad metrics assigned by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), which considers the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and the makeup of student attendance-zone characteristics like urban and suburban populations that affect student demographics on a specific school campus.

Methods

Open coding was the method utilized for the analysis of data collected through one-to-one, in-depth qualitative interviews. Each participant was interviewed in a one-on-one setting. Upon completion of all one-to-one interviews, a focus-group discussion was organized by the researcher to allow further discussion between all participants. In each of the data-collection steps (one-to-one interviews, focus-group discussions, and follow-up one-to-one interviews), the discussion/responses were audio recorded and then transcribed into hard copies for easier coding. Following the completion of the interviews, the recording of interviews was transcribed and evaluated to find recurring information or themes common to multiple participants plus other significant information that should be considered when exploring the teachers' perspective of working with diverse learners. Information obtained through the interview process provided the researcher with the ability to triangulate with

information from the review of literature. The goal was to understand the connection to theory and its relation to studies that have explored the same topic or a similar line of inquiry. An index of central themes and subthemes provided the presentation of data. Explicating the perspectives of teachers currently serving in one urban school district shed light on the challenges and opportunities that result from rapid changes to the student population.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of teachers serving diverse learners. Specifically, Hispanic students comprise the fastest-growing, best-represented student population in Texas public schools. Demographic changes have made Texas public schools some of the most diverse in the nation, thus, new approaches to teaching are needed to adequately meet the student needs. Classrooms now feature populations of students who come from many different walks of life, and factors to consider include cultural, social, and economic differences that affect the student's own worldview and approach to learning. Au (2009) explains that public schools must grapple with meeting the needs of culturally diverse students to deliver quality instruction.

Exploring the teachers' perspective has allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of educators currently practicing in Texas Public Schools. The teachers interviewed have significant experience working with diverse learners and with exposing opportunities, challenges, and ideas about improving student-learning outcomes through enhanced instructional strategies that account for diversity among learners. Exploring personal feelings and attitudes about leadership, resources, training, and preparation has helped to establish common elements across participants in the study. Thomas (2011) explains the urgency of improving outcomes for minority students across the United States. Given that underachievement will have long-term implications socially, economically, and politically, the future lies squarely

on the ability of schools to prepare learners for the ever-changing global society that they will enter when they graduate from high school. Ultimately, the goal is to prepare students for post-secondary pursuits like college, career, military, and other training programs that will allow them to become productive citizens who can contribute to their communities in a positive and productive manner.

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Years of Experience	Ethnicity	Gender
Participant #1 “Jane”	8	Caucasian	Female
Participant #2 “Mary”	16	Caucasian	Female
Participant #3 “Francis”	14	Caucasian	Female

Demographic information for participants in this study is important because it reveals useful insights. The common thread between all participants was their credentialing as licensed professional educators who meet the requirements of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the State Board of Education (SBOE). Next, each of the participants serves in the same urban school district, which has a majority minority student population. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym to indemnify personally identifiable information. The participants are listed below.

Participant #1: “Jane” is a 30-year-old, self-identified Caucasian female with eight years of teaching experience in Texas public schools. She teaches English. During the one-to-one interview, she was somewhat apprehensive at the beginning

but seemed to gain confidence as the dialogue unfolded around the subject of meeting the needs of students.

In response to the broad question about educating Hispanic students, Jane made the following statement:

I think as educators, like we want to improve the situation, but a lot of it is bigger than what is happening within the school. And so, I mean, I think ultimately the answer is not just within the school, but within the broader community and showing them that they have a place to be successful and that the academics are useful to them and that they can succeed in that.

Participant #2: “Mary“ had 16 years of experience teaching English in the ESL department and self-identified as a 48-year-old Caucasian female. Exhibiting no hesitation, she was very open to discussion about serving students and provided rich and thick descriptions of her experiences as an educator, demonstrating dedication to her work and a passion for serving students who do not speak English as their primary language.

Mary responded to inquiry about educating Hispanic students by stating the following:

I mean, I can’t speak Spanish, but my kids are very successful. So, I think they need to understand. I do not have to learn Spanish; I just have to be able to connect with them and have that relationship so I can see what’s needed to help them be successful.

Participant #3: “Francis“ self-identified as a 46-year old Caucasian female. She has 14 years of experience in education. She is married with six children.

Portraying a calm demeanor, she seemed to be very thoughtful in her responses. Teaching freshman and sophomore level English Language Arts (ELA), she discussed her experiences with students with special needs. Serving as the department head of special education, she spoke about some specific challenges that exist for Hispanic students who present learning needs that are above and beyond those of other students.

Responding to the question about educating Hispanic students, Francis suggests the following

I would say even time, time building relationships, not just with the student, with the parents. Again, just the whole social, emotional, on top of educational. But not all teachers are going to take the time to do that because it is stopping, copying, pasting, going over here into this app, putting it in, reading it, ‘Uh, okay. Let me type mine in, copy, paste it, put it back over here.’ But it’s taking the time and then that parent knows, they know I can’t speak Spanish, so they know I’m having to do something to be able to have that communication piece and then that’s building your relationship with them in a positive manner cause they know I’m taking the time and I care enough that I’m wanting to have that communication with them.

Presentation of Data

The data is presented based on the response to the same question from different participants prior to the analysis and explanation of themes. The interview protocol for the study assured that all teachers received the same initial questions. Follow-up questions based on responses differ depending on what the researcher was

able to derive from the feedback provided in the one-to-one interview and what information the participant revealed. The following chart presents a selection of questions and the answers provided by each of the participants in the study. Each of the questions provided the researcher with an initial point of inquiry with which to begin the conversation in an effort to obtain data relating to a specific angle of inquiry that was deemed necessary to the study:

Question: Can you please discuss your feelings about the status of your Hispanic students' academic abilities?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 "Jane"	But I do feel that our Hispanic students are just as capable as all other students as succeeding, but they do have that extra step on their plate of having to acquire a second language and having to process in that second language, and they respond in the second language.
Participant #2 "Mary"	Well, this my Hispanic students come with everything that all the rest of the students come with. Some of them have a higher education; some of them have a lower education. Some of them are, you know, struggle with the English language and some of them do not.
Participant #3 "Francis"	The communication piece with the parents, a lot of the parents do not speak any English. I speak—well, I can't say zero Spanish, but very little Spanish. So, even that communication piece has been hard when the student is struggling. And I'm trying to reach out to the parents so that they can help him at home.

Question: Can you please discuss what you perceive to be one of the greatest challenges to connecting and educating Hispanic students?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 "Jane"	I think there are certain, like, cultural challenges, particularly with boys. I think there's a little bit of a way that they view women sometimes differently. Not all Hispanic kids, but I think on the whole, I tend to have more problems with them having problems with

	female authority figures. And I think part of that is cultural, but I mean there are always exceptions to that. I also think there's just a challenge in that.
Participant #2 "Mary"	<p>I think the biggest problem is, well, it's twofold. One, is that when they come over here, the most of my students come over here from other countries might not even be living with their family, their close family. They're living with aunts, uncles or distant cousins or other people. So, they're missing that relationship at home. When they come to school, that's just one added, that's just something they carry on their shoulders with them when they come.</p> <p>Another thing that I think the Hispanic students have, that is hard to deal with, is their level of education. Like I said, there are a few that come and they're already educated, but there are many that come with a lack of education.</p>
Participant #3 "Francis"	The biggest challenge I have seen again is the Hispanic student with disabilities. I keep going back to that factor because it's like, say you have, which I've seen a lot in special education, so a Hispanic student that has what they've labeled them with a specific learning disability and maybe reading comprehension or mathematics. And it's really hard to figure that piece out. Like, is it the language? Is it the fact that they don't understand the English? But then I've had teachers come back and say they don't understand it in Spanish either. So, then you have that question of is it language or is it really the disability?

Question: Can you please explain how yourself and possibly others access information on reaching/teaching Hispanic students?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 "Jane"	You know, ultimately, I think good instruction is good instruction and whether you're working with a Hispanic student or the low socioeconomic student or a student with learning disabilities. It all pretty much comes down to really the same thing, which is connecting with them. So, ultimately, I think I accessed information on just best practices in general and then adapt to the individual student.

Participant #2 “Mary“	I do a lot of training for social-emotional learning because when these kids come into the classroom, there’s no way you can reach them if you can’t connect with them, and you have to connect where they are, and where they are is so different than where we are.
Participant #3 “Francis“	So, myself, I’ve always relied on our ESL department.... And try to get her support on how to, we better support them in the classroom. Even as far as do we get that English version turned into a Spanish version and see if that makes a difference in the classroom. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn’t. So, again, you go back to that barrier of-is it the disability or is it the language barrier?

Question: Can you explain the level of support you receive in regards to meeting the needs of your Hispanic students?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 “Jane“	<p>I think we have some great resources on our campus in terms of not only meeting the academic needs but the emotional needs, you know. I don’t want to use specific names, but there are several peer professionals on our campus that are here to perform a certain role. Like the counselor secretary or the assistant to the special education department had that fill a much bigger role in terms of communicating with parents, not just because we need somebody to translate, but so that those parents feel like they have somebody who is kind of in their corner and understanding them and helping us really build that outreach with the families.</p> <p>When you’re working with a student that is acquiring English or that has other difficulties, it takes a lot of your focus. And so, the more of those students you have in the room that you’re trying to meet their needs, the more your effort is kind of divided. So, I think ideally more like paraprofessional support to help meet the needs of those students.</p>
Participant #2 “Mary“	Right now, I think the biggest support, at least coming from the district level is money because I can find the programs. Is money, because the programs I seek out for my kids and the students, I try to write up in, like

	<p>get immigrant grants written out so I can get the funds to purchase those programs.</p> <p>I need more ESL teachers.</p> <p>It's like the state of Texas is giving us the rules and telling us what we have to do, but then the money is not always there.</p> <p>I do have a para. If I did not have her, I'm pretty sure I would go under...I know I would. I'll have to show you my list...I've made a job responsibility list. Like, what my responsibilities are for L-Pack and what my responsibilities are. I haven't even finished. When you see it, you're gonna be—like—how did that happen. I don't know how it's possible. I'm waiting for support right now.</p>
Participant #3 "Francis"	<p>I always feel there could be more [resources], unfortunately, because the expectation of the student is to do their work in English and it's provided in English. We do modifications and we even utilize Google translate and every tool that's available to us but as a teacher, I still feel like we could do more.</p>

Question: What is the main resource in your field/position in educating Hispanic students?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 "Jane"	<p>I mean, we've done like the sheltered instruction training and the Psyop training and all of that kind of stuff. But ultimately, I think what it really comes down to is like building the relationship and understanding their background and valuing the students. Like what you do in terms of instruction matters less than if the students trust you and can open up to you and take academic risks with you. So, I think the biggest resource has really been the, like, social-emotional learning. Training that I've done because I think that, that is what allows you to do everything else.</p>
Participant #2 "Mary"	<p>Well, I am. Let me look, I'll tell you. I use a lot of different people.</p>

	Yeah, I go on like Twitter is just—like my—when I’m not sure and I need something, I’m looking for something new, and I really want my kids to have something different and see if I can type. Most of them are experts in the field of ESL.
Participant #3 “Francis“	I’ll say all students across all levels that struggle with that language barrier because—especially our school, I mean we have a highly populated Spanish-speaking student base and there are students on this campus that can’t speak any English and they’re in general education classes.

Question: How do you perceive the overall status of Hispanic students in education?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 “Jane“	I mean, I think there’s a lot of perception of them as less capable and that they’re just not going to be successful. Unfortunately, I think that is their own perception of themselves a lot of times, a lot of, particularly the young men that I speak to don’t have a vision of themselves completing high school.
Participant #2 “Mary“	So, we have to find a better way to help those students get to graduation, and sometimes that might mean we don’t do this here. But in my mind, if you want that kid to be successful, you’re gonna give him the English language, you’re gonna teach them that, you really give them access to all the curriculum. But you’ve also got to realize that some of them are so smart and if you can give it to them in Spanish, they’d ace it, be done, get credit and move on.
Participant #3 “Francis“	I think automatically, unfortunately when a teacher knows that they have a Hispanic student coming into their class, they get a little nervous because of the communication barriers especially if they don’t understand the language. I have heard teachers say in, you know, “If I have ESL kids in my class, I don’t need any SPED kids in my class. “And it’s like, “Wow.” So, unfortunately, we don’t get to make up our classroom make-up. And so you may have special-education students, Hispanic students or a Hispanic student that isn’t a special-education

	<p>student. But I do feel like sometimes it is a negative label, unfortunately.</p> <p>Like instead of, “Hey, come, you’re welcome into my classroom. “And do your assessments and see where that student is. I, I feel like more, I should say my experience has been that I’ve seen teachers automatically be like, “Oh, no.”</p>
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Question: How would you describe the status of Hispanic students within your own classroom?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 “Jane“	<p>I think the more we can have, like, role models and mentoring particularly, you know—we used to have a teacher over the journey program who was this Hispanic man that was an important role model to them to see successful adults that look like them and have been through similar experiences being in a part of their lives and school and in those extracurriculars. So, I think the more that we can have them reflected in the staff around them and the mentors and even bringing in mentors from our community that can then be role models to them for what they can achieve because unfortunately a lot of them right now are lacking male role models for a various reasons. So, I think the more we can show them their own potential, the more they can work towards.</p> <p>But I also know that like I am a White woman and as much as I try to understand them, like, I have unconscious biases. So, I tried it as much as possible, like listen to them and to really authentically think about how I’m being biased and try to combat that in myself.</p>
Participant #2 “Mary“	<p>Having Hispanic teachers. I think when you have students of different races, it’s important to have teachers somewhere in there and they’re learning each year that represents their race, because I think when they see someone who has a background like theirs be successful, then it tells them, “Hey, I can be successful, too.” But when you go to school and all you see not downing anybody.... But I can listen and I can care and I can make a connection and I can</p>

	relate with them on different things because even though we don't have the same things happening in our lives, we both know how to be happy. And we both know what it feels like to be angry and all of that. Is their social-emotional side of them.
Participant #3 "Francis"	I've always been mindful of that and I try to build in those lessons, cross-cultural for everyone because I feel like it's good that everyone understands everyone else's background and appreciates it and respects it. So, I guess you could say, more social-emotional learning.

Question: What do you feel could be done to improve Hispanic success rates in your classroom?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 "Jane"	I mean, I tried to do everything that I can for them. I think it doesn't come down to, like, well, if we lower the standard, then they can meet the standard. I think every time you lower the standard, they're just going to lower their performance. So, I think what you really have to do is like keep pushing the standards higher to show them that you have faith and confidence in what they can achieve, because it's easy as an educator to say, well, they're not meeting the standards, so I'm going to make it easier for them. But they know when you're doing that and what you're really communicating is that you don't think they're capable. So, I think, keeping high standards, but giving them the tools they need to reach it is what really leads to greater success.
Participant #2 "Mary"	I think, well, one of the things I would really like to do, and I haven't done it yet, but it's definitely a thought in my head is to either have somebody come in here who can speak to them that's from their country, like split them up by countries and they can see someone like bringing that successful in that. I feel like that's something they need to see can happen here, and I've even thought about using like Skype or something to connect with somebody and let them hear that, whether it's in their own language or English or whatever. But just hear it and see it and know that it's possible that I would love to see that connection happen.

Participant #3 “Francis“	<p>I guess to go one step further would to be possibly having that same curriculum in a Spanish version to where then they’d have all three pieces. They’d be able to have the Spanish piece, the English piece, and the visuals and tie it all in together and the repetitiveness of that would help them better learn that link, the English language.</p> <p>Probably money and time.</p> <p>I’d say time. I mean teachers have a lot more on them than people could ever imagine... And so I can see, you know, it’s where are you going to find that time to then go through every single lesson and add in those visual supports?</p>
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Question: What do you feel could be done to improve Hispanic education in all classrooms?	
Participant	Response
Participant #1 “Jane“	<p>I think maybe giving more variety and opportunity for how they can show their understanding. Because sometimes they may not be able to express what they’re thinking or know in the way that other students can. But if you give them like multiple modes to choose from, then they might actually be able to express something more powerful than what you initially thought. So, if you think the only way they’re going to be able to show what they know is to write an essay, but they may never be able to do that, but they can still show their mastery of their skills in other ways with less of the like linguistic burden.</p>
Participant #2 “Mary“	<p>The teachers need to understand that their students, even if they are speaking English, if their first language is not English, that they have got to scaffold and differentiate, even if it looks like all is well.</p> <p>But I think that they need to understand that they’re going to have to scaffold and work on vocabulary and use things like Civils students and use things to connect content to culture, to bring that culture into what they’re teaching.</p>

Participant #3 “Francis“	<p>First it starts with teacher buy-in and then again, I think learning that student, building, that relationship with that student, letting them know you’re caring for them and their needs.</p> <p>‘Cause if you don’t even have that relationship, then you’ve already lost that child ‘cause they don’t feel like you care.</p>
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Emerging Themes

Six themes emerged from the study based on the data collected from the participants, adding to the body of knowledge about teacher effectiveness and instructional strategies that will allow schools to respond to the needs of diverse students. The following presents data that have contributed to the development of each theme.

Discussion of Emerging Themes

Discussion of emerging themes offers a closer examination of findings and linkages to the existing literature and helps to build the case for improved practice, development of policy, and consideration of the needs that exist from the teacher’s perspective.

Theme 1: Relationships are critical to building trust

Francis had the following to say:

I’ve always been mindful of that and I try to build in those lessons, cross-cultural for everyone because I feel like it’s good that everyone understands everyone else’s background and appreciates it and respects it. So, I guess you could say, more social-emotional learning.

In response to another question, Francis offered the following statement:

First it starts with teacher buy-in and then again, I think learning that student, building, that relationship with that student, letting them know you're caring for them and their needs.... 'Cause if you don't even have that relationship, then you've already lost that child 'cause they don't feel like you care.

Mary made the following statement:

I do a lot of training for social-emotional learning because when these kids come into the classroom, there's no way you can reach them if you can't connect with them, and you have to connect where they are, and where they are is so different than where we are.

In answering another question, Jane said the following:

I mean we've done like the sheltered instruction training and the Psyop training and all of that kind of stuff. But ultimately, I think what it really comes down to is like building the relationship and understanding their background and valuing the students. Like what you do in terms of instruction matters less than if the students trust you and can open up to you and take academic risks with you. So, I think the biggest resource has really been the like social-emotional learning. Training that I've done because I think that, that is what allows you to do everything else.

Jane continued in another response to say the following:

You know, ultimately, I think good instruction is good instruction and whether you're working with a Hispanic student or the low socioeconomic student or a student with learning disabilities. It's all pretty much comes down to really the same thing which is connecting with them. So, ultimately, I think

I accessed information on just best practices in general and then adapt to the individual student.

Theme 2: Language barriers create difficulty in instruction

“Can you please discuss your feelings about the status of your Hispanic students’ academic ability?” Jane gave the following answer:

But I do feel that our Hispanic students are just as capable as all other students as succeeding, but they do have that extra step on their plate of having to acquire a second language and having to process in that second language and they respond in the second language.

To the same question, Francis said the following:

I’ll say all students across all levels that struggle with that language barrier because--especially our school, I mean we have a highly populated Spanish-speaking student base and there are students on this campus that can’t speak any English and they’re in general education classes.

Mary had the following to say:

So, we have to find a better way to help those students get to graduation, and sometimes that might mean we don’t do this here. But in my mind, if you want that kid to be successful, you’re gonna give him the English language, you’re gonna teach them that, you really give them access to all the curriculum. But you’ve also got to realize that some of them are so smart and if you can give it to them in Spanish, they’d ace it, be done, get credit and move on.

Theme 3: Students need more diverse educators

Mary stated the following:

I think when you have students of different races, it's important to have teachers somewhere in there and they're learning each year that represents their race, because I think when they see someone who has a background like theirs be successful, then it tells them, "Hey, I can be successful, too."

Jane had the following to say:

I think the more we can have like role models and mentoring particularly, you know, we used to have a teacher over the journey program who was this Hispanic man that was an important role model to them to see successful adults that look like them and have been through similar experiences being in a part of their lives and school and in those extracurriculars. So, I think the more that we can have them reflected in the staff around them and the mentors and even bringing in mentors from our community that can then be role models to them for what they can achieve because unfortunately a lot of them right now are lacking male role models for a various reasons. So, I think the more we can show them their own potential, the more they can work towards.

Theme 4: Preconceived notions compromise instruction

"How do you perceive the overall status of Hispanic students in education?"

In response, Francis had the following to say:

I think automatically, unfortunately when a teacher knows that they have a Hispanic student coming into their class, they get a little nervous because of the communication barriers especially if they don't understand the language. I have heard teachers say in, you know, "If I have ESL kids in my class, I don't

need any SPED kids in my class.“ And it’s like, “Wow.“ So, unfortunately, we don’t get to make up our classroom make-up. And so, you may have special-education students, Hispanic students or a Hispanic student that isn’t a special-education student. But I do feel like sometimes it is a negative label, unfortunately.... Like instead of, “Hey, come, you’re welcome into my classroom.“ And do your assessments and see where that student is. I, I feel like more, I should say my experience has been that I’ve seen teachers automatically be like, “Oh, no.”

Jane stated the following:

I mean, I think there’s a lot of perception of them as less capable and that they’re just not going to be successful. Unfortunately, I think that is their own perception of themselves a lot of times, a lot of, particularly the young men that I speak to do not have a vision of themselves completing high school.

She also had the following to say in response to another question:

But I also know that like I am a White woman and as much as I try to understand them like, I have unconscious biases. So, I tried it as much as possible like listen to them and to really authentically think about how I’m being biased and try to combat that in myself.

Theme 5: Resources are not adequate

In answering the question regarding support for Hispanic students, Mary said the following:

Right now, I think the biggest support, at least coming from the district level is money because I can find the programs. Is money, because the programs I

seek out for my kids and the students, I try to write up in, like get immigrant grants written out so I can get the funds to purchase those programs...I need more ESL teachers.... It's like the state of Texas is giving us the rules and telling us what we have to do, but then the money is not always there.

Jane stated the following:

I think we have some great resources on our campus in terms of not only meeting the academic needs but the emotional needs, you know, I don't want to use specific names, but there are several peer professionals on our campus that are here to perform a certain role. Like the counselor secretary or the assistant to the special education department had that fill a much bigger role in terms of communicating with parents, not just because we need somebody to translate, but so that those parents feel like they have somebody who is kind of in their corner and understanding them and helping us really build that outreach with the families.... When you're working with a student that is acquiring English or that has other difficulties, it takes a lot of your focus. And so, the more of those students you have in the room that you're trying to meet their needs, the more your effort is kind of divided. So, I think ideally more like paraprofessional support to help meet the needs of those students.

In responding to one of the interview questions, Francis said the following:

I always feel there could be more [resources] unfortunately because the expectation of the student is to do their work in English and it's provided in English. We do modifications and we even utilize Google translate and every tool that's available to us but as a teacher, I still feel like we could do more.

Theme 6: Work load takes away critical time

Francis made the following statement:

I guess to go one step further would to be possibly having that same curriculum in a Spanish version to where then they'd have all three pieces. They'd be able to have the Spanish piece, the English piece, and the visuals and tie it all in together and the repetitiveness of that would help them better learn that link, the English language.... Probably money and time.... I'd say time. I mean teachers have a lot more on them than people could ever imagine.... And so I can see, you know, it's where are you going to find that time to then go through every single lesson and add in those visual supports?

Mary had the following to say:

I do have a para. If I did not have her, I'm pretty sure I would go under.... I know I would. I'll have to show you my list.... I've made a job responsibility list. Like, what my responsibilities are for L-Pack and what my responsibilities are. I haven't even finished. When you see it, you're gonna be—like—how did that happen. I don't know how it's possible. I'm waiting for support right now.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This qualitative study has examined the perspectives of teachers serving diverse learners in one urban Texas public school. As the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, Hispanics represent a talented and diverse group of learners with specific needs. Consideration of the cultural, social, and economic variables in conjunction with the perspectives of teachers who have serving students has revealed valuable information with which to inform the decision-making process from many standpoints. To deliver quality instruction, it is important to meet the unique needs of culturally diverse students (Au, 2009).

Previous chapters of this manuscript have offered a review of literature covering (1) a brief history of student achievement, (2) achievement gaps, (3) demographic change in the U.S. and Texas relating to the makeup of Texas schools, (4) strategies for teaching diverse students, (5) history of challenges for teaching minority students, and (6) an examination of Hispanic student achievement and critical pedagogy. A chapter is also included to present the methodological approach to this study. The initial chapter introduces the problem, offers background, issues a problem statement and presents an overarching research question. The final two chapters present the data and offer the summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

Restatement of Study Significance

Shedding light on the lived experiences of the teachers who work every day to educate students is important. Information must be documented for consideration in the decision-making process. By virtue of contributing to the body of knowledge

regarding teacher perspectives of student achievement relating to minority student success, this study is significant to improving outcomes. Cairo (2012) explains that underperforming schools comprise a problem that stretches well across the U.S. Texas schools are not alone in the pursuit of new directions that can better meet the needs of students and respond to rapidly changing demographics.

Schools in Texas and other high growth states might be able to use the information provided here to better serve their students and improve outcomes. The data collected through this study may prove to be beneficial in optimizing the success rates of all of our students—especially those who are underserved and disadvantaged by an antiquated system of education.

Presentation of Findings

Findings from this study reveal six themes that derive from the data collected in the one-to-one interviews. Open-coding provided a heuristic for the analysis of the data (Creswell, 2013). Utilization of multiple sources of information allowed the researcher to understand the phenomena and make meaning of the personal testimonies and stories shared by participants in the study, all of whom reflected on their own personal attitudes, feelings, and beliefs relating to the instruction of Hispanic students in Texas public schools.

Themes emerging from this qualitative, narrative inquiry include the following: (1) relationships are critical to building trust, (2) language barriers create difficulty in instruction, (3) students need more diverse educators, (4) preconceived notions compromise instruction, (5) resources are not adequate, and (6) workload takes away critical time. Confirming much of the existing literature that underpins

this study, the results add context to established issues that remain challenging to the development of successful approaches to instructing Hispanic students in Texas public schools. The emerging themes have ties to existing literature but also generate new knowledge regarding existing lines of reasoning about best practices, challenges, and opportunities for educating Hispanic students.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, Texas has a student population that continues to become more and more diverse, with the fastest growing population being Hispanic. With these diverse populations, many could speculate positively, but one remaining issue continues to grow as the population continues to change: the under-achievement of the Hispanic student population in their academics. This study has tried to understand the perspectives of Texas Public School teachers who have experience working in high Hispanic-population schools. Telling and examining the stories of these teachers is important, as doing so could lead to state or even national mandates supporting the needs of a student population that is in desperate need of any support it can receive.

This study presents a lot of information. Several themes presented themselves during the examination of the raw data. From the raw data it was concluded that the main theme is that, to get through to the students—for them to “buy-in“ to a teacher and his or her lesson—the teacher must first establish and build a relationship with the student. Showing students care is nothing new. As the saying goes, “if a student does not like you, they won’t learn from you.” The only difference is that there is now data which supports this statement. Another way this can be presented is through culturally responsive teaching. Students yearn for a classroom that recognizes them

for who they are, where they come from, and where they have been. Culturally responsive teaching can play a major role in establishing a welcoming environment for each student, highlighting their differences as a positive rather than as a negative. This is a major theme brought forth by this study: creating an environment that is conducive for learning by making the student feel important, loved, and worthy of being there.

Another finding from the study is one that could have been predicted, especially with the Hispanic population being the focus of the study: The language barrier creates difficulty in instruction. What was not presented as a theme but was mentioned throughout the process of data collection, is that the language barrier not only effects the students but also the parents. It is difficult to have support and even a relationship with parents when they struggle with English as well. The parents are often less fluent than the students when it comes to the English language, which makes it even harder for them to support their children in an academic setting.

Moving forward, it was noted several times that Hispanic students could be more successful and more motivated if they had staff members they could look up to and/or relate to. In other words, sometimes what the students are being taught is not as important as who is teaching them. In order for students to have confidence and see that a high-school diploma or college degree is attainable, they need to see those role models in the school. Having teachers and administrators who accurately represent the student population is vital to the success of the struggling population at hand.

It is not always easy to admit to having preconceived notions about a student, as it is a subconscious preconceived notion. This theme has presented itself through

the data and seems to be one that many people would struggle to admit or even know about themselves. This sort of information could lead to trainings within a school to help teachers, administrators, and support staff understand how they feel towards a specific population of students. Having these trainings and understandings could lead to a more open and understanding teacher base that is ready to meet the needs of all students, rather than just those who are “easy” to teach.

The final two themes seem to be closely related: a lack of resources and heavy workloads take critical time away from teachers. Throughout the process of collecting data, there were many occasions during which the participants referenced needing more time, money, and resources. With more resources, school districts would be able to hire more staff to lighten the load of everyone involved so that each student could be supported more accurately.

Unfortunately, the scenes within many of our public schools look the same: Student needs are not being met for one reason or another. Regardless of where in the world our students’ journeys began, they are here now and are desperately trying to obtain the same education as every other student. Students do not get to choose the lives they are given and the circumstances into which they are born, so punishing them by not giving them the resources they need to be successful is only hurting the country in which they currently live. A term discussed previously, *opportunity gap*, accurately summarizes what is happening within many of our schools today. Under-achieving minority populations—specifically the Hispanic population—are being labeled as not capable in academic settings, but there is much more to it. In order for all students to meet the standards of state and local testing requirements, it is vital that

all students be given the opportunity to do so. To ensure that students are given appropriate opportunities to succeed, it is important for teachers to meet them where they are academically rather than requiring them to meet the teachers where they are. Meeting the needs of all students will lead to a more lucrative and successful population, whereas an undereducated and underprepared population will lead to a society that relies on support.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that there are multiple opportunities for future research related to demographic change in Texas public schools and student academic-achievement rates. The researcher recommends follow-up research to this study which uses different teacher demographics and a comparative study that examines the difference between the three lowest achieving demographics: Hispanic, African-American, and Native American. In addition, the same study should be conducted within a rural rather than in an urban setting.

Recommendation #1: Given that this study has revealed the perceptions of educators within one subject area, the researcher recommends a follow-up study which considers the perceptions of teachers in other subject areas. A follow-up study could prove to be beneficial to the consideration of under-achievement within minority groups in Texas public schools. The follow-up study could focus on teachers who work with Hispanic students in other subject areas to determine whether there are similarities across the board or if English language arts present more difficulties.

Recommendation #2: A study which focuses on the perceptions of the students could prove beneficial to school leaders as they continue to search for solutions to the

continuous under-achievement of select minority groups. Examining the real-life stories and experiences of students who have lived through the struggle of under-achievement could lead to ideas for closing the achievement gap. The perceptions of the students are vital in seeing and understanding the full situation.

Recommendation #3: It is recommended that this study be replicated with a focus on other low-achieving minority groups. Focusing on the other minority groups could uncover similarities in the factors leading to the under-achievement of these students. It is suggested that the study be conducted in the same subject area to facilitate comparison.

Recommendation #4: The participants of this study were all of the same ethnicity and gender—White and female—so it is recommended that a study be done which focuses on male teachers of other ethnicities. A comparison of the results could show similarities and/or differences in student attitudes, work-ethics, and cooperation with teacher directives and expectations. It is important to understand the perception of all teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Patton (2015) explains that the interview protocol provides an essential structure to help the researcher assure that a basic format guides the interview process.

Specifically, the protocol helps the interviewer develop categories and questions that keep the interview focused on the topic of exploration, thus adding to the likelihood of gleaning meaningful information that is pertinent to the subject being explored. In addition, the protocol helps the researcher remember critical points that are essential to the study. Listing specific predetermined questions also provides consistency across multiple conversations, though the researcher can ask probing follow-up questions that are generated by a response submitted to one of the questions asked as a part of the interview protocol. Finally, the interview protocol allows the evaluator to make good use of the time he or she has with the participants, as it keeps the conversation on track and focused on the matter under investigation.

As a framework for investigating the lived experiences that could contribute to a better understanding of why there is a lack of achievement in Hispanic students, this interview protocol provides a solid foundation for inquiry. Interview questions developed for the study align as an extension of the overarching research question designed for the study.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title of Study: The Changing Face of Education: Perspectives on Demographic
Change and Student Achievement in Texas Public Schools

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Note to Interviewer: *Allow the interviewee to expand on questions without worrying about time. Please be sensitive to the varying beliefs and customs of people residing in rural communities.*

Hello! My name is _____, I'm a doctoral student with The University of Houston. I'm here to learn about your experience with teaching minority students, more specifically, Hispanic students, and what you see to be the contributing factors in their lack of academic success compared to their White counterparts. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to look closer at the lived experience of educators directly responsible for teaching Hispanic students to understand their attitudes and beliefs about where the students are experiencing the most struggle. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. If it's okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation since it is hard for me to write down everything while simultaneously carrying an attentive conversation. Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only myself and my colleagues working on this study will be aware of your answers the purpose of that is only so we know whom to contact should we have further follow-up questions after this interview. Although you have signed a consent form, I'll need to

re-confirm that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this study.

Please state your name and age and verbally confirm your willingness to participate

by answering the following consent questions:

Consent/Demographic Questions

1. *What is your first and last name?*
2. *What is your age? (Participant must be at least 18 years old)*
3. *Do you agree to participate in this study?*
4. *What is your race?*
5. *What is your gender?*

Interview Questions

1. Can you please discuss your feelings about the status of your Hispanic students academic ability?
2. Can you please discuss what you perceive to be one of the greatest challenges to connecting and educating Hispanic students?
3. Can you please explain how yourself and possibly others access information on reaching/teaching Hispanic students?
4. Can you explain the level of support you receive in regards to meeting the needs of your Hispanic students?
5. What is the main resource in your field/position in educating Hispanic students?
6. How do you perceive the overall status of Hispanic students in education?
7. How would you describe the status of Hispanic students within your own classroom?
8. What do you feel could be done to improve Hispanic success rates in your classroom?

9. What do you feel could be done to improve Hispanic education in all classrooms?
10. Is there anything you would like to share about your experiences relating to educating Hispanic students?

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Institutional Review Boards

APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

August 5, 2019

Jason Hamilton

jehamilton3@uh.edu

Dear Jason Hamilton:

On August 5, 2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	THE CHANGING FACE OF EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Investigator:	Jason Hamilton
IRB ID:	STUDY00001761
Funding/Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interview Protocol Recruiting and Questions.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Letter of Invitation.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• HRP-502a (1).pdf, Category: Consent Form;• HRP-503.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	Danielle Griffin

The IRB approved the study on August 5, 2019 ; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

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/>