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# A Case Study: Meeting the Needs of English Learners With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

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A Case Study: Meeting the Needs of English Learners With  
Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

by  
Michelle Ivette Marrero Colón

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the  
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## **Approval Page**

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## Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Michelle Ivette Marrero Colón

Name

December 19, 2018

Date

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Abstract**

A Case Study: Meeting the Needs of English Learners With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education. Michelle Ivette Marrero Colón, 2018: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: English language learners, emergent literacy, acculturation, secondary school teachers

Increasing numbers of English-language learners with limited or interrupted formal education are entering schools across the United States. This new trend is affecting school districts with new challenges as high school teachers of English speakers of other languages are not prepared to address the beginning literacy needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education. In addition, students with limited or interrupted formal education are encountering challenges in high school as they are simultaneously learning a new language and academic content in a new culture in addition to learning how to read and write for the first time in their lives. Moreover, additional challenges that arise with this group of students involve addressing their socioemotional and acculturation needs.

This qualitative study examined how high school teachers of English speakers of other languages in a small urban mid-Atlantic school district integrated social and academic English-development skills for students with limited or interrupted formal education. To accomplish this, the researcher collected data by conducting eight individual teacher interviews and six classroom observations. The researcher also gathered student background information, which included assessment scores that aided during the analysis of classroom observations.

Five general themes emerged from data analysis: (a) meeting the socioemotional needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education by building relationships, (b) differentiating instruction to meet the academic needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education, (c) meeting the beginning literacy needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education who have limited knowledge of literacy instruction, (d) lack of integration into the school culture and students creating their own community, and (e) the power of students' native languages. The findings of this study will assist school districts across the United States to focus on the areas of needs to provide high-quality educational opportunities to students with limited or interrupted formal education. The gathered information will also contribute to enhance teaching practices that benefit the socioemotional, academic, and acculturation needs of this unique student population.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States has always been known for its diverse population; however, during the last 30 years, the country has experienced massive growth of culturally and linguistically varied populations, reshaping United States society (Frey, 2015). In 2010, the population of the United States was 68% Caucasian, 15% Hispanic, 12% African American, and 5% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Projections from the 2012 U.S. Census Bureau indicated that, by 2060, minorities will compose 57% of the population in the United States, representing an increase of 20% from 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Furthermore, these projections include various groups, with Hispanics identified as the fastest growing population, with an increase from 52.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In addition, the number of African Americans will increase from 41.2 million in 2012 to 61.8 million in 2060, and the number of Asians will increase from 15.9 million in 2012 to 34.4 million in 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In 2011, more non-White babies were born than White babies, marking a pivotal period in the history of the United States (Frey, 2015). According to Frey (2015), it is projected that, by the year 2040, Caucasians will constitute the new minority, transforming the country into a more racially diverse society.

These dramatic demographic shifts are impacting educational organizations across the United States as school communities continue to become increasingly more diverse racially, culturally, and linguistically (Baecher, Knoll, & Patti, 2016; Frey, 2015; Marx, 2014; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2016). As a result, there is a substantial increase in numbers of English learners (EL) in schools across the United States (McGee, Haworth, & Macintyre, 2014; Robinson-Cimpian, Thompson, & Umansky, 2016). Ryan (2013) also emphasized that one in five students speaks a

language other than English.

However, not all of these students are language learners, as EL is a term utilized to refer to those students who are actively learning English (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). Most importantly, the percentage of ELs registered in public schools increased from 4.2 million in the 2003-2004 school year to 4.5 million students in the 2013-2014 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). An example of this transformation has occurred in the states of North and South Carolina. Between 2000 and 2012, the EL population increased approximately 135% in North Carolina and 610% in South Carolina (Douglas Horsford & Sampson, 2013). Moreover, ELs are enrolled in three of four public schools in the nation (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Virginia is one of 10 states with significant changes in EL enrollment, as it increased from 36,802 in the 2000-2001 school year to 88,033 in the 2010-2011 school year, a 139% increase (Douglas Horsford & Sampson, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) indicated that the EL population increased from 4.2 million in 2003-2004 to 4.5 million in the 2013-2014 school year. Specifically, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of students specifically from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Ethiopia, and Mongolia. Also, in the past 5 years, there has been an increase in the numbers of students with limited, interrupted, or no formal education and the numbers of unaccompanied minors who entered the country undocumented.

Consequently, school districts have been encountering challenges in creating programs that provide equitable, meaningful, and effective education to ELs (O'Sullivan, 2015). Despite the rapid and increased numbers of ELs, school districts have failed in their ability to support them to meet their educational needs (Hopkins, Thompson,

Linquanti, Hakuta, & August, 2013). Zacarian (2013) affirmed that ELs are among the lowest performing subgroups in the United States in terms of standardized state assessments, graduation rates, and absenteeism. The author stated further that the achievement gap between ELs and general education students is significant and continues to increase. Furthermore, within the EL population, there is a subgroup of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). As a result, school districts across the United States face additional challenges meeting their academic, social, and emotional needs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Dooley, 2009; World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment [WIDA] Consortium, 2015; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

The ELs who are SLIFEs have different backgrounds and life experiences (Spruck Wrigley, 2013; WIDA Consortium, 2015). Researchers and educators have identified a series of characteristics shared by SLIFEs regardless of their ethnic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b). According to DeCapua and Marshall (2015), the characteristics are as follows: (a) lack of proficiency in English; (b) limited or no literacy in native language; (c) limited, interrupted, or no formal education; and (d) significant below-grade-level subject area knowledge. The WIDA Consortium (2015) noted various reasons that contribute to the lack of access to formal educational opportunities. These include poverty, geographic isolation, limitations in transportation, natural disasters, war, and the necessity to enter the workforce. Lastly, SLIFEs arriving in school districts are at higher risk to drop out of school compared to other ELs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b, 2015; Dooley, 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study addressed how a school district in a mid-Atlantic state approaches the challenges associated with integrating social and academic English development skills for

ELs with limited or interrupted formal education (i.e., SLIFEs). According to DeCapua and Marshall (2010a), ELs who are SLIFEs are entering secondary schools in the United States, resulting in additional challenges as they have limited time to develop not only English language proficiency, but literacy and content knowledge as well. Sylvan (2013) asserted that high school SLIFEs have to learn English and are required to learn a curriculum at a higher level than their background knowledge exposure has prepared them for. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) also revealed that many SLIFEs experience confusion and alienation as a result of adjusting to a formal educational environment. Gahungu, Gahungu, and Luseno (2011) argued that high school SLIFEs placed in age-appropriate grade levels require additional responsive intervention, or the students will most likely dropout from school.

According to DelliCarpini and Alonso (2014) and Robinson-Cimpian et al. (2016), school districts across the United States are encountering challenges in providing equitable high-quality education to this unique student population. Hopkins, Lowenhaupt, and Sweet (2015) and Brooks, Adams, and Morita-Mullaney (2010) asserted that school districts are encountering ongoing challenges in providing equitable access to curriculum, especially in content areas. Furthermore, nationwide data indicate that ELs demonstrate a significant achievement gap (Coady, Harper, & De Jong, 2016; Reider & Wooleyhand, 2017). Brooks et al. specified that schools across the United States struggle to support the needs of ELs, resulting in a significant achievement gap between ELs and native English speakers on standardized test scores and graduation rates.

**The research problem.** According to Wong Fillmore (2014) and Atesoglu Russell (2015), ELs can meet higher standards and expectations, although school systems are facing challenges in providing both linguistic and academic development support.

Wong Fillmore also confirmed that ELs are encountering challenges in meeting common core state standards because they are not exposed to complex materials that develop both language and academic content development. The Council of the Great City Schools (2014) and Wong Fillmore noted that school districts report significant challenges in finding high-quality, rigorous, grade-level materials. Furthermore, teachers are inadequately trained and lack professional knowledge and credentials for teaching ELs (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Coady et al., 2016). These challenges are contributing to the achievement gap disparities.

Educational leaders across the United States are concerned that they do not have the skills, professional preparation, or experience in educating linguistically diverse students (Landa, 2011). Research findings revealed by Kraft and Gilmour (2015) concluded that educational leaders felt unprepared to evaluate and provide instructional support to teachers within a specific area of expertise. The researchers also found that the lack of leadership training, combined with additional job demands, resulted in limited conversations and minimal feedback to teachers. Baecher et al. (2016) reached similar conclusions in a study in which educational leaders stated that there is a need for specialized expertise and training related to observing teachers with ELs. Educational leaders expressed that they lacked the knowledge of best practices to promote English language development and content (Baecher et al., 2016). Gentilucci, Denti, and Guaglianone (2013) and Lynch (2012) also asserted that educational leaders lack the skills and knowledge necessary to address the challenges related to the multifaceted role of leadership. Furthermore, Sanzo (2012) emphasized that it is the role of educational leaders to ensure high-quality instruction to all students.

**Phenomenon of interest.** Demographic shifts are impacting school districts

across the nation as the number of ELs is rapidly increasing (Alford & Niño, 2011; Whitenack, 2015). In 2013, ELs composed more than 20% of kindergarten to Grade 12 students in public schools in the United States (Shapiro, 2014). Even more important, ELs are the fastest growing student population in the United States (Alford & Niño, 2011; Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Consequently, school districts are encountering challenges in providing equitable high-quality educational opportunities (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014; Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2016). In addition, DelliCarpini and Alonso (2014) pointed out that minimal change has taken place that addresses the needs of ELs.

Furthermore, the achievement gap as an ongoing challenge. The achievement gap must be addressed because the EL population is expected to increase substantially before 2020, and, according to Passel and Cohn (2008), many of these students will likely need services in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Zacarian (2013) affirmed that ELs are among the lowest performing subgroups in the United States in terms of standardized state assessments, graduation rates, and absenteeism. The author found that the achievement gap between ELs and general education students is significant and continues to increase. The ELs are more likely to drop out; however, the risk is higher for ELs who are SLIFEs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2015; Dooley, 2009; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014). Consequently, this study examined how ESOL high school teachers integrate social and academic English development skills for SLIFEs.

**Background and justification.** The ELs are the fastest growing student population in the United States, yet there are disparities in their academic achievement (Calderon et al., 2011) due to lack of high-quality equitable educational opportunities (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014; Robinson-Cimpian et al.,

2016). The 1974 Supreme Court's *Lau v. Nichols* ruling guaranteed meaningful educational opportunities to ELs (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013). Furthermore, because this group of students is more likely to drop out, it is crucial for school districts to explore effective means and tools to motivate students to complete their education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). The future of this nation greatly depends on the ability of educators to provide high-quality education to ELs (Frey, 2015; U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The role of educational leaders is fundamental for the academic success of ELs (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012; Smith & Addison, 2013). However, numerous leaders believe educational leadership training programs are not adequately preparing these students to address the challenges that may arise in leading schools with ELs (Baecher et al., 2016; Mendoza-Reis & Flores, 2014; Whitenack, 2015). In addition, Smith and Addison (2013) asserted that it is essential for educational leaders to possess the necessary knowledge and skills needed to effectively lead in the 21st century. According to White, Hilliard, and Jackson (2011), emerging school leaders must have knowledge and experience in working with diverse students, possess technological skills, and have the ability to deliver instructional modeling leadership; however, school leaders are not being adequately trained, which impacts their ability to effectively promote the academic achievement of ELs (VanTuyle & Reeves, 2014; White et al., 2011). Most importantly, educational leaders in schools with ELs must have knowledge of best practices for the teaching and learning of this student population (Whitenack, 2015).

**Audience.** By examining how ESOL high school teachers in a small urban mid-Atlantic school district integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs

who are SLIFEs, school districts may utilize the qualitative data as a guide for the creation of ongoing professional development and training for educational leaders and teachers. Moreover, the findings will enhance the knowledge and skills of leaders and teachers for creating and promoting an inclusive environment in which all students receive high-quality equitable education. It is hoped that this investigation will serve as a resource for the development of adequately trained leaders and teachers who promote high-quality equitable education to language learners around the world.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** There is recognition of the importance in conducting ongoing research on how to provide high-quality education to ELs (Baecher et al., 2016). Consequently, there has been an increase in research related to this special student population. However, there is limited research on instruction of the language development of ELs (Saunders et al., 2013). In addition, Windle and Miller (2012) emphasized there is limited research on how teachers respond to educating SLIFEs. For this reason, this study was designed to provide information on how ESOL high school teachers integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs. DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009) specified that there is also a “lack of indepth proven research on what works with SLIFEs” (p. 4). Therefore, this study should provide information on strategies that, according to high school ESOL teachers in a mid-Atlantic state school district, are effective for working with SLIFEs.

Montero et al. (2014) conducted a study in Canada to explore guided reading as an early reading instructional strategy to assist SLIFEs develop English language and literacy. As part of the study, nine secondary ESOL teachers received professional development on research-based early reading instructional strategies for 2 years (i.e., 3-hour sessions every 4 to 6 weeks). In addition, 11 SLIFEs ages 14 to 20 (i.e., six



Somalians, four Iraqis, and one Colombian) participated in this study. Students were assessed in their native language upon entry; six were identified as nonliterate in the first language (i.e., L1), and five were determined to be semiliterate. Moreover, all of the students were new to English. Findings indicated that students with regular attendance showed significant progress. Montero et al. commented that researchers agree on the fundamental need for literacy instruction for SLIFEs; however, there is limited research on which approaches are the most successful for high school emergent literacy. Therefore, this research study aimed to collect recommendations based on teacher interviews on best instructional practices for meeting the literacy and academic English development needs of ELs who are SLIFEs.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this applied dissertation, the following terms are defined.

**Academic language.** This term refers to content language and vocabulary needed to gain full understanding of the academic content areas. Cummins (1981) theorized that cognitive academic language proficiency may take approximately 5 to 7 years.

**Accommodations.** According to the U.S. Department of Education, ELs are eligible for accommodations during instruction and standardized assessments with the purpose of facilitating meaningful participation and address their unique linguistic needs. Accommodations may include small-group testing, extended time, multiple testing sessions, online audio version, read aloud, English dictionary, and bilingual dictionary use. In order for ELs to receive these accommodations, they must have been applied during routine classroom activities (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

### **Assessing comprehension and communication in English state to state**

**(ACCESS)**. This term refers to an assessment created by the WIDA Consortium and the Center for Applied Linguistics to determine the English language proficiency of ELs.

**English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)**. This term refers to a program that serves students who are ELs in developing English language skills in the four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). It is important to note that this is not the same as bilingual education.

**English language proficiency**. This term refers to the level of English competency in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each state has adopted its own leveling system for determining English language proficiency. Thirty-nine states adopted the following WIDA performance levels: 1 (entering), 2 (beginning), 3 (developing), 4 (expanding), 5 (bridging), and 6 (reaching).

**English learners (ELs)**. This term refers to students who are actively learning English. This term has evolved as in the past, as these students were referred to as either students with limited English proficiency (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008) or ESOL students.

**Equal educational opportunities**. This term refers to access to high-quality equitable education to succeed academically. According to the U.S. Department of Justice and U. S. Department of Education (2015), school districts must ensure they address the language barriers that impede ELs from participating meaningfully and equally in all educational programs.

**High-quality equitable education**. This term refers to access to grade-level curriculum at the performance level of English language proficiency. In some school districts, ELs are enrolled in ESOL classes without access to grade-level curriculum. However, this is not considered high-quality equitable education (Bosworth, 2012;

Lopez, McEneaney, & Nieswandt, 2015; Shapiro, 2014). In contrast, other school districts place ELs in mainstream classes without language support, and this not an equitable setting (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014; Lopez et al., 2015).

**Limited English proficiency.** This term was adopted by the U.S. Department of Education to refer to ELs who are enrolled in schools with limited proficiency; therefore, they will encounter challenges in meeting state requirements (Bardack, 2010; National Council of Teachers of English, 2008).

**Native English speakers.** This term is utilized to identify students whose first language is English.

**Native language (L1).** This term refers to a language learner's first or native language (Bardack, 2010).

**Second-language acquisition.** This term refers to the process of language learning through developmental stages (Krashen, 2003; Young-Scholten, 2013). However, for the purpose of this dissertation, it is essential to differentiate that some students are learning English as a second language, whereas others are learning it as an additional multiple language.

**Social language.** This term refers to everyday social language utilized inside and outside the school setting. This everyday social language development has been identified by Cummins (1981) as basic interpersonal communication skills.

**Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).** This term refers to ELs who are new to the United States school system and have interrupted or limited educational opportunities in their native country (WIDA Consortium, 2015). These students have no or limited literacy in their native language and are below grade level in content knowledge and skills (Lukes, 2015; New York State Education

Department, 2011; WIDA Consortium, 2015). However, other researchers use the term students with interrupted formal education, and Gahungu et al. (2011) utilize the term culturally displaced students with truncated formal education.

**Target language (L2).** This term has been identified by Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985) and Cummins (1981) as the new language being learned. In this study, English is identified as L2, although there are cases of students who are learning it as their third language.

**WIDA model.** This term refers to a model created by the WIDA Consortium to assign an initial level of English language proficiency to newly arrival ELs. Results guide districts in determining appropriate placement for language support.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to examine how ESOL high school teachers in a small urban mid-Atlantic school district in the United States integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs. It is essential to conduct this study as the SLIFE population is rapidly increasing in school districts across the United States, and, according to DeCapua and Marshall (2015), it is essential to provide the necessary support that will result in completion of a high school education. This case study should help school districts, educators within the ESOL discipline, and general education teachers gain a better understanding of the unique needs of high school SLIFEs. Moreover, the study hopes to not only promote the academic achievement of SLIFEs, but support their socioemotional needs as well, ultimately improving graduation rates within this special student population.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the author discussed relevant previous and current literature related to the academic and social achievement of ELs who are SLIFEs. The review included the rationale for researching this problem and discussed the theoretical framework. Furthermore, an overview of the history of educational federal mandates intended to protect the civil rights of equitable educational opportunities for ELs was provided. The author also described the profile of the school district and the two sites in which the case study took place by providing significant demographic information. Most importantly, an indepth analysis of ESOL students and SLIFEs was provided. In addition, ESOL teacher preparation, the nonacademic challenges of SLIFEs, reunification, and the development of language-acquisition theory and literacy were examined. Lastly, the researcher included the research questions.

### Theoretical Framework

The problem regarding how a school district in a mid-Atlantic state approached the challenges associated with integrating social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs is grounded in the theory of social justice. The theory of social justice was originally developed by John Rawls in 1971 and was primarily used to present and explore the concept of justice and equality. There is no set definition for the term *social justice*, as there are a variety of views on its meaning (Berkovich, 2014). However, Rasinski (1987) defined social justice as a value or belief that individuals hold toward inequality among certain social groups in comparison to others and how these beliefs affect society.

However, Rawls (1971) provided a simplified definition of social justice referring to it as being fair. Furthermore, Scanlan (2012) and Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) identified

social justice as a complex concept with a plethora of factors that included the distributions of resources, domination within cultures, and relations of power. Another view for the term social justice was provided by Bell (2010), as he defined social justice as a process that ultimately permits individuals to have equal participation within society. The author also noted that the goal of social justice is to allow individuals to be interdependent while being aware of their role as responsible members within society. Lastly, Theoharis (2007) conceptualized social justice as leadership that addresses challenges related to race, social class, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and other concerns that are often marginalized by leaders.

The theory of social justice's foundation is based on the basic human rights identified by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant in the social contract (Rawls, 1971). Rawls (1971) focused on creating a society that is fair. Consequently, Rawls identified two principles that support a basic structure of a just society (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). The first principle states that all individuals are entitled to basic freedoms, such as freedom of speech and the pursuit of liberty and happiness (Rawls, 1971, 1999). The second principle addresses distribution within inequalities in a social and economic context (Rawls, 1971, 1999). According to Rawls, social and economic inequalities will exist but must benefit everyone, including the least advantage as long as they do not interfere with the basic human rights.

The concept of social justice in education was initiated in response to inequalities toward expectations of students from low-income and culturally nondominant communities (Lazar, 2013). Although legal segregation was outlawed in 1954 through the final decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Harrison & Clark, 2016), school districts are failing in providing equal educational opportunities (Harrison & Clark, 2016;

Orfield & Lee, 2005). In fact, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (2011) expressed that inequality in education is the most critical diversity issue encountered by schools in the United States. Cruz and Stake (2012) also indicated that “equitable education is one of the most important challenges of the present century” (p. 122). Scanlan (2012) agreed about the existence of inequalities in the educational system but emphasized that eliminating these inequalities is an ambitious difficult to achieve goal.

Kantor and Lowe (2006) argued that there are numerous factors that can hinder the social justice process in education because of its multifaceted and intertwined nature within other social structures. Most importantly, to ensure social justice in education, social justice leadership is essential (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). Therefore, educational leaders, including superintendents, principals, and assistant principals, are crucial for ensuring social justice within their school districts (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011; Whitenack, 2015). Enacting social justice educational leaders can hold teachers accountable and responsible for nurturing and promoting the fullest potential of all students (Lazar, 2013).

However, Becker, de Wet, and van Vollenhoven (2015) stated that teachers play a fundamental role in ensuring equality in education. Therefore, the authors indicated that there is a need for teachers to be trained on human rights literacy. Becker et al. defined human rights literacy as having the knowledge of human rights processes. According to the authors, human rights literacy is fundamental because teachers play a crucial role in education, and there is a need to implement human rights values in teaching and learning as a humanizing practice. Lazar (2013) also noted that social justice inequalities are more significant in underserved communities but especially from educators who have preconceived negative perspectives of low-income groups, culturally and linguistically

diverse groups, and other marginalized groups.

Cochran-Smith (2010) developed a theory of social justice in education guided by three principles. The first principle states that teachers need to promote equity in learning for all students. The principle entails teachers to challenge inequities not only in the classroom, but in society. The second principle requires educators to recognize and respect all social, racial, and cultural groups. Most importantly, it encourages educators not to make generalizations about marginalized groups and to promote cultural sensitivity and awareness in the school community. Cochran-Smith's last principle of social justice education focuses on the need for educators to acknowledge that conflicts will arise due to differences in opinions related to the nature of justice. The author also stated that these conflicts need to be managed to implement effective conflict resolution interventions.

The theory of social justice is appropriate for this dissertation because experts in the field of education argue that ELs are not receiving equal educational opportunities (Coleman & Avrushin, 2017; Crawford, 2004; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). McKenzie et al. (2008) and Gándara (2010) indicated that ELs are among the group of students who are frequently segregated. Results from a case study that examined how two principals created an inclusive learning environment for ELs, conducted by Theoharis and O'Toole (2011), found that ELs were "underserved and underachieving" (p. 677).

The ELs who are SLIFEs represent a subgroup within the EL population (DeCapua et al., 2009) who are at a higher risk of being marginalized because of their lack of literacy and educational experiences (Coleman & Avrushin, 2017). Moreover, The U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education (2015) noted that ELs encounter many challenges in schools because they are not receiving the necessary support to succeed academically. In addition, most EL programs encounter the challenge



of providing the appropriate linguistic and academic support students need while maintaining equitable access to academic content (Hopkins et al., 2015). This case study examined how ESOL teachers are integrating social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs.

### **Background of Federal Mandates for Educating ELs**

The history of federal mandates and legislation related to the education of ELs began in 1906 when the U.S. Congress mandated schools to conduct instruction utilizing English (Lopez et al., 2015). An additional component of this mandate was the requirement for individuals who applied to be citizens of the United States to speak English (Lopez et al., 2015). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act prohibited federally funded programs from discriminating individuals and mandated school systems to provide equal educational opportunities to all learners, including ELs (Jimenez-Castellanos & Topper, 2012). Four years later, in 1968, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was approved by Congress (Lopez et al., 2015). Also known as the Bilingual Educational Act, or Title VII, this legislation focused on the rights of ELs. Most importantly, this legislation allocated school districts with additional funding to conduct research on language instruction.

In 1974, the decisions related to *Lau v. Nichols* and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974 marked a fundamental development in the education of special student populations that included ELs. These two events were significant because they required public schools to address the challenges that impacted ELs in accessing and fully participating in public education (Lopez et al., 2015). First, in *Lau v. Nichols*, the Supreme Court specified that services to ELs were mandated by the federal government (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014). The federal mandate also required states to provide

adequate instruction to ELs, and failure to comply would result in a violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2014; Lopez et al., 2015). In addition, the decision also stated that schools must provide support to ELs in learning English and content (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016) and support bilingual education where possible (Gallegos & Wise, 2011).

The Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974 required school districts to provide equitable education by addressing language barriers that prevent ELs from accessing curriculum (Jimenez-Castellanos & Topper, 2012; Lopez et al., 2015). Moreover, the law deemed school districts that denied equal opportunities to all learners to be unlawful. The Equal Educational Opportunity Act stated the following:

The Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States that all children enrolled in public schools are entitled to equal educational opportunity without regard to race, color, sex, or national origin. No State shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by the deliberate segregation by an educational agency of students on the basis of race, color, or national origin among or within schools. (Lopez et al., 2015, p. 417)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 marked a pivotal period, as the federal government held school districts accountable for the academic success of all learners, focusing on special student populations that included ELs (Gallegos & Wise, 2011; Kenyon, MacGregor, Li, & Cook, 2011; Lopez et al., 2015). The No Child Left Behind legislation mandated public schools to provide adequate educational opportunities to ELs, while progressing in fluency and learning content (Jimenez-Castellanos & Topper, 2012). The legislation also focused on addressing the specific needs of ELs under Title III. Title

III requires school systems to report adequate yearly progress within the EL subcategory, including progress within individual level of English language proficiency (Kenyon et al., 2011). Consequently, ELs are assessed annually to determine the level of English language proficiency until they demonstrate proficiency in English.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, the most recent educational legislation, states that school districts must provide equitable and effective opportunities for all students to learn, including ELs (Jimenez-Castellanos & Topper, 2012). The legislation also mandates school districts to provide evidence of effective instructional activities, strategies, or interventions through student outcomes (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). Lastly, ELs are entitled to grade-level curriculum access and rigorous course work at their English proficiency level. According to this legislation, schools are held accountable for providing linguistic and academic support to ELs without furthering inequity or segregation (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

Most importantly, the Every Student Succeeds Act is the first legislation to include SLIFEs as one of the subgroups within the EL population, as Klein and Michell (2016) pointed out that the legislation mandates school districts to monitor the academic performance of ELs who are SLIFEs. Furthermore, the accountability of EL performance within English proficiency has been shifted from Title III under the No Child Left Behind to Title I under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Reaching a higher level of full accountability for the academic performance of ELs requires the committed efforts educators and leaders at the federal, state, and local levels (Hopkins et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

### **Research Site Profile**

This research was conducted at two high schools located in Metropolitan County

Public Schools (MCPS), a pseudonym given to protect the district's identity. The MCPS is a suburban district with extensive resources. In the 2014-2015 school year, it invested \$15,643 per student for their education. Although MCPS is one of the wealthiest districts, 30.12% of students received free or reduced-price lunches during that academic year. The community provides exposure to a plethora of culturally and linguistically diverse populations, which, according to Frey (2015), serve as an asset for the development of skills needed for competing in a global society. In the last 20 years, demographic changes have impacted this district with a rapid and constant increase in culturally and linguistically diverse students (Douglas Horsford & Sampson, 2013).

Furthermore, the diverse population in the district includes not only students born in the United States, but also immigrants from around the world. However, there has been a significant increase of students specifically from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Ethiopia, and Mongolia. In addition, in the past 3 years, there has been an increase in numbers of students with limited, interrupted, or no formal education and unaccompanied minors who entered the country undocumented. Statistics from the state department of education indicated that the district enrolled 26,348 students in 2016 representing the following ethnic background: 45.8% White, 28.9% Hispanic, 10.5% African American, 9.0% Asian, and 5.3% of two or more races or American Indian.

Enrollment has drastically increased in the ESOL program at MCPS as demographic shifts continue to evolve. Nine percent of MCPS students received ESOL services during the 2014-2015 school year. It was reported by the district that 25% of ELs were receiving ESOL services at the elementary level, and 12% of ELs were receiving ESOL services at the secondary level. The ESOL students at MCPS come from approximately 114 countries. However, the largest percentages are from El Salvador with

8%, 4% from Guatemala, 3% Ethiopia, and 2% Bolivia. Approximately 99 different languages are represented within this student population, with the following being the most common languages spoken: 66% Spanish, 6% Arabic, 6% Amharic, 3% Mongolian, and 3% Bengali. Despite the increase in numbers of ELs, the district has not met annual measurable objectives within the on-time graduation requirements in 3 years within the subgroup of students with limited English proficiency. Unfortunately, the dropout rate among ELs is also rapidly increasing. Lastly, in the 2017-2018 school year, there were 52 high school ELs identified as SLIFEs.

The MCPS is a school district located in a WIDA Consortium member state; however, the school district utilizes their own leveling system of English language proficiency that differs from the WIDA levels. The district's system of English language proficiency consists of four levels of A, B, EX-A, EX-B, resulting in a significant number of students repeating A and B levels. These levels do not correlate with the research on language-acquisition stages and their characteristics. According to Cummins (1979, 1981), it takes an average of 2 to 3 years to acquire what is known as basic interpersonal communication skills. Also known as surface proficiency, it is the language utilized in informal settings (Cummins 1979, 1981). On the other hand, cognitive academic language proficiency takes an average of 5 to 7 years to acquire (Cummins 1979, 1981). Also known as deep structure, it is the language of textbooks, academic courses, and literacy development. However, Collier (1987) specified that these time frames are impacted depending on the quality of language instructional programs.

The first high school in which the study was conducted was identified as Site A to protect the school's identity. Site A had an enrollment of 2,104 students during the 2016-2017 school year. Demographics included 44.8% Hispanic, 21.5% White, 19.8% African

American, 8.6% Asian, and 5.3% representing two or more races or American Indian. In addition, 34.8% of students were identified as receiving free or reduced lunch and 52.6% as economically disadvantaged. Overall, 36.2% of students were identified as EL; however, this statistical information includes WIDA Level 6 students who are also known as formerly ELs and are no longer receiving ESOL services as they tested out of the program. Lastly, 12 students were identified as SLIFEs (see Appendix A).

The second high school in which the study was conducted was identified as Site B. Site B had an enrollment of 2,537 students during the 2016-2017 school year. Demographics included 42% White, 33.6% Hispanic, 10.4% Asian, 8.7% African American, and 5.3% representing two or more races or American Indian. Furthermore, 32% of students were identified as receiving free or reduced lunch and 36.4% as economically disadvantage. Moreover, 24.8% were identified as ELs, but, as previously mentioned, this demographic data also included Level 6 students who are not receiving direct ESOL services. Lastly, 10 students were identified as SLIFEs.

### **English for Speakers of Other Languages**

The EL is a term utilized to identify students whose first language is not English and who are currently learning English as a new language (Roy-Campbell, 2013). The ELs, also known as ESOL students, are the fastest growing student population in the United States (Alford & Niño, 2011; Calderon et al., 2011; Tung, 2013). DeCapua et al. (2009) emphasized that the EL population has steadily increased, causing changes in the demographic composition within school systems across the United States. According to Roy-Campbell (2013), the number of ELs in public schools drastically increased from 3.5 million in 1998 to 5.3 million in 2009. Moreover, an estimated 11% of students in the United States during the 2014-2015 school year were identified as ELs (Callahan &

Shifrer, 2016). The ELs are highly diverse with varying unique needs (Alford & Niño, 2011), as there are several subgroups among them (Calderon et al., 2011; Roy-Campbell, 2013; Salva & Matis, 2017). For instance, Calderon et al. (2011) and Roy-Campbell (2013) identified long-term ELs as one of the subgroups. These students have been in schools within the United States since kindergarten; however, they are still classified as ELs when entering middle and high schools (Calderon et al., 2011). Many researchers attribute this long-term classification to inadequate programs that do not address their needs (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2011; Calderon et al., 2011; Menken & Kleyn, 2010).

Dually identified students represent another subgroup within ELs. Dually identified students are those who are receiving special education services and are also identified as language learners. It is crucial to note that ELs are more likely than White students to be identified as having learning or cognitive disabilities (Sullivan, 2011). Sullivan (2011) also mentioned that ELs are overrepresented in special education. A third subgroup of ELs involves migrant students. Most students within this subcategory are born in the United States and lack proficiency in English due to interrupted education as a result of their parents' constant migration in search of agricultural jobs (Calderon et al., 2011; Nevarez-La Torre, 2011; Roy-Campbell, 2013; Salva & Matis, 2017). Lastly, SLIFE, another diverse group within the EL population, have limited or interrupted formal education. This group served as the focus of this research; therefore, a comprehensive profile was provided in this dissertation.

**Entry identification and placement of ELs.** Federal law requires school districts to identify students who demonstrate limited English proficiency, also known as ELs (Peregoy & Boyle, 2009); therefore, most school districts across the nation require ELs to register at a welcome center, also known as intake center. Registering at a welcome

center became a federal requirement by the No Child Left Behind Act, now the Every Student Succeeds Act, with the main purpose of assessing students' English language proficiency and assigning an entry level of English language proficiency. Upon arrival, families complete the home language survey to determine if there is a language other than English or in addition to English spoken in the home (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2015). If the family member indicates in the survey that they speak another language, then an assessment is given to determine if the student has need for English language support (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Currently, 39 states are utilizing the WIDA model as the assessment to identify the students' level of English language proficiency upon entry. The WIDA model assesses the students' level of English language proficiency in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, many intake centers assess the students in math and L1 to obtain additional background information on the students' previous education. Moreover, parents are interviewed to find out more about the students' previous educational background. However, according to DeCapua et al. (2009), this initial interview should be conducted in schools in which the family and student will feel more comfortable and school interviewer will be able to gather more accurate information. After assessing the students' level of English language proficiency, most intake centers make a placement recommendation for schools to follow. Once students are enrolled, the recommended placement might change at the school as a result of numerous factors, which include student performance on additional assessments, teacher observations, resources allocated to support ELs, and classroom enrolment.

**Yearly proficiency-level assessment.** The WIDA Consortium, formerly known



as the Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas Consortium or the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, was created as an action by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which mandated school districts to assess ELs' level of English language proficiency on a yearly basis (WIDA Consortium, 2012). The WIDA Consortium was created by the Wisconsin Department of Public Education in collaboration with the Delaware Department of Education in 2003 (WIDA Consortium, 2012). Most importantly, WIDA partnered with the Center for Applied Linguistics for assessment development. With this initiative, WIDA and the Center for Applied Linguistics developed the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State (ACCESS), which assesses ELs' level of English language proficiency. Currently, there are 39 WIDA Consortium states and over 200 schools that form part of the WIDA International School Consortium.

According to WIDA, there are six levels of English language proficiency, each with its own characteristics within the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (see Appendix B). The levels are 1 (entering), 2 (beginning), 3 (developing), 4 (expanding), 5 (bridging), and 6 (reaching). Students at the lower proficiency levels need differentiated instruction with a higher degree of sensory graphic and interactive support. These supports are released as the student begins to progress within the language acquisition continuum in all language domains. However, each student progresses within each level at different rates depending on a variety of factors that include previous educational history, L1 literacy, culture, motivation, family circumstances, cognitive development, and current instructional program. The WIDA's level of English language proficiency is a composite of the ACCESS individual scores within each language domain. However, the language domains of reading and writing are assigned more weight

when averaging the scores because these two domains are essential for academic success in all content areas.

### **Background on SLIFEs**

The SLIFEs represent a subgroup within the diverse group of ELs (WIDA Consortium, 2015). According to Bigelow and Schwarz (2010), SLIFEs are ELs who (a) have no previous formal education or lack consistent schooling, (b) are performing 2 or more years below grade level in content knowledge, and (c) are mostly members of collectivistic cultures. Due to limited or no formal education, SLIFEs lack literacy in their native language (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b; Dooley, 2009; WIDA Consortium, 2015) and also lack critical academic skills (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Freeman & Freeman, 2002).

The lack of or limited educational experiences of SLIFEs can be attributed to many factors. According to Montero et al. (2014) and DeCapua and Marshall (2011), factors include armed conflicts and other types of violence, natural disasters, and political, religious, and ethnic persecution. DeCapua and Marshall (2015) also discussed additional factors, such as refugee status, living in regions that lack educational infrastructure, and economic reasons. The WIDA Consortium (2015) also emphasized that lack of transportation, poverty, and living in isolated geographic regions are additional factors that contribute to not having access to formal educational opportunities. Lastly, DeCapua and Marshall (2011) added that access to formal educational opportunities in many underdeveloped countries is limited. For instance, the researchers stated that, in some countries, free education is provided only up to the elementary level, and to pursue anything beyond that will be costly. Access to educational opportunities may also be impacted by inadequately prepared teachers and unfamiliarity with the

language of instruction.

There are no accurate statistics in the United States indicating how many ELs are SLIFEs (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; DeCapua et al., 2009; Short, 2002; WIDA Consortium, 2015) for many reasons (DeCapua et al., 2009; WIDA Consortium, 2015). First, there are differences in opinion about which characteristics should be taken into consideration for identifying a student as being SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Moreover, school districts do not separate SLIFEs from the EL population when reporting data to the state (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). In addition, many school districts do not obtain ELs' previous educational experiences history upon registration (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). When students are registering, many parents provide inaccurate information about their child's previous education in fear of not being accepted in school as a result of their lack of education (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009). DeCapua et al. (2009) revealed that there are parents who feel embarrassed of their child's gaps in education. On the other hand, others might provide school records showing consistent education; however, those documents might be fabricated (DeCapua et al., 2009).

The lack of or limited education is caused by numerous factors. For instance, students might be enrolled in schools but could have had inconsistent attendance, causing academic gaps, or students attend school, but their school system had limited resources, including books and supplies (DeCapua et al., 2009). In addition, Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) indicated that the quality of education could be hindered as a result of deficient teacher qualifications and training. Furthermore, academic gaps of SLIFEs can also be a result of inadequate quality of education provided in areas with limited educational infrastructure (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua et al., 2009;

Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). Another factor that contributes to the lack of education is the amount of compulsory education required in certain countries.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), compulsory education varies from state to states. In 30 states, students are mandated to attend school until the age of 16. However, in nine states, students are required to attend school until the age of 17. Lastly, 11 states and the District of Columbia require their students to attend school until they reach the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The state in which the study was conducted is one of the nine states whose compulsory age is 17. On the contrary, students in Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador are mandated to attend school until the ninth grade (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Years of compulsory education can vary from country to country. Appendix C includes an outline of the years of compulsory education in countries in Latin America and the United States.

It is fundamental to note that, within the group of SLIFEs, there are further subgroups with a variety of additional unique experiences and characteristics. One identified subgroup involves unaccompanied minors, which the Homeland Security Act of 2002 refers to as unaccompanied alien children (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 defined unaccompanied minors as undocumented individuals under the age of 18 upon entry and whose parents or legal guardians are not living in the United States to provide for them. Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) also indicated that, for the last 10 years, there has been a significant increase in numbers of unaccompanied minors entering the United States. For instance, in 2004, approximately 2,000 unaccompanied minors entered, compared to approximately 60,000 in 2014 (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017).

Furthermore, the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (2017b) indicated that

approximately 170,000 unaccompanied minors entered the United States since October 2013. According to Coleman and Avrushin (2017), this statistical information does not include the thousands of unaccompanied minors who have entered the United States in previous years. Most unaccompanied minors come from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017a). There are many reasons unaccompanied minors escape their country; however, most of them are looking for asylum due to violence and are hoping to reunite with their families (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015). A study conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2013) reported that 48% of unaccompanied minors experienced some form of violence in their native country. Violent events may be caused by domestic disputes, sexual assaults, gang and mafia recruitment and participation, and corrupt government agencies.

Another subgroup of ELs who might fall into the SLIFE category are refugees. Refugees are forced to leave their native country because of war, persecution, or natural disaster (Salva & Matis, 2017). Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) identified refugees as the second largest group of SLIFEs. According to Vecchio, Dhillon, and Ulmer (2017), there are more than 13 million refugees around the world, and the number continues to rapidly increase. The researchers also reported that unprecedented, increased numbers of children are forced to leave their native country as a result of social, political, and environmental turmoil (Vecchio et al., 2017). Consequently, refugee students are entering schools across the world, causing a need for educational research on how to effectively meet their unique academic and socioemotional needs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b; Vecchio et al., 2017).

Many refugee children experience disruption in their schooling as they are

displaced (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b; Salva & Matis, 2017), and, at times, it can last for months, if not years (Vecchio et al., 2017). Miles and Bailey-McKenna (2016) also attributed the lack of education of refugee children to the limited education provided in refugee camps. For instance, some camps focus on religious education (Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2016), and others have inadequately trained teachers and limited resources (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Miles & Bailey-McKenna, 2016). As a result, many refugee students experience limited formal education. Lastly, trauma is a main concern among this group of students, causing challenges in school socialization, academics, mental, and physical health. Consequently, a strong support system is needed in a safe environment to be academically successful (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Salva & Matis, 2017).

Migrant students represent an additional SLIFE subgroup. Migrant students are a transient population, as their families move from place to place seeking agricultural jobs (Nevarez-La Torre, 2011; Salva & Matis, 2017). In a case study of a migrant student native from Mexico with indigenous background, conducted by Nevarez-La Torre (2011), the authors found that the migrant student encountered additional challenges because the student lacked the educational continuity to succeed academically. According to Nevarez-La Torre, this subgroup of ELs encounter additional challenges because teachers are not trained to provide services to students with a transient background. Lastly, the researcher also stated that the school lacked appropriate materials for this population.

### **Teacher Preparation for ESOL Classes**

When SLIFEs enter most school districts across the United States, they are placed in ESOL classes. However, according to Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017), most ESOL

classes are designed to provide the language support needed for students to transition to regular education classes. Hickey (2015) and Custodio and O’Loughlin also indicated that ESOL classes are not adequate for SLIFEs because these classes are specifically designed for students who have strong academic background and L1 literacy. Most importantly, ESOL teachers, especially at the high school level, are not adequately trained to meet the needs of SLIFEs, specifically as the instruction relates to the teaching of emergent literacy skills and numeracy (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Montero et al., 2014; Silva & Kucer, 2016). Montero et al. (2014) also emphasized that ESOL teachers are not prepared to teach foundational print literacy. Moreover, Hickey revealed that limited research exists on which strategies work best with SLIFEs and that the needs are so great that teachers do not have time to wait for such research to be provided. Therefore, this study was designed to provide indepth information on high school ESOL teachers and their approach to integrate social, academic, and literacy developmental skills for SLIFEs.

Dooley (2009) conducted a qualitative study in Australia to explore effective strategies for language teaching to West African SLIFEs. To accomplish this, the author conducted classroom observations and compared them with literature from observations carried out by other researchers. Dooley found that secondary SLIFEs needed teachers who were not only ESOL teachers, but also experts on literacy. Another study conducted by Thorstenson (2012) found that teachers were “unwilling or unsure of how to work with these students, suggesting that this group of students will continue to struggle in and beyond school” (p. 139). The findings also indicated that teachers expressed feelings of resentment for having to teach SLIFEs; therefore, having SLIFEs in the classroom was considered a burden (Thorstenson, 2012). The findings of both Dooley and Thorstenson

share a similar theme related to teachers' lack of literacy training. This lack of literacy training increased the challenges among teachers in being able to provide the appropriate instructional support SLIFEs need to be academically successful.

### **Nonacademic Challenges of SLIFEs**

The SLIFEs encounter unique challenges that go beyond academics and language support compared to other ELs (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). According to Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) and the WIDA Consortium (2015), SLIFEs need specialized programs that provide emotional and psychological assistance. As a matter of fact, the WIDA Consortium emphasized that the emotional and psychological needs of SLIFEs must be met first before they are fully immersed in an educational setting. Emotional and psychological needs are common amongst SLIFEs, as they have encountered many life experiences such as war (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015).

Consequently, the WIDA Consortium (2015) emphasized the importance of teachers to be familiarized with students' backgrounds, especially in addressing sensitive topics that may create emotional instability and cause flashbacks of painful memories. In addition, many SLIFEs are also traumatized by their experiences crossing the border, by gang violence, and with poverty (Zimmerman-Orozco, 2015). Other SLIFEs might exhibit resiliency as a result of being forced by their parents to enter the United States against their will causing additional emotional challenges as they leave their family and friends (Sylvan, 2013).

Unaccompanied minors have additional emotional and social challenges that cause extreme pressure to cope with many life changes (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). According to Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017), school districts are not adequately



prepared to address the unique psychological and emotional needs of each student. Some may display fear to share their experiences, which can be very traumatic. Coleman and Avrushin (2017) also stated that these socioemotional needs that unaccompanied minors exhibit will impact their academic achievement potential.

**From culture shock to acculturation.** Most ELs who are SLIFEs can encounter culture shock (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017). Culture shock was defined by DeCapua and Wintergerst (2004) as a feeling experienced by an individual when placed in a completely new cultural context, which causes inner conflicts and struggles. Custodio and O’Loughlin (2017) also stated that culture shock can “result in overwhelming feelings of sadness, anxiety, frustration, and fear, living in an unknown place with an incomprehensible language” (p. 70). Culture shock, also known as the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment (see Appendix D) can manifest in four phases; honeymoon, culture shock, acculturation, and adaptation (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009; Lysgaard, 1955).

The first phase of the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment is known as the honeymoon stage, as the newly arrive immigrant may feel excitement in the new environment (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009). During this phase, individuals are ecstatic and fascinated by everything in their new surroundings (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009). Most immigrants are not long in the honeymoon stage because they begin to feel overwhelmed by the numerous stimulations, including understanding of the new language and culture (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017).

The second phase of the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment is culture shock (DeCapua et al., 2009), also known as the frustration phase (Custodio & O’Loughlin,

2017). During this phase, the student may experience feelings of frustration, unhappiness, disappointment, anger, and depression (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009). Furthermore, the individual begins to compare everything about the new country with the native one (DeCapua et al., 2009). In addition, physical symptoms might manifest, including frequent illness, sleepiness, insomnia, and nervous habits, as well as emotional symptoms that can include anxiety, fear, regressive behaviors, silent period, thoughts of trauma, frustration, and depression (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Moreover, this phase can be particularly more challenging for teenagers who are experiencing typical teenage identity issues while also adjusting to the new culture (DeCapua et al., 2009). Most importantly, Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) emphasized that it is crucial to monitor students during the first two phases of the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment to provide the necessary support systems including assistance from social workers, psychologists, and most importantly parents.

Acculturation is the third phase of the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment.

Adjustment to the new culture commences as the individual begins to adjust and feel comfortable with the new culture and language while comparing and contrasting both (DeCapua et al., 2009). The last phase of the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment is adaptation. Adaptation occurs as the individual acclimates to the new culture as a result of developing a well-defined understanding of it (DeCapua et al., 2009). Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) revealed that, during this stage, ELs are immersed in the new country and culture, thus feeling at ease speaking the new language in a variety of settings.

Bang (2017) conducted a study in the metropolitan area of Detroit to examine the process of acculturation and integration of Iraqi refugee students in schools in the United States. The study's participants were 100 Iraqi refugee high school students between the

ages 14 and 20. The findings of Bang's research indicated that the Iraqi students' acculturation and integration processes were impacted by numerous factors while settling in the United States. To begin with, the students' acculturation process was impacted by posttraumatic syndrome disorder as they encountered traumatic events in their country due to war and during their journeys to refugee camps. In addition, Bang found that their educational gaps also impacted the process of acculturation and school adjustment. According to Bang, students with educational gaps were at a higher risk of not assimilating to American or adjusting to the school environment.

Based on his research findings, Bang (2017) suggested that school districts and communities need to be ready to provide the appropriate support systems to refugees, as these students are willing to seek assistance because they are aware of their educational gaps. The researcher stated further that it was evident that participants were attempting to assimilate and integrate into the United States' culture; however, they needed the support of not only the school, but also the community. Bang also emphasized that this support is essential for students, so they can feel welcomed in their new home country.

An additional study that examined the acculturation process was conducted by Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Baezconde-Garbanati, Ritt-Olson, and Soto (2012) in Los Angeles, California. This empirical research studied factors that may lead to depression during the acculturation process amongst Hispanic students. The study included 2,420 ninth-grade Hispanic students who had to complete a survey related to their acculturation process during their freshmen, sophomore, and junior high school years. The results of the study indicated that those students who had a strong family bond exhibited less symptoms of depression as a result of the stress associated with acculturating. In contrast, those students who had family conflicts exhibited higher levels of depression. Lastly, the

authors concluded that the process of acculturation might lead to depression because of the pressures associated with it.

The studies conducted by Bang (2017) and Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2012) had limitations. Bang described the population sample as a limitation in the study because it involved only 100 Iraqi students. Lorenzo-Blanco et al. also identified the population as one of the limitations of their study, as they focused only on one Hispanic subgroup. Therefore, this case study provides information on how ESOL high school teachers are supporting ELs who are SLIFEs of various backgrounds with the challenges associated with the acculturation process.

**Reunification.** Migration often involves extended separation from parents and children (Boccagni, 2012); thus, this phenomenon is often identified by researchers as reunification (Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013). Reunification is a term utilized to refer to families who have been separated for long periods of time. Bertolani, Rinaldini, and Tognetti Bordogna (2014) identified reunification as a symbolic process of coming together. Also known as reunited families, this phenomenon is a result of parents migrating to a new country and being forced to leave their children with multiple caretakers in their native country (Bertolani et al., 2014; Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013; Lau & Gordon, 2015). In addition, reunification in the United States is most common among Central Americans (Lau & Gordon, 2015).

After years of separation, the child enters the United States and is reunited with the parents. However, there are a significant number of challenges that arise when family members experience the separation and reunification process. For instance, feelings of anger, resentment, and neglect are common among these children and teenagers who were left behind, at times with multiple primary caretakers (Bertolani et al., 2014;

Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013; Lau & Gordon, 2015). Additional emotional instability is developed by these students as they are forced to leave their primary caretaker with whom they have formed a special bond (Bertolani et al., 2014; Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013; Lau & Gordon, 2015). Furthermore, once reunited, parental responsibilities and authority have to be relearned (Lau & Gordon, 2015). Students from reunited families are also more likely to perform lower academically compared to other students (Lau & Gordon, 2015), as they confront a series of challenges that include depression (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Tordova, 2008). Lau and Gordon (2015) stated further that these emotional needs are not being met in school districts because there is a lack of resources to address the reunification phenomenon.

Reunification is a phenomenon that is currently being experienced in multiple countries across the world. In Italy, migrants from numerous countries, including Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Moldova, Peru, Philippines, and Ukraine, (Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013), as well as India, Morocco, and Pakistan (Bertolani et al., 2014) are often a product of reunification. Bonizzoni and Leonini (2013) conducted a qualitative study of teenagers who experienced reunification when their mothers migrated to Italy. The researchers interviewed 32 teenagers who experienced reunification to explore the challenges they encountered through the separation and reunification process. Findings indicated that, despite circumstances encountered by mothers for migrating to another country, their children experienced feelings of abandonment (Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013). Furthermore, children also encountered the feeling of loss of their mother, especially those who had a developed mother-child bond as a result of their years together.

It is very common for many reunited children to express distress and rebellion

(Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013). For instance, many of them rebel and refuse to attend school. Moreover, when children finally find out that they will be reunited with their mothers in the new country, additional distress feelings emerged as a result of having to leave their primary caretakers with whom they had already established a strong significant bond (Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013). Lastly, those participants with longer periods of separation encountered more complex challenges because they needed more trust-building time with their mothers (Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013).

### **Academic Challenges of SLIFEs**

The SLIFEs encounter the dual challenge of simultaneously learning to speak a new language while they are also learning to read and write in it without fully understanding this additional language (Spruck Wrigley, 2013). Furthermore, SLIFEs have been unable to develop print literacy skills in their L1 as a result of gaps in their formal schooling or limited or interrupted formal education, causing additional challenges in the language-acquisition process (Montero et al., 2014; Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2012). Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) also indicated that high school SLIFEs, especially those who enroll when are 16 or older, have limited time to master English to complete the rigorous course to complete graduation requirements. In addition, Dooley (2009) conveyed other challenges that secondary ESOL teachers may face. For instance, in his study, Dooley found that refugee students from indigenous backgrounds did not even possess basic skills such as holding a pencil and book.

The SLIFEs have numerous complex and, as DeCapua et al. (2009) presented, unique needs. However, it is crucial for educators not to fall under the false impression that SLIFEs are not educated, as they come from a variety of rich experiences (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Straley, 2016). Furthermore, Salva and Matis (2017) emphasized

that SLIFEs are not mentally delayed; therefore, they should not be referred to special education services, which is a common practice in school districts across the United States (DeCapua et al., 2009). For instance, 30% of SLIFE Iraqi refugee ELs were referred for special education services in New York (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010).

Salva and Matis (2017) stated, “They experienced lack of opportunity, but not an inability to learn” (p. 11). The SLIFEs are fully capable of learning; therefore, school districts need to provide them with appropriate resources and highly qualified teachers who are capable of understanding and addressing their needs (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; DeCapua et al., 2009; Salva & Matis, 2017). Custodio and O’Loughlin (2017) also indicated that ESOL programs are designed for students with strong L1 skills and educational background, and these programs will not meet the needs of SLIFEs.

The SLIFEs encounter numerous challenges that may impede their academic success. The first challenge that affects SLIFEs when they enter schools in the United States involves their lack of knowledge regarding school procedures. For many SLIFEs, the classroom in the United States might be their first time in a structured educational environment (Coleman & Avrushin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009; Salva & Matis, 2017). DeCapua et al. (2009) identified this as school shock. The SLIFEs encounter the challenge of adjusting to school culture and the expected behaviors within a formal school environment, including following classroom routines, transitioning from one activity to another (DeCapua et al., 2009), and holding a pencil (Dooley, 2009).

In a study conducted by Gahungu et al. (2011) in Chicago of 14 Burundian refugees, the authors found that these refugees lacked the academic readiness that Western students exhibit when they enter school. The authors also indicated that these

Burundian students encountered numerous challenges in adjusting to the school culture. To begin with, the concept of first and last name became a challenge because, in Burundian culture, this concept does not exist. Another challenge that students encountered was related to telling time. According to the researchers, teachers were surprised when they asked the students what time school begins, and Burundian students would respond that they started school at 2:00 a.m. This practice is attributed to the fact that Burundians considered 7:00 a.m. as the first hour of the day. A final example of intercultural differences that impacted the academic development of the Burundian students involved the concept of birthdays because, in their traditional culture, only the years of birth is documented. Lastly, SLIFEs encounter an additional challenge of learning academic content knowledge.

The academic needs of SLIFEs go beyond language instruction (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; Montero et al., 2014; Spruck Wrigley, 2013; WIDA Consortium, 2015). The SLIFEs encounter the dual challenge of learning to speak a new language while learning how to read and write it, despite lacking literacy in L1 (Huang, 2013; Spruck Wigley, 2013). Consequently, SLIFEs rely on oral communication as the primary means for learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a, 2010b). According to DeCapua and Marshall (2011), SLIFEs are comfortable with oral communication because their culture is structured through oral practices instead of written. Furthermore, knowledge is transmitted and retained through oral communication relying on memorization and repetition (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010b).

Although SLIFEs depend on oral communication, Montero et al. (2014) specified that SLIFEs must be immediately introduced to print literacy. Consequently, teachers need to integrate oral and written skills in instruction consistently upon entry (DeCapua



& Marshall, 2010a). Most importantly, teachers need to connect oral and written forms so that SLIFEs can make meaning from print (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a). Moreover, Hickey (2015) and Baecher et al. (2016) noted that the L1 is fundamental in the academic success of SLIFEs. For this reason, SLIFEs should be provided with the opportunity to develop L1 literacy (Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999). However, Hickey recognized the difficulty of hiring teachers who are proficient in the students' L1. Subsequently, the education of SLIFEs must be a collaborative effort (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Hickey, 2015). School districts need to tap into the community to gather resources and volunteers to appropriately provide services to SLIFEs (Hickey, 2015).

### **Development of Language-Acquisition Theory**

When teaching SLIFEs, it is critical for teachers to have knowledge of second-language acquisition theories (Salva & Matis, 2017) because students learn English and develop literacy skills simultaneously (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Salva and Matis (2017) also noted that understanding the language-acquisition process sets the foundation for meeting the needs of SLIFEs. According to Krashen (2003), the language-acquisition process is a subconscious process; while it is happening, we are not aware that it is happening. Also, once we have acquired something, we are not usually aware that we process any new knowledge; the knowledge is stored in our brains subconsciously. Although second-language acquisition theories have changed throughout the years, researchers agree that it is a complex developmental process that varies according to each individual. Krashen (2008) also revealed that past second-language acquisition theories stated that language learners acquire a language by learning rules, drilling, and focusing on grammar. However, according to Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985), these methods of teaching and learning language are not effective.

Krashen's second-language acquisition theory is composed of five hypotheses: acquiring versus learning a language, natural order, monitor, comprehensible input, and affective filter (Krashen, 1981, 1987; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The acquiring versus learning a language hypothesis states that there is a great difference between acquiring a language versus learning it because the two are completely different processes (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 2003). According to Krashen (2003), the language-acquisition process is a subconscious one, as the individual is not aware that it is occurring.

The second hypothesis, the natural order, stipulates that individuals acquire language in a specific developmental order (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985, 2003). The hypothesis also emphasizes that grammar rules are learned naturally by the language learner; therefore, grammar-based language teaching should not be conducted. This is particularly true for SLIFEs due to previous gaps in their educational background history. According to Collier (1987) and Cummins (2000), students with strong L1 skills will acquire L2 faster as they are able to transfer L1 skills to L2. Consequently, SLIFEs will not be able to transfer academic skills and concepts because they never had the opportunity to learn them in their native language. However, Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik, and Queen (1998) stated that SLIFEs will acquire language and literacy if teachers meet them at their level of English language proficiency.

Monitor, Krashen's third hypothesis, specifies that the learner "uses consciously learned rules" (Ponniah, 2010, p. 15) to edit output in written and spoken forms. The fourth and most crucial hypothesis in Krashen's second-language acquisition theory is the comprehensible input hypothesis (Hatch, 1978; Ponniah, 2010). Salva and Matis (2017) also identified comprehensible input as "being one of the most important factors in second language acquisition" (p. 51). The comprehensible input hypothesis, formerly

known as the input theory, explains how language acquisition occurs (Krashen, 2003). The comprehensible input hypothesis indicates that the process of language acquisition occurs only when students understand the messages that are being conveyed whether oral or in written form (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985, 2003). In addition, the comprehensible input theory explains that speaking fluently is a skill that cannot be taught as spoken fluency emerges naturally over time through comprehensible input (Comia Buri, 2012). As a matter of fact, Krashen (2003) indicated that the language-acquisition process is effortless and involuntary.

Comprehensible input is one of the best practices when working with ELs (Li, 2013). Comprehensible input can be accomplished in the classroom by using a variety of visuals and exposing students to new vocabulary (Krashen, 1981; Li, 2013). Most importantly, comprehensible input can be achieved by not oversimplifying instruction, thus implementing an instructional approach that challenges students at one level higher than their English proficiency level (Krashen, 2003; Li, 2013). According to experts in second-language acquisition, effective language instruction must provide input one level beyond the student's linguistic competence (Li, 2013).

Basically, the input that is being conveyed to the student, cannot be too easy nor too difficult so it can be meaningful and useful to the learner (Xu, 2011). Krashen (2003) also stated that the focus in a language learning classroom must first be on listening and reading instructional activities, and, whenever students are ready, they should be allowed to communicate orally. It is essential to note that oral language should never be forced (Krashen, 1981, 2003). Xu (2011) agreed that speaking is not necessary and is not harmful during the language-acquisition process. However, listening is fundamental; therefore, students must be exposed to a variety of listening activities.

Making language and content comprehensible to ELs in the classroom is an essential task during the language-acquisition process. Teachers need to implement a variety of strategies to make input comprehensible to all students (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Comia Buri (2012) conducted a study in science classes in schools in the Philippines where content was being taught in English (i.e., L2). Through this study, the researchers were comparing comprehensible input strategies and their impact on facilitating learning in the science class. The findings of the study revealed that, of the 10 comprehensible input strategies, four were the most utilized by teachers: translation, use of visual aids, excessive coordination, and paraphrasing. However, the use of visuals was the most preferred comprehensible input strategy utilized by teachers as it resulted in facilitating the students understanding of the science concepts. The researchers also found that teachers often utilized translation as a comprehensible input strategy, especially in classes with students whose English (i.e., L2) was at the beginning stages.

Nowbakht and Shahnazari (2015) conducted a study in Australia of 30 Persian students performing at the beginning level of learning English. The purpose of the research was to compare the effects of comprehensible input, output, and corrective feedback of L2 vocabulary. The researchers emphasized that, in order to have effective comprehensible input, the student must also produce written output. To accomplish this, Nowbakht and Shahnazari randomly divided the students into two groups. The control group received only comprehensible input of the words, and the experimental group also received comprehensible input; however, these students were asked to provide output production. In addition, the experimental group was also provided with feedback. The findings indicated that students in the experimental group were able to recognize more vocabulary items compared to the students in the control group.

The researchers also concluded that the corrective feedback was more effective than the output strategy for improving vocabulary in L2. The research of Nowbakht and Shahnazari (2015) coincided with Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis, which states that students should not be rushed to produce output. Consequently, the corrective feedback given to the students in the research of Nowbakht and Shahnazari was more successful than the output strategy, as students might not have been prepared to produce output as they were probably at an early stage of linguistic and literacy development while internalizing language. The current study was designed to provide additional information on the comprehensible input strategies that ESOL teachers are utilizing as a means to develop academic and literacy English skills.

Krashen's (2003) last hypothesis in second-language acquisition theory is the affective filter hypothesis. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis "claims that affective variables do not impact language acquisition directly but prevent input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition" (p. 6). Krashen (1981, 1982) pointed out that low anxiety, learning environment, student motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem are factors that impact the second-language acquisition process. It is vital to note that lowering the affective filter of SLIFE becomes an essential component in their second-language acquisition process.

Salva and Matis (2017) recommended lowering the affective filter by creating a welcoming, stress-free, and engaging learning environment that encourages students to be risk takers by not being afraid of making mistakes as they learn their new language. Krashen further emphasized that students at the early stages of the second-language acquisition process may also exhibit what he referred to as the silent period of language acquisition. This is a stage when students should not be forced to speak because it may

increase the affective filter, hindering the student's second-language acquisition process. During this stage, students are internalizing the new language and making sense of its meaning; therefore, they are not ready to communicate orally.

In a quantitative study conducted by Melouah (2013) to English learners in the License Master Doctorate program in Sodd Dahlab University in Algeria found that many students had high anxiety in their English courses. Thirty students ages 17 to 22 performing at the beginning stages of second-language acquisition participated in the study as they completed a questionnaire related to factors that affect their English oral production. The findings indicated that students suffered anxiety in speaking English as they experienced fear, low-self-confidence, and low self-esteem. The students indicated that these factors affected their oral production in English, which correlates with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. Based on the findings, the researcher made several recommendations to lower the affective filter.

First, teachers need to eliminate competition as this caused an increase in anxiety level. In addition, Melouah (2013) indicated that teachers should encourage students to be risk-takers by avoiding direct correction which caused high levels of anxiety as students felt humiliated. Therefore, the researcher recommended teachers to correct students indirectly. Furthermore, Melouah explained that teachers must incorporate strategies such as small group discussion and provide positive feedback as a way to lower the levels of anxiety, which ultimately promote English oral production. The researcher also recommended teachers to identify students who demonstrate high levels of anxiety and provide them with the support needed so they can be comfortable in communicating orally in English. Although the current research study did not survey students, it should provide significant information on how teachers integrate social and academic English

development that also supports the acculturation process of SLIFEs.

### **Development of Literacy**

The language-acquisition process for SLIFEs will take longer and will be more challenging because they lack L1 literacy. DeCapua et al. (2009) defined literacy as the “basic tools one needs to read and write with fluency and comprehension” (p. 20). Literacy skills are crucial for academic success (Montero et al., 2014; Shi, 2013). This can be accomplished by inquiring about the students’ background by asking questions related to the language they speak, the written form of L1 if applicable, sound-symbol knowledge, identification of consonants and vowels, writing first and last names, and development of cursive and print handwriting (DeCapua et al., 2009). Furthermore, the researchers indicated that teachers need to teach SLIFEs phonology and phonetics to develop literacy. However, high school teachers are not experts and are not trained in the area of beginning literacy (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua et al., 2009; Dooley, 2009; Hickey, 2015).

Findings from a qualitative research conducted by Menken, Kleyn, and Chae (2012) on high school long-term English-language learners indicated that these students who had been in high school for 7 or more years exhibited strong oral social English skills; however, they were not being successful in their academic classes. The researchers attributed the lack of academic progress to the fact that students had not fully developed their L1 literacy skills. The researchers also concluded that these students need to develop academic literacy in both L1 and L2 in order to succeed in any content area. Lastly, the researchers acknowledged that there is limited research on high school students with no or limited literacy. Consequently, the findings of the current study should enhance the literature related to the education of ELs who are SLIFEs and should also provide

educators with approaches that are effective in meeting the literacy needs of high school ELs who are SLIFEs.

Tarone (2010) conducted a three-part study to examine the impact of L1 literacy skills on the learning of L2 and its literacy development. The researcher's purpose for conducting this study was to examine the challenges encountered by Somali students with limited or no literacy in L1 during the development of literacy in their new language. Moreover, Tarone also wanted to explore the effects of the students' limited L1 on the acquisition process of the new language. The researcher conducted classroom observations and also analyzed student work samples. The first part of Tarone's research included 35 participants from Somalia with limited or no L1 literacy. The student participants' ages ranged from 15 to 27. To examine the impact of low literacy in L1 on the acquisition of L2, the researcher divided the students into two groups. The first group consisted of student participants who were identified by an assessment as low literate.

The second group of students were identified as moderate literacy learners. The researcher found that the students in the moderate-literacy group performed better on accuracy of recall and language production compared to the students with low literacy. Findings from the second part of the study also found that students of the moderate literacy group were able to recall questions; however, students with low literacy were not able to recall the questions. From the first two parts of the study, Tarone (2010) was able to conclude that alphabetic print literacy promotes the development of L2. For the last part of the research, Tarone focused on grammar. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference between the product of the students in the low-literacy group compared to the moderate literacy group. For instance, the students in the low-literacy group failed to utilize the third person singular correctly, but members of the other group



were able to utilize it correctly. In addition, students with moderate literacy were able to write complex sentences with more vocabulary.

Tarone (2010) also specified that there is an urgency to conduct more second-language acquisition research studies on adolescents and adult language learners who have limited or no literacy in their L1 and how it impacts the development of L2.

Tarone's research focused on the content and literacy development of SLIFEs in a social studies class. Consequently, the current study should add to the literature of language development and literacy related to SLIFEs, specifically how ESOL teachers integrate content and literacy development in English 1-2 Language, ESOL 1-2 Science, and ESOL 1-2 Social Studies classes.

An additional research on literacy was conducted by Somé-Guiébré (2016); however, this study examined the challenges that Francophone African ELs faced when developing literacy in L2. Somé-Guiébré wanted to examine if placing ELs in mainstream classes would promote or hinder their literacy development. To accomplish this, the author observed two students from African descent speakers of French and Lingala. One of the students had been in the United States for 5 months (i.e., Student A) and the other for 3 years (i.e., Student B). However, Student B had not yet developed the academic language needed to be academically successful. Somé-Guiébré conducted three daily classroom observations a week for a period of 3 months for 5 hours each. In addition, the researcher conducted semistructured interviews with four teacher participants.

Somé-Guiébré (2016) found that both students had limited exposure to content knowledge. Limited exposure to content knowledge varied among the two students. For instance, Student B was pulled out from mainstream classes for ESOL instruction. On the

other hand, Student A was placed in ESOL classes most of the day. Furthermore, Student A was not receiving math classes as the teacher indicated that the students' math level was unknown. Somé-Guiébré also reported that the literacy development of students was hindered due to the lack of collaboration amongst mainstream and ESOL teachers. Lack of interaction among mainstream teachers and ELs was also a factor affecting the literacy development of the students. The researcher suggested that teachers need to collaborate for the benefit of the students' content and literacy development. Lastly, the researcher agreed on students using L1 as a means to clarify terms. Student B often interpreted for Student A in Lingala, and according to the researcher, this increased student participation.

Choi and Ziegler (2015) also conducted a case study to identify the issues and needs of adult SLIFE in Luxembourg. The researchers observed five adult SLIFE; one never had formal education, and the others had only 1 to 4 years of formal education. Consequently, they lacked L1 skills. The researchers observed the adult French language class and noticed that the students needed assistance in reading simple sentences. Moreover, the case study findings indicated that the French L2 courses needed to be designed for SLIFE learners by utilizing materials that were adequate for the students including pictures to provide high support for comprehensible input. The researchers also commented that the classes lacked interaction because they were focused on "paper, pencil, and board" (p. 17), and technology was rarely utilized.

In addition, Choi and Ziegler (2015) stated further that teachers emphasized reading comprehension, even though students were still in the process of learning to decode. Lastly, the researchers recommended the use of smartphones and strategies that promote phonological awareness. Most importantly, the researchers argued that adult

SLIFEs must also be taught numeracy and study skills in order for them to reach academic success. The current study examined how ESOL teachers are meeting the emergent literacy needs of ELs who are SLIFEs; therefore, it should provide information on strategies that teachers are utilizing for addressing the literacy needs of students who are either learning to read and write for the first time in their lives or have developed some beginning literacy in their L1.

The studies conducted by Menken et al. (2012), Tarone (2010), and Somé-Guiébré (2016) shared the common theme of L1 as a key element for acquiring L2. These findings coincide with the research of Collier (1987) and Cummins (2000), which also emphasized the importance of L1 skills in the development of L2 as students transfer skills from L1 to their new language. Menken et al. specified that students need to develop literacy in both L1 and L2 in order for them to be academically successful. Similarly, Tarone's research indicated that students with higher literacy skills in L1 were more successful in accomplishing tasks given in L2. Correspondingly, students in Somé-Guiébré's study participated more when translation of complex terms were provided in L1. Lastly, the findings of Choi and Ziegler (2015) indicated that SLIFEs must be taught literacy; however, the authors specified that students must also be taught numeracy. The current study ultimately examined the approach of ESOL teachers in supporting the literacy development of high school SLIFEs.

### **Research Questions**

As the SLIFE high school population continues to increase in schools across the nation, teachers will encounter additional challenges in meeting the unique social, academic, literacy, and acculturation needs of this specific group. The lack of research related to high school SLIFEs requires comprehensive studies that focus on examining

instructional approaches that address how teachers can better provide for their needs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Salva & Matis, 2017; Saunders et al., 2013), specifically as it relates to their emergent literacy needs (Montero et al., 2014; Roy-Campbell, 2013). The researcher examined indepth approaches that ESOL teachers were utilizing to meet not only the linguistic, but also the literacy needs of SLIFEs. Therefore, the following research questions were established to guide this applied dissertation:

1. How and in what ways do ESOL high school teachers in a small urban mid-Atlantic school district integrate social-emotional and academic English development skills to ELs who are SLIFEs?

2. How and in what ways are ESOL high school teachers meeting the literacy needs of ELs who are SLIFEs?

3. How do ESOL high school teachers support the acculturation process of ELs who are SLIFEs?

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter described the methods that were utilized to examine how ESOL high school teachers integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs. In addition, the chapter explained the researcher's rationale for the selection of the design approach and the selection process for participant identification. Furthermore, a thorough explanation of the data-collection instruments, necessary procedures, and vital steps of data analysis was provided. Moreover, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and integrity, and potential researcher biases were explained. Lastly, the limitations of the study were reviewed.

#### **Research Design**

Researchers conduct qualitative studies when a phenomenon needs indepth exploration (Creswell, 2015). There are numerous approaches to qualitative studies; however, case studies are beneficial because they allow for more profound investigation (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Yin, 2013). The case-study research approach is utilized by many disciplines, including psychology, medicine, political science, and education (Creswell, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Consequently, the approach that was utilized for this qualitative research involved a case study because it aimed to examine how ESOL high school teachers in a small urban mid-Atlantic school district in the United States integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs.

The qualitative approach allows for indepth investigation and understanding of complex issues (Creswell, 2015; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Yin, 2013). Furthermore, case-study research is beneficial because it investigates the phenomenon of interest intensively in its natural surroundings (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Yin, 2013).

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2017), case-study research allows for thorough examination of a phenomenon, as it utilizes information from a variety of sources that allows for a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation.

Case studies allow for a broader analysis of the phenomenon being studied (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Most importantly, effective case studies provide a detailed account of a bounded system by identifying themes, issues, or specific situations that could be investigated further if needed (Creswell, 2013). As previously stated, case studies allow for extensive data collection (Creswell, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017) that require indepth analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Patton, 2002). Lastly, this collection of data is organized by the researcher into a cohesive primary resource (Patton, 2002).

Miller, Mitchell, and Brown (2005) conducted case-study research to explore the challenges that Sudanese SLIFEs are encountering in Australian high schools. In addition, the researchers focused on the challenges that teachers are encountering when working with this special student population. The researchers selected two high schools in Australia that have been impacted by an increase number of Sudanese refugees. Specifically, three ESOL and five general education teachers with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 5 years participated in this study. The researchers conducted focus groups with the teachers. Findings from this study revealed that teachers encountered numerous challenges while working with SLIFEs, including student trauma, social, cultural, and relational exchanges, meeting literacy and communication needs, lack of funding, and access to appropriate text and materials.

The education of ELs who are SLIFEs is a complex contemporary phenomenon that is impacting school districts (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; Dooley, 2009; Hickey,

2015). Consequently, to better understand this phenomenon, a case-study approach was the most adequate because it provided the opportunity for the researcher to conduct in-depth investigation (Creswell, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Yin, 2013, 2018). In addition, the case-study approach allows for multiple data-collection instruments (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013, 2018), which were imperative for the investigation of this study's phenomenon. For this reason, the researcher conducted individual teacher interviews and classroom observations in natural educational surroundings. Most importantly, a case-study approach facilitates ongoing examination and focus on fundamental research questions, and it also allows for the development of new questions as data are being collected and analyzed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were identified utilizing the purposeful sampling approach. According to Creswell (2015), purposeful sampling is when a researcher intentionally selects participants and sites to collect data related to the central phenomenon. In case-study research, purposeful sampling facilitates a diversity of perspectives that result in a wide range of data (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, purposeful sampling is the most adequate form of sampling in qualitative research because the researcher can be selective in choosing participants who have the knowledge and experience of the phenomenon to be studied (Creswell, 2013).

After obtaining approval to conduct the study from the Research Review Committee from MCPS and Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board, the researcher contacted the ESOL data coordinator to obtain a query of ELs who were SLIFEs. These data were utilized by the researcher to identify the high schools with the highest enrollment of this student population. After identifying the two high schools with

the highest enrollment of ELs who were SLIFEs, the researcher presented in the ESOL secondary county-wide monthly meeting and introduced the study by providing its purpose, research questions, research design, and chosen participating schools. The researcher also explained that additional information about the study would be sent via e-mail to the ESOL department chairs of the chosen schools with the purpose of initiating the identification process of potential teacher and student participants.

The researcher then proceeded to contact the department chairs of the two participating high schools to coordinate a meeting with ESOL teachers of SLIFEs to discuss the study further. The researcher also requested from the ESOL department chairs an updated query of ELs who were SLIFEs. These meetings served as a means for recruiting teacher participants. It is vital to note that the researcher conducted the meeting in each respective school for the teachers' convenience. During each meeting, the researcher utilized the PowerPoint from the county-wide meeting presentation to reiterate the information related to the purpose of the study, its research design, teacher requirements for participation, and expectations from teacher participants.

Teachers who expressed interest in participating were asked to sign a consent form before culminating the meeting. Moreover, an e-mail was sent to all teachers who attended each meeting to thank them for their time. The researcher also attached to the e-mail a copy of the signed consent form to the teachers who had already signed them at end of the meeting. The researcher contacted undecided teachers via e-mail and proceeded with the consent process with those who agreed to participate. The researcher then provided each participant with a copy of the signed consent forms before the interview.

The participants in this study included eight high school ESOL teachers endorsed



by the Virginia Department of Education with at least 5 years of experience teaching ELs (see Appendix E). Teachers also had to currently be providing ESOL services to SLIFEs in Grades 9 to 11. The ESOL teachers were expected to participate in a 45- to 60-minute individual teacher interview and at least one 60-minute classroom observation. Interviews were conducted toward the end of the 2017-2018 school year in June, and, due to time constraints, observations were conducted in October of the 2018-2019 school year. Therefore, two teachers were unable to participate in the 60-minute classroom observation because their schedules changed in the new school year and they no longer had SLIFEs in their classrooms.

As previously stated, the researcher also conducted classroom observations to observe how ESOL teachers meet the socioemotional, literacy, and acculturation needs of SLIFEs. Consequently, 20 students participated in this study. Student participants were high school ELs ages 14 to 20 who were SLIFEs (see Appendix F). In addition, students were identified as having limited or no native language literacy with significantly below grade-level general academic skills. Students have been in the United States for no more than 3 years.

During the teacher recruitment meeting, the ESOL department chair at each school site assisted the researcher in identifying potential student participants utilizing the updated query of ELs who were SLIFEs. The query included students' names, age, grade, parent or guardian information, phone number, and WIDA ACCESS scores. After identifying the potential student participants, the researcher contacted their parents or guardians via e-mail and phone call and invited them to an informational meeting. During this meeting, the researcher provided detailed information of the study, including its purpose, rationale, advantages, and confidentiality agreement. Most importantly, parents

who agreed to student participation signed a consent form, and the student signed an assent form. However, 18 of the parents were unable to attend this meeting, and the researcher scheduled home visits. The researcher was accompanied by a colleague (i.e., ESOL or Spanish teacher) and explained the purpose and other essential information related to the study to the parents. At the end of each home visit, parents or guardians signed the consent forms, and students present signed the assent form. Students not present signed the assent form before the classroom observation.

The researcher observed 20 student participants (i.e., 10 students from each school) during their ESOL-1 Language, ESOL 1-2 Social Studies, or ESOL 1-2 Science. It is also vital to note that SLIFEs are clustered in the same classes; therefore, all students were observed five to 10 at a time. Each class observation lasted 60 minutes in length. During classroom observations, the researcher focused on the integration of SLIFEs into social and academic English development skills and students' level of engagement. The researcher also focused her observation on the level of student and teacher interaction, comprehensible input levels, student literacy needs, socioemotional growth, and acculturation process.

### **Instruments**

The researcher utilized a variety of data sources for this case study. The researcher conducted teacher individual interviews and classroom observations and utilized EL students' ACCESS scores when analyzing and interpreting data from interviews and classroom observations.

**Interview protocol.** The first data-collection instrument the researcher utilized in this qualitative study was an interview protocol. This instrument was utilized during individual teacher interviews (see Appendix G). According to Yin (2018), interviews are

one of the most essential sources when conducting a case study. In addition, Kvale (2008) noted that an interview protocol is essential during the interview process to guide and provide structure to the interview. Individual interviews allow participants to freely share information which individuals might not feel comfortable sharing in front of others (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). The researcher obtained consent from the interviewees, assured interviewees of confidentiality, obtained permission to record and transcribe the interview, and took notes during the interviews utilizing the interview protocol.

The process of validation is essential to ensure trustworthiness and reliability of an instrument (Creswell, 2015; Kvale, 2008). Kvale (2008) stated that conducting research is crucial in the process of validation, as questions need to be derived from research. Therefore, the researcher created questions grounded on research from DeCapua and Marshall (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2015) and from Krashen's (2003) hypotheses of language acquisition to ensure confirmability. The teacher interview protocol was submitted to two experts to establish validity and credibility of the instrument, which, according to Creswell (2013), are fundamental in qualitative research. During this phase, experts reviewed the questions focusing on clarity and effectiveness of each question in addressing the topic of investigation. Furthermore, experts analyzed each question to identify those that were misleading. To ensure dependability, the questionnaire was adjusted based on the feedback from the experts.

The first expert has 20 years of experience in ESOL with a doctorate in administration and supervision. In addition, he is employed by a neighboring school district as an ESOL teacher providing support to WIDA Level 1 students, including literacy students. Furthermore, he is a consultant for the Center for Applied Linguistics.

The second expert is an associate teaching professor and researcher for the Office of English Language Center at Georgetown University. She serves as designer and instructor in international education programs. Furthermore, her teaching experience includes secondary, postsecondary, and graduate level.

Creswell (2013) emphasized that a questionnaire pilot test must be conducted to establish validity and trustworthiness. Creswell stated further that the pilot test refines the plans for data collection and provides an opportunity for the development of additional questions relevant to the phenomenon. Consequently, the researcher conducted two interviews to ESOL teachers independent of the study utilizing the instrument. This provided an additional opportunity to assess the questionnaire, identify additional adjustments, and according to Creswell, will also assist in the refining of questions. The researcher made additional adjustments based on the pilot.

**Observation protocol.** To obtain additional detailed data, the researcher also utilized an observation protocol (see Appendix H). The tool was created by the researcher based on research information from studies conducted by DeCapua and Marshall (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2015). The researcher utilized this tool during classroom observations. Its purpose was to facilitate the recording of information during classroom observation sessions (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the researcher took notes focusing on best practices utilized by ESOL teachers to address social-emotional development, academics, and acculturation. Therefore, the observation protocol consisted of three columns that allowed the researcher to record under observation focus, descriptive notes, and reflective notes. Under the observation focus heading, the researcher included a check list of socioemotional observable behaviors. However, for additional detailed notes, the researcher recorded under the descriptive notes column.

Academic development was the second area of focus, in which the researcher recorded observations related to the development of academic language, and the integration of language skills. The researcher also recorded a description of classroom activities under the descriptive notes column. The third area of focus was literacy development, in which the researcher utilized a checklist which included the integration of language skills in the development of content and beginning literacy instruction. The researcher recorded observations of how teachers were meeting the literacy needs of SLIFEs on the descriptive notes column. The final area of focus, acculturation, was included with a check list of observable behaviors related to the students' acculturation process and the integration of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. The researcher also recorded descriptive notes under this area of focus. Lastly, the researcher recorded reflective notes under each area of focus immediately after conducting the classroom observations. The researcher enlisted the collaboration of an expert to review the observation protocol to provide feedback.

**The WIDA ACCESS scores and student background information.** The researcher also collected WIDA ACCESS scores and student background information to build student profiles. Student WIDA ACCESS scores and profiles assisted the researcher during the classroom observations and interviews analyses. This information served as baseline data for students' academic language development in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The preliminary data also provided the researcher with background knowledge about each student participant's strengths and needs. The district granted the researcher approval to access the students' WIDA ACCESS scores and student profiles. The researcher also requested permission from parents to obtain WIDA ACCESS scores and student background information through

the parent consent forms.

### **Procedures**

The researcher obtained approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board and the district's Research Review Committee. Once approval was granted, the researcher contacted the district's ESOL data coordinator to access the high school query and identified the two schools with the highest SLIFE enrollment. In addition, the researcher obtained approval from the county's ESOL secondary specialist to introduce the study during the monthly district-wide secondary ESOL meeting. During the meeting, the researcher provided information about the purpose, rationale for this research study, and requirements for the selection of teacher and student participants. The two selected high schools were also announced during this presentation.

After the county-wide ESOL monthly meeting presentation, the researcher sent a follow-up e-mail to department chairs of the two chosen high schools and coordinated a meeting with ESOL teachers who provide services to SLIFEs. The goals for these meetings, one meeting per school, included providing additional information about the study, answering teacher questions, introducing the confidentiality agreement, and recruiting teacher participants. During this meeting, the department chair provided an updated list of ELs who were SLIFEs, including the students' names, parents or guardians, age, and phone number to initiate the recruitment process of student participants. Teachers who decided to participate signed a consent form at the end of the meeting.

The next day, the researcher proceeded to contact each teacher via e-mail thanking them for their willingness to participate in the study. A copy of the purpose of

the study, consent form, and confidentiality agreement were attached to this e-mail. Once the researcher had the eight teacher participants, the researcher contacted each, also via e-mail, to establish a schedule for individual interviews and classroom observations. An additional copy of the consent form was provided to each participant before conducting teacher interviews and classroom observations. Teachers were informed that student background information and ACCESS scores for ELs were collected by the researcher utilizing the county's database.

The researcher also conducted classroom observations; therefore, student participants were recruited. The researcher utilized the parent or guardian contact information from the SLIFE-EL query that department chairs had available during the teacher informational meeting to recruit potential student participants. The researcher contacted potential student participants' parents or guardians via e-mail and phone. In addition, a letter was mailed home in English and native language to invite parents or guardians and students to the informational meeting. The researcher explained the details of the study and those interested in participating were invited to an informational parent or student meeting.

The interest meetings, one in each site, were conducted to explain in detail the study and its benefits. Interpretation in Spanish was provided by the researcher to ensure understanding and transparency of the study. However, only two parents assisted the meeting at both sites. For this reason, the researcher conducted home visits with one of the ESOL-Spanish teachers. During these meetings and home visits, the researcher described the research, its purpose, and explained that classroom observations would not impact instruction. Furthermore, the researcher informed parents and students that confidentiality of their identity and documents would be maintained.

The researcher read and explained the consent form in simple language to the parents and obtained consent by having them sign the document. One parent who never learned how to write gave consent by placing an X on the parent signature section of the document. The researcher also read and explained the assent forms to those students who were present and obtained their signature. For those students who were unable to attend the parent informational meeting or were not present during the researcher's home visit, the researcher contacted them via phone and indicated the importance of signing the assent form before classroom observations.

**Data collection.** Once consent forms from teachers were completed, the researcher initiated the teacher interviews. The researcher began conducting teacher interviews according to the interview schedule. The researcher interviewed eight teachers: four in Site A and four in Site B. The interviews were conducted in June 2018, which was the last month of the 2017-2018 school year. The researcher utilized the interview protocol as a guide to conduct the interview and take notes. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the information within 48 hours and sent the transcription to each teacher for validation of accuracy.

After completing the consent and assent process with parents and students, the researcher completed the individual student background form, which included students' ACCESS scores by utilizing the county's database. The district authorized the researcher to access the students' ACCESS scores. Moreover, parents authorized access to these scores by signing the consent form. Information collected through this form assisted the researcher to create individual student profiles for indepth analysis of data.

The researcher followed the observation schedule, which was created by the researcher based on availability dates provided by teacher participants. During each



classroom observation, the researcher observed teacher and student interaction, focusing on social-emotional development, integration of academic language skills, literacy needs of SLIFEs, and acculturation. To accomplish this task, the researcher utilized the observation protocol to take notes during each classroom observation. It is essential to note that the researcher was able to observe only six of the eight participants because only six had SLIFE enrollment in their classroom when observations were conducted.

**Data analysis.** Data analysis is a process that involves a combination of numerous procedures (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). Creswell (2013) explained that the process of data analysis includes data organization and initial read-through, themes organized to represent the data, and the researcher's interpretation. Consequently, the researcher followed the same steps to analyze data collected from classroom observations and interviews. Creswell (2013) also noted that data analysis begins when the researcher prepares and organizes the data. Therefore, the researcher first transcribed each individual teacher interview within 48 hours before analyzing data.

Creswell (2013) and Yin (2013) recommended utilizing a graphic organizer/chart to organize data during the process of data analysis. Consequently, the researcher copied each interview transcript and observation protocol notes into a chart. The researcher then read each interview transcript and observation protocol notes while memoing, which according to Creswell (2015), is essential during this stage of data analysis. After reading interview transcript and classroom observation notes several times, the researcher coded the data by reducing it into significant segments and assigning names for each of them. During this stage of data analysis, the researcher identified descriptive, en vivo, emotion, eclectic, and simultaneous codes for indepth analysis of the data. The researcher also utilized memoing during this stage of data analysis.

The researcher identified each code with a specific color to facilitate analysis and reviewed initial codes to ensure accuracy. Next, the researcher reduced the codes by identifying patterns and placing them into broader categories. The researcher utilized a graphic organizer to organize codes into broader categories. After careful analysis of the categories, the researcher developed themes. After developing themes, the researcher organized them into a matrix. Lastly, the researcher wrote a final narrative with a detailed explanation of the themes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During the beginning stages of conducting a study, it is essential for the researcher to disclose the purpose of study to potential participants (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, the researcher communicated the purpose of the study to the potential participants and granted time for them to decide whether they would like to participate. When potential participants agreed to participate, they signed an assent form and parents a consent form. Most importantly, the researcher was sensitive to the privacy and needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse families, teachers, and the research environment during all phases of the process. Participants were able to withdraw at any time from the study. Creswell (2013) and Yin (2018) specified that ethical issues may arise during all phases of the research process, including prior to the study, at the beginning of the study, during data collection and analysis, in reporting the data, and in publishing a study. Therefore, the researcher was sensitive to ethical considerations during all phases of the research process.

To begin with, the researcher obtained approval from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board and the school district's Research Review Committee. Most importantly, confidentiality was maintained during all phases of the

research process. For example, the identities of all participants were protected as the researcher utilized pseudonyms. The researcher was the only individual with access to data materials. Electronic data was placed in a password protected computer and other materials were locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Lastly, all research materials will be destroyed after 3 years. Documentation, including notes, transcripts, and recording, will be stored in a secure place for three years.

### **Trustworthiness and Integrity**

Establishing trustworthiness and integrity are fundamental during qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). Therefore, the researcher utilized triangulation to establish validity (Yin, 2018) and corroborate evidence (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, triangulation allows for the use of multiple sources of data collection. Consequently, the researcher collected data from individual ESOL teacher interviews and classroom observations. Furthermore, the interview and observation protocols were reviewed by two experts in the ESOL research field. Both protocols were also piloted with two teachers independent of the study. When analyzing data, the researcher shared transcriptions and matrixes with an ESOL expert to ensure accurate coding and analysis. Finally, transcriptions were shared with teachers to establish accuracy immediately after transcription for member checking. However, the final report was sent after submission.

### **Potential Research Bias**

The researcher's potential bias is her belief that high school ESOL teachers are not adequately trained to work with SLIFEs. The researcher believes that a stronger support system is critical to effectively address the academic, socioemotional, and acculturation needs of high school SLIFEs. The researcher also believes that school districts are not providing these appropriate support systems for this unique student

population. The researcher has been an ESOL teacher and department chair for 18 years at the elementary, middle, and high school levels both in Puerto Rico and northern Virginia. The researcher is also an instructor for the Center for Language Education and Development at Georgetown University. Moreover, the researcher has had the privilege to hold an administrative position as the ESOL on-site coordinator for the No Child Left Behind Title III Summer Scholars Program in a school district during the summers of 2008 to 2010. Also, during these summers, the researcher participated in the English and Content Curriculum and Instruction Summer Project for WIDA Level 2 ESOL students. Through this project, the researcher was involved in developing, evaluating, and selecting appropriate materials for this specific group of students.

The researcher's first encounter with an EL who was an SLIFE was during the 2010-2011 school year, as an 18-year-old female student from Afghanistan with no formal education was enrolled in three of the researcher's classes. The student had no L1 literacy skills and had no knowledge of basic mathematical functions such as addition and subtraction. As an ESOL teacher, the researcher encountered challenges that went beyond just teaching English. Although the student had acquired valuable life skills in her country, she was encountering significant difficulties adapting to a new culture in a new country and adjusting to a school environment with unique socioemotional and academic needs. Additionally, school staff, specifically physical education and culinary arts teachers, were communicating on a regular basis with the researcher for advice on how to address the needs of the student. In the last 4 years, the researcher has observed a significant increase in numbers of ELs who are SLIFEs specifically at the high school level, where students have less time to fulfill graduation requirements. As a result, the researcher would like to expand her knowledge about this specific student population and

explore how school districts can best meet their needs.

The researcher's philosophy of education is that all students learn when provided with adequate high-quality educational support. It is her belief that it is fundamental to have high expectations, taking students from their current performance level to a higher level of assessment guided instruction. To ensure management of potential biases, the researcher remained objective and impartial during all phases of the research study. A reflective journal assisted the researcher to identify, internalize, and manage potential bias throughout the research study. In addition, to monitor possible bias, all analysis and findings of the research study were reviewed by an expert.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provided a summary of the findings of the qualitative research study conducted at two high schools in a mid-Atlantic school district. The case-study design was utilized to examine in depth the approaches ESOL teachers are utilizing to meet the linguistic, literacy, and socioemotional needs of SLIFEs. To accomplish this, the researcher collected data by conducting individual teacher interviews and classroom observations. The researcher also gathered student background information, including WIDA ACCESS scores and overall proficiency levels in English with the purpose of developing individual student profiles that assisted in analyzing classroom observation. This chapter began with a summary of the participants' background information. The researcher also discussed significant findings that surfaced when analyzing interviews and observations. In addition, an indepth discussion of the identified themes with exemplar quotes was provided.

### Participant Summaries

To examine how ESOL high school teachers integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs, a case-study approach was selected. This approach required the researcher to gather data utilizing a variety of methods. Consequently, the researcher conducted individual teacher interviews and classroom observations, which required the participation of teachers and students. Eight high school ESOL teachers and 20 SLIFEs participated in this case study. The researcher assigned teacher and student participants pseudonyms to protect their identity.

**Teacher participants.** Rita was born to Puerto Rican parents in New York and is fluent in Spanish. Rita's highest degree is a master's degree in education with a specialization in ESOL. She has been teaching ESOL for 26 years all in MCPS.

Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to observe Rita during the classroom observations time frame due to changes to her instructional duties schedule, and she no longer was teaching SLIFEs. Beth is Caucasian and is also fluent in Spanish. Her education includes a bachelor's degree in English and Spanish and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. She is certified in English and Spanish kindergarten through Grade 12 and is currently working on completing national board certification. Beth had been teaching for 11 years, and 5 years were in MCPS.

Julia's father is from the United States, and her mother is from Burkina Faso, a country in West Africa. Julia is fluent in French and Spanish, and she grew up internationally previously living in numerous countries around the world. Her degrees include a bachelor's degree in international development with a minor in Spanish and a master's degree in education. She is certified in ESOL kindergarten to Grade 12 and the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol and has recently completed a SLIFE course. Her 11 years of experience as an educator include teaching in Puerto Rico and 2 years in MCPS.

Rosa is Caucasian, is fluent in French, and stated having some conversational ability in Spanish. She holds a bachelor's degree in comparative literature and a master's degree in ESOL. In addition, Rosa is certified in English, ESOL kindergarten to Grade 11, French kindergarten to Grade 12, and biology. She has been teaching for 12 years, and 3 years were in MCPS. It is important to note that Rosa was the second teacher participant who the researcher was unable to observe as Rosa's schedule also changed, and she was no longer teaching SLIFEs.

Emily is also Caucasian, is fluent in French, and has conversational Spanish. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education with minors in French and history and

is currently completing a master's degree in teaching culturally, linguistically, diverse, and exceptional learners with an ESOL endorsement. Furthermore, Emily is certified in elementary education kindergarten to Grade 6, special education, French kindergarten to Grade 12, and ESOL kindergarten to Grade 12. She has been teaching for 11 years. When the study began, it was Emily's first year as a high school teacher.

Sandy is Caucasian, speaks Azerbaijani, and stated to have medium competency in Spanish. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree in English and history and a master's degree in teaching culturally, linguistically, diverse, and exceptional learners. She is certified to teach ESOL kindergarten to Grade 12 and secondary social studies. Sandy has been teaching for 8 years, and 3 years were in MCPS. Sonia is Caucasian and is fluent in Spanish. She holds a bachelor's degree in Spanish and is certified in Spanish kindergarten to Grade 12, ESOL kindergarten to Grade 12, and English. Sonia has been teaching for 17 years, all in MCPS, with 16 years in elementary school. She has been an ESOL teacher for 12 years, and, when this study began, it was also her first year as a secondary teacher. The final teacher participant is Kim, who is Caucasian and is fluent in French and Spanish. Her bachelor's degree is in French language and literature, and her master's degree is in ESOL education. Her certification includes ESOL kindergarten to Grade 12 and secondary social Studies. She has been teaching for 5 years in MCPS.

**Student participants.** Ten SLIFEs from each site participated in this case study, for a total of 20 students. The following paragraphs offer descriptions of the student participants.

***Bartolo.*** Bartolo is a 17-year-old who entered MCPS in October 2015. He was born in Guatemala, and Spanish is his L1. He is currently in 11th grade and lives with his



father with whom he was recently reunited when he moved to the United States. When he registered in MCPS, he scored 1.0 in all language domains of the WIDA model. Bartolo's 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 1.8, Speaking 1.4, Reading 1.7, and Writing 3.1, for an overall score of 1.8 on Tier A. Sonia, his ESOL English teacher, indicated that Bartolo was placed in an English Level 2 class this school year as he has been in the country for 3 years, and the ESOL team determined he should not repeat the Level 1 class for a third time.

**Rocio.** Rocio is a 17-year-old unaccompanied minor who entered MCPS in December 2017. She was born in Guatemala, and Spanish is her L1. She is currently a ninth grader and lives with a guardian. When she registered in MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains of the WIDA model. Rocio's 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 2.4, Speaking 1.6, Reading 1.7, and Writing 1.8, for an overall score of 1.8 on Tier A.

**Carmelo.** Carmelo is a 15-year-old unaccompanied who entered the MCPS in May 2018. He was born in Guatemala, and Spanish is his L1. He is currently a ninth grader and lives with a guardian. Carmelo's 2017-2018 WIDA model scores are as follows: Listening 1.7, Speaking 1.3, Reading, 1.0, and Writing 1.2, for an overall score of 1.3.

**Petra.** Petra is a 19-year-old who entered MCPS in May 2017. She was born in Guatemala, and Mam is her L1. Petra is also fluent in Spanish. She is currently a 10th grader and lives with a guardian. When Petra registered in MCPS, she scored the following in the WIDA model: Listening 1.7, Speaking 1.3, Reading 1.0, and Writing 1.0, for an overall score of 1.2. Petra's 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 2.4, Speaking 1.5, Reading 1.9, and Writing 1.9, for an overall score of

1.9 on Tier A.

**Lucio.** Lucio is a 16-year-old who entered MCPS in March 2018. He was born Guatemala, and Achi is his L1. Lucio is also fluent in Spanish. He is currently a ninth grader and lives with his mother and father. Lucio's 2017-2018 WIDA model scores are as follows: Listening 1.0, Speaking 1.0, Reading 1.0, and Writing 1.0, for an overall score of 1.0.

**Penelope.** Penelope is a 14-year-old who entered MCPS in April 2018. She was born in Guatemala, and Spanish is her L1. She is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. Penelope's 2017-2018 WIDA model scores are as follows: Listening 1.0, Speaking 1.0, Reading 1.7, and Writing 1.0, for an overall score of 1.3.

**Angelino.** Angelino is a 16-year-old who entered MCPS in March 2018. He was born in Guatemala, and Spanish is his L1. Angelino is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. His 2017-2018 WIDA model scores are as follows: Listening 1.0, Speaking 1.0, Reading 1.0, and Writing 1.0, for an overall score of 1.0.

**Muddasar.** Muddasar is a 14-year-old who entered MCPS in August 2018. He was born in Pakistan, and Pashto is his L1. Muddasar is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. His 2017-2018 WIDA model scores are as follows: Listening 1.8, Speaking 1.3, Reading 1.0, and Writing 1.3, for an overall score of 1.6.

**Santulnino.** Santulnino is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in March 2018. He was born in Guatemala, and Achi is his L1. Santulnino is also fluent in Spanish. He is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. His 2017-2018 WIDA model scores are as follows: Listening 1.0, Speaking 1.0, Reading 1.0, and Writing 1.0, for an overall score of 1.0.

**Mahmood.** Mahmood is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in August 2018. He

was born in Morocco, and Arabic is his L1. Mahmood is also fluent in French. He is currently a 10th grader and lives with his parents. His 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 2.5, Speaking 1.7, Reading 1.6, and Writing 1.0, for an overall score of 1.6 on Tier A.

***Malala***. Malala is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in September 2017. She was born in Bangladesh, and Bengali is her L1. Malala is currently a 10th grader and lives with her parents. When she entered MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model. Her 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 1.8, Speaking 1.5, Reading 1.8, and Writing 1.9, for an overall score of 1.8 on Tier A.

***Hipolito***. Hipolito is a 17-year-old unaccompanied minor who entered MCPS in July 2017. He was born in Honduras, and Spanish is his L1. Hipolito is currently a ninth grader and lives with a guardian. When he entered MCPS, he scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model. His scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 2.6, Speaking 1.5, Reading 1.8, and Writing 2.0, for an overall score of 1.9 on Tier A.

***Dominga***. Dominga is a 14-year-old who entered MCPS in January 2018. She was born in Colombia, and Spanish is her L1. Dominga is currently a ninth grader and lives with her parents. When she entered MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model. Her 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 1.9, Speaking 1.3, Reading 1.6, and Writing 1.9, for an overall score of 1.7 on Tier A.

***Celestina***. Celestina is a 17-year-old who entered MCPS in January 2018. She was born in El Salvador, and Spanish is her L1. Celestina is currently a ninth grader and lives with her parents. When she entered MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains

in the WIDA model. Her 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows:

Listening 2.6, Speaking 1.6, Reading 1.8, and Writing 1.9, for an overall score of 1.9 on Tier A.

***Eusebia***. Eusebia is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in March 2017. She was born in Guatemala, and Mam is her L1. Eusebia also speaks Spanish. She is currently a ninth grader and lives with her parents. When she entered MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model. Her 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 1.8, Speaking 1.3, Reading 1.7, and Writing 1.9, for an overall score of 1.7 on Tier A.

***Lucrecia***. Lucrecia is a 16-year-old who was born in the United States from Salvadoran parents. When she was 2 years old, her parents relocated the family to their native country. She entered MCPS in January 2017. Lucrecia is currently a ninth grader whose L1 is Spanish, and she lives with her parents. When she entered MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model. Her 2017-2018 scores on the ACCESS for ELs are as follows: Listening 3.3, Speaking 2.2, Reading 1.8, and Writing 2.8, for an overall score of 2.2 in Tier A.

***Bonifacio***. Bonifacio is a 16-year-old who entered MCPS in August 2018. He was born in Guatemala, and Spanish is his L1. Bonifacio is currently a ninth grader and lives with a guardian. When he entered MCPS, he scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model.

***Florencio***. Florencia is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in August 2018. He was born in El Salvador, and Spanish is his L1. Florencio is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. When he entered MCPS, he scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model.

*Esperanza.* Esperanza is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in August 2018. She was born in El Salvador, and Spanish is her L1. Esperanza is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. When she entered MCPS, she scored 1.0 in all language domains in the WIDA model.

*Venancio.* Venancio is a 15-year-old who entered MCPS in August 2018. He was born in Venezuela, and Spanish is his L1. Venancio is currently a ninth grader and lives with both parents. When he entered MCPS, he arrived with an overall score of 1.8 on the ACCESS for ELs from another county; however, the individual scores by domains were not available.

### **Significant Findings**

As the researcher analyzed the data, seven significant findings surfaced during teacher interviews that are essential for discussion. Two of the seven (i.e., the ESOL program design in MCPS and age-appropriate materials) were also observed during classroom visits. These findings are also significant, as they impact the socioemotional, academic achievement, and acculturation needs of SLIFEs.

**The SLIFEs from indigenous backgrounds.** Five of the eight teachers in this district shared that there has been a significant increase in numbers of SLIFEs who are from indigenous backgrounds. According to teachers and student background information collected by the researcher, this group of students is predominantly from Guatemala and speakers of Mam or Achi, which are Mayan dialects. The teacher participants also indicated that this subgroup of SLIFEs encounter additional challenges compared to nonindigenous SLIFEs. For instance, two teachers shared that there seems to be a cultural clash among Spanish-speaking and indigenous Guatemalans. From her observations, a teacher shared that, when grouping students from Guatemala during cooperative learning

activities, she encountered resistance among Spanish-speaking and indigenous Guatemalans. In the past, students of Mayan descent would not admit they spoke an indigenous language, and those who were able only spoke Spanish. Becky described this unique occurrence by stating the following:

We have a lot of Mam speakers and over the last couple of years, we have seen a change in how in the beginning nobody admitted they spoke Mam. And now, we have a group of kids who would speak in class in Mam, and that's kind of cool because before they were like, "Don't tell anybody I speak Mam."

As Becky indicated, in the past 5 years, this student population has increased, resulting in students embracing their identities, ultimately speaking and interacting with one another in their indigenous dialect. Another concern related to this student population is their low self-esteem. Kim described a sense of hopelessness as follows:

Then, I had a couple of kids coming from Guatemala my first year of teaching. One of them was like, "Soy burro-I am dumb." You know, the challenges that I find especially with the limited formal education students is that they have this engraved in them. That they are not good enough. That they are not worthy. That they are not ever going to succeed and changing their mind about it. But it is really a challenge. As a teacher, to see this sort of like engraved. "This is who my people are." This is specifically Guatemalans. They are the Mam speakers.

**The SLIFE identification process.** The SLIFE identification process is another emergent topic of concern. Four teachers expressed inconsistencies in the identification process of SLIFEs. Sandy provided a vivid example of a student from Guatemala who was not identified as SLIFE upon entry, and, after 3 years in the system, teachers found that the student had not been properly identified:

Anyways, this kid was kind of starting to have some real issues, and we were looking at scores. I mean, he has been here for three years and is still in an ESOL level 1 class, and his reading level is still like- in the reading A through Z still like in J. This is like a first-grade reading level. And so, we called an IAT on him to see if maybe there is a cognitive or learning disability, and basically in that meeting, we discovered that he had maybe gone to first grade.

On the other hand, after the interview, Rosa shared she has had students who were misidentified as SLIFE. She reached this conclusion after conducting informal classroom observations and having conversations with students. According to Rosa, these students' academic progress seemed to indicate that it was possibly due to some type of formal education exposure. Consequently, Rosa believed these students would have been placed in a higher ESOL proficiency level.

**Special education identification.** During the interview, three teacher participants shared their concern about the special education identification prereferral process for ESOL students, specifically SLIFEs. According to these teacher participants, referring SLIFEs who may also have special learning needs associated with a disability is a complex and lengthy process. Moreover, even in cases that were strongly supported with input from an ESOL teacher's expertise in language acquisition process, the special education committee attributed the student's needs as language based. Rita explained this challenge as follows:

Challenges are when they also show learning disabilities. Then, we encounter additional challenges because they will not be tested until they have maybe one, two, or even three years in Level 1. Then, we go, "Something is wrong. He is not progressing." But it takes so long to test them, and that to me is one of the biggest

challenges.

After the interview, as the researcher exited the classroom, a former student approached her to greet her. After the student excused himself to return to class, Rita stated the following:

He is one of the students I was referring to regarding the special education identification process. He has been in the country for years, and he is still a Level 1. He tries so hard, but for some reason, his progress is extremely slow.

The researcher was astonished, as this student had been enrolled in her Accelerated Literacy class 3 years ago. Like Rita, the researcher had concerns and initiated the prereferral process.

**The ESOL program design in MCPS.** Three of the teacher participants raised concerns about the ESOL program in MCPS. One of the concerns is related to MCPS's leveling system for English language proficiency, as it does not correlate with the WIDA levels. In addition, it is more challenging for students to progress within with MCPS's levels of English language proficiency, as the performance definitions within each level are more demanding compared to those of WIDA. Consequently, several students remain at the same level with this leveling system, even though that they have met the criteria to move to a higher WIDA level.

For example, a student can score at WIDA Level 2 on the ACCESS for ELs; however, if the student does not meet criteria to proceed within MCPS's Level 2, the student will remain at Level 1. Becky explained this as follows:

But now, by the time they are 18, and they are ready to do it, they are aging out, or they are frustrated because they are still in the same ESOL level. So, they kind of fossilized a little bit, and they are stuck and frustrated. So, we can offer more



classes to the kids as they move up in science, but don't move up their English level.

Kim also expressed that MCPS has not provided ESOL teachers a curriculum or a guide for this unique group of students. She stated the following:

I remember a few years ago that they were supposed to make that new curriculum intended for students with limited or no formal education, but it we are still waiting for it. Teachers need some guidance of what and how we are supposed to teach.

**Age-appropriate materials.** Six of the eight teacher participants indicated that it is challenging to find age-appropriate materials at beginning reading levels. Although finding materials for SLIFEs in high school has improved, especially in content areas, it is still a challenge. Kim stated, "It's a lot of work because they aren't just materials that exist. I have become my own mini-publishing textbook company. Emily added, "The materials at times can be way too elementary, and you just feel that having to read that, and they can't connect to that either. I think it has been a lot easier with science. Rosa stated the following:

Trying to find enough materials can get really hard...that address the standards that you are trying to address, that are culturally sensitive, and that are respectful to the student ages. Then, also that are challenging and at the right level developmentally. It's kind of gotten better since I started teaching. I feel there are more resources out there and schools have gotten better at finding and buying and promoting those resources, but it's still an area of need. I still feel like I spend a lot of time just looking for materials that you know, might be better used on planning instruction instead of just searching. I kind of mentioned finding

appropriate materials-that's such a big challenge.

During classroom observations, there was a class in which students had to read for the first 5 minutes as a warm-up activity. Students were reading books that were at their beginning reading level; however, most books were not developmentally appropriate for high school students.

**Making assumptions.** During the interviews, three teacher participants recommended that educators should not make assumptions about the knowledge, abilities, or past experiences of SLIFE. This finding correlates with Salva and Matis (2017), who indicated that teachers should not assume that SLIFE have awareness of all aspects of the new culture, especially as it relates to school. In making assumptions, Rosa indicated the following:

Teachers can't make assumptions about what students know or don't know how to do. How to Google something. It might be like how to use a scantron, right? Because they have never done that. So, you have to show them, "Fill the box this way, or it won't work." So, I feel that you can't just make assumptions about what you think they should have encountered before. Sometimes I continue to make assumptions that I find out later, Oh! That was a total mystery for that student. I just assumed it was clear what I wanted them to do. And, sitting in class, and listening when the teacher is talking and not having a side conversation is another assumption, right? "Why are you being so rude?" Oh, maybe they don't know that that's not appropriate behavior.

Or, I can just to say, "You guys, I will give you the opportunity to talk, but here are the signals for when is okay and here are the signals when it's not okay." I mean, they are some things that are applicable to any student acquiring English.

Like, not making assumptions about background knowledge. Right, so if you are teaching, we just did a unit on short stories and so, I did use some fairy tales in my instruction. I just can't assume that they are familiar with these fairy tales. Often they are because they exist in other cultures, but not always, or just a different version and or maybe, they just didn't encounter because they weren't in school.

Sandy also referred to the topic of not making assumptions as she stated, "I think another thing, you can never ever assume that a kid knows something. Like, I will be, "You guys have been learning about Christopher Columbus in your country." And they are like, "Ah, I have no idea."

Four teachers also acknowledged the importance of not making assumptions related to an SLIFE's knowledge of basic classroom routines. Because of this, teachers emphasized the importance of implementing clear classroom routines as a means to assist SLIFEs during the transition process. Emily stated the following:

So, they are not used to the culture of a school let alone the culture of a school in the United States and understanding all the norms and routines that come with it, and also just spending time with that before you really jump to academic development. In my opinion, is really important, so they can feel successful in small amounts of things in the classroom before you really push them academically and in language wise as well.

Becky added the following comment:

The hardest part is to spend two or three years learning how to be in school, and they waste all that time because now they are 18, and now they like school. They know how to do it. They are organized. They can sit in a class. They have built

that classroom endurance. They understand it. They understand to be in class. It's mostly the boys who I feel have the hardest time dealing with the school culture. I mean, it's not all the time, but it's most of SLIFE students that experience more difficulty.

**Reunification and unaccompanied minors.** Reunification (Boccagni, 2012; Bonizzoni & Leonini, 2013; Lau & Gordon, 2015) and unaccompanied minors (Coleman & Avrushin, 2017; Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017) can be identified as factors that affect the socioemotional development of SLIFEs. These factors surfaced in this study, as six teacher participants pointed out the impact of reunification and the unaccompanied minor status in the academic achievement of SLIFEs. Julia described her concern in regard to the phenomenon of reunification as follows:

Sometimes they have so much. You know, a lot of stress going on at home with the reunification that can be present. Then, when they are in school, it's like a break, so they get very tired in school. So, I think that's been a challenge, but it's difficult because, I had a student who really loves school, but his father is not here anymore. So, "I have to support my mother." So, it's not like they don't want to learn, but because of life: the circumstances and being able to eat and live. You know, they need to make some of those hard choices for their family.

Similar, to Julia, Sandy also observed the distinctive challenges associated with reunification that are reflected in the classroom environment. She described these challenges as follows:

How much of it is problems at home because so many of them have reunification issues. I mean, you are like, "What's going on with you." "Oh, well, I'm having problems with my mom. We are fighting" So, a lot of them are depressed. They

are away of their friends. It's hard in the classroom to see like specifically what is happening there.

Kim shared that it is also a challenge to have unaccompanied minors as they entered the country without a parent or legal guardian. She illustrated the following:

They don't have any support or guidance at home. At times, I can't even contact parents as they are unaccompanied minors living with friends, family members, or other individuals. Also, they work long hours to support themselves and their families back home. How can I contact parents, if many of them are alone here?

### **Themes**

The researcher identified five overall themes from data analysis: (a) meeting the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs by building relationships, (b) differentiating instruction to meet the academic needs of SLIFEs, (c) meeting the beginning literacy needs of SLIFEs with limited knowledge of literacy instruction, (d) lack of integration into the school culture and students creating their own community, and (e) the power of students' native language (i.e., L1). The themes were identified in individual teacher interviews and classroom observations conducted by the researcher. The subsequent section included direct quotes from the participants and notes from classroom observations that exemplify the identified themes.

**Theme 1: Meeting the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs by building relationships.** The socioemotional needs will impact students' academic achievement (Coleman & Avrushin, 2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015). In order for students to be fully immersed in a formal educational setting, they must have their socioemotional needs met before this occurs (WIDA Consortium, 2015). The SLIFEs enter school systems with a variety of socioemotional challenges (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Salva & Matis,

2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015). All eight teacher participants provided details of the numerous socioemotional challenges that SLIFE encounter. For instance, Rita expressed the following:

Their life is very difficult too, most of them. They are going through so much. You know, how can I learn. I put myself in their shoes. Why would I care about learning to write when I'm just living with my mother who has another family, and I haven't seen her in 10 years? She's a stranger.

Rosa, as well, attributed students' academic performance to a socioemotional factor. She also expressed that students will perform academically if their socioemotional needs are met. She indicated this with the following statement:

I would say, in general, when their major socioeconomic, major sociocultural needs, and emotional needs are met, they will improve academically. So, some of them have really traumatic things in their backgrounds and that kind of overshadows everything that is happening in school, of course because it's just so major, and it affects everything.

Building relationships is fundamental for the socioemotional development of SLIFE. According to DeCapua et al. (2009), SLIFE need socioemotional support, especially during the second phase of the U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment. Custodio and O'Loughlin (2017) indicated that, during this phase, known as culture shock, students may be overwhelmed, frustrated, unhappy, anxious, or depressed. In addition, Krashen's (1981, 1987, 2003) affective filter hypothesis of second-language acquisition indicates that language learners need a stress-free environment in which the affective filter is low and will facilitate the students' language-acquisition process. Consequently, building relationships with SLIFE during this stage is crucial.

All teacher participants revealed that building relationships with SLIFE is the key in meeting their socioemotional needs. For instance, Rita expressed, “First of all, I spend the first 2 to 3 months just getting to know the students on a personal level. Do they work? Do they have siblings?” One way that Rita establishes relationships with students is by having open conversations with them. She accomplishes this as follows:

I have an activity every Monday. We talk about, and this is for language proficiency development and just to get to know them, and is called the good and new. And we talk about what we did on the weekend. And that’s when they start sharing. “Well, I went on a picnic, or I was working.” I just start by developing a just a relationship.

Trust plays an important role when building relationships with ELs (Burns & Roberts, 2011), and five teacher participants mentioned this. Becky validated the importance of trust in building relationships by stating the following:

I found for me personally, that it is all about building relationships. But I think a lot of that, sort of addresses these things. In my opinion, the first thing that has to happen is they have to trust you.

During classroom observations, the researcher observed Becky promoting a sense of trust when she greeted individual students in English as they entered the classroom and some responded in both English and Spanish. The teacher and students interacted as they were getting ready for instruction. Becky was having a dialogue with a male student about his work and how he was doing in general. Throughout instruction, students were engaged in a stress-free environment that promoted risk taking as they were familiarized with the classroom routines and expectations. The teacher also celebrated when students answered correctly, and, when students were uncertain, the teacher encouraged them to pass an

unknown question to another peer by stating, “Would you like to pass your question to someone else?”

Julia also builds relationships with her students; however, one way she accomplishes this is by connecting with them by sharing her past experiences as an EL during her teenage years. She explained as follows:

I think something that helps me connect with these students is having come to the United States when I was a teenager. So, having that commonality, I share that emotion with them. Sort of, you know, how I felt first coming to the United States. I think, just the initial coming to a new country, new culture, and language is something that I can connect with the students.

Julia stated further that she builds relationships by celebrating the countries of origin and recognizing the importance of collaborative relationships:

I think also something that we do, we have a map in the classroom, and I give everyone a little pin. They can put a pin from where they come from. And, I just sort of let it go organically. We go around and just tell our stories. We talk a lot about family. I try to build a sense of community in my classroom, which is really important, and we talk about family and what their family life was like before they came here.

Like Becky and all participants who were observed, Julia greeted the students by name as they entered the classroom and asked how each one was doing. In addition, Julia had a conversation with a student who was absent and expressed she was missed and exhibited genuine concern when asking the reason for her absence. Throughout instruction, there was an environment of respect in which the teacher would ask students to follow expectations by politely stating, “Please, put your phones away. Can someone



help me read the objectives on the Smartboard?” Moreover, all students were engaged and eager to help each other. For example, one student was having difficulty following instructions, and his peer assisted him by interpreting the instructions in Spanish. The student also showed her notebook for additional support.

Emily noted that she builds relationships in a safe environment by sharing past experiences including herself, but she also stipulated that it takes longer to build trust with SLIFEs:

I think the first thing I do with any student, in specifically these is just creating a relationship with them. And, I know that the relationship with these students takes a lot longer than our mainstream students, putting in the time at the beginning of the school year to try to build that trust. I also try to show a lot about myself, so that they can start to understand more what American culture is from my point of view at least and how they can potentially integrate into that, while not losing their identify. The activities I try to play with these students are having them try to tap into their past experiences in a safe setting where they feel comfortable sharing and kind of exploring a little bit what their past looks like and how that may have affected them and changed them. And, I think that definitely comes after a relationship has been formed where they feel like we have a community in a safe classroom.

Emily also greeted individual students as they entered the classroom and projected on the Smartboard a welcome message for them: “Good morning! Let’s get ready for class!” During the classroom observation, the researcher witnessed how Emily has also created an environment in which all students are welcomed, engaged, and comfortable in taking risks. Most importantly, Emily involved Malala, the only non-Spanish speaker, in this

class saying, “How do you say\_\_\_\_\_ in Bengali?”

Moreover, all teacher participants stressed the importance of collaborating with the counseling department to meet the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs. Three teachers stressed the importance of counselors to also establish a relationship with students to provide the appropriate support. Rita explained, “The counselors here are very closed to the students too. And as far as in the classroom, I just observe and try to keep them engaged and ask them how they are doing, and just building rapport.” Emily affirmed the importance of counselors building a relationship with students:

Guidance counselors here have a close relationship with them. So, we continue communicating, and if I’m seeing something in the classroom that might be of concern, they can immediately kind of step in to build the relationship and also help them.

**Theme 2: Differentiating instruction to meet the academic needs of SLIFEs.**

Differentiating instruction is essential for meeting the academic needs of SLIFEs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). Differentiation is modifying instruction to meet individual student needs. There are various ways to differentiate instruction, including adapting materials, providing graphic support, linguistic and nonlinguistic representations, scaffolding instruction, collaborative work, and comprehensible input. All teacher participants indicated they differentiate instruction to meet the needs of SLIFEs. Rita described the different ways she differentiates instruction as follows:

Because the class is always mixed level, you don’t have just the beginning. You have stronger students there, and they need to move on. So, I start with the highest level because I need to get these kids going, and then work it down. And my expectations are to meet each student where they are and take them to the next

level. I don't measure all with the same ruler. I absolutely adapt materials, modifying their work load, preparing them for tests, asking them questions that I know they know the answer to, so they can be successful, providing their own individual vocabulary list. They are at square one, and my instruction is always accompanied by visuals.

In contrast to Rita, Becky modifies student work by providing three different levels of the material and utilizes a variety of graphic support, such as visuals, plans, and engaging hands-on activities. Most importantly, Becky stressed that she plans instruction building on students' background knowledge. Becky illustrated how she differentiates instruction:

We spend a lot of time building background information. Figuring out what did they learn in their country. In specifically with our electricity unit we just did, I found that they know a ton about electricity, but they didn't necessary learn the academics that goes with electricity. They can put a circuit together, but they don't know about electrons and neutrons, and atoms. So, that has always been sort of interesting: visuals. Everything has to be visual. Sentence frames. There always have to be sentence frames.

I usually offer, if it's a quiz, I usually have like two or three levels of quizzes. One with the pictures. The second one often the pictures but maybe not a word bank and the third will maybe have key words underlined, and then there's a word bank as well: conferencing, sentence frames, pictures. Lots of pictures. Everything has pictures.

Oh, and a lot of movement. We do a lot of movement in class, and in science we do a lot of science hands on stuff, and they love that. I will divide

them up into reading groups. A lot of the reading guide books, like if I if I am doing reading, I often start with the lower level students, and then their questions might be filling the blank with what goes with the reading. The higher level group of students might have the straight answer the questions. They have to look for the information. So, it's, is making the materials a little bit different.

Another means that Becky differentiates instruction is by scaffolding information to students, meaning she breaks down the information.

We are going to write it together, but first, we are going to talk about it, and we will brainstorm the vocabulary. After we talk about it, we are going to write about it. I provide some sentence frames to get them started. So, I sort of used that as my ticket to get them to write a little bit more.

During the classroom observation, students completed a warm-up activity on science vocabulary. As students completed the warm-up activity, the teacher circulated around the classroom and assisted students individually by reading the question and rephrasing some of them as needed. During the discussion of the warm-up activity, the teacher constantly drew on the board to clarify terms and fundamental concepts. After discussing the warm-up activity, the teacher guided students in reading an article about the cell theory. Students had a copy of the source so students could follow, and the teacher also projected the article on the Smartboard. In addition, Becky adapted the article by writing key questions about the reading on the side margins of the handout. The teacher called on individual students to read aloud, and, after students read a paragraph, they discussed what they read, while the teacher guided students to highlight important information. Teacher also guided students in answering each question on the side margin, while modeling how to write in complete sentences on the Smartboard. These steps in

completing this task are known as scaffolded instruction, which is a type of differentiated instruction technique.

Becky also prompted students to answering questions related to science, guiding them from developing a basic knowledge to a deeper understanding of the concept. Becky accomplished this by utilizing a variety of questioning techniques that met the needs of all students. For example, she asked, “What is a cell theory?” A student answered, “Can be true.” The teacher then said, “Yes, it is something that can be true. But, what is a cell?” Another student stated, “Something small.” The teacher kept asking questions until a student reached the complete answer to the original question by saying, “An idea that all living organisms have cells.” Furthermore, an important tool for differentiating instruction that was utilized during this lesson was a vocabulary graphic organizer that included the words, definition, and illustration of the term.

Sandy, like Becky, provides three versions of every assignment and at times allows students to choose the level of quiz they would like to complete:

It’s like this scale of like scaffolding and support. I try to use as much differentiation as I can. In my social studies class, I give literally, three versions of every assignment. I have one that is like match a picture to a word. I have one where, you know, match the sentence to a word. And then one that there is like, write a sentence or write something. Lots and lots of visuals and scaffolding; here is my final exam for social studies, and every single one has a picture, even if they can’t read the question, they can say, “Oh, this guy, he’s a construction worker.” I think that I can actually kind of go back to what I said earlier about kind of the levels of differentiation that I try to do in my classes, and you know, a kid - If I give a kid the easy quiz, and they get it done in 5 minutes, I’m like, “Why don’t

you try this medium quiz? Why don't you just try it?" And sometimes, they get excited, so I give them the choice, "Would you like easy or medium?" and they would look at it, and would say, "I will try the medium."

Words, but I know that they can probably match. Well, they can definitely match a vocabulary word to a picture. They can probably match a vocabulary word to a definition. They might be able to put a sentence. You know, I think, just by say-when they are new, I'm going to have them write the word to a picture, to the picture.

A basic strategy that you learn about working with a diverse population is giving them multiple ways to show what they learned, but other times, we will do a project where they have to make a poster with a picture of what they learned.

Maybe they do a like reader's theater like speaking project, so not only depending on whether they can read the book and answer the questions.

Sandy also emphasized that, as students make progress in the literacy and language acquisition process, the less scaffolding they will need. She stated, "And I think as they constantly get literacy, they get less scaffolding." Sandy's remarks are consistent with Krashen's theory of second-language acquisition.

During the classroom observation, Sandy initiated instruction with a warm-up activity about continents and oceans. Students had access to the warm-up activity electronically via Canvas, and, for those students who have not been issued one, the teacher provided a paper copy. Each question in the warm-up activity was written with short simple words and had graphic support, which is appropriate for the nine students as they are identified as WIDA Level 1: Entering. The teacher provided individual support to Carmelo, Lucio, and Angelino, who encountered challenges reading the sentences. As

students who scored a 1.0 on the reading component of the WIDA model, they were given additional support to complete the task. Those students who scored between 1.7 and 1.9 on the reading component of the WIDA ACCESS for ELs were able to complete the warm-up activity without individual support.

After completing the warm-up activity, Sandy discussed it and utilized realia such as maps and a globe to demonstrate the difference among them (i.e., flat versus round). In addition, the teacher provided sentence starters by writing them on the board: “The continent is \_\_. The ocean is \_\_\_\_\_. The Atlantic Ocean is between \_\_\_\_\_. Which continent is \_\_\_?” so when students shared answers as a class, they used the sentence frames as models to produce complete sentences orally. Julia differentiates instruction by implementing a variety of strategies. She described these strategies as follows:

When they come, the students are all in different levels. You know, making sure you differentiate. I try to take sort of their knowledge and their experiences to build into the curriculum. I think a lot using a lot of manipulatives and hands on- A lot of graphic organizers. I use a lot of images, and we sometimes go back to basics, a lot of visuals.

Lots of interaction and opportunities to talk, using graphic organizers as scaffolds, and also allowing them to have resources so all the students have access to a laptop. So, using a lot of visuals, as I said, modeling, TPR, total physical response, and always having whatever it is I’m going to be teaching them, I usually have it written it on the board as we have discussions. So, they can see, the written and the oral, and then we practice it. Just taking what they know and then giving them the academic language that goes for it. Lots of sentence starters. As I said before lots of graphic organizers.

In addition to utilizing graphic support to differentiate instruction, Sonia stressed the importance of providing individual support to SLIFE as she indicated, “One of the main things I do is a lot of one on one.”

During the observation, Sonia taught a lesson on Spirit Week, and, after the warm-up activity, students discussed Spirit Week and its significance in American schools. Sonia rephrased sentences as needed to ensure comprehensible input. For example, “Have you noticed something different from school this week?” Sonia provided wait time before students responded allowing them to internalize the language and make sense of it. When students were unable to answer, she rephrased the question again by simplifying and making the language meaningful by stating, “What is different this week in school? How are students different? Have you noticed how they are dressed?”

After the discussion, the teacher showed a video about Spirit Week. At the end of the video, students engaged in an oral discussion sharing what they saw. Then, Sonia assigned students to write a paragraph about Spirit Week. She gave instructions orally and in written form by projecting them on the Smartboard. After giving the instructions, Sonia modeled expectations and provided many examples orally: “On Monday, students wore \_\_\_\_\_. On Tuesday, \_\_\_\_\_.” Because some students were still having difficulty getting started with the task, the teacher provided them with a sentence starter to begin the paragraph in written form on the board: “In school this week, we had Spirit Week. Students wore \_\_\_\_\_.” Sonia circulated around the room and provided individual assistance to students who needed additional support.

Although the teacher differentiated instruction utilizing a variety of strategies, it was not enough for Bartolo, who stated, “No entiendo,” which means “I don’t understand.” Bartolo was frustrated and stated that he would not do the work. However,



this student was provided with individual support as he was given additional sentence starters, such as “On Monday, students dressed as\_\_\_\_\_. On Tuesday, students\_\_\_\_\_.” With the individual support and additional scaffolds, Bartolo was able to produce four sentences. As a student with a 1.8 composite score on Tier A of the ACCESS for ELs, Bartolo needed additional scaffolds in class to facilitate the completion of the written task.

What is interesting about this case is that Bartolo’s highest score on the ACCESS for ELs was in Writing with a 3.1, which is Developing. The performance definitions for WIDA English language proficiency levels within WIDA Level 3 indicate that a student within this stage can produce general and some specific language of the content areas and expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs with graphic or interactive support (WIDA Consortium, 2012). However, the writing component of the ACCESS for ELs provides scaffolds at a higher level with graphic support, and this might explain his high score in the written component on Tier A of the ACCESS for ELs. A significant finding for differentiating instruction is the commonality of utilizing graphic support, such as pictures and graphic organizers, by all eight teacher participants to meet the academic and literacy needs of SLIFEs. This practice correlates with the performance definitions for WIDA English language proficiency levels, which indicate that students performing at WIDA Level 1: Entering need pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas (WIDA Consortium, 2012).

**Theme 3: Meeting the beginning literacy needs of SLIFEs with limited knowledge of literacy instruction.** One of the biggest challenges of teaching SLIFEs is that this student population has limited or no literacy in L1 (DeCapua et al., 2009; Huang, 2013; Montero et al., 2014; Shi, 2013). When SLIFEs enter school systems, they are

learning a new language and content, while also learning how to read and write for the first time (Huang, 2013; Spruck Wigley, 2013). This is also a unique challenge, especially for secondary teachers, as their formal training does not include beginning literacy instruction (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; Hickey, 2015). This was exemplified in the research by six teacher participants who shared their concern for not having formal training on beginning literacy. For instance, Julia stated the following:

For example, I had a student who did not know the alphabet at all. So, it was a little bit challenging because as a secondary school teacher, I don't have literacy background or too much foundation on literacy background. But, I'm trying to. That's one of my goals for the coming year.

Like Julia, Kim feels that she is not the most adequate person to teach beginning literacy skills. She expressed these feelings by stating the following:

Sometimes I am not, you know, comfortable teaching literacy. A lot of these teachers who started in elementary school are very comfortable with word study, and I'm not. I do word study type things in how they appear in other text. But, I'm not as knowledgeable as elementary teachers or those teachers that started in elementary who are much comfortable with that.

Rosa had the same sentiment by expressing the following:

I have been working on trying to teach word study and phonetics and sound awareness. Not, that is something I read about and I practice in my classes, but this never came up in my formal training, and I do feel like- when I talk to other teachers in my team-we are all kind of approaching it from our own space with the skills that we have and we share. But, people's comfort levels are different, and I don't feel like- just having our occasional meetings is sufficient training for

people who do not feel confident about how to apply literacy strategies.

As a former elementary teacher, Emily also agreed on the need for ESOL secondary teachers to receive training in beginning literacy. Emily voiced this concern: “I do think training will be very helpful for beginning literacy teaching strategies. Just having, I feel, I can even use this review or refresher on that since I haven’t taken a course since my undergraduate.” Sonia and Sandy shared the same response. Sonia state the following:

I mean, I definitely think that professional development for ESOL secondary teachers is needed, and I think a series of classes and even maybe, you know, when students are designated as SLIFE, that maybe they are pulled for support classes for their English classes.

Sandy made the following comment:

I’m a content teacher, but I’m also still an ESOL teacher first, and foremost. And, I think something I need to do more of and if you are talking to Ms. Collins, she will be very good to interview about this because she has a background in elementary. So, early literacy. I think like kind of approaching it in a predictable way and trying to do much like basic literacy stuff as much as we can. Again, that’s a weakness of mine because I have really not taught like brand new readers. So, I don’t feel like, have as much experience as I would with teaching word sound or like you know, letter sounds or phonemes. But, I think that this is something that does need to be taken into consideration: beginning literacy.

To support and develop literacy, the classrooms of all six teacher participants who were observed had displays of word walls, graphic and linguistic representation of key content vocabulary according to the themes being studied, and classroom items were all labeled.

There were sentence starters, such as “May I go to the bathroom? May I sharpen my pencil?,” and other frequently asked questions that facilitate the implementation of classroom routines.

Most lessons were not focused on beginning literacy instruction when the researcher carried out the observations. However, Emily, who has an elementary background, and Julia spent about 15 minutes of class on building beginning literacy. Emily began class with a warm-up activity having students read independently a book at their reading level. As students read, Emily circulated and assisted students who needed individual support. After reading, Emily had a short word study lesson focusing on words that begin with the letter J. As students read the word jaguar, they noticed that jaguar is a cognate. Emily explained what cognates are and students continued to read the rest of the words out loud. Using the Smartboard, Emily modeled what students had to do for completing the graphic organizer by writing the word, the first letter of the word, drawing a picture, and writing it in L1.

On the other hand, Julia’s beginning literacy instructional focus was on high-frequency words. First, Julia read the words with the student out loud as she listened for correct pronunciation. Then, each student created flashcards of the high frequency words. Once this task was completed, students had to work in pairs, and, utilizing the flashcards, they had to quiz each other. One student would dictate the word and the other would write the word, and then the students switched roles. Lastly, students had to write a sentence with the high frequency words. Before writing their sentences independently, Julia elicited responses from the students for the correct punctuation rules and content within writing a complete sentence by asking, “What do we need in a sentence? What else do we need?” As students called out answers, Julia wrote them on the board.

To address the concern of teachers' limited beginning literacy training, Julia made the following suggestion: "I will definitely like to have more support in that area as a high school teacher. Maybe even observing elementary school ESOL/HILT teachers, and how they meet the literacy needs of their students."

**Theme 4: Lack of integration into the school culture and students creating their own community.** The acculturation process impacts students' academic achievement (Bang, 2017). A peculiar observation for the researcher involved the teachers' reactions when asked questions referencing the acculturation process of SLIFEs. Some hesitated for a moment before answering, others exhibited feelings of frustration with nonverbal cues, and one teacher wanted reassurance by asking if the information was going to remain anonymous. Furthermore, all teacher participants expressed their concern about the limited integration of SLIFEs into the school culture; teachers attributed this to the ESOL program scheduling procedures of MCPS and practices in which SLIFEs are enrolled into all sheltered classes. When asked about the students' acculturation into the school culture, Sandy and Rita described it as a challenging process. Sandy stated the following:

This one is a little bit hard to find the answer because I don't think our school system- the way we do like sheltered instruction in ESOL, I don't know that it is for the purpose of acculturation. The program is not very supportive of that. We have kids who don't engage with their peers in any language other than Spanish. They come here, and they are in sheltered classes where their peers speak Spanish. Last year, I actually had White kids, and I had my ESOL kids and there was no crossing of that line. It was interesting because even the kids who are Latino and who grew up in this school system, were on that side (points to the

side where White students would sit). I don't know if there's a solution because we are a high school. We have block scheduling. They need sheltered instruction. I'm not saying put them in a regular government class. You know, but it is hard because their first two years, probably, they are in this like very tight little group of students who have similar background. But, as far as acculturation within the largest school community, I don't see that happening. I walked into a ceramics class before, and I was like-Wow! These are just all my kids.

Rita stated the following:

Culture! That's so hard because the school is so huge. At the beginning levels, they are all the same kids pretty much, even in physical education. We have an ESOL physical education. They are pretty sheltered at the beginning, and they don't want to. It's scary.

Rosa and Emily also indicated that the acculturation process of SLIFEs is challenging and indicated that it is an area of concern as SLIFEs are together all day, including in elective and physical education classes. To promote the language acquisition and acculturation process, Rosa and Emily believe SLIFEs should be taking electives and physical education with general education students. Rosa stated the following:

I feel this is something that I don't have a great answer to. Like is something that I worry about, and think a lot because I feel like the nature of the students' schedules are so they are not being very integrated into the school culture. What I would like to keep working on is also getting more of our students involved in electives that aren't in our department. And, so, I really think, it's good for them to be in an art class with other kids. To be in music class with other kids. So, something that they are not with the same kids all day. I know that they feel really

safe with their group, and that's wonderful, but I think the exposure to what other kids are doing in the school and how they really kind made a community out of the school, I think that would be great for them.

Emily made the following comment:

We can still do a better job with integrating students into mainstream. I know for example, we have ESOL physical education classes, when really!? Why can't they just be mainstreamed with other kids because language is not even that big of a component in these classes.

Moreover, Sonia and Kim expressed the desire to integrate SLIFEs into school events such as school government association activities, field trips, and homeroom. Sonia stated the following:

I would like to do a lot of things to integrate ESOL students into the school culture. I gave blood and the first thing I asked the school government association, I believe the president, was, "Do ESOL students participate in the school government association Olympics?" and he kind of nodded. With integrating them into different things. I was kind of in shock when the freshman ESOL students didn't go on the freshman field trip. So, I asked, "Do we talked to so we, our freshmen can go on the field trips." And Ms. C and I said, you know, when we talked to the English department, we can say, we would do a modified version of whatever book they are studying for that field trip, so they can try to at least participate. A lot of things were shocking to me coming from elementary. Again, this is my first year, and it was kind of shocking. I think it is totally different in elementary school.

Kim added the following statement:

My kids even in their art classes, they are segregated from everybody. In their homeroom, they are segregated. Our kids have no idea what the school government association is, what the elections are, or why people are out here doing crazy stuff in the hallway. It's hard though because I don't think there's such of a movement at a larger school scale. Almost 10% of our student population are in our program. They don't participate. So, I think that is like community aspect. I think is most difficult to build, and I don't think that our school has done a very good job of building it.

Desir's (2009) research findings on Haitian students in search for identity in schools in the United States indicated that the student participants "try to preserve and create an accepting social space that included their Haitian identity that those in the school tended to look down upon" (p. 147). Furthermore, Desir stated that students had a sense of security by being within this community. Similar to these findings, SLIFEs in MCPS create their own community as a survival mechanism for dealing with the complex challenges associated with the acculturation process within the school community. Sandy described this phenomenon as follows:

So, I think they, as a means of emotional support, they create a very like similar kind of social group. The way that our classes are, kind of reinforces that the way is like and it's tough. They are in this very tight little group of students who have similar background and similar kind of experiences, So, they do- I think become accustomed to that. But, as far as acculturation within the largest school community, I don't see that happening.

Rita added the following:

They know me because I am always outside, and it is like a community. I think that's very helpful. I try to put myself in their shoes, and I'm like Holy Moly! You



know, and that's why their friendships are so tight because their friends are safe.

It's a safe zone. They get in a group quick, which is a great thing they have that.

Emily offered the following comment:

I think that definitely comes after a relationship has been formed where they feel like we have a community in a safe in the classroom. It was really cool because most of these kids haven't interacted very much with native English speakers, and they stick very much to their own peers that speak Spanish. And during this activity, they are getting into feel more of like the community instead of being in this, their own little bubble and pocket.

Moreover, during all classroom observations, students were interacting with each other as a community. For instance, students who understood the content and instructions assisted peers who were having challenges. Students have also formed strong friendships as evident from their personal conversations in class. In Kim's class, students demonstrated caring for each other as one student asked another, "Are you ok? Why were you absent?" Another student asked a female student who is expecting, "How are you feeling?" Similar behaviors were observed in Sandy's class as a female student encouraged the only non-Spanish speaker to answer a question by saying, "You can do this! Go ahead! You get this!" In Sonia's class, a number of students assisted each other by interpreting instructions in Spanish to peers who needed clarification.

**Theme 5: The power of students' native language (i.e., L1).** Second-language acquisition research supports the use of the students' native language (i.e., L1) to support the development of the target language (Afzal Awan & Aslam Sipra, 2015; Krashen, 1981; Tang, 2002). Krashen (1981, 1982) and Kato (2018) indicated that utilizing L1 during instruction is beneficial for language learners as they transfer L1 knowledge to

their new language. Krashen (1982) also specified that the use of L1 provides the comprehensible input needed to make learning meaningful. All eight teacher participants shared using L1 for meeting the socioemotional, academic, literacy, and acculturation needs of SLIFEs. To meet the socioemotional needs, Rosa utilizes her basic knowledge of Spanish to welcome SLIFEs into her classroom. She explained as follows:

I think that students need to know that they are safe in class. So, at the beginning, this is when I use my limited Spanish, right. Just to make sure I can tell the students welcome. But then, I just try to say to them in Spanish, you are not going to understand that much and is normal. But don't worry, and I can understand you if you have any questions.

Emily indicated L1 is not only used by her, but also during assemblies to clarify expectations. She stated the following:

I think, a huge piece of it is showing them that their identify is still valuable. Their language is still valued. We do different assemblies throughout the first month that talk about the school culture and expectations for student behavior. Although not all of these students speak Spanish, our presentations are done in English and Spanish to help since the majority of them do speak Spanish.

Most importantly, L1 is utilized during instruction by all teacher participants. For instance, Rita indicated she pairs students who speak the same language during cooperative learning activities; thus, the stronger student assists peers by providing interpretation as needed to facilitate comprehensible input. She describes this as follow:

I let them use their language if-when they are working with a stronger student. The stronger student has a better grasp of English. But, even though, they are repeating instructions of what they learned in Spanish, they are still internalizing

it. Absolutely, and even I will use it when they just can't understand some things as they just don't get it, and I will say the word in Spanish, plus, parent meetings.

Emily, Kim, and Sonia also encourage the use of L1 as an instructional strategy that facilitates comprehensible input and makes instruction meaningful, especially at the early stages of acquiring English. Emily stated the following:

I also think that incorporating their first language to whatever extent that can be done is important too. So, whether or not that's through translation of vocabulary words or sometimes we would watch a video in Spanish first and then, we will watch it in English. So, they are having a little bit more of the background knowledge of the topic, but yeah, incorporating their first language seems to work.

Kim added, "I give them the opportunity to find the words in their language before we start." Sonia commented, "For me, most of them can use translation to facilitate understanding of concepts." Becky also values the use of L1 during instruction, but she encourages students to use the targeted language. She describes this as follows:

This, we do a lot of pre-assessments and a lot of brainstorming prior. Some of it is-a lot of it is in Spanish. They don't really get in trouble if they speak their language in my class. There's not a negative consequence for speaking their language. There are positive reinforcements for practicing in English; we do have like an English-speaking practice rubric where they do this self-assessment on how much effort did they put into, and I think that's important that they are not in trouble about it and is more like, let's figure out how we are going to say this in English.

Most importantly, Julia includes non-Spanish-speaking students during class instruction

by making sure she accommodates for their needs as well. Julia stated the following:

A lot of my classes at least have one student who doesn't speak Spanish. So, I try to get them to produce something or have them translate, so that students who don't speak Spanish don't feel left out, and sometimes I even ask them because they have science and social studies, "What is this in your language?" You know, and I tell them, "This is what it is in English."

Throughout all six classroom observations, teachers utilized L1 for multiple purposes. To begin with, in each of the six observations, students greeted teachers as they individually entered the class in Spanish and English. At times, teachers would also greet them in Spanish. As far as instruction, L1 was utilized by all six teacher participants. For instance, Emily utilized L1 as a scaffolding technique when students needed. In various instances, Emily asked students, "How do you say \_\_\_\_\_ in Arabic? French? Spanish?" Moreover, students in Emily's class were encouraged to use L1 as a support. For example, in an activity that required students to complete a vocabulary graphic organizer, they were also asked to write the word in L1. The teacher even wrote the words in Spanish to model the assigned task. Students also assisted peers who needed clarification by explaining instructions in Spanish.

Similar to Emily, Sandy utilized L1 throughout the class as students asked questions in Spanish. For instance, during the warm up activity, Carmelo asked, "Que continente tiene rojo?" (Which continent has red?). Sandy clarified, "It is not a continent, it's an ocean." Moreover, when students were reading, some would translate in Spanish out loud. If a student did not know a vocabulary word in English, and they did not understand the term even with the graphic support, Sandy would translate it. Students in Sandy's class would also assist each other by translating instructions. An example of this

type of interaction was when Petra, as a WIDA 1.9, assisted Carmelo, a WIDA 1.3, by translating into Spanish the instructions of what they had to do during the last class activity, in which students had to cut the names of 16 countries and glue them into the correct continent column of a graphic organizer.

Students in Becky's class also assisted each other by translating instructions into Spanish. Most importantly, Becky included Muddasar, the only non-Spanish-speaking student, by constantly asking him, "How do you say \_\_\_ in Arabic?" During the class, Becky also reviewed the term natural selection by providing examples and asking questions related to the term. The teacher then drew a pair of duck feet and a pair of bat feet and asked students, "Why are bat's and duck's feet different?" Petra asked the teacher if she could explain in Spanish. Once the teacher gave approval, Petra proceeded to explain in Spanish "Puedo explicar en español. Porque unos nadan. Las patas son diferentes porque patos nadan y el otro no. Eso es selección natural."

Translated into English, the student said, "I can explain in Spanish. Because some swim. The feet are different because ducks swim and the other doesn't. That's natural selection." This is a perfect example of an SLIFE's ability to fully understand and obtain knowledge of complex content knowledge if provided with differentiated instruction with the appropriate instructional supports. In this case, Petra understood the concept of natural selection and was able to explain in L1. Petra's ability to explain the concept in English was impacted by two important factors: her WIDA Speaking score of 1.5 and her recent arrival in 2017. This student is at the early stages of the language acquisition process and is developing content language.

In another class, Julia encouraged students during instruction to write the meaning of the high frequency words in L1 when they were creating flashcards. After completing

the flashcards, Julia provided written and oral scaffolded instructions for the next activity. Students had to work in pairs and dictate the high-frequency words to their partner. After Julia explained the instructions, she asked students if they understood, and one student stated he did not. Julia proceeded to clarify instructions in Spanish so that all of the students would understand the next steps.

Lastly, the development of literacy in L1 and new language are fundamental for academic success (Menken et al., 2012). This correlates with research findings from Collier (1987) and Cummings (2000), which stressed the importance of L1 literacy in the process of acquiring a new language. This was also exemplified in this study as Rosa indicated the following:

What letters of the alphabet do they know, and what sounds of the alphabet do they know, and which ones do they know not only in Spanish, but English. Or which ones do they know in Spanish? Which ones do they know in English? Something I wish is for is there could be more bilingual instruction in schools. I wish that we could address the students' first-language literacy at the same time that we are working on their second-language literacy.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summary of the findings of the qualitative research study conducted at two high schools in a mid-Atlantic school district. The chapter began with a summary of the participants' backgrounds. Significant findings that surfaced when analyzing interviews and field notes taken from classroom observations were also described. Most importantly, the researcher discussed the five general themes that emerged from data analysis: (a) meeting the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs by building relationships, (b) differentiating instruction to meet the academic needs of SLIFEs, (c)

meeting the beginning literacy needs of SLIFEs with limited knowledge of literacy instruction, (d) lack of integration into the school culture and students creating their own community, and (e) the power of students' native language (i.e., L1). In addition, the researcher provided an indepth analysis of the themes utilizing teachers' accounts and students' scores on the ACCESS for ELs.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This concluding chapter included a discussion and description of the qualitative study. In addition, the researcher provided an overview of the problem and analyzed the implications of emerged themes. The researcher also presented the limitations of the study and provided recommendations to school districts, educators, and universities across the United States. Lastly, considerations for future research were provided based on this case study's limitations and findings.

### **Overview of Study**

Demographic shifts are evident in the United States, impacting societies across the nation as communities are more culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse (Baecher et al., 2016; Frey, 2015; Marx, 2014; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2016). Within these changes in demographics, there has been a significant increase in the population of ELs (Alford & Niño, 2011; Calderon et al., 2011; Frey, 2015). The ELs have been identified as the fastest growing student population in schools in the United States (Alford & Niño, 2011; Calderon et al., 2011). Within this special student population, there is a subgroup of students who have additional and unique needs and have been identified as SLIFEs. The limited research on SLIFEs indicate that this student population has additional challenges because the students not only have to learn a new language in a new culture, but also arrive with limited academic background and critical socioemotional needs. In addition, ESOL teachers, especially at the secondary level, are encountering challenges in providing the academic support that SLIFEs need to succeed academically.

At MCPS, the population of SLIFEs has been increasing; therefore, the district began to officially identify ELs who are SLIFEs with the purpose of obtaining indepth



data and academic analysis. During the 2017-2018 school year, 78 students were identified as SLIFEs at the secondary level. The SLIFE population at MCPS is so diverse that it includes students from indigenous Latin American backgrounds speaking Spanish, indigenous dialects, or both. The SLIFEs from African countries include students from Morocco and Congo and South Asian countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

This qualitative research study examined how ESOL high school teachers in a small urban mid-Atlantic school district in the United States integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs who are SLIFEs. To accomplish this, the researcher gathered data from eight individual ESOL teacher interviews and six classroom observations. In addition to teachers, 20 high school SLIFEs from a variety of different backgrounds participated in the study. The researcher also utilized student participants' scores on the ACCESS for ELs to analyze classroom observations.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Significant findings revealed that there is an increase in numbers of SLIFEs from indigenous backgrounds in MCPS. According to teacher participants, this subgroup of ELs encounter additional socioemotional and academic challenges. Teachers indicated that SLIFEs from indigenous backgrounds are often bullied by nonindigenous peers and seem to have lower self-esteem. This might be due to the historical background of this population in Latin American countries. Throughout the history of Guatemala, indigenous groups have suffered decades of discrimination, marginalization, inequalities, suppression, and violence (Wang, 2006). Approximately 200,000 indigenous people were assassinated during the Civil War (Wang, 2006). Moreover, in 2006, 250,000 people were displaced as their indigenous communities were destroyed (Wang, 2006).

Moreover, educational opportunities for indigenous individuals are limited not

only because of inequalities, but also because Guatemala has the lowest educational expenditure in Latin America (De la Garza, 2016). In addition, De la Garza (2016) stated that students from indigenous backgrounds have the highest dropout and illiteracy rates. De la Garza attributes this problem to the language of instruction, which is Spanish, and to the fact that most indigenous languages do not have a written language. Five general themes emerged from data collection and analysis: (a) meeting the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs by building relationships, (b) differentiating instruction to meet the academic needs of SLIFEs, (c) meeting the beginning literacy needs of SLIFEs with limited knowledge of literacy instruction, (d) lack of integration into the school culture and students creating their own community, and (e) the power of students' native language (i.e., L1).

**Meeting the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs by building relationships.**

Meeting the socioemotional needs is critical for the academic development of SLIFEs (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010a; Vecchio et al., 2017; WIDA Consortium, 2015). Rishel and Miller (2017) specified that the socioemotional needs of ELs vary according to their experiences. The researchers also indicated that ELs are vulnerable because they are experiencing a variety of emotionally mixed feelings as a result of their transition to a new country and school. Moreover, SLIFEs encounter age-associated challenges in addition to those related to learning a new language and a new culture (Drake, 2017). Stewart (2016) emphasized the importance of establishing relationships as a foundation for the development of socioemotional and academic benefits of ELs. Stewart also indicated that establishing relationships is more crucial for teachers of adolescent ELs, as this group has a variety of additional socioemotional needs that stem from trauma and their transition to a new language and culture. However, these relationships have to be

genuine, build on trust, be culturally responsive, and be based on clear expectations and classroom guidelines (Stewart, 2016).

As revealed in this study, all ESOL teacher participants indicated SLIFEs come with a variety of socioemotional needs. Teacher participants also acknowledged the importance of building relationships with SLIFEs as a means to address their socioemotional needs. Teachers revealed that building relationships with SLIFEs is the foundation for meeting their socioemotional needs. Consequently, teacher participants expressed that it is not uncommon for them to spend a significant amount of time getting to know their students. Teachers accomplish this by creating a welcoming, stress-free, and trusting environment, in which all languages and cultures, including those of the United States, are respected, celebrated, and utilized as an asset for learning. Furthermore, teacher participants indicated that providing clear classroom guidelines and establishing high expectations for learning assist in addressing the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs as well. Lastly, three teacher participants expressed the important role that school counselors play in the socioemotional growth of SLIFEs; therefore, counselors must also establish relationships with SLIFEs.

**Differentiating instruction to meet the academic needs of SLIFEs.** Research on the role of differentiated instruction for ELs is abundant; however, it is not specific to SLIFEs. Differentiated instruction is essential in promoting success with ELs at a variety of proficiency levels (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015). In this case study, all teacher participants differentiate to meet the language and academic needs of SLIFEs. For instance, teachers utilize pictures and simple graphic organizers to support the development of language and facilitate the understanding of concepts. Moreover, two teachers indicated they modify materials at three different levels according to students'

level of English language proficiency. Teachers also indicated they build on students' background knowledge while focusing on key vocabulary. Additionally, teachers stressed the importance of designing engaging and hands-on lessons, including cooperative learning activities. Sentence frames are also utilized by teachers to promote oral language, beginning reading, and writing skills. Rosa emphasized that SLIFEs can understand complex concepts as long as the material is scaffolded. Lastly, teacher participants recognized that SLIFEs need a high level of individual support.

**Meeting the beginning literacy needs of SLIFEs with limited knowledge of literacy instruction.** The ESOL teachers, especially at the secondary level, are not trained to teach beginning literacy (Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Hickey, 2015; Montero et al., 2014; Silva & Kucer, 2016). As found in this case study, secondary ESOL teachers are not adequately trained to teach beginning literacy. For instance, six teacher participants acknowledged not having formal training on beginning literacy instruction. Some teacher participants alluded to not feeling comfortable teaching beginning literacy and recognized the need for incorporating this instruction to meet the needs of SLIFEs in this area.

All teacher participants, including the two with elementary backgrounds, mentioned the need for professional development on secondary beginning literacy instruction. Despite the lack of beginning literacy training, some teachers are incorporating beginning literacy strategies in their daily instruction. For example, Emily began her lesson by focusing on words with the beginning consonant J. Similar to Emily, Julia began the class with a short word study lesson. However, her lesson focused on high-frequency words, as students were engaged in a variety of activities applying them.

**Lack of integration into the school culture and students creating their own**

**community.** Coleman and Avrushin (2017) specified that ELs are often segregated from general education students due to the nature of how ESOL programs are structured, thus impacting their integration into the school culture. In addition, research findings from Desir (2009) found that students created a sense of community by socializing with peers from the same background, not only as a means to cope with the challenges associated with the acculturation process, but also as a mechanism to preserve their own identity. However, they were looked down upon within the school community (Desir, 2009). Moreover, students encountered challenges during their transition to mainstreamed classes as they struggled dealing with losing their established bonds and personal relationships with their teachers who were familiarized with their backgrounds (Desir, 2009).

Findings of this study indicated that SLIFEs at MCPS are also segregated as a result of scheduling within the ESOL program. The SLIFEs are often together in all classes, including electives and physical education, which limits their exposure to general education students. Similar to Desir's (2009) findings, SLIFEs in MCPS build their own sense of community because they tend to stay together with students from the same background. Furthermore, Sandy described how general education students, including non-ESOL Latino students, avoided socializing with SLIFEs during homeroom. The researcher also observed how, on occasions, SLIFEs gravitated toward students from similar backgrounds.

This was evident during the observation in Kim's class, in which all Spanish-speaking students sat around a long table in the center of the room, but the non-Spanish-speaking student sat by himself on the left side of the room. Later, this student was integrated by the teachers for a collaborative learning activity. A similar observation was

witnessed in Emily's class, when Malala, the only non-Spanish speaker in that class, was not engaged during class discussion. Lastly, Rita indicated that ELs experience challenges when transitioning to mainstreamed classes as they are accustomed to the security and support the ESOL program offers.

**The power of students' native language (i.e., L1).** There is a strong relationship between literacy in L1 and L2. Second-language acquisition research has found that students' L1 facilitates the acquisition of a new language (Afzal Awan & Aslam Sipra, 2015; Krashen, 1981; Tang, 2002). According to Krashen (1981, 1982) and Kato (2018), students who have a strong foundation in L1 acquire L2 at a faster rate as they transfer their knowledge to the new language. Research conducted by Lee and Walsh (2015) also found that students' languages are encouraged and respected in the school environment, and students often utilized L1 to clarify terms that facilitate learning of new concepts. Importantly, Ochi (2009) stressed the importance of utilizing L1 as a means for lowering anxiety, ultimately increasing the production of L2.

Language-acquisition experts have also found that high school L2 learners with limited literacy in L1 encounter significant challenges in developing literacy skills in L2 (Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, & Humbach, 2012). On the other hand, there are researchers who have a different point of view in regard to L1's role in second-language acquisition (Ali Grami & Alzughabi, 2012). The researchers argued that L1 may interfere with the acquisition of L2 in students whose L1 is Arabic. According to Ali Grami and Alzughabi (2012), Arabic ELs are at a lower of proficiency level in English due to the interference of L1. Research findings on this topic recommend utilizing an approach that does not frequently depend on L1 (Ali Grami & Alzughabi, 2012).

In this case study, all teacher participants recognized the importance of utilizing

L1 for meeting the socioemotional, academic, and acculturation needs of SLIFEs.

Teacher participants provide a welcoming classroom environment by greeting students in both L1 and L2. In addition, teachers indicated that utilizing L1 as a scaffold technique with SLIFEs assists with lowering the affective filter, which results in facilitating the school acculturation process. The L1 is also utilized by teachers to clarify classroom expectations that promote a positive learning environment. Similar to the research of Lee and Walsh (2015), students in this case study utilized L1 as needed to assist each other by providing interpretation of complex subject matter. Teachers recognized and valued the other languages represented in the classroom by including non-Spanish-speaking students to interpret terms in their language. This inclusive classroom environment practice also promotes cultural awareness and global education.

### **Limitations**

According to Price and Murnan (2004), all studies have limitations. This case study had several limitations. To begin with, the sample of participants was limited to eight teachers and 20 students. Furthermore, the study was conducted in only two high school sites. In addition, the researcher was limited in time, despite the extension granted by the school district to the researcher to conduct the study for two semesters. Lastly, the researcher was unable to gather indepth data on the acculturation process of SLIFEs as they adjust to their new environment. This additional data could have been obtained by shadowing SLIFEs during their regular school schedule and observing their interactions with peers, school staff, and school community.

### **Recommendations**

After indepth analysis of the data collected from this study, the researcher has several recommendations that will assist educators in improving the support they provide

to meet the socioemotional, academic, language, and acculturation needs of SLIFEs. First, the researcher recommends school districts to train secondary ESOL teachers on beginning literacy instruction. To address this need, the researcher also recommends universities across the nation to include courses on beginning literacy instruction for SLIFEs within the curriculum for ESOL teacher training programs. The district should also provide reading specialists to collaborate with high school ESOL teachers of SLIFEs. The reading specialists will serve as a resource by working directly with students, providing teacher training on beginning literacy instruction, or coteaching a reading class specifically designed for the needs of SLIFEs. The district should also promote collaboration among ESOL high school and elementary teachers by allowing high school teachers to observe the elementary classroom level during beginning literacy instruction.

A strong foundation in L1 reinforces the acquisition of L2. Therefore, the researcher encourages MCPS to develop a specialized curriculum for SLIFEs in which ESOL and Spanish teachers implement a multidisciplinary collaborative approach for literacy development that supports L1 and L2. The curriculum must also include components for academic language development to promote higher academic achievement. This collaboration can also be utilized by teachers to coordinate interactions among non-Spanish native speakers enrolled in basic Spanish courses and SLIFEs. This interactive model will benefit both groups of students, especially SLIFEs, as it facilitates the language acquisition and acculturation process.

The third recommendation is for the county to explore the implementation of the mutually adaptive learning paradigm model. The model was developed by Marshall (1998); however, it has been adapted throughout the years based on research findings



conducted by DeCapua and Marshall (2010b). It is a unique instructional model that focuses on the language, content, and cultural needs of SLIFEs at the secondary level (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). This instructional model allows teachers to create objectives taking into consideration elementary and secondary standards (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Importantly, the model allows for flexibility to meet the individual needs of each SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

The researcher also recommends making changes in the schedules of SLIFEs to include them in elective and physical education classes so they can be exposed to English native speakers. This cross-cultural approach will not only support exposure to L2, but it will encourage SLIFEs to socialize with native speakers of English, ultimately promoting the acculturation process. This will require training for all educators and close collaboration between general education and ESOL teachers.

Also related to curriculum and scheduling, the researcher recommends for the district to promote alternative educational opportunities for SLIFEs with interests and skills related to vocational education. However, the state department of education must focus on the unique needs of this student population and consider making modifications on a case-by-case basis to high school graduation requirements. In addition, modifications to existing vocational programs might be needed to include language support from highly trained educators.

Lastly, proper identification for SLIFEs upon entry is crucial. Consequently, the researcher recommends the district to designate highly qualified and experienced ESOL teachers to the entry assessment specialist positions. In addition, assessment specialists must have clear, specific, and consistent guidelines for proper identification of SLIFEs. An additional recommendation relates to proper identification of SLIFEs who might also

have special learning needs or disabilities. The district must also establish clear, specific, timely, and consistent guidelines for proper identification of SLIFEs who might also need special education services. The prereferral process must include a language-acquisition expert, such as an ESOL teacher, proper documentation of interventions and their impact on learning, and performance-based assessments.

### **Considerations for Future Research**

After analyzing all components of this qualitative study, the researcher has several recommendations for future research. Because addressing the socioemotional needs of SLIFEs is imperative and counselors are an integral component in addressing these needs, the researcher believes a study should be conducted with counselors as participants. This qualitative study should explore how counselors are meeting the needs of SLIFEs and their feelings related to their own ability and knowledge in meeting the socioemotional needs of this student population. Second, the researcher suggests an indepth longitudinal study on the acculturation process of SLIFEs. To accomplish this, the researcher suggests conducting interviews of SLIFEs to examine perceptions of how their socioemotional, academic, and acculturation needs are being met.

The researcher also suggests conducting a study on the role of L1 during the acquisition process of L2. To examine the role of L1, the researcher suggests conducting an experimental research design in which the control-group students do not receive scaffolded instruction through the use of L1, as they are fully immersed in English. The experimental group will receive scaffolded instruction as needed in L1. Findings of the study will clarify if L1 hinders or supports the acquisition process of L2.

### **Conclusion**

As the population of SLIFEs at the high school level continues to increase in

schools across the nation, districts need to explore effective ways to provide high quality equitable educational opportunities. To accomplish this, educators will first need to develop an awareness of the unique socioemotional, academic, and acculturation needs of SLIFEs. Consequently, schools must design specialized programs focusing on the specific needs of SLIFEs. However, this will require appropriate funding, highly qualified and experienced teachers, specialized teacher training programs, and age-appropriate instructional materials. Equally important, school districts must promote high expectations by setting realistic obtainable goals for SLIFEs. This can be achieved by creating a collaborative interdisciplinary approach in which all educators take ownership for creating educational environments that provide a strong effective support system for SLIFEs.

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Appendix A  
Demographic Information

## Demographic Information

<b>Demographic Information</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Site A</b>	<b>Site B</b>
Total Enrollment	26,348	2,104	2,537
Free or Reduced Lunch	30.12%	34.8%	32%
Economically Disadvantage	33%	52.6%	36.4%
White	45.8%	21.5%	42%
Hispanic	28.9%	44.8%	33.6%
Asian	9%	8.6%	10.4%
Black	10.5%	19.8%	8.7%
Two or More Races or America Indian	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%
ESOL Enrollment	28.6%	36.2%	24.8%
SLIFE Enrollment (2017-2018)	78	12	10

## Appendix B

### Performance Definitions for Proficiency Levels



## Performance Definitions for Proficiency Levels

6- Reaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specialized or technical language reflective of the content areas at grade level</li> <li>• a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity and extended oral or written discourse as required by the specified grade level</li> <li>• oral or written communication in English comparable to proficient English peers</li> </ul>
5- Bridging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specialized or technical language of the content areas</li> <li>• a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays or reports</li> <li>• oral or written language approaching comparability to that of proficient English peers when presented with grade level material</li> </ul>
4- Expanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific and some technical language of the content areas</li> <li>• a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in oral discourse or multiple, related sentences or paragraphs</li> <li>• oral or written language with minimal phonological syntactic or semantic errors that do not impede the overall meaning of the communication when presented with oral or written connected discourse with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>
3- Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general and some specific language of the content areas</li> <li>• expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs</li> <li>• oral or written language with phonological, syntactic or semantic errors that may impede the communication, but retain much of its meaning, when presented with oral or written, narrative or expository descriptions with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>
2- Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general language related to the content areas</li> <li>• phrases or short sentences</li> <li>• oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede the meaning of the communication when presented with one to multiple-step commands, directions, or a series of statements with sensory graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>
1- Entering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas</li> <li>• words, phrases or chunks of language when presented with one-step commands, directions</li> <li>• WH-, choice or yes/no questions, or statements with sensory, graphic or interactive support</li> </ul>

## Appendix C

### Years of Compulsory Education in United States and Latin America

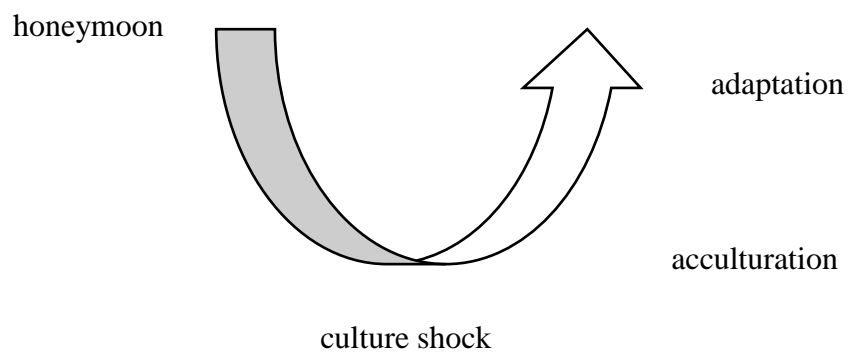
## Years of Compulsory Education in United States and Latin America

<b>Country</b>	<b>Years Required</b>	<b>Percentage Actually Attending Final Grade</b>
U.S.	12	96
Colombia	9	43
Ecuador	9	40
El Salvador	9	23
Dominican Republic	9	60
Mexico	9	28
Honduras	9	21
Guatemala	11	no data

Appendix D

The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment

### The U-Curve of Cultural Adjustment



Appendix E

Teacher Participants

## Teacher Participants

Teacher	Site	Years of Experience	Years in MCPS	Language(s) in addition to English
Rita	A	26	26	Spanish
Beth	B	11	5	Spanish
Julia	A	11	2	French Spanish
Rosa	A	12	3	Spanish (conversational) French
Emily	A	11	5	Spanish (conversational) French
Sandy	B	8	3	Spanish (conversational) Azerbaijani
Sonia	B	12	18	Spanish
Kim	B	5	5	Spanish French

Appendix F  
Student Participants



## Student Participants

Student	Country of Birth	Language(s)	Age	MCPS Date of Entry	Grade	Site
Bartolo	Guatemala	Spanish	17	October 2015	11	B
Rocio	Guatemala	Spanish	17	December 2017	9	B
Carmelo	Guatemala	Spanish	15	May 2018	9	B
Petra	Guatemala	Mam (L1) Spanish	19	May 2017	10	B
Lucio	Guatemala	Achi (L1)	16	March 2018	9	B
Penelope	Guatemala	Spanish	14	April 2018	9	B
Angelino	Guatemala	Spanish	16	March 2018	9	B
Muddasar	Pakistan	Pashto	14	August 2018	9	B
Santulnino	Guatemala	Achi (L1) Spanish	15	March 2018	9	B
Mahmood	Morocco	Arabic (L1) French	16	August 2018	10	B
Malala	Bangladesh	Bengali	15	September 2017	10	A
Hipolito	Honduras	Spanish	17	July 2017	9	A
Dominga	Colombia	Spanish	14	January 2018	9	A
Celestina	El Salvador	Spanish	17	January 2018	9	A
Eusebia	Guatemala	Mam (L1) Spanish	15	March 2017	9	A
Lucrecia	United States	Spanish	16	January 2017	9	A
Bonifacio	Guatemala	Spanish	14	August 2018	9	A
Florencio	El Salvador	Spanish	15	August 2018	9	A
Esperanza	El Salvador	Spanish	15	August 2018	9	A
Venancio	Venezuela	Spanish	15	August 2018	9	A

Appendix G  
Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

**Time of interview:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:** Michelle Marrero

**Interviewee:**

**Position of interviewee:**

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this case study is to examine how ESOL high school teachers in a small urban Mid-Atlantic school district integrate social and academic English development skills for ELs with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).

**Consent form signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent to record interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Educational Background/Degrees:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Certifications:**

**Years of experience as an ESOL teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years working for the county:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**In addition to English, other languages spoken:**

**Questionnaire:**

1. How do you address the social-emotional development of ELs with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)?
  - a. Culture shock
  - b. PTSD
  - c. Feelings of alienation
  - d. Feelings of being overwhelmed
  - e. Depression
  - f. Anxiety
  - g. Reunification (family reunification)
  - h. Other
2. How do you support the academic development of ELs with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)?
3. How do you support the acculturation process of SLIFE into the United States school system?
4. What factors do you take into consideration when planning instruction for the unique needs of SLIFE?
5. Which strategies have you found to be effective when working with ELs who are not literate in their native language (cannot read or write in their native language)?
6. How do you ensure SLIFE receive comprehensible input (making meaning of

language just beyond the students' proficiency level) during instruction?

7. How do you provide SLIFE access to content language?
8. How do you integrate SLIFE into the school culture?
9. How do you facilitate the acculturation process?
10. What have you noticed about the integration of SLIFE to the American school culture?
11. What successes and challenges do you encounter when supporting SLIFE?

Appendix H  
Observation Protocol

## Observation Protocol

Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer: Michelle Marrero

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Observation Focus	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<p><b>Social-Emotional Needs</b></p> <p>How and in what ways do ESOL high school teachers in a small urban Mid-Atlantic school district integrate social-emotional and academic English development skills to ELs with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)?</p> <p>___ Welcoming, accepting, and safe learning environment            ___ Classroom routines in place            ___ Interaction between teacher and students            ___ Interaction between student and classmates            ___ L1 support            ___ Meaningful and engaging instruction            ___ Exhibits Empathy</p>		
Observation Focus	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<p><b>Academic English Needs</b></p> <p>How and in what ways do ESOL high school teachers in a small urban Mid-Atlantic school district integrate social-emotional and academic English development skills to ELs with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)?</p> <p>___ Welcoming, accepting, and safe learning environment            ___ Classroom routines in place            ___ Interaction between teacher and students            ___ Interaction between student and classmates            ___ Visual support            ___ Teacher took into consideration the students' ACCESS scores/WIDA ELP levels when planning for differentiated instruction within each language domain (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).            ___ Comprehensible input            ___ L1 support            ___ Meaningful and engaging instruction</p>		

Observation Focus	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<p data-bbox="370 277 604 302"><b>Literacy Development</b></p> <p data-bbox="305 331 662 441">How and in what ways are ESOL high school teachers meeting the literacy needs of ELs with limited or interrupted formal education?</p> <p data-bbox="305 470 646 798"> <input type="checkbox"/> Development of academic language (CALP)  <input type="checkbox"/> Literacy Needs/Teacher has knowledge of literacy stages  <input type="checkbox"/> Integration of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities)  <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensible input  <input type="checkbox"/> L1 support  <input type="checkbox"/> Visual support  <input type="checkbox"/> Integration of content in literacy instruction         </p>		
Observation Focus	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<p data-bbox="412 882 561 907"><b>Acculturation</b></p> <p data-bbox="305 936 656 1045">How do ESOL high school teachers support the acculturation process of ELs with limited or interrupted formal education?</p> <p data-bbox="305 1075 665 1348"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher promotes cultural awareness  <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher serves as a facilitator for the proper implementation of accepted behaviors, values, and practices of the new culture  <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher maintains an inclusive classroom environment  <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers promotes high expectations for student performance         </p>		