INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC ACQUISITION THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Olga Noemi De Jesus

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Many institutional programs are changing to incorporate more online opportunities as a way to meet the needs of their students. Therefore, international English language learners are being encouraged to take online courses in order to complete their programs of study at United States colleges or universities (Tan, Lee, & Steven, 2010). In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher sought to investigate international undergraduate English language learners' perception of and experiences with language and academic acquisition through online learning. This study was conducted with a selected group of 10 undergraduate international students enrolled in the Liberal Arts program at a private four year college in New York State. The data for this study was collected via: (a) participant screening questionnaire, (b) individual participant interview, and (c) focus group interviews. The researcher transcribed the interviews, analyzed the transcriptions, and coded the data into four related themes: (1) perception of online learning, (2) perception of cultural differences, (3) perception of second language acquisition, and (4) perception of academic content acquisition. The findings of this study indicated that overall, participants' perceived advantages and disadvantages regarding English as a second language acquisition, academic acquisition, as well as disadvantages associated with cultural differences.

Keywords: Distance Learning or online learning, English language learner, language development

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation and my achievement of it to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. The book of Jeremiah 11:29 state “For I know the plans I have for you; plans to prosper you and not to harm you.” Who I am, who I’ve become I owe it all to God!

Acknowledgments

I feel compelled to thank many people for their support throughout this journey. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family. My son Orlando E. De Jesus, who continuously put my life into perspective and helped pull me through the hardest times with his sweet smiles, hugs, and kisses; my mother Maritza Santos who is now in heaven, who went above and beyond to raise me with unconditional love and with her teaching to fear the Lord above all things. I want to thank my church family for their fervent prayers. I want to acknowledge and thank my outstanding dissertation committee. Dr. Leldon Nichols, for guiding me as my dissertation chair and putting me on the right track in the process; Dr. Fredrick Milacci, research consultant, for guiding me through the construction of my research design; Dr. Joan Fitzpatrick, for sharing her knowledge and resources; Kristen Hoegh for serving as chief editor; Dr. Mi-Hyun Chung for conducting the audit trail and Dr. Aramina Vega Ferrer, for graciously accepting the challenge to mentor me. Lastly, I want to thank the participants who volunteered for this study and my colleagues for their support.

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List of Abbreviations

Basic Intrapersonal Communication Skills (BICS)

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CAPL)

English Language Development (ELD)

English Language Learners (ELLs)

Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

According to Tan, Lee, and Steven (2010), the development of technology has provided new learning opportunities, which are increasingly more accessible to a growing number of individuals in higher education. Tan et al. (2010) emphasized that international English language learners (ELLs) are often encouraged or required to take online courses with the language of instruction in English to in order to complete their programs of study at United States colleges or university. Min-Hua (2007) emphasized that international students have several challenges in their academic studies at North American universities. These challenges include different factors: (a) inadequate English proficiency, (b) unfamiliarity with North American culture, (c) lack of appropriate study skills or strategies, (d) academic learning anxiety, (e) low social self-efficacy, (f) financial difficulties, and (g) separation from family and friends. According to Min-Hua (2007), despite the general perception that American culture is characterized more by diversity than by homogeneity, the American ideology of cultural homogeneity implies an American mindset that because Eurocentric cultures are superior to others, people from different cultures should conform to the dominant monoculture canon and norms. Also, Min-Hua (2007) emphasized that these students usually are: (a) well educated in their native languages, (b) have met a passing score on the required **(**TOEFL**)** exam, and (c) need further language study in order to be well prepared for college-level work.

According to Blumenthal (2002), within this population of ELLs are some students who, like international students, have been well educated in their native languages, but there are many who have not. Some have briefly attended U.S. high schools and can get along well in their daily lives in English; however, Blumenthal (2002) emphasized that there are others who enter

the community college with little or no English proficiency. Some community college ELLs students plan to continue their education beyond English as a Second Language (ESL), perhaps at a four year institution, but others come to the community college for English instruction only.

According to Chisman (2011), a substantial portion of adult education teachers are not fully qualified to provide either traditional or new workforce-oriented instruction. Most are "experienced but not expert" (p. 3) for two basic reasons: few have had extensive formal training in adult basic skills instruction, and too few suitable in-service programs are available to them. Blumenthal (2002) reported that in an informal survey of subscribers to the Community College ESL, employment issues ranked high on ESL professionals' lists of concerns. Adjunct instructors in ESL, like those in other areas, are low-paid, often work at several institutions, and may have substantial commutes as they move from one college to another. Blumenthal (2002) argued that even when ESL instructors are hired on a full-time basis they are often not on a tenure track, in part because many ESL courses offer neither institutional nor transfer or degree credit. For example, it is not uncommon for a coordinator of an established ESL program to work under a term-by-term adjunct contract instead of being on a permanent tenure-track contract. According to Henrichsen and Savova (2000), the reliance on part-time instructors, at times the only paid professionals in an ESL program, as well as the disrespect and second-class status many experience at their institutions, are important issues for ESL professionals. Henrichsen (2010) argued that because ESL is viewed as a *skill*, rather than a *content* field, many content-area colleagues consider the field to be less demanding and less rigorous than content fields, or as something that anyone who speaks English can teach with little or no training. However, the ability to teach language skills involves more than the ability to produce and understand language.

Situation to Self

Having been an educator for 17 years with expertise in working with ELLs and in higher education, I conducted this study from an epistemological and positivistic perspective. As an instructor who has taught both traditional courses on campus and online, I can appreciate the differences in the teaching and learning process between the two. When teaching on campus, I am able to interact with the students on an academic level, but also on a personal and more familiar level. I can assess the students' learning progress through visual observation, and appreciate better the students' behaviors and cultural perceptions. However, the teaching and learning experience can be different with online students because it is difficult to visually observe their personalities or assess their content understanding.

Problem Statement

The idea for this study originated from an observation made by my colleagues of the International Undergraduate Liberal Arts program at a four year college in the state of New York. These undergraduate students are international students who have come to this four year College to pursue a Liberal Arts degree from an American accredited institution. Part of the admissions process for acceptance is a score of 71 or higher on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam. Once accepted into the program, these students are allowed to register for courses either in a traditional lecture or online format. Many of these international students prefer the online distance learning format because they seek convenience and flexibility in the delivery of instruction (Walts & Lewis, 2003). However, according to Appana (2008), in a distance learning environment, instruction is delivered through a mode in which the teacher is physically separated from the learner. Moore (2007) emphasized that, in distance education, students and instructors experience a sense of separation, which is caused by more than the

simple physical distance between students and instructors. Moore referred to this distance as *transactional distance,* "a psychological and communications gap, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner" (p. 90), created in part by the physical distance inherent to online learning. A large transactional distance (e.g., that between geographically dispersed learners and instructors in an asynchronous, text-based, online learning environment) may contribute to students' feelings of isolation and disconnectedness, which can lead to reduced levels of motivation and engagement, which can consequently lead to attrition.

Other concerns pertaining to ELL students taking online classes are (a) student assessment, (b) course placement procedures, and (c) policies which differ widely from college to college. Benson (2003) reported that while one college might use a holistic writing assessment instrument to place ESL students into their initial courses and monitor students' subsequent progress, a college in a bordering district might use a discrete-point grammar test for the same purposes. Some colleges require that students enroll in certain levels of ESL, based on assessment results, while others leave that decision to the students. These differences significantly complicate the implementation of comparative studies of student and program success.

In a national evaluation of adult education ESL programs, conducted by Fitzgerald (1995), it was found that it is often difficult for directors of adult education programs to find highly qualified ESL instructors. Fitzgerald (1995) noted that informal conversations with colleagues and a review of ESL job sites show that a Master's in Linguistics is the preferred degree for adult education ESL programs, but related bachelor's degrees are also accepted. Often, the staff of these programs report that it is particularly difficult to find and keep good

instructors because in formal academic programs faculty are more likely to be paid more and attain higher status and more stable employment than in adult education programs (Fitzgerald, 1995). This conclusion was supported by Pino (2008), who emphasized that it is particularly difficult for company-based ESL programs to find qualified teachers who are skilled in the teaching of English and who possess the requisite industry knowledge.

Blumenthal (2002) argued that although there is a general consensus in the literature about the conditions just described, a long-lasting solution that acknowledges funding constraints has not been reached. Still, Blumenthal (2002) contended there is a need to elevate ESL to the status that is granted to other disciplines at the community college with the appropriate funding base and commitment to full-time, tenure-track faculty. Perhaps one way to reinforce the advocacy for these changes is to conduct an increasing number of more formal research studies on how part-time to full-time teacher ratios affect student success in ESL.

In addition, the format of instructional delivery is an area to be considered in regard to ELLs (Liu, 2007). In most community colleges and universities, students have the option to register for courses either online or in traditional on campus courses. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2010), online learning is an area that is rapidly growing in higher education due to the fact that many students who pursue degrees seek convenience and flexibility in the delivery of instruction. The provision of instruction with the use of different instructional delivery methods allows the learner to absorb content in a way that fits the individual learner. According to Wood (2011), today, students have grown up immersed in digital technology. However, many higher education professors still do not speak the same digital language as their students. The issue may be that the pedagogical and epistemological beliefs of faculty, who are *digital immigrants*, affect the teaching methods used in the current higher education classroom.

The United States Department of Education reported that by 2006, 3.5 million students participated in on-line learning at institutions of higher education in the U.S. According to Allen and Seamen (2010), almost 50% of all students in higher education took all courses online.

The team of Ambient Insight Research (2009) reported that 44% of postsecondary students in the United States took some or all of their courses online, and they projected that this figure would rise to 81% by 2014. Participation in online learning allows students the flexibility and convenience of doing the course work from the comfort of their homes or dormitory rooms and allows them the ability to refer back to the posted lecture notes or PowerPoints for reference at any time during the semester. However, the online learning experience exists in an environment where the teacher is physically separated from the students; therefore, Ignash (2000) emphasized that the definition, measurement, and documentation of the success of ESL students is a complex and difficult task that has rarely been attempted outside of individual institutions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate international undergraduate ELLs' perceptions of and experiences with academic and language acquisition through online learning at this four year New York state college. The results from this study could help the participating students to better understand their learning experiences; in addition, they could help the online instructor to better understand the recommended pedagogical practices, which are associated with online instruction.

Significance of the Study

The results and conclusions from this study may assist the administrators and faculty of the International Liberal Arts program at this four year college to attain a better understanding of

the second language development process and the academic performance of the students in the program. Also, it may allow the experts in the field to make recommendations as to what stage of second language acquisition an undergraduate student is proficient enough to take an online course, and what strategies or techniques are necessary to ensure both second language development and academic success. Potentially, the findings will help the ELLs who participate in this study to better understand their individual processes of learning academic material and the English language through an online course.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the undergraduate international English Language Learners' perceptions of and experiences with academic and language acquisition through online learning, the following questions guided this study:

1. How do select English language learners describe their perceptions of and experiences with academic and language acquisition through online undergraduate course at this four year New York state private college?
2. How, if at all, do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their language acquisition?
3. How do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their general academic skills?

Definitions

Distance education or distance learning: A field of education, which is focused on teaching methods and technology in order to deliver teaching, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom. It has been described as "a process to create and provide access to learning when the source of

information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both" (Honeyman & Miller, 1993, p. 67).

ELL **(**English Language Learner): "an active learner of the English language" who may benefit from various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly in the U.S. to describe K-12 students (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 2).

ESL (English as a Second Language): This term increasingly refers to a "program of instruction designed to support the ELL; it is still used to refer to multilingual students in higher education" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 2).

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language): This instrument is used to evaluate the ability of an individual to use and understand English in an academic setting. It was developed to ensure sufficient English language proficiency for non-native speakers who wish to study at American universities. "It has become an admission requirement for non-native English speakers at many English-speaking colleges and universities; additionally, institutions such as government agencies, licensing bodies, businesses, or scholarship programs may require this test" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 2).

Research Plan

I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach in an attempt to elicit common experiences among research participants' perceptions of English language development and academic skills through online learning. Creswell (2012) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p. 59). For this approach, the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. Qualitative research has been an ideal tool in multicultural research. Morrow,

Rakhsha, and Castaneda (2001) provided an array of reasons for the use of a qualitative research design to study multicultural issues:

- It includes context as an essential component of the research.
- It addresses the researcher's process of self-awareness and self-reflection.
- It is uniquely able to capture the meanings made by participants of their experiences.
- Scholars in the field of multicultural counseling and psychology have called for expanded methodological possibilities to address questions that cannot be answered with the use of traditional methods.
- Its methods provide the opportunity for voices that were previously silenced to be heard and lives that were marginalized to be brought to the center (pp. 582-583).

Thus, the rationale for the use of a qualitative research method was to obtain information about the shared phenomenon of online learning, which may have an impact on the international ELL's development of language and academic skills at the undergraduate college level. Creswell (2012) defined a phenomenological study as something that "describes common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 76). The collection and analysis of the data on the various individual experiences will assist in the development of insight on this phenomenon through the themes that emerge and the interpretation of those themes in relation to the institution that serves this group.

This study was conducted with 10 selected international undergraduate students who scored a minimum of 71 on the TOEFL exam. Participants were selected for this study with the use of purposeful sampling methods. Purposeful sampling is a procedure which "focuses on selecting information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). According to Berg (2004), "This procedure helped to identify information-rich

participants who have had extensive experience as ELLs. Purposeful sampling is used in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons, who display certain attributes, are included in the study" (p. 36**)**. The ELLs students needed to fit the following criteria in order to be considered for this study:

- International undergraduate students,
- Have more than one year of experience as an ELL,
- Range in ages,
- A minimum of 71 on their TOEFL exam, and
- Must be enrolled in an online course at the time of the study.

The research data was collected via multiple methods. First, a screening questionnaire was used to purposefully select the participants in this study (see Appendix A). Second, participants were individually interviewed for a more personal and in depth exploration of their experiences of second language acquisition and academic development through online learning. Third, the participants were asked to participate in a focus group, which met at a later time. I transcribed the audio-taped interviews, analyzed the transcriptions, and categorized them into related themes.

Delimitation

I considered the previous academic or technology experiences that the candidates may have had that could possibly affect the research study. Therefore, a purposeful selection of the participants ensured that the participants' prior competency varied. Also, I took consideration of the participants' dispositions in this study by the use of carefully posed questions during the interview, which were both closed and opened ended.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

According to Allen and Seaman (2008), with all the advances in technology, online learning is rapidly substituting the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. Appana (2008) posed that online learning is attractive to students because of its convenience. Online courses are advantageous because they can be accessed from home and provide scheduling freedom. Appana (2008) emphasized that some people feel online courses lacks learning advantages and hinders the learning process of its users. Further, Appana (2008) reported that "depending on a student's learning style; online learning can pose certain limitations" (p. 8). The purpose of this study was to explore the participants' perception of their online learning experiences.

According to Maurino (2006), online learning lacks the benefit of natural inquiry. Maurino (2006) emphasized that in a traditional classroom, when students have questions they can raise their hands and ask, whereas in an online course this would not be possible. In an online course, students would have to email the professor the question and wait for a response. Maurino (2006) stressed that "the questions may become forgotten or remain unanswered, possibly negatively affecting a student's overall grade" (p. 258).

In an online learning environment, communication is delivered to the learner through electronic channels, such as e-mails and discussion boards. Thus, according to Taylor and White (1985), the attention of the teacher moves from instructional delivery, which is of prime concern in the classroom, to instructional design. This has consequences for the nature of the input that the learner receives. According to Al-Shehri and Gitsaki (2010), Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers have utilized the Cognitive Load Theory to account for differences in learner

performance with regard to different learning activity. Some instructional designs were shown to have an impact on cognitive load and working memory. Al-Shehri and Gitsaki (2010) emphasized that this impact was found to be accentuated in a multimedia environment where there is a variety of interacting elements and tools, which can lead to cognitive overload and consequently reduced learning outcomes.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) stressed in their study that through asking and answering questions in traditional classroom settings, students become motivated to engage in a discussion and participate in study groups. They emphasized that students in online classrooms do not have the benefit of interaction with each other, which can limit their overall learning experiences. Furthermore, Rosenfeld (2007) noted that there are fewer distractions in a traditional classroom setting; students are encouraged to be active participants. Zhang and Kenny (2001) maintained that in an online classroom, students are more prone to be easily distracted because they are at home. They may be distracted by personal phone calls, chores, TV or even roommates (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Wenden (1991) suggested that in an online course there is no assurance that a student is paying full attention to the lesson at hand.

Tucker (2000) maintained that traditional classroom learning provides additional resources unavailable to the online learner. In a traditional setting, the students have access to libraries, laboratories, and other resources. Tucker (2000) underscored that students have more in person access to their professors in a traditional classroom than online. On the other hand, Pica (1983), argued that the fact that the teacher and learner are separated does not necessarily mean that the learner cannot act on the input. Pica (1983), suggested that, despite limited input, much of second language acquisition (SLA) depends upon learner variables and not on environment or contextual variables.

While the question of optimal linguistic environment for adult ELLs has been considered for many years, Pica (1983) suggested that adults can increase their second language proficiency in either a formal (i.e., classroom) or informal environment (i.e., online). On the other hand, Van Patten (2007) stressed that the optimal linguistic environment is that which provides face-to-face instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Technology evolution is changing the way courses are developed and delivered, especially in higher education (Hicks, Reid, & George, 2001). According to Liu (2007), technology has advanced and globalized learning through the development of online delivery vehicles. This technological advancement has caused staff at institutions of higher education to quickly embrace the demand and competition by developing and providing instruction through more online courses. Researchers argued that growth in online programs is predicted to continue and even accelerate (Edelson & Pittman, 2001; Liu, 2007; Salmon, 2000). Cifuentes and Shih (2001) suggested that higher education faculty and students obtaining the necessary hardware and software to "use e-learning to minimize the costs of educational learning" (as cited in Partow & Slusky, 2001, p. 70).

Over the past seven years, the staffs of numerous institutions of higher education have reported that online enrollment has increased notably faster than overall higher education enrollments (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Nearly 30%, or over 5.6 million students who enrolled in institutions of higher education were reported by Allen and Seaman (2010) to be enrolled in at least one online course in the fall 2009 term. In addition, 63% of all reporting institutions declared that “online learning was a critical part of their institution’s long term strategy” (p. 2). The largest increase in the incorporation of online learning, as a part of the long term strategy of

institutions, was most evident among institutions where associate's degrees were awarded in the southern United States. It was reported by Allen and Seaman (2010) that in 2005, 78% of the reporting institutions agreed it was a part of their long term strategy. The continued growth in online enrollment has resulted in institutions of higher education feeling the pressure to compete for the online student population through growth of existing course offerings.

Community colleges are among the forerunners of online course offerings; more than three-quarters of community colleges now offer the same course in face-to-face and online learning modules (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). In fact, 97% of reporting public two year institutions offered online, hybrid/blended online, or other distance education courses, and of those institutions, 66% reported offering undergraduate hybrid/blended online courses. The greatest factors affecting the decisions among public two year institutions regarding online course offerings included (a) seeking to increase student enrollment, (b) making more courses available, (c) meeting student demands for flexible schedules, and (d) providing access to college to those whom otherwise would not have access.

Additionally, Hicks, Reid, and George (2001) stressed that more and more faculty of colleges, universities, and other educational institutions are adopting online learning as a way to increase access to learning. Eberle and Childress (2007) noted that more institutions are embracing online learning as a way to reach larger numbers of worldwide and nontraditional students. Liu (2007) demonstrated that online classrooms are becoming more diverse and "continually changing with the dynamic student body from all over the world" (p. 240).

Tan et al. (2010) argued that the development of technology has increased the learning opportunities for students in higher education. Tan et al. (2010) highlighted that with the number of courses increasing to meet students' needs and demands, international English language

learners are often encouraged or advised to take online courses to complete their programs of study at U.S. colleges and universities. Similarly, Lee (2007) used cluster analysis to identify heterogeneous subgroups among college students in terms of their perceptions of the online learning community. Among Korean college students, three subgroups were found in terms of patterns of their online learning community perceptions: (a) one subgroup that emphasized the meaning of community, (b) the other subgroup that enjoyed the new communication tool, and (c) the third subgroup that had a poor perception of online learning communities. Lee also identified three subgroups among U.S. students followed by the degrees of perception of and satisfactions with online learning communities. The members in each subgroup of U.S. students had different learning needs in regard to online learning communities. Comey (2009) reported that blended classes provide an atmosphere that is as good as or better than both face-to-face and online classes in producing higher levels of student participation and a stronger sense of being connected to the instructor. He found that in both face-to-face and blended courses, students perceived that their instructors were more supportive and student-centered and had more positive feelings about the cooperative nature of the classroom environment than did online students. Further, classes taught online foster a stronger perception that the course is intellectually challenging and that the evaluation criteria and course content have been clearly articulated than either face-to-face or blended classes.

Lastly, Connor (2009) compared the student learning outcomes of traditional and online delivery styles in accounting courses at the university level, and found no difference in student perception of overall learning outcomes. However, traditional students were more confident of accounting concepts than online students. Factorial ANOVA of the data demonstrated interactions between enrollment status and delivery systems and differences in perception of

overall learning outcome between those aged 18-25 and 36-45, as well as a significant difference with age group 26-35 between delivery systems.

Tan et al. (2010) contended that even though there is a demand for diversity and diversity sensitivity in the classroom, there is little research regarding students' perceptions of online learning, particularly with respect to ESL students. Wang **(**2007) maintained that such research could inform the institutions of cultural awareness and culturally responsive education. This kind of research may foster more effective instructional practices.

Self-Efficacy Theory

According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, self-referent thought mediates between knowledge and action, and through self-reflection, individuals evaluate their own experiences and thought processes. Knowledge, skill, and prior attainments are often poor predictors of subsequent attainments because the beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and about the outcome of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they will behave. Bandura (1986) reported that how individuals interpret the results of their performance attainments informs and alters their environments and their self-beliefs, which in turn informs and alters their subsequent performances. The foundation of Bandura's (1986) model of conception of reciprocal determinism is based on the (a) individual factors in the form of cognition, affect, and biological events; (b) behavior; and (c) environmental influences (see Figure 1). Bandura (1986) posited that because personal agency is socially rooted and operates within sociocultural influences, individuals are perceived as both products and producers of their own environments.

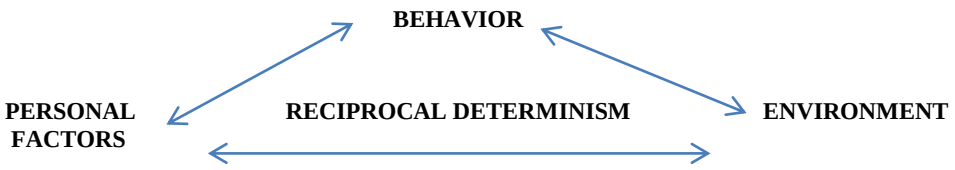

Figure 1. Bandura's (1986) Model of Conception of Triadic Reciprocality.

Bandura (1986) highlighted self-reflection as the most exceptional human ability. Through this form of self-reflective thought; humans can analyze and change their own thinking and behavior. Bandura (1986) explained that these self-analyses includes perceptions of self-efficacy, or the beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute what is necessary to handle any given situation. These beliefs of individual abilities affect behavior in several ways. For example, Bandura (1986) believed that this impacts the individual's choices and actions because people engage in tasks in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not. Furthermore, Zimmerman (2000) noted that self-efficacy has emerged as a highly effective predictor of students' motivation and learning. As a performance-based measure of perceived capability, self-efficacy differs conceptually and psychometrically from related motivational constructs, such as outcome expectations, self-concept, or locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Self-efficacy beliefs have been found to be sensitive to subtle changes in students' performance contexts, to interact with self-regulated learning processes, and to mediate students' academic achievements.

Wigfield and Karpathian (1991) defined academic *self-concept* as individuals' knowledge and perceptions about themselves in academic achievement situations. Schunk (1991) added that academic *self-efficacy* refers to individuals' convictions that they can successfully perform given academic tasks at designated levels. When students have a positive perception about themselves in terms of academic achievement, they are more likely to be able to transfer this self-efficacy

perception to the acquisition of second language learning through online courses (see Figure 2).

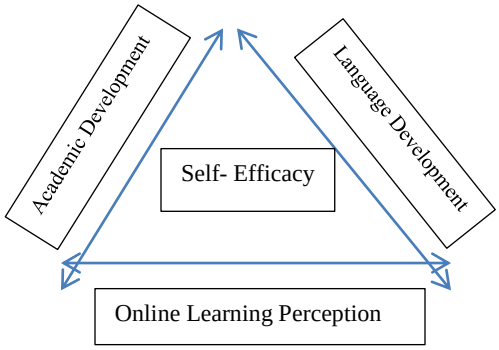

Figure 2. Model of Relationship between Academic, Language Development, and Online Learning Perception.

Adult Learning Theory

To successfully instruct adult learners in a distance learning environment, educators must become familiar with the concepts of andragogy, the study of the assumptions and processes used to facilitate adult learning (Wlodkowski, 1999). Merriam and Brockett (1997) defined adult education as "activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" (p. 8). In Knowles' (1980) classic learner-focused theory of andragogy, he suggested that much of adults' intentional learning activities are motivated by the desire to move from their current levels of proficiency to new, higher levels. Knowles developed his adult learning theory of andragogy to address the inappropriateness of teaching adults by use of the developmental processes of pedagogy, the study of childhood learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1989). Knowles et al (1989) felt that the customary characteristics of childhood learning fail to take into account the adult learner's age, life-long experiences, physical stature, and practical approach to learning. Adults are more self-directed, having as their specific goals the immediate application of what they have learned.

The adult student generally enters the learning environment, whether traditional or distant, with a high degree of motivation (Ehrman, 1990). Adult learners possess different motives that encourage them to participate in education, as well as many factors that limit their active participation. According to Wlodkowski (1999), educators should realize that although adults do respond to outside motivators such as career advancement, higher salaries, and promotion, internal motivators such as self-esteem, quality of life, pride, and quality of work are also important factors that drive adults to improve their education. Wlodkowski (1999) identified the following motivational assumptions as critical for helping adults learn:

- Adults are always motivated to do something, whether they are motivated to learn or not to learn;
- Adults are responsible for their own motivation; however, the educator's role in a web-based learning environment is to influence and affect learners in positive ways;
- All instruction/teaching should be delivered in a motivating manner;
- There is no one best instructional method; and
- Every instructional plan should include a positive motivational plan.

Attitudes are learned, resulting in well-defined values that are either favorable or unfavorable (Wlodkowski, 1999). Wlodkoski explained that the independence that adults have experienced in their lives will cause them to create barriers to protect themselves against instructors or web-based learning environments they perceive as imposing, degrading, or threatening to their concept of adulthood. Further Knowles (1989) noted that the adult learners will be receptive to new concepts and principles that they recognize as critical to their personal and professional lives. Therefore, creating positive attitudes toward the subject and learning situations is critical

for the adult learner's success in an online learning environment (Wlodkowksi, 1999).

Shank and Sitze (2004) maintained that online learning environments have the potential to support a learner-centered paradigm by which individuals assume a more active role in the learning process. For instance, in online learning environments, learners often initiate communication with their instructors through the regular use of electronic mail and other computer-mediated communication tools when assignment clarification is needed or when content questions are raised about a course topic. In addition, learners can assume control of their learning experiences by initiating discussion groups with peers during critical periods in an online course. Increased responsibility and accountability for learning is required of online learners. They become active seekers and producers of information, anytime and from any location, by sharing information with or retrieving information from various resources such as instructors, other students, electronic libraries and databases, and other internal and external information resources.

Learning Styles Theory

Kolb's (1993) research findings suggested that individuals possess preferences for learning that favor some learning abilities over others. Kolb (1993) reported that there are four basic learning modes, which describe the learning preferences of everyone: (a) solid experience, (b) reflection, (c) précis conceptualization, and (d) experimentation. Furthermore, he maintained that the majority of people utilize only two of the four basic learning modes. Kolb (1984) described the four learning modes as follows:

- Concrete experience is real life experiences that are external to the learner,
- Reflective observation is an individual's internal reflection of the relevance of an actual event and how it is important/applies to his or her life,

- Abstract conceptualization is the process whereby an individual internalizes new ideas in the process of creating new theories, and
- Active experimentation is external to an individual as he/she puts the theories and ideas into practice.

Kolb (1984) emphasized that in various learning situations, students use an eclectic learning process. He stressed that a single mode does not identify an individual's learning style and argued that it is a combination of processes, which reflect four learning styles. Kolb (1984) described the association between the learning modes and the learning styles in the following way:

- The Convergent learner moves in cycles in which theory is moved into practice and back again,
- the Divergent learner is focused on action and reflection wherein the individual ponders the relevance of real life experiences,
- the Assimilative learner utilizes the development of theories and logic to convert observations into knowledge construct, and
- the Accommodation learner relies on practicality wherein the individual is focused on movement into action.

Felder and Silverman (1988), Kolb (1993), Saba (1999), and Shank and Sitze (2004) support accommodating student learning styles in online learning environments in order to increase the performance and satisfaction levels of students enrolled in online courses. Saba (1999) maintained that distance learning requires students to be independent learners. Shank and Sitze (2004) argued that online education should be geared toward student-learning rather than the direct instruction by the teacher. Felder and Silverman (1998) demonstrated that students have

differing strengths and preferences in the ways they process and learn new concepts. For example, Prensky (1998) suggested that learning styles change from generation to generation; for students who grew up during the information age, they require: (a) faster speed, (b) a more visual approach, and (c) greater active engagement. When there is a mismatch between the instructors's teaching style and the learning style of the student, the student will become inattentive, discouraged, and discontent with the course (Felder & Silverman, 1998). As a result, Shank and Sitze (2004) reported that it is critical for distance learning instructors to understand the potential learning style differences among their students. Shank and Sitze (2004) reported that there are no fewer than seven perceptual learning styles. According to Shea-Shultz and Fogarty (2002, perceptual learning styles are characterized as the methods that individuals use to extract information from their environments.

The seven perceptual learning styles are print, aural, interactive, visual, haptic, kinesthetic, and olfactory. Shea-Shultz and Fogarty (2002) characterized the seven perceptual learning styles as follows:

- The print learning style refers to seeing printed or written characters;
- The aural learning style refers to hearing and listening to sound;
- The interactive learning styles refer to verbal communications;
- The visual learning style refers to the ability to see visual images, such as pictures and graphics;
- The haptic learning style refers to the sense of touch;
- The kinesthetic learning style refers to motor skills and coordinated body movements; and
- The olfactory learning style refers to an individual's sense of smell and

taste.

Felder and Silverman (1988) developed a learning model that was comprised of the most prevalent learning style differences among students in an effort to provide empirical evidence that supports the need for instruction that addresses the learning preferences of students. The Felder-Silverman learning style model consists of the following distinct learning style dimensions: (a) Processing (i.e., Active-Reflective); (b) Perception (i.e., Sensing-Intuitive); (c) Input (i.e., Visual-Verbal); and (d) Understanding (i.e., Sequential-Global). Felder and Silverman (1988) reported that there are parallels between their four dimensions and Kolb's (1984) Active, Reflective, Concrete, and Abstract learning modes, as well as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Schroeder, 1993) categories of Extravert/Introvert and the Sensing-Intuitive. The purpose of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Schroeder, 1993) is to collect data relative to individual personality differences. The MBTI is designed to indicate a person's personality preference on each of four dichotomous dimensions: (a) Extroversion-Introversion, (b) Sensing-Intuition, (c) Thinking-Feeling, and (d) Judging-Perceptive. These dimensions are described as

- the Extroversion-Introversion dimension indicates whether an individual prefers to focus attention on his/her external environment or toward internal thoughts and ideas. Extroverts prefer to participate in action oriented activities that allow them to interact with their peers. Introverts prefer to focus their energy internally and tend to be reflective thinkers;
- the Sensing-Intuition dimension indicates whether an individual prefers to perceive the world through a reality lens or through impressions and imagination. Individuals, who prefer the Sensing mode, rely on their sensory inputs. These individuals are

interested in the facts and solve problems with the use of proven step-by-step instructions and solutions. Intuitive people seek out patterns and relationships among the facts they have gathered. These individuals trust their instincts and try to solve problems through creativity and imagination. Intuitive people tend to look at the big picture without worrying about the individual details;

- the Thinking-Feeling dimension indicates whether an individual prefers to make decisions through logical analysis or through personal values. Individuals, who prefer the thinking mode, make decisions based on concrete analysis, logic, and principle. Feelers value harmony as they focus on human values and empathy. These are individuals, who prefer the feeling mode and focus on human values and needs as they make decisions or arrive at judgments; and
- the Judging-Perceptive dimension indicates whether an individual views the world as a structured environment or as a spontaneous environment. Individuals, who use the judging mode, are decisive, self-starters, and self-directed. These individuals focus on completing the task, knowing the essentials, and they take action quickly. Perceptive individuals are best characterized as curious, adaptable, and spontaneous. They start many tasks, want to know everything about each task, and often find it difficult to complete a task.

Felder and Silverman (1988) described the dimensions of their learning style model as

- the Processing dimension is focused on the individual's tendency to process and ability to conceptualize new information and concepts. Active learners tend to retain and understand information through participation in activities. Reflective learners prefer to think and internalize information before they take action. Active learners

prefer to work in group activities whereas reflective learners desire to work independently of others;

- the Perception dimension is focused on the individual's preference for contextualization of new information and concepts via concrete or abstract stimuli. Sensing learners prefer to learn the facts and practical solutions. These individuals are good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on work. Intuitive learners prefer discovering the possibilities and relationships. These individuals are innovative and prefer to work with abstract concepts such as mathematical formulas;
- the Input dimension is focused on the individual's preference for internalization of new information or concepts through visual or verbal sensory inputs. Visual learners prefer to learn from visual images such as: (a) pictures, (b) diagrams, (c) flow charts, (d) videos, and (f) demonstrations. Verbal learners prefer to learn from audible cues such as: (a) lectures or (b) reading material, which is written in textbooks or articles; and
- the Understanding dimension is focused on the individual's preference for thinking process. Sequential learners tend to gain understanding when they think in logical and linear steps. These learners tend to follow sequential paths to find solutions. Global learners prefer to think holistically and take large jumps without paying attention to the details. These learners tend to absorb material randomly and do not see the individual connections before they grasp the big picture.

Shank and Sitze (2004) posited that the most effective web-based courses are designed with several options that allow students to learn with the use of their preferred perceptual learning style. For example, in a web-based course, a student who prefers the print learning style

could choose to read a printed text file that contains the contents of a lesson, whereas a student who prefers a combination of the aural and visual learning styles would use interactive media that contain visual and audible communications. When Shea- Shultz and Fogarty (2002) studied the effectiveness of audio and video media in a corporate training environment, they found that the rate for retention increased from 20% to 75% when computer-mediated instruction was introduced into the course. Shea-Shultz and Fogarty (2002) suggested that if the instructor assessed learning styles of the students at the outset of a distance learning course, this would enable the instructor to gauge how the students need the content to be delivered.

In order to accommodate the different learning styles of students, adult educators must recognize their own instruction styles. Ebeling (2000) argued that it is evident that instructors teach in the learning styles they dominate. As a result, many learning activities are not employed because instructors concentrate only on one stage of the learning cycle. Taylor (1998) suggested that instructors in an online learning environment should be flexible in their teaching styles in order to accommodate the various learning styles of students. For example, students who are Sensing learners and Intuitive learners and operate within Felder and Silverman's (1988) Perception dimension would benefit from the instructor's use of different media and activities to present the content of an online course. As a result, the instructor should provide abstract information to Intuitive learners, who prefer to apply theory to practice, and provide concrete information to Sensing learners, who prefer to construct meaning from observations into real life experiences. Verduin and Clark's (1991) research of learning styles within the distance education setting found that when the teaching styles and the learner styles match, the students report being more satisfied with the course. Additional researchers (Borg & Shapiro, 1996; Filbeck & Smith, 1996; Hayes & Allinson, 1996) have shown that grade point averages, student

satisfaction, and student success increase whenever there is a match between instructors' teaching styles and the students' learning styles. Therefore, it is essential that in an online course the instructor makes every effort to understand a student's learning style and deliver instruction as best possible in that learning mode.

Second Language Acquisition Theory

Krashen (1988) theorized that English language learners come into the learning environment with a set of conditions that affects the process of their second language acquisition. The conditions to be considered are the learner's age, mindset, personality type, and ability to process input of the English language. His theory implies that the input provided by the teacher must be comprehensible, and if it is not provided with context clues and gestures, the student will have difficulty with comprehension.

Considering the factors that enhance second language learning, it is intuitive that in order for the English language learner to acquire language, the environment must be established on optimal learning conditions. Krashen (1988) maintained that these learning conditions should include direct comprehensible input and the opportunity for social interaction as a way to rehearse the second language being acquired.

Nagle and Anders (1986) explored the idea that comprehension rather than interaction is the operative variable in language acquisition. They asserted that if comprehension is ignored, a major aspect of learning is left unexplored. Therefore, one established theoretical claim is that comprehension plays a key role in second language acquisition. Faerch and Kasper (1987) reported that one factor in comprehension is the role of metalinguistic awareness and that the learners are more apt to acquire language if they recognize a gap in their knowledge and take responsibility to fill it.

From a social constructivist point of view, learning is a process of constructing meaning about, or making sense of experiences (Candy, 1991). According to Vygotsky (1978), interpretation of the world depends on the social environment in which events are experienced. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that students can be transformed into independent thinkers through social interaction mediated by language and with assistance of a mentor. Similarly, Oxford (1996) argued that the affective side of the learner is probably one of the biggest influences on the success or failure in learning a language. Oxford (1996) maintained that based on this concept, the optimal language learning environment for second language acquisition is in a face-to-face classroom where the student can develop language through social interaction with teacher and peers.

Related Literature

Academic Language

Coleman and Goldenburg (2010) indicated that one of the challenges English language learners faced was learning content while still having to acquire the English language. Coleman and Goldenburg (2010) maintained that due to this, teachers sometimes do not know how much spoken English the ELL student is processing or understanding. Hence, the academic goal should be to make academic content as comprehensible in order for students to develop content knowledge and learn the English language that accompanies it. Tan, et al. (2010) reported that in this age of technological advancement, online learning is increasingly replacing the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. According to Tan et al. (2010), as the result of the increase in online learning opportunities, many institutions are advising English language learners to take online courses.

Academic language is an essential component for content learning. According to Cummins (1984) academic language is what ELLs lack the most. Cummins (1984) argued that academic language is different from everyday communication skills. This is what Cummins (1984) referred to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). BICS are the communication skills used for social interaction. On the other hand, according to Cummins (1984) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is formal language related to literacy and academic success. Cummings (1984) maintained that it takes two years to develop BICS and five to seven years for an ELL to develop CALP. He noted the differences between the two forms of language acquisition and emphasized their importance in regard to how English language is instructed. Fillmore and Snow (2000) posed that academic language is the language ability necessary for students to learn content taught in English.

Cummins (1984) reported that even though this notion of social and academic language may have its complexities, it is essential to understand this as a process for ELLs to acquire the English language. Cummins' (1984) BICS and CALP characterized a valuable difference between a form of language that is informal and less complex, and language which is more formal, and complex to learn.

Fillmore and Snow (2000) indicated that fluency in academic language is extremely vital in the process of developing content skill. Fillmore and Snow (2000) maintained that knowledge of academic disciplines such as math, science, and history is detrimental for academic achievement. Therefore, language facilitates the learning of academic content. Cummins (1984), and Fillmore and Snow (2000) maintained that ELLs tend to develop social language in English, which facilitates day to day conversation, but often these students are weak in academic content knowledge. Therefore, it is highly recommended that teachers focus on the academic

language needed for academic success.

The lack of current empirical research, which identifies effective techniques and approaches, is a problem. Dutro and Moran (2003), Lyster (2007), Schleppegrell (2001), and Zwiers (2008) recommend educators learn a variation of teaching strategies to implement in their classrooms when instructing ELLs. These techniques include things like understanding and validating the student's native language skills and using them as a scaffold; and implementing class discussions before, during, and after reading to reinforce comprehension (Dutro & Moran, (2003); Lyster, (2007); Schleppegrell, (2001); and Zwiers, 2008).

Swain (1985) emphasized the importance of teaching both receptive and expressive language. The use of sheltered instruction strategies makes academic content comprehensible. Hence, students who effectively develop receptive language will have better understanding of the lesson. However, Swain (1985) maintained that students need to be taught expressive language, that is, "comprehensible output" (p. 236), in order for them to participate in class discussions and be able to convey understanding of the content. Chamot (2005) reiterated that content instruction was a great opportunity to teach second language skills. Hence, he recommends the teaching of content while supporting the development of language skills within the instructional time. Chamot (2005) posed that the learning of academic content and language skills are not exclusive of each other. Therefore, ELLs in the general classroom can be offered additional opportunities to develop English language skills (Chamot, 2005).

Also, Chamot (2005) emphasized the importance of a connection between conversational and academic language; they are not completely different from each other.

Chamot (2005) maintained that tapping into the student's personal experiences as an instructional strategy can be very effective. He emphasized that when a student is familiar with some aspect of the instruction from a social angle, he or she will be able to transfer those experiences which facilitates comprehension and language association with the new learning experience. Chamot (2005) argued that students are able to transfer prior knowledge to the new learning. For example, Chamot (2005) explained that if a student has the ability to compare and contrast things previously, he or she will be able to transfer this concept into another task which would require him or her to compare and contrast two identities. In order to reinforce the student in making these language connections, Chamot (2005) suggested that teachers bring this skill to a conscious level. Although students may have mastered the skill of comparing and contrasting, they still need the support in understanding how they can apply these previously learned skills when learning new content in school.

Furthermore, Schleppegrell (2001) argued that academic language instruction should consist of syntax and textual comprehension. Schleppegrell (2001) separated academic language from social language. He reiterated how academic language is more complex than simply learning content-based language. Schleppegrell (2001) argued that although students may demonstrate understanding of vocabulary, they may still not be able to fully understand the full context of a passage which contains those same words. According to Dutro and Moran (2003), academic language and curricular content are closely linked. The authors maintained that it is not enough for a student to have receptive understanding. Dutro and Moran (2003) emphasized the importance for students to also be able to express themselves orally and in writing using academic language.

Language Learning

Research on language learning tactics has been a repeated theme in applied linguistics books and journals for over 30 years (Chamot & O'Malley 1990; Cohen, 1996; Fröhlich, Naiman, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin & Wenden 1987), which makes clear the complex nature of strategies used among language learners. More recently, a number of publications in the areas of applied linguistics, computer-assisted language learning, and language assessment (Cohen & Upton, 2006; Vandergrift, 2003; Vinther, 2005) have focused on the continued efforts to gain a more central understanding of the development and use of language learning strategies as these factors inform theory and pedagogy, which is essential in order to help students gain the tools they need to become more self-directed learners. Rost (2002) argued that while each of the four linguistic skills (e.g., listening, reading, writing, and speaking) is important for second language acquisition (SLA), listening is viewed as the "primary means of L2 acquisition" (Rost, 2002, p. 103). In addition, listening is a notably important skill for international students in a university setting, where most students receive input from their professors in a lecture format, often in large-enrollment courses.

Therefore, these learners are often referred to as *over-hearers*: those who hear without the speaker's intention or knowledge (Buck, 2001; Rost, 2002) due to their scarcity of opportunity, and maybe lack of ability or desire to ask questions and process meaning during the lecture, which further emphasizes the need for effective use of listening strategies. Rost (2002) maintained that because students receive so much important language input aurally, they have to work to develop aural proficiency skills and strategies that can help them manage the listening comprehension process in real time. Hauck (2005) emphasized that development of listening strategies in particular has

been shown to lead to increased strategy use, more effective management of the listening process**,** and improved learner autonomy (Hauck, 2005; Rubin & Thompson, 1996).

According to Hauck (2005) and Rubin and Thompson (1996), listening is an active and complicated process in which listeners must identify sounds and lexical items and make meaning of them through their use of grammatical structures, verbal and nonverbal cues, and cultural context. Researchers (Hauck, 2005; Rubin & Thompson, 1996) refer to listening strategies as two types of means that learners use to make meaning of aural input: (a) bottom-up, where listeners use their linguistic knowledge of sounds and word forms and build up to more difficult lexical items and grammatical relationships to comprehend the input; and (b) top-down, where prior experience, real-world knowledge or experience with the listening context help the listeners to interpret an utterance (Vandergrift, 2002). Vandergrift (2002) maintained that these processes are not to be used exclusive of each other, but rather alternate and combine to help the listener make meaning. Although this is naturally true of all learners, research (Peterson, 2001) has shown that successful and less successful listeners process input quite differently from one another. Peterson (2001) emphasized that less successful listeners tend to rely largely on either top-down or bottom-up processing and spend great amounts of conscious attention on perceptual activity (e.g., identifying word boundaries, recognizing meaningful sound units) so little is left over for higher-level operations (e.g., relating new information to that stored in long term memory). In contrast, according to Rubin and Thompson (1996) higher-proficiency listeners use both top-down and bottom-up processes to make meaning of aural input.

Peterson (2001) argued that processing aural input for comprehension requires learners to relate the incoming information in real time to what they already know. The immediacy with which listeners need to meet communication goals has emphasized the need for both designing

listening materials in a way that allows learners to practice listening at their own pace and level, and explicit listening training. Peterson (2001) suggested that one way in which teachers can help their students practice listening is to design materials that allow for listening texts to be repeated.

Hatch (1983) advised that repetition and restatement of input benefits learners by allowing them more time to process information in the input as well as the associations between syntactic forms. Anderson (1985) perceived that when the learner's combination of syntactic and semantic processing are "in conflict. . . comprehension is hurt" (p. 347). Van Patten (2007) agreed in his discussion of the input theory that processing input for both meaning and form is essential to comprehension, but emphasized that "learners process [meaning] in the input before anything else" (p. 117). According to Van Patten (2007), inevitably, low-level listeners who spend most of their time processing meaning may not have the opportunity to process forms when listening to a text for the first time due to limitations of both time and working memory capacity.

Vandergrift (1999) emphasized that even though repetition can give lower-proficiency listeners an opportunity to process input for both meaning and form individually and without the constraint of time, the provision of listening strategy training can aid learners in becoming more aware of the various listening processes used by successful listeners and decide when to use them. Vandergrift (1999) maintained that this training can then empower learners to guide and evaluate their own comprehension, as well as to help them work with more difficult material.

Cohen (1996) stressed that listening strategy training is part of the broader area of language learning strategies which include both learning and use strategies. Cohen

(1996) stated that together these strategies "constitute the steps or actions selected by learners to either improve the learning of an L2, the use of it, or both" (p. 5).

Formerly, the goal of determining which strategies learners used was to compare strategies of more and less effective language learners (Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975). These researchers maintained that foundational research led to a number of strategy taxonomies that named, classified (e.g., cognitive, metacognitive, social, affective), and exemplified how various strategies were used.

Recently, research on language learning strategies has shown that what makes a successful L2 learner and user is more dependent upon the learner's choice of strategies for a given assignment or situation (Chamot 2005; Cohen, 2011; Khaldieh, 2000; Vandergrift, 2003) rather than the actual strategy. Some studies on the topic of listening research support this statement. For example, O'Malley, Chamot, and Küpper (1989) used verbal protocol methods to compare the listening strategies of effective and ineffective high school ESL students, as well as to see if the strategies students used paralleled Anderson's (1985) three theoretical phases of listening comprehension. They discovered that effective and ineffective listeners differed as to the strategies they chose to use during the various phases of listening comprehension. Vandergrift (2003) supported this theory by emphasizing that more effective listeners made greater use of both bottom-up and top-down processes, while less effective learners became fixated on individual word meanings. Vandergrift (2003) analyzed the listening comprehension strategies of seventh-grade Canadian French students, who ranged from more to less skilled. It was discovered that the more skilled listeners used more metacognitive strategies, such as comprehension monitoring, than the less skilled students. The less skilled students were found to use more translation as they listened.

According to Chamot (2005), informative studies (Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 2011; Khaldieh, 2000; Vandergrift, 2007) have "confirmed that the good language learners are skilled at matching strategies to the task they were working on, whereas less successful language learners apparently do not have the metacognitive knowledge about task requirements needed to select appropriate strategies" (p. 116). This kind of knowledge, described as "the part of long-term memory that contains what learners know about learning" (Wenden, 1991. p. 45), triggers learners' abilities to "manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning" (Wenden, 1998, p. 519). Research (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 2003) on strategy use by effective and less effective listeners has discovered the use of metacognitive strategies to be particularly important for augmenting success. Hauck's (2005) mixed methods study investigated the listening strategies used by four students enrolled in an ESL listening strategies course at a major Midwestern university. Hauck (2005) maintained that these strategies differ according to the students' proficiency levels, the ways in which repetition affects listening strategies used, and the influence of strategy instruction on students' metacognitive awareness of strategies used while listening to oral texts. Hauck (2005) emphasized that learners who have regular opportunities to develop their metacognitive awareness through training may become more autonomous language learners. Hence, it is an important goal for the teachers of any strategy training programs to not only teach students a variety of strategies, but also to help raise students' metacognitive awareness of the learning process.

According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), the use of sheltered instruction strategies, or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) can facilitate comprehensible language needed for content learning. Krashen and Terrell (1983)

defined comprehensible input as the strategies that enable ELLs to understand the meaning of a lesson by means of context cues, cognitive association, and building background knowledge that draws on students' experiences.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) emphasized the importance of sheltered instruction to have clearly stated language objectives in addition to the content objective. According to Short (1994), it is important for educators to combine language instruction along with content-area instruction. Therefore, Short (1994) endorsed the development of language objectives in addition to content-area objectives when it came to instructing ELLs. According to Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2008), in the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) model for making content comprehensible to English Learners, there is an emphasis on the need for a language objective along with a content objective. Other researchers (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006) suggested that the language goals be adjusted for the students' proficiency levels.

Genesee, Lindholm- Leary, Saunders, and Christian (2006) reiterated that it takes most ELLs many years to develop academic language skills. Genesee et al. (2006) maintained that it does not take much imagination to conclude that if students are performing at less than high levels of English proficiency, and instruction is offered only in academic English, these students will not succeed in academic content. Genesee et al., (2006) argued that ELL students will not be able to compete academically with their English speaking peers. Hence, Genesee et al. (2006) presented that regardless of what type of ESL or bilingual program ELLs are in, educators should focus on effectively teaching academic language skills.

Online Education

Officials at the U.S. Department of Education (2010) reported that by 2006, 3.5 million

students participated in on-line learning at institutions of higher education in this country. Allen and Seamen (2008) claimed that almost a quarter of all students in post-secondary education were enrolled in fully online courses in 2008.

The team of Ambient Insight Research (2009) reported that 44% of postsecondary students in the United States took some or all of their courses online, and they projected that this figure would increase to 81% by 2014. It is obvious that online learning is moving quickly from the margins to being a predominant form of postsecondary education, at least in the U.S.

Zhang and Kenny (2010) noted that higher education institutions now offer online classes. Online education seems to be the latest attraction for many students, and it is viewed as perhaps the alternative when it is a challenge to schedule courses and keep a job. Kenny and Zhang (2010) affirmed that online education, as experienced through computer-mediated communication (CMC), "is being heralded as meeting the needs of course participants' lifestyles by allowing them to juggle personal commitments, to manage time conflicts, and to access course materials from a variety of locations" (p. 17). In turn, the demand for online classes has caused institutions to schedule more online courses to accommodate the needs of their students. As a result, the faculty must now train and prepare to teach in an online platform. McCrory, Putnam, and Jansen (2008) stressed that it is very important to have suitably trained staff to work with students online. The faculty should be familiar with the content area, and in addition, be highly trained in the use of the computer and Internet.

According to Pino (2008), the increasing use of personal computers and the Internet makes available a "new set of instructional possibilities" (p. 65). Web-based

instruction is viewed as an alternative instruction mode. Sanca and Cavus (2008) reported that ESL is the process by which students learn English in addition to their native language; therefore, "learning via internet is an alternative way to learn English" (para. 1). According to Rosenfeld (2007), since the students of postsecondary education are different in their interactions with media, teachers in schools must teach and nurture the collaborative and networking skills needed in the networking world.

Although technology is widely accessible due to its affordability, it is imperative to consider whether it is being used effectively in the institutions of higher education. These institutions need to consider the learning needs of all students, including English language learners, who choose to take online courses. In a study of three international students' experiences in online learning at a four year institution, Kenny and Zhang (2010) found that some of the participants were reluctant to engage in course discussions because they were not sure what they could contribute. These students were not from North America and lacked background knowledge. The design and delivery of the online course were focused on what was familiar for local students, and students with strong English proficiencies and Western cultural backgrounds tended to dominate the discussion forum. Kenny and Zhang (2010) concluded that, in order to meet the needs of learners, "it is necessary for online distance education course designers to be aware of the needs and expectations of international students" (p. 29).

Maurino (2006) maintained that students in online learning can lack the benefit of unplanned inquiry. In an online learning environment, students have to send their questions via email and wait for a response from the instructor. Maurino (2006) emphasized that in an online environment students sometimes have questions that go unanswered due to the limited accessibility of the instructor; this may have negative impact in the students' overall grades and

learning experiences.

Online learning has become popular in the U.S. as an alternative way to obtain an education. Nonetheless, the quality of the education of the students who take online courses at the higher education level is of alarm to some. Benson (2003) emphasized that it is important to assess participants' learning in the online format to ensure learning.

Meyer (2007) maintained that in traditional classroom settings, students assist one another through discussion opportunities, which facilitates comprehension. In an online environment, students may not have the advantage of interacting with each other, which can limit their complete learning experience. In an online classroom, students usually have the benefit of working from the convenience of their homes; however, without being in a physical classroom and engaging with other students, online learners may find they are distracted by cell phones, television, radio, children, spouses, or roommates. There is no way to ensure a student is fully engaged in the learning experience in an online course. These distractions cause the student to fall behind on their course work, thus, leading to increased anxiety.

Pichette (2009) compared the anxiety profile of classrooms and distance language learners, as well as anxiety levels between first semester and more experienced students in both environments. The results of the study indicated that there were no differences in anxiety profiles between classroom and distance learners in the case of French speaking language learners at Quebec University. However, it showed close to significantly higher anxiety among first semester students than among more experienced learners in the case of distance learning.

Beeley's (2000) study on student success in distance learning found that students

with low task values, low prior grades in English, and students over the age of 28 were more likely to drop out of online classes. There was also evidence that "dropping the class was negatively correlated with the grade achieved in English" (p. 6). This result might be expected, in which a student who has strong English skills would find the text based demands of the distance learning class easier.

Similarly, Zhang and Kenny (2010) explored the experience of three international students enrolled in online distance education courses. The findings indicated that previous education and especially language proficiency strongly impacted the learning of these students in this environment. Non-native English speakers needed more time to process readings, post replies to discussion topics, and reply to peers. Their lack of familiarity with North American culture and socialization language made it difficult to follow course discussions. They also tended to avoid socializing in the course, which left them at the periphery of course activities.

However, Guardado and Shi (2007) reported that the electronic feedback students received from instructors with a follow up conference sustained some of the similar features of traditional classroom written feedback. Another positive feature is that a text-only environment pushes students to write balanced comments with an awareness of the audience's needs and with an anonymity that allowed peers to make critical comments on each other's writings. However, according to Guardado and Shi (2007), the participants in their study expressed little confidence in peer commenting in general. The authors reported that some participants shied away from the request to express and clarify meaning, which resulted in online peer feedback turning into a one-way communication process. The authors recommended that teachers provide guidance in clarifying the comments in question as a way to maximize the effect of online peer feedback.

According to Appana (2008), online learning is more convenient and advantageous due

to home access and scheduling freedom. However, online learning can pose certain learning disadvantages. In an empirical study with an emphasis on the significance of affective factors conducted by Lin (2008), this researcher stated that "more than 80% of students believed that their relaxed and positive attitudes and teacher's interesting ways of teaching and frequent encouragement did enable them to achieve a greater knowledge of English much more effectively" (p. 120).

According to Ahern (2008), the ability to remove the constraints of time and place is a major hallmark of computer mediated communication, but still he supported real time synchronous forms of interaction. He stated that the use of "synchronous technologies create a strong network bond because each of the participants must be present at the same time in order to communicate" (p. 99). Cunning, Fagerten, and Holmsten (2010) reported that many of the net-based English for academic purpose students experienced technological difficulties and the constraints of the online space available would sometimes cause problems in a synchronous seminar. Although the rich environment provided by the desktop videoconferencing system provided multiple modes of communication, the authors concluded that "a modern communication approach requires both synchronous channels and voice" (p. 174).

Instruction and Course Delivery

One aspect in this current study, which needs to be taken into consideration, is the issue of instruction and course delivery. For example, Dickinson (1987) asserted that self-instructional language learning develops personal autonomy and improves learning efficiency. This is assuming**,** of course, that the learner has an inclination to this kind of learning style. According to Thang, Thang, and Puvaneswary (2010), the planning and close monitoring of a writing

activity, which incorporates interactive and reflective learning, helped to raise the students' awareness of their own learning processes, and consequently helped them to be more responsible for their learning.

In a phenomenological study on students' interaction experiences in distance learning courses, Lui, Moore, Graham, and Lee (2003) found that, as a result of the instructor sending out the course syllabus and reading list with assignment expectations, the students' perception of distance learning course was that they needed to study by themselves and did not want to contact their classmates. These students were less likely to interact with their peers. Lui et al. (2003) concluded that the phenomenon of student interaction in a distance education setting is intertwined with many factors in an institutional setting. These factors are: (a) course factor, (b) difference from traditional course factor, (c) learning factor, and (d) instructor factor.

Cultural Differences

In a study conducted by Tan et al. (2010), the participants in their study expressed overall dissatisfaction when it came to cultural sensitivity in online courses. In this study, participants collectively perceived that online learning does not promote cultural understanding between students and instructors. Cultural considerations created or exacerbated perceived challenges with technology used in online learning, which resulted in a lack of trust and/or experience using technology. According to Tan et al. (2010), the three participants in the study, who had little technological experiences in their home countries, reported resistance in using technology to send messages. These students were troubled by the thought of sending messages "to nowhere" (p. 12). Furthermore, it was reported that these students experienced anxiety from the difficulty of learning the technology and subsequent distrust of it. Consequently, these same three participants conveyed the difficulty they had using time effectively in online situations. Tan et

al., (2010) stated that “the cause of this particular challenge stems from cultural traditions of striving for perfection to avoid shame” (p. 5).

According to Tan et al. (2010), all participants expressed the perception that online learning does not promote cultural understanding as much as face-to-face learning. In their study, the authors reported the perceptions of the online experiences of their participants. Tan et al. (2010) quoted one participant as saying, "I felt that I could not understand others well, nor could I be understood by others” (p. 6). According to Tan et al. (2010), another student expressed disappointment with the lack of cultural sensitivity of the online professor. Tan et al. (2010) reported that participants also identified perceived challenges regarding culturally related difficulty with time management, lack of trust, and experience using technology, and the nature and content of some online discussions. According to Tan et al. (2010), students reported that culturally responsive teaching is not as well promoted online as it is in a traditional classroom. Tan at el. (2010), concluded by reiterating that these challenges are intensified by the lack of recognition and understanding of cultural differences as well as lack of fostering community-building.

Summary

In this phenomenological study, I sought to investigate undergraduate English language learner’s perceptions of language acquisition and academic development through online courses. This study was conducted with a selected group of 10 undergraduate international students enrolled in the Liberal Arts program at a four year private college in New York State. The review of literature for this study included the empirical and theoretical research regarding language and academic acquisition among undergraduate English language learners. The literature review was based on four central

theories: (a) Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy theory, (b) Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory, (c) Kolb's (1993) learning style theory, and (d) Krashen's (1988) second language acquisition theory. In addition, I included current research, which addressed academic learning, language learning, online education, instructional and course delivery, and cultural differences as a way to support the theoretical framework. Presented in Chapter Three is the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe undergraduate English language learners' perceptions of their online learning experiences. I had hoped that the results would provide more information regarding second language development and the effects of cultural differences in an online learning environment. According to Creswell (2012), phenomenology is not only a description of the participants' perceptions of the lived experience, but it is also an interpretative process of the meaning of the lived experiences by the researcher.

Research Design

I designed a qualitative phenomenological study. This design was the best fit for this study because it is "an in depth study of instances of a phenomenon in real life settings and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 634). Phenomenology is concerned with understanding phenomena from the perspective of those who have experienced them. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to find the essence of the experience of a phenomenon. Therefore, the goal of this study was to uncover these essences or underlying themes of meaning of shared experience (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology is the descriptive methodology of human science, seeking to explore and describe phenomena as they present themselves in the lived world. It has its origins in philosophy. It is a discovery-oriented method where the observer needs to have an attitude of openness to let the unexpected meanings emerge (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenology deals with persons as opposed to subjects. A person is a whole being, complete with past experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Persons live in a world of experience, replete with both cultural and social influence (Caelli, 2000; van Manen, 1997; Willis, 2001). Humans seek meaning from their experiences and from the experiences of others (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). Phenomenology

emphasizes the participants' experienced meanings rather than just a description of their observed behaviors or actions (Polkinghorne, 1989). For this reason, the experience of language learning and its meaning, can hopefully be better captured through a phenomenological approach, where meaning is interpreted through language. Participants provide descriptions as they talk about their specific experiences with the phenomena under study (Giorgi, 1997). These descriptions include feelings, beliefs, and convictions about their language learning processes. For this study, a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2012) was used to gather and analyze data on the English language learners' perceptions of their experiences with online learning.

Research Questions

1. How do select English language learners describe their perceptions of and experiences with academic and language acquisition through online undergraduate course at this four year New York state private college?
2. How, if at all, do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their language acquisition?
3. How do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their general academic skills?

Participants

Participants for this study were selected with use of purposeful sampling methods. Purposeful sampling is a sampling procedure which "focuses on selecting information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Use of this procedure helped to identify information-rich informants; "purposeful sampling is used, in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study" (Berg, 2004, p. 36). Specifically, criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select

10 individuals who were perceived to be information rich. A screening questionnaire (see Appendix B) was used to ensure diversity among participants and that they met the following criteria for this study: (a) international undergraduate student; (b) have more than one year of experience as an ELL; (c) students will range in age; (d) must have scored at least a minimum of 71 in the TOEFL exam; and (e) be enrolled in an online course at the time of the study. Once permission to conduct the study was received from the Internal Review Boards (IRB) from the four year private college in New York and Liberty University, the selection process of participants began.

Setting/Site

This four year New York state College is a private institution that was founded in 1950. There is a total undergraduate enrollment of over 7,000, its setting is suburban, and the campus size is 55 acres. The programs at this college are offered in a semester-based academic calendar. According to *U.S. News & World Report* (2012), this college is ranked in the 2013 edition of Best Colleges is Regional Universities (North), Tier 2. Its tuition and fees are $17,556 (2012-2013). This College has a gender distribution of 32% percent male students and 67.1% female students, with an ethnic make-up of 28% African-American, 3% Asian, 31% Hispanic, 0% Native-American, 29% Anglo, 6% unknown, and 1% International. At this school, 4.0 % of the students live in college-owned, -operated, or -affiliated housing, and 96.0 % of students live off campus. This college is part of the NCAA II athletic conference. The staff of the College International Students Office assists members of the college international community through the provision of direct support with academic, career, employment, immigration, personal, cross-cultural, and financial matters. Also, it provides referral sources to other college offices and academic departments. In addition, staff of the International Students Office advises students on

immigration matters including general information on students' rights and responsibilities, assistance with procedures for transferring institutions, extensions of stay, permission to work, and practical training experiences.

Procedure

Once I obtained IRB approval from both Liberty University and from the New York state four year college, I began the study. I started this study by sending the international undergraduate students an e-mail (see Appendix A) inviting them to participate in this study. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that in a phenomenological study the researcher should interview from 5-25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. However, for this study, I hoped to have 10-15 participants in the study. Students who expressed interest in participating then met with me individually in a designated conference room on campus, at which point I administered the screening questionnaire (see Appendix B) for final purposeful selection of participants. The 10 participants then signed the consent form (see Appendix C) and obtained a copy for their records. After the selection process was done, I then scheduled the participants for a 45-60 minutes long individual interview (see Appendix D). Finally, I scheduled another 45-60 minute focus group meeting at a later date to discuss the participants' perceptions of academic and English language development experiences with online learning.

Researcher's Biography

My name is Olga N. De Jesus, and I was the researcher conducting this qualitative phenomenological research. I was born and raised in New York City, and both of my parents are Puerto Rican-American. Growing up, my mother who was bilingual (i.e., Spanish/English) emphasized the importance of speaking two languages and being proficient in both. Having that kind of influence for languages and respect for the two cultures, it inspired me to learn more

languages. In High School, I studied French, and in college I studied German.

Because of my own experience growing up in a bilingual household, I became sensitive to the needs of the ELL population and decided to become a bilingual teacher. I have been in the field of education for 17 years. My teaching experiences have been in bilingual special education with middle school students and in higher education with graduate students. I am presently working in the capacity of administrator; my current position is Director of Graduate Education Programs at this four year college.

In my position as a graduate instructor, I have designed and taught online courses. I am currently the only full time faculty with bilingual experience and credentials teaching the required courses for the New York State bilingual teaching certification extension in the teacher preparation graduate program at this four year college. I have found that teaching online has challenges, which are different from the challenges of teaching face-to-face. One of the challenges is with communication. No matter how clear and precise I presume the course syllabus has been written, and how clearly the posted instructions for an assignment are, there is always a student who would send me an e-mail asking for clarification or further instructions. Most often the e-mails come from graduate students who are presumably English proficient. These incidents led me to reflect on the undergraduate international students, who are ELL and take online courses in their first year of the program. This study is not only of great interest because of my dissertation, but its findings are of great interest to me as an educator, and also to this four year college.

Data Collection

This section presents the procedures for the participant screening questionnaire, individual interviews, and the focus group interview administration.

Participants screening questionnaire

This study used the general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). A semi-structured interview involves the preparation of an interview guide that lists a predetermined set of questions or issues that are to be explored during an interview. This guide served as a checklist during the interview and provided a more systematic and comprehensive way to obtain the same basic lines of inquiry with each person interviewed (Patton, 2002). Moustakas (1994) suggested that when studying a phenomenon, it is important to understand the whole picture. Information from the questionnaire provided a snapshot of the participant pool and assisted me in building layers of meaning while gaining a glimpse at the whole picture of the phenomenon. Weaving together demographic descriptive data into the interview and focus group, analysis helped provided a holistic representation of the phenomenon. The data collected and included were years the participant had been in the United States, age, gender, age, native language, TOEFL score, and educational background of participants (see Appendix B).

Individual Interview

Each participant was interviewed in English at a designated conference room in a building located on campus. Participants were interviewed individually for 45 to 60 minutes during the spring semester. Each interview was recorded on an audio device, transcribed by me, approved by the participant, and then integrated and stored for the research. Interview questions were designed to obtain undergraduate international English language learners' perceptions of online learning (see Appendix C). Also, there was a great deal of flexibility. In the event that participants were unable to attend an in person interview, the data was collected via phone conference or via email correspondence.

Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic, typically consisting of groups of 6-12 people with similar backgrounds. Patton (2002) stated, "Unlike individual interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say" (p. 385). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argued that group interviewing, though not a substitute for one-on-one interviewing, constitutes "another level of data gathering perspective on the research problem" (pp. 53-54) that may not be accessible through individual interviewing. Lofland and Lofland (1984) reported that group interviewing of participants, who were individually interviewed previously, could be a source of validation of previously collected data by providing additional data to expand and enhance the research findings. Participants were invited to participate in the focus group meeting on an alternate date. The participants were notified of the time and place of this group interview a week in advance. A conference room was requested at this four year college library for the focus group session. The interviews were audio-tape recorded, and recordings were transcribed by me. Interview transcriptions were used to triangulate the data. All obtained data was analyzed based on themes and categories, according to the constant comparison method presented by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Data Analysis

After data collection, I fulfilled the primary responsibility of organizing the collected data and devising a workable plan for transcription (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Gay, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Following transcription, Moustakas (1994) outlined a very structured approach to phenomenological data analysis involving epoche, horizonalization (significant statements), meaningful units (themes), textural and structural descriptions, and essences of the experience.

Epoche

The first step of phenomenology, as described by Moustakas (1994), is called *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment. Moustakas explained the epoche phase as "setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence" (p. 180). Therefore, I examined prior experiences and prejudgments and wrote a full description of my own experience with the phenomenon of online learning.

Transcription

To ensure accuracy of data, audio recordings were carefully transcribed. Initially I transcribed the data myself and then engaged the services of a professional transcriptionist in order to maximize accuracy. I reviewed the accuracy of the transcribed text multiple times. Only minor errors were found requiring correction.

Horizonalization

I carefully analyzed the interview transcriptions and highlighted the meaningful statements or quotes that provided the essence of the experiences of these participants as I received them. In a qualitative study, it can be challenging to identify important statements and convert them into meaningful units. Marshall and Rossman (2006) emphasized that information varies in "levels of abstraction, in frequency of occurrence, in relevance to central questions in the research" (pp. 156-157). In following the recommendations made by Miles and Huberman (1994), I created matrices in order to note patterns and emerging themes and to cluster and count data from the participant screening questionnaires, individual interview transcriptions, and focus group transcription.

Meaningful Units

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), clustering is another name for clumping

information into classes. The process of coding is "a critical aspect of most qualitative research" (Gay, 1996, p. 228). Therefore, caution was taken to critically analyze data and identify meaningful units. As is quite normal and expected in a qualitative study, ongoing revision was practiced throughout the study. This allowed me to accurately represent the data in figures, tables, and narrative discussion (Gay, 1996). The primary patterns of the data were labeled with words, numbers, and colors. During the coding process, I looked for data related to answering the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The meaningful units were closely scrutinized and ultimately grouped according to the research questions.

Textural and Structural Descriptions

The textural and structural descriptions provide the reader with a description of what was experienced and how it was experienced. Textural descriptions consisted of the central and most thematic constituents from all the participants. Moustakas (1994) described this procedure as examining textural data obtained from the participants' different perspectives, roles, and functions and determining what is universal or most cited for the group. After textural descriptions and before structural descriptions was the process of imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). This process provides a means of arriving at "the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In this process, I considered the possible meanings of the textural descriptions and brainstormed vantage points and meanings, while remaining open to structural elements as they consciously emerged. For example, while attempting to differentiate between personal, social, and cultural effects, I realized that many times the effects verbalized by participants were common and overlapping. Moustakas (1994) described this process as "varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent

perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (pp. 97-98). This process led to structural descriptions by delving deeper into the experience in terms of "conditions, situations, or context," (Creswell, 2007, p.8). Structural descriptions offered rich description of how the phenomenon was experienced by participants. The combination of textural and structural descriptions allows the researcher to move to the final step in data analysis, a formulation of the essence of the experience.

According to Creswell (2007), data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or discussions. For this qualitative phenomenological study, I implemented a narrative analysis.

Step 1. I described personal experiences with the phenomenon under study and categorized information about the perceptions of the English language learners' experiences with online learning, the common themes that emerged from interviews, the questionnaire, and my observational field notes.

Step 2. I developed a list of vital statements from the interview and field note observations. This was done for each theme that emerged from the participants in regard to their experiences with online learning and language development. I read through each interview and marked themes, highlighted vital statements, and noted and differentiated factors through colored highlights. .

Step 3. I took the vital statements and grouped them into "meaningful units" (Creswell, 2007, p 154) or themes.

Step 4. I wrote a textural description of what the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon.

Step 5. I wrote a structural description of how the experience happened. Content was grouped by experiences and then transferred to a separate file for each data set: (a) factors; (b) common themes; (c) vital statements (e.g., meaningful units, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions); and (d) finally incorporated into a composite description of the actual phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Creswell emphasized that "this is the essence of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study" (pp. 159). This process allowed the data to be organized, categorized, and filed in a manner that allowed me to refer to this when necessary to write, further analyze, and create the narrative.

Trustworthiness

Content Validity

Content validity ensures that the qualitative questions in this study measure the elements of the phenomenon and fully represented what the questions were designed to measure. Carmines and Zeller (1991) defined content validity as "the extent to which a measurement reflects the specific intended domain of content" (p. 20). The questions presented in this study were evaluated for content validity by various professional experts and modified according to their suggestions (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the experts assessed data collection instruments, not only in terms of writing clarity and subject importance, but also in terms of their own feelings and impressions.

The integrity of qualitative research is determined by its trustworthiness, or value to the audience. The criteria for the evaluation of the trustworthiness of a qualitative study are: (a) credibility through member checking, (b) dependability through peer review, and (c) confirmability through an audit trail (Patton, 2002). Credibility of data

collection was established with the use of member checks (Creswell, 2007). After the transcripts were checked for accuracy, they were sent to the participants via email to review for accuracy and clarity, and any additional comments. Data was triangulated from screening questionnaire, individual interviews, focus group interviews, and observations during the focus group session to validate the findings of this study (Creswell, 2007).

Triangulation. Phillimore and Goodson (2004) believed triangulation to be the single most comprehensive means of obtaining trustworthiness. Triangulation consists of looking at an equivalent phenomenon or research question from supplementary sources of evidence. According to Denzin (1978), there are four types of triangulation: a combination of data collection, methods, theories, and researchers. Furthermore, Phillimore and Goodson (2004) suggested applying a variety of theories, sources of data collection, and the use of multiple participants in a study. This study triangulated its data sources through three separate data collection methods. Data were gathered from a questionnaire, a focus group interview, and individual interviews. To ensure this study's validity, I utilized several strategies. The first strategy was to carefully scrutinize and re-examine data collected, and analyze facts and data for accuracy. To demonstrate trustworthiness, other strategies of validity used in this study included participant checking, multiple modes of obtaining data, audit trails, and peer reviews (Creswell, 2007; Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

Participant review. Dependability refers to a consistent application of the data analysis procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I had a colleague review the work and question the quality and validity of the interpretations that I presented in the narratives and themes. I submitted rough drafts to the participants for their review and to comment on, as well as provided access to raw data. This was important because it addressed any bias or quality issues

in the study through this external check. In addition, the dissertation chair and committee members reviewed all procedures in this study.

Member checks. Participant members checked on the narratives derived from their interviews. Each participant was provided with a rough draft of the narrative report to confirm, negate, or suggest changes in the component that describes their experiences and interpretations which were reached as a result. This increases the validity of the text, narrative, and the interpretation of such in the study.

Clarifying Researcher Bias. I presented the case of my experience through comments that reflected my past experiences, biases, and situations that may impact the study. I informed the reader of my position in regard to the phenomenon being studied.

Audit trail. Data collection was organized in a table that described the actual data collection and dissemination process. The data collection method was documented consistently throughout the period dedicated to interviews, meetings, observations, time spent to write, review, and rewrite. It was kept in a table like format and reviewed by an external auditor. This allows for the study to be replicated, it clarifies any questions that readers or other researchers might have, and provides a map of the process. Confirmability was augmented by the availability of an audit trail consisting of objective, thorough, and organized records which were safely stored as described in the data management section.

Ethical Considerations

The assumptions were that these participants are all computer literate, and that they were admitted to the undergraduate liberal arts program under the same conditions or requirements. Also it is assumed that they are all first year international students in the liberal arts undergraduate program. Although I work in the same institution where the research was

conducted, none of the participants were my students. The ethical considerations in this study were to obtain appropriate approval from my chair, IRB committees from both Liberty University and the four year college, maintain the confidentiality agreement, and safe keeping of records. All participants were assigned a pseudonym for identification, and all data was stored in a file which was backed up into computer files. I developed a data collection matrix as a visual means to locate and identify information for the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the phenomenological research design that was used in this study. The study consisted of 10 undergraduate international students, who were purposely selected for this study, and interviewed for a better understanding of their perceptions of second language and academic acquisition through online learning. Semi-structured individual and focus group interviews were conducted. The data were organized, categorized, and filed in a manner that permitted me to refer to this when it was necessary to write, further analyze, and create the narrative. The findings from this study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate international undergraduate English language learners' perceptions of language and academic acquisition through online learning. Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological method was employed to analyze the data in participants' transcripts. In this method, each participant described his or her personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. I then identified significant statements provided during the interview by the participants. The "language that derived from the participants" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 69) was then coded. A code is a label, a definition, or a description of the units of meanings (Boyatsis, 1998).

The list of units of relevant meaning extracted from each interview was carefully scrutinized and the clearly redundant units eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). To do this I contemplated the literal content, the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned and also how (non-verbal or para-linguistic cues) it was stated. Coding is done to organize the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes were examined for relationships and clustered into larger units of information which were labeled as "formulated themes." Then, I wrote a composite description, the essence of the lived experiences, and presented this as the culminating aspect of this phenomenological study. Provided in this chapter are the results from the study. The contents of this chapter consist of (a) the demographic information for the participants, (b) the codes and themes from both individual and focus group interviews, (c) a textural description of what the participants experienced with the phenomenon, and (d) a structural description of how the experience happened (Creswell, 2007).

Description of Findings

At the start of the study, 20 invitations were sent via email to potential international

undergraduate students, who had taken one or more online courses during the fall 2013 academic semester. Of the 20 invitations sent, only 10 agreed to and signed consent for their participation in the study. At times it was difficult to schedule the individual interviews due to the tight schedules and availability of the participants. Of the 10 participants, four could not have an in-person interview and opted to complete the questionnaire and introductory interview questions via email correspondence. For these students, I followed up with a phone conference to confirm their responses. The other 6 participants had their individual interviews in person. However, all 10 participants attended the focus group interview. In this chapter, I include my reflexivity. These results are shared first. In addition, triangulated phenomenological analyzed data obtained through the participant screening questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus group interview are presented.

Researcher's Reflexivity

I started this research study reflecting on my own experiences of having been both an online student and an instructor of online graduate courses. I noted some of the challenges I experienced as a student. For example, I reflected on the impact that the lack of immediate interaction with my professor had on me. Many times I had questions about an assignment and had to wait for the professor to email a response to my inquiry. I reflected on the inconvenience of having an internet failure at a time where I was in the middle of taking a mid-term exam online and having to start all over again once internet access was recovered. I often wondered if any of the work done was saved or uploaded successfully. For these reasons, once I became an online instructor, I became more aware and sensitive to these issues as being a potential challenge for my students.

When I learned that international undergraduate first year students were being allowed to

register for online courses in this private four year college in New York State, it caused me to pose the following research questions explored in this study:

1. How do select English language learners describe their perceptions of and experiences with academic and language acquisition through online undergraduate courses at this four year New York state private college?
2. How, if at all, do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their language acquisition?
3. How do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their general academic skills?

As the researcher of this study, I brought to the study a phenomenon to explore (online learning) and a philosophical orientation to use (I wanted to study these undergraduate English language learners' perceptions of online learning). I engaged in extensive interviews with the 10 participants who volunteered for this study, and I analyzed the interviews using the steps recommended by Moustakas (1994). I began with the reflection of my own experiences (epoche) with online learning as a means to position myself, acknowledging that I cannot completely remove myself and my interpretations from the situation. After having read thoroughly through all the participants' statements, I located significant statements or quotes about their perceptions of online learning. These statements were then clustered into four broader themes with 12 sub themes. The final step I took was to write a narrative description of what they had experienced and how they experienced it, and combined these two into a longer description that reflects the "essence" of their experiences.

Results of Screening Questionnaire

The results of the screening questionnaire are shown in Table 1. The participants in this

study consisted of four males and six females, aged 18-28 years. Interestingly, their TOEFL scores were all in the passing range of 70s, with their number of years in the United States being 1-3 and with various native languages.

Table 1

Individual Interview Participants' Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	TOEFL Score	Years in U.S.	Native Language
Abigail	F	18	71	2	Spanish
Bruno	M	20	78	1	German
Catalina	F	28	74	2	Spanish
Don	M	19	72	3	Mandarin
Emily	F	22	76	2	Spanish
Frank	M	20	71	2	Mandarin
Gabriela	F	21	71	1	Spanish
Helen	F	22	73	2	Russian
Ian	M	19	78	1	French
Jennifer	F	23	71	3	Farsi

Results of Interviews

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were the second form of data collection used in this study. Creswell (1994) asserted that interviewing is a foundational method of collecting data in a qualitative study. The interviews conducted in this study were semi-structured and provided rich interpretive data that aided me in understanding how the individual participants perceived online learning. Individual interviews were scheduled with each participant at a predetermined date, time, and mutually convenient location. Prior to the actual interview, the same introduction and

summary of the study was read to all participants. The interview questions (Appendix C) contained probes that facilitated a richer discussion during the interview process. The average length of the interviews was approximately 60 minutes.

Focus Group Interview

A focus group meeting of the study participants was the first step in gathering triangulated data for this study. The purpose of the focus group meeting was to provide an avenue for discussion among participants who had experienced similar phenomena (Creswell, 2004). This type of data collection is advantageous when gathering data on a new topic and allows participants an opportunity to react and build on the responses of other participants (Creswell, 2004). All 10 participants were invited to attend a single focus group meeting. The focus group meeting was held in a private room located in the library commons of the private college, and lasted approximately one hour. As the group moderator, I introduced myself and gave a brief summary of the study. After light snacks were served, I facilitated the semi-structured discussion, and dialogue focused on eliciting individual and group responses to focus group questions with probes as found in Appendix D. Following transcription and data analysis, focus group transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet where they will remain for the required three year period.

Additional data were obtained from the individual interviews as shown in Table 2. Of the 10 participants, nine reported that they studied some or much English in their native countries prior to coming to the U.S. Their responses varied when asked the question "in terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, in which aspect do you think you have made the most progress since learning English?" The four participants who reported having studied English in their native countries had similar responses. These four students perceived strength in English

reading and writing skills and weakness in speaking. They indicated that because they were not confident in speaking English, they preferred online courses. Ian stated "in an online course I do not have to speak English and this is better for me because I am not comfortable speaking in English yet. I can read and write better than I can speak." The students who studied no to very little English prior to coming to the United States reported that even though they experienced difficulty with reading and writing in English, they still opted for an online course because of scheduling purposes. One of these students, Jennifer, stated that "online I have more time to read the information and review it as much as I need to better understand."

Table 2

Individual Interview Items and Responses

Pseudonym	Place of Birth	Studied English in Native Country	ESL Strength	ESL Weakness
Abigail	Guatemala	very little	speaking	writing
Bruno	Germany	yes	writing	speaking
Catalina	Colombia	very little	speaking	reading & writing
Don	China	very little	speaking	reading & writing
Emily	Ecuador	yes	writing	speaking
Frank	China	very little	speaking	reading & writing
Gabriela	Mexico	very little	listening & speaking	reading & writing
Helen	Russia	yes	reading & writing	speaking
Ian	France	yes	reading & writing	speaking
Jennifer	Middle East	no	speaking	reading & writing

Significant Statements

Identifying significant statements from the transcripts from the matrix allowed me to immerse myself in the statements regarding the experiences of the participants. This process, horizonalization, requires that statements are first simply gleaned from transcripts and provided

in a table, in no particular grouping or order, to illustrate the range of perspectives about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Meaningful Units

The next step in the data analysis process was to reduce the data into common, non-repetitive, non-overlapping meaning units (Creswell, 2007; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Gay, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). After color-coding and entering all the data into an Excel spreadsheet, all relevant and meaningful data were bracketed and consequential units were established. Bracketing is the process in which "the focus of the research is placed in brackets; everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). The units were coded using the participants' words, and all bracketed data were given equal value or weight. This process of reduction was especially helpful when all I wanted to view were the significant statements in order to establish meaning units. The meaning units were arrived at by closely analyzing all significant statements for repetition among participants. Once the repeated, overlapping, and/or irrelevant statements were deleted, I was left with the "horizons" or textural meanings of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) defined the horizon as "the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character" (p. 95). As shown in Table 3, four meaning units emerged from my analysis. Consistent with Creswell's (2007) application of Moustakas's methodology, I have provided a sampling of the significant statements that clustered together to create each.

These questions generated meaningful statements. I then created a list of significant statements and extracted meaning. Arranging the formulated meanings into clusters resulted in four major themes with sub-themes as shown in Appendix G.

Response to Research Question 1

RQ1. How do select English language learners describe their perceptions of and experiences with academic and language acquisition through online undergraduate course at this four year New York state private college?

T1. Perceptions of Online Learning

Likes of online learning. In discussion of what they liked best about online learning, these students mentioned the accessibility of a wide range of information available on the internet to be one of its best features. Access to a wide variety of literature enables students to obtain a thorough understanding by consulting different views on the researched topic and sharpens their research skills. International students perceived the ability to search infinite alternatives available online and flexibility of time and place to be the most valuable features of online learning. Also, students reported that traditional learning lacks the flexibility of time and place and could be a distraction in instances in which teachers discuss familiar issues in class.

International students perceive that certain students can benefit most from online learning: (a) students who work full-time, (b) those with limited access to school, or (c) those with a disability. Six out of the 10 students admitted taking an online course because it fit in their schedule. One student noted, "I usually take it because I cannot fit an in person class in my schedule" (Helen). Don mentioned, "I like better online because it is more flexible with time." Another student said, "I like the luxury of learning in the comfort of home" (Gabriela). Ian stated, "With an online course I can work more hours at my job." Jennifer pointed out practical reasons for taking online classes: "I like online because it saves me commuting time and gas money." Frank noted that online classes allowed him to add more classes to his overall schedule: "Taking online class helps me to add more class to my on campus schedule." One student stated, "I have learned that I learn better in person than online but if it weren't for online

classes I probably would never be able to finish my degree on time" (Catalina).

Moreover, results from these international students revealed that, while they preferred learning online for schedule flexibility reasons, a teacher's constant engagement and supervision in threaded discussions not only enhanced students' learning, but also strengthened the bond between the two. Therefore, in online learning, courses that involve students' active participation are considered more valuable than those without students' active participation. In addition, a few international students mentioned that writing messages online allowed them enough time to make reasonable revisions in their work and encouraged in-depth thinking. In traditional learning, in contrast, students are expected to respond promptly without allowing them time to register, think, and respond to the question asked.

Dislikes of online learning. The most commonly discussed weaknesses of online learning were: (a) procrastination, (b) lack of student motivation, (c) unclear teacher expectations, and (d) difficulties in collaboration with fellow students on group projects. One student stated, "I really don't like it when I ask a question and it take a day or days for the professor to answer" (Emily). Another student stated, "I do dislike that fact that I cannot concentrate as I would in a classroom" (Catalina). Don stated, "I am not as motivated to learn in an online course because I don't have the professor there in front of me to encourage me. I have to do all the learning on my own." Gabriela stated, " Not only do you feel like you are learning the material on your own but sometimes it becomes confusing because you don't understand what the professor wants." These students perceived that it was difficult enough to learn the content material in English without the presence of the professor to facilitate, but that it was just as difficult to complete

assignments, especially if they had to work in groups. One participant stated, "One time I had to work in a group assignment and I felt lost" (Jennifer). Ian mentioned, "I didn't like group assignments because I had to write all the time to the group to ask questions and when I spoke with the group leader on the phone to ask question, she was not very helpful." Helen noted, "I felt very insecure sometimes to ask questions in a group conversation because I did not know the meaning of the words." In addition, failure to gain the same amount of knowledge, expertise, and learning experiences equivalent to those of traditional students emerged as a major reason for students' preference to take traditional classes. One student stated, "I tend to learn better when I talk about the material than when I just read and write about it" (Abigail).

Technology competency. Of the ten participants, three had little experience with technology in their native countries, and reported that they only used technology to send messages. These students were concerned about sending messages and wondering if they were received. These participants described their anxiety from the difficulty of learning how to use computers, understand the Blackboard system, and subsequently did not trust it. Jennifer stated, "One time I had problems with Blackboard and the professor said for me to get help form IT people, when I did the IT guy was able to work on my computer from his office. This frightens me because I think they could come into my computer any time." Frank reported that although he felt comfortable using computers, he still had problems understanding the Blackboard system: "When I first took an online course, I had to become familiar with the computer system and the first week I missed an assignment because I did not know where to upload it."

In addition, these students reported that connection issues related to internet speed while taking online exams also impacted their online learning experiences. Most of the students mentioned their preference for taking an online class, however, only if it is an elective course

that they do not intend to take again, if the same course is taught in class by a teacher who grades strictly, if they desire to lessen their academic workload, if they have had a positive previous online learning experience, and/or if they have prior knowledge and background on the content of the course.

Of the 10 participants in the study, seven had previously taken one or more online courses. One participant had taken her first online course that fall 2013. All participants perceived that both language and culture differences presented challenges in their online learning experiences. For this reason, they emphasized avoiding taking more than one online course at a time. The more positive attitudes were evident in participants with more proficient language skills, online course experience, and length of time spent in the U.S.

Time management. Three of the 10 participants reported the difficulty they had using time effectively during their online course. One student reported, "It was stressful to complete all the work on time" (Catalina). Another stated, "I find that online course are more intense and require more work each week. It was difficult for me to keep up" (Emily). One of these participants offered the following explanation:

> I had difficulty learning. I always wanted to do everything right, and I always read all others' postings first to make sure I was on the right track when I posted. I always questioned if I understood everything and wonder if I was being understood. That's why I took so long to respond to a discussion. (Jennifer)

Several of the students commented on the turnaround time of email communication between the professor and students. One student stated "I really don't like it when I ask a question and it takes a day or days for the professor to answer and

since I have a difficult time trying to express myself in writing, it's challenging" (Helen). Another participant commented on Helen's comment by stating, "Yes it's true that the professor takes too much time to answer an email, so some times I prefer to send an email to everyone in my class to see who answers first" (Bruno).

T2. Perceptions of Cultural Differences

Cultural differences. When responding to their cultural perceptions, all participants perceived that online learning does not promote cultural understanding between students and instructors. Four participants were astonished at the way U.S. students incorporated personal experiences, feelings, and opinions into their online discussions. Their astonishment was based on cultural differences. One participant explained "back home, when we had class discussion we were only expected to talk about the lesson, nothing else" (Don). "For me it was a cultural shock when I read other student's postings and found that many times they were personal things which had nothing to do with the lesson" (Jennifer). "When I read post like that I feel it was a waste of time" (Emily).

Lack of culturally responsive teaching. All participants reported their perception that online learning does not promote cultural understanding as much as face-to-face learning. One student noted, "I often felt that I was not being understood and sometimes I was misunderstood" (Don). "I feel that in a traditional class, you have the opportunity to explain yourself more than in online class" (Bruno). Another student expressed disappointment in this regard as well: "In online class, you cannot see people and how they look, it's hard to know what they really feel or think when they write something in response to something you wrote" (Helen). Another participant (Don) expressed that at times he felt "lonely" because sometimes his postings went unanswered. Similarly, one participant experienced disappointment with the fact that once the

course was over, they were not encouraged to continue their relationship among peers or with the instructor. He explained: “I’m a very social person and I had hoped to keep the relationships with my peers even after the course had ended, I wanted to meet them on campus to talk more and develop perhaps a friendship” (Bruno). Another student asserted, "I feel that I spent an entire semester with these other students, and would not know them if I saw them on campus. It just does not cultivate friendship" (Ian). Of the 10 participants, seven reported their willingness to share, explain, and discuss their cultures online to foster understanding and avoid at least some of the issues previously discussed. One student related that her professor asked them to post an introduction of themselves as their first discussion board. She stated, “This was ok but it didn’t help me appreciate my classmate’s culture” (Catalina).

Age and gender differences. The participants in this study consisted of four males and six females and their ages ranged from 18-28. In review of the data, I noted age and gender differences among the participants. Typically, the much younger male participants perceived online learning to have a positive impact on their attitude and motivation for learning. For example, during the interview, when the younger males responded to the question about the impact of online learning on their attitude, motivation, and anxiety toward learning, I noted that these participants (e.g., ages 19 and 20) perceived that they were more motivated to learn. One of the participants stated: “Online learning makes me move faster and motivated me to work on time” (Don). Ian, who is 19 years old, stated, “I like online only because I can go over the learning module as many times as I need to best understand.” Frank, who is 20, also emphasized that he was more motivated to complete the course work online than in an in person class: “I don’t worry to do my work quickly for the in person class because I have more time before the

due date, where in the online it's due within a few days or by the same week."

In comparison, the female participants perceived that online learning had a negative impact on their attitude and motivation for learning. These participants perceived that they had taken an online course because it facilitated a flexible schedule that allowed them to do other things. One participant, Emily, age 22, stated "the online course allows me to have time for a campus life and engage in extracurricular activities." Gabriela, age 21, also emphasized that online courses allowed her to be part of a dance club in school. Helen, age 22, stated "taking online courses allows me to keep a part time job." Emily, age 22, and Jennifer, age 23, also reported that they did perceived their motivation for taking an online course to be academic, and for this reason they perceived that had a negative impact on their online academic performance. "I didn't think online was so intensive and with everything else, I struggled to keep up" (Emily). Another female participant (Catalina, age 28) stated, "It definitely was stressful to complete all of the work on time because of how busy I was with everything else, but I have always been motivated to finish so I can begin my career."

Response to Research Question 2

RQ2. How, if at all, do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their language acquisition? When discussing responses to questions related to their perception of second language acquisition through online learning, the participants became more engaged and eager to share. The common sub themes were relevant to identified linguistic skills: (a) vocabulary, (b) reading, (c) writing, (d) listening, and (e) speaking.

T3. Perceptions of SLA

Vocabulary. Online learning seems to foster the development of English vocabulary.

One student seemed to be satisfied with the vocabulary learned and noted:

“In an online course I took during the summer, I learned a lot of new words. When I would see a word I did not know posted, I would write it down and look it up” (Emily). Another student reported on learning vocabulary through an online course: “When reading the different posts, I would see new words in English and after reading the sentence a few times, I would understand the meaning” (Jennifer). While another student reported her frustration with learning new vocabulary words:

> At the beginning was difficult because I did not know the meaning of the words. I will always have to have a dictionary with me all times; especially very difficult when your classmates knew English and the professor assumed you knew English. The time you have to spend translating everything in your head and trying to understand at the same time. (Abigail)

Similarly, the use of vernacular phrases and acronyms was confusing to most, causing considerable anxiety and occasional embarrassment. As one participant, Don, explained, "they used too many colloquial expressions and slang in the discussions. I was often puzzled why they used these informal expressions in class." Catalina commented that learning new words in English was “a challenge,” because she had not learned much English before coming to the U.S.

Reading and writing. According to participant responses, they perceived that online learning has a positive effect on English reading and writing skills. Most participants perceived being encouraged to write while being mindful of whom they were writing to, which provided opportunities for editing and revising their writing. One participant described another positive factor inherent in online learning situations regarding motivation for reading: “If I did not understand the chapter reading, I could still

get the information from the professor during the class lecture in a traditional classroom" (Abigail). Another participant indicated her improvement in writing skills from online course work and stated:

> I learned to write better during my online course. I always felt it was so difficult to write in English. The online course helped me to see more writing of English and allow me to write with better with the spell check of the computer. (Jennifer)

Another participant reported that her biggest obstacle was writing when she stated, "I write things in English that doesn't make any sense but I feel like they make sense in Spanish" (Gabriela). Furthermore, another participant commented that "I do not feel comfortable writing emails to the professor because it's hard for me to write the right words" (Helen). On the other hand Bruno and Emily shared that they did not have problem with writing because the "Microsoft word helped with spelling." These students felt that they did experience more difficulty with reading comprehension. Bruno stated, "Most time I have to read thing more than once" and Emily commented that she preferred the professor to post lecture notes as PowerPoint presentations because it helps her to understand the information better than if she were reading it from a book.

Listening and speaking. All participants agreed that their online experience does not foster English listening and speaking skills. Helen commented that speaking English was "hard at the beginning because I did not know the meaning of words." Don stated, "to speak in English is much harder because it has many difficult sounds to pronounce that are not the same as my own language." Bruno stated, "Speaking in English is very hard" and Emily commented, "Although I can understand English, speaking it is much harder." Ian seconded Emily by stating, "Yes that is true, speaking it is much harder." Jennifer emphasized that she often responds with

gestures because her spoken English is not as good: “I shake my head to say no.”

All the participants agreed that although they could understand when spoken to in English, they felt that having to respond in English was much more challenging and that for that reason, they were glad it was an online course they had taken. However, these participants agreed that they would have liked for the online course to have had more audio or videos. One participant's comments reinforced this: “I would have liked for the professor to post videos which would have helped me not only understand the lesson, but also allow me to learn English pronunciation” (Frank). Although the other participants Abigail, Gabriela, and Catalina did not comment in this discussion, through facial and physical observation, I perceived that they were in agreement with the other participants by nodding in approval.

Response to Research Question 3

RQ3. How do the perceived experiences of English language learners at this four year New York state private college affect their general academic skills?

T4. Perceptions of Academic Achievement

Learning styles. During the focus group interview, the question of how online learning addressed students’ individual learning styles was asked. Most of the participants agreed that although the online system, Blackboard, had various features to enhance learning, it was mostly just visually stimulating. One participant stated, “I learn better in person than online because in person I can see the example the teacher makes” (Abigail). Another stated, “I personally don’t like the online because I like to have the interaction between the professor and student” (Helen). While another participant stated, “I have difficulty staying on task and the online helps me to make sure I meet the deadlines on time” (Frank). Don and Ian also emphasized, “I like the interaction of professor and student;” “me too.” “To be honest, I only learn things for the

moment or test; or maybe I never had a professor that cared. It does not mean I never cared for my class, but the professor never made it interesting" (Catalina).

Academic achievement. During the individual and focus group interviews, structured questions were asked that related to the participants' self-efficacy on academic achievement through online learning. During the individual interview, the participants were asked: "What grade did you earn in your online course?" They all indicated that they had done well with course grades, which ranged from A- to C+. Jennifer stated, "I pass the course." Don stated "I did ok." Catalina stated, "I earned a B+." Emily stated "I got a B also." Abigail stated, "I got a C+." Helen stated, "I earned a B- which was my lowest grade that semester." While Frank stated, "I got an A-."

When the participants were asked during the focus group interview, "do you feel that you have gained academic content knowledge through your online courses?," one participant, Ian, reported that he had definitely gained academic content because of the high volume of posted information. While Jennifer stated "I did ok, but I feel that I could have done better in a face-to-face class, an online class is more intensive." Another participant stated, "I definitely gained academically because if I did not understand something I would have to teach it myself and I didn't understand then I would ask the professor" (Frank).

Overall, eight of the 10 students reported that they had gained content knowledge to some degree; while the other two (Bruno and Gabriela) reported that they had not, even though they had earned a passing grade. When asked to expand on why they felt they had not gained academic content, one student stated: "To be honest, I only learn things for the moment or test; or maybe I never had a professor that cared. It does not mean I never cared for my class, but the professor never made it interesting" (Gabriela).

Description of Participants' Experiences

The researcher must, according to Moustakas (1994), analyze how the emergent meaning units relate to the essence of an experience by creating composite textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions are what were experienced, while structural descriptions reveal how it was experienced. After the textural description was obtained, I engaged in the process of imaginative variation in order to arrive at "the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In this process, I varied the possible meanings of the textural descriptions and brainstormed vantage points and meanings and remained open to structural elements as they consciously emerged. This process led to my formulation of the structural description of the phenomenon. The combination of textural and structural descriptions allowed me to move to the final step in data analysis, a formulation of the composite description, or essence, of the phenomenon.

Textural Description

What did my participants experience through online learning? While the degree of perceived damage varied considerably, all participants proclaimed ill effects from their experiences, with only one reporting that in part its occurrence provided some degree of benefit (i.e., improved academic grade). When ELLs talked about online learning, they employed dramatic, emotionally-charged language, using such phrases as "confusion," "a traumatic experience," and "distressed…then ticked off…then embarrassed." One participant summed up her experience: "it was just stress, more than anything." The impact was often pervasive and far-reaching. Another participant explained, "I really don't like online learning, but I had no choice at the time." The participants described the experience as consuming a great deal of mental energy, with the participants mulling over not only the details of the online learning itself, but

spending a considerable amount of time in introspection as well. One individual talked about the online learning experience as causing her to "go back and re-evaluate why I registered." The experience was described by one participant as making her "more self-conscious" and feeling "alone." As one might expect, one participant concluded, "It has changed me as a student."

Structural Description

In what contexts did the participants experience online learning? Some participants focused on the unexpectedness of the experience of the independent study aspect of online courses. One participant explained the online students' reactions to her discussion board post made her feel inadequate. All participants felt some degree of social isolation, expressing their perception that the reactions of other online students who were English dominant were unwelcoming. Some participants were able to find a way to explain the actions of their online peers, providing some degree of closure to the event. Others, unfortunately, grappled not only with the incomprehensibility of the act itself, but an inability to find meaning in actions of the online cultural discrimination. Some participants were able to effectively move past their experience, mainly through arriving at the "reason" for their peers' actions.

Composite Description of the Phenomenon of Participants

According to Moustakas (1994) the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated must finally be synthesized into a composite description. This step of analysis, called "intuitive integration," in turn becomes the essence that captures the overarching themes or meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Four overarching themes were consistently present throughout all steps in the phenomenological data analysis. The overarching themes included: (a) perception of online learning, (b) perception of cultural differences, (c) perceptions of SLA, and (d) perceptions of academic content acquisition.

While there was a plethora of literature and advice supporting the struggles that English language learners endure, there is a noticeable paucity of research and discussion of the aftermath of undergraduate online learning experiences. This inquiry sought to fill this void in the literature and reported that the consequences of online learning were varied, but not one co-researcher reported feeling positive after their experience. Social concerns and feelings of isolation included statements from participants like, "There was definitely avoidance for learning" and "I felt like I wasn't really learning." Unfortunately, the negative aftermath of experiencing online learning affected their ability to complete assignments and some felt it had damaged their GPA: "I did ok," according to Jen. "It made me question why I register for it," remarked Abigail.

With today's technology, the embarrassment and humiliation can be viewed over and over, simultaneously, by multitudes of people. Many of the participants still have not achieved a sense of resolution, even though in some cases, they had taken an online course before. Ultimately, most participants described finding themselves in situations where they had little confidence in themselves or others to successfully navigate the online learning.

Summary

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological method was employed in the analysis of the data from the participants' transcripts. Presented in this chapter was a description of the themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that emerged from the participants' demographic profile questionnaires, individual interviews, and the focus group interview. The following four sections are presented in the next chapter: (a) a summary of the findings, (b) a discussion of the findings and implications in relation to the literature and theoretical framework, (c) limitations and recommendation for future research, and (d) the

conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of an overview of the findings, implications, limitations, recommendations for future research, and the conclusion of the study. This study sought to investigate undergraduate English language learners' perceptions of language and content acquisition through an online course.

Summary of Findings

The data indicated that perceptions differed between individual participants. For example, seven of the 10 participants saw the lack of face-to-face contact in online learning programs as a disadvantage, while the other three perceived it to be an advantage. Overall, participants perceived advantages and disadvantages in regards to English as a second language acquisition and academic acquisition. They also perceived disadvantages associated with cultural differences.

In regard to English language acquisition, the participants identified some advantages and disadvantages with academic and English language learning in an online course. Some participants felt that they survived the course by having a dictionary always with them. All 10 participants reported that their online experiences did not foster their English listening and speaking skills. However, most participants acknowledged that their English writing and reading skills had improved through their participation in the online course.

Concerning student performance, the participants noted that although they earned a passing grade, the majority consensus was that they could have done better in a face-to-face course. The participants identified some academic challenges due to their limited English proficiency and due to the instructional delivery of content online.

Also, the participants identified challenges in regard to culturally related difficulty with time management, technology competency, and the nature and content of some online discussions. Overall, students perceived that online learning does not reinforce culturally responsive teaching as well as face-to-face classes. These challenges were intensified due to the lack of faculty cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Implications of the Findings

The implications of the findings in this study are particularly relevant in the educational arena, but have applications in other settings as well. The participants in this study presented their perceptions of having been in an online course. They were all strong, dedicated people committed to being good undergraduate students. For the most part, the participants just wanted to pursue an American degree while still developing their English language skills through an online course. The results of this study have theoretical, methodological, and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study supported Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy, Knowles' (1980) theory of adult learning, Kolb's (1993) learning style theory, and Krashen's (1988) second language acquisition theory as presented in the theoretical framework section of Chapter Two.

Academic Content Acquisition

Bandura (1986) posed that through self-reflection, individuals can evaluate their own experiences of knowledge and skill acquisition. These beliefs of self- efficacy and abilities can influence the individual's environment and behavior. When asked the question about their perceptions of acquired content knowledge, some of the participants associated acquisition of

content knowledge with the course grade, while others perceived their content gain by what they remembered from the course. For example, Frank stated "I got an A-." Others described their perception of having gained minimal content knowledge. For example, Gabriela stated, "To be honest, I only learn things for the moment or test." The participants' sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1986) or personal perception of academic content acquired through online learning varied in that some reported that they had gained minimal content knowledge while others perceived satisfaction with content knowledge acquired through their online experiences.

Another factor, which contributed to academic content learning, was the learning styles of the participants. In Kolb's (1993) learning style theory, he emphasized that individuals possess preferences for learning. Furthermore, Kolb (1994) identifies and describes four learning modes (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation). Of these four, reflective observation was identifiable as the learning mode of most participants. Kolb's (1993) theory of learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) was also evident in this study as being an influential agent in the participants' perceptions of academic content acquisition. For example, in an act of reflective observation, Jennifer stated "I did ok, but I feel that I could have done better in a face-to-face class, online classes are more intensive." Don and Ian emphasized "I like the interaction of professor and student;" "me too." It was evident that these students preferred the opportunity for teacher demonstrations of the lessons and preferred the opportunity for student and teacher live interaction during the lesson. Most of the students agreed that it would have been helpful if the professor posted sample assignments because they could have visualized what the expectation of the assignment was.

Second Language Acquisition

The findings from this research also confirmed Krashen's (1988) second language

acquisition theory and Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory. Knowles (1980) suggested that adults' intentional learning activities were motivated by their desire to move from one level of proficiency to a higher one. Nine of the 10 students had reported having studied English as a second language in their native countries and expressed their excitement of having the opportunity to study in America and improve their English. One student reported being excited and motivated during his first online course: "It made me work faster and motivated me to do work on time" (Frank). One participant describes her motivation for reading:

> In a face-to-face class, if I fail to finish my reading, I could still get some general idea from the instructor and peers in class. This is not true in online courses. If I don't read, I cannot post and respond to others. If I do not post and respond, then I could not get credit. (Abigail)

Krashen (1988) maintains in his second language acquisition theory that ELLs come into the learning environment with a set of conditions (age, mindset, personality type, and ability to process information) that influence their process of second language acquisition. During the individual interview, each participant was asked to describe his or her perception of learning English and perception of English proficiency. One student reported that although she had studied English in her native country, learning English had become a difficult process because she did not have anyone at home to support her: "It was difficult for me to learn because my mom spoke Spanish to me all the time" (Abigail). The mindset of this student was that she was shortchanged in the process of learning English because she did not have a solid second language foundation to build on. Abigail, being the youngest of the participants, also reported that she felt she had learned

more content and English in the traditional courses she had taken. Therefore, she preferred to take traditional courses rather than online. She stated "I tend to learn better when I talk about the material than when I just read and write about it" (Abigail).

Overall, the participants in this study perceived that online learning had advantages and disadvantages in the facilitation of their second language learning experiences. Some of the participants reported that they were able to see improvement in their reading and writing English language skills, but not with the other linguistic skills of speaking and listening.

Course Instructional Delivery

This study reveals the importance and implications of how specific physical and instructional design must be carefully considered in an online course. During the focus group interview, the participants were asked to describe their online course experiences more in-depth. Specifically they were asked to describe their likes and dislikes. Overall the participants reported the advantages and disadvantages of online learning as they perceived them. However, among their responses was the constant emphasis on the instructional delivery as being an issue in their second language and content acquisition process. Overall, they agreed that understanding the basic information such as the course syllabus was a challenge. One student reported "I always had a dictionary with me at all time; professors assume you know English" (Hellen). Gabriela stated "It becomes confusing because you don't understand what the professor wants." These students felt that there was a lack of comprehensible input. Other students felt that even when they managed to understand the syllabus and assignment information, whenever they had a question, it took a long time to get a response form the professor. Emily stated, "I don't like it when I ask a question and it takes a day or days for the professor to answer." Online syllabi, computer scored assessments, and discussion topics are

useful in an online course system; however, if there is a lack of feedback and interaction, the experience can shift to an independent learning experience. The general consensus of the participants was that they were unsatisfied with the lack of feedback and interaction with the online instructor. An online course experience, which lacks any type of orientation as well as lacking a relationship to and with the other participants and/or instructor, does not allow the necessary interaction for learning to occur.

Based on only the courses provided at one university, the descriptions provided by these students emphasized the importance of interaction among students and its relevance in the use of pedagogy and the theoretical framework presented in Chapter Two. Further, this study revealed implications for higher education faculty who teach online. Interaction, need for an orientation to the online environment, and assumption of technological proficiency were among the factors acknowledged by the undergraduate students in this study. These findings are confirmed by additional research in similar university settings, and may have strong implications for online course structure and design, not only for graduate education majors involved in teaching or programs of school administration, but also for related social disciplines and faculty in institutions of higher education.

Cultural Differences

This study also confirms Tan et al.'s (2010) explanation of cultural differences among ELLs in higher education. Regarding aspects of culture and cultural diversity, the participants reported an overall dissatisfaction. Their general consensus was that the faculty, as well as other students, were not sensitive to the issue of cultural differences. They perceived that the expectations of online learning were the same for both English

native and international English language learners.

Most of the participants agreed that both language and cultural differences presented challenges in online learning. They also reported that for these reasons they were cautious about the number of courses taken in a given semester. The overall positive perceptions of online learning that came from the participants were the following: (a) proficient language skills, (b) online course experience, and (c) time spent in the United States.

Limitations

A few limitations were taken into consideration in this study. The first one was that participants in the study were at different levels of English language acquisition. The second is that academic performance may have attributed to prior content knowledge and not as a result of the distance learning experience. Lastly, the results cannot be generalized as the focus of this study was only on ELLs at this four year college.

Researcher Transparency

The results of this phenomenological study revealed that these undergraduate international English language learners perceived that online learning had its advantages and disadvantages. These perceptions consisted of English as a second language acquisition, academic acquisition, as well as disadvantages associated with cultural differences. Their perceptions of technological competency (knowledge of computers or computer system failures), frustration with professors' response turnaround time, age and gender differences, and lack of opportunity for practicing their English speaking and listening skills confirmed my own bias of dislikes of online learning.

However, what was most revealing to me, were their perceptions of what they liked about online learning, and the lack of culturally responsive teaching. Their perceptions of why they

liked online learning revealed that it was not because it fit their schedules as much as it was that they perceived that it was advantageous in learning the content. Several of the participants agreed that they preferred online because they could go back to the lecture notes and postings to reread for comprehension. They also perceived that they had achieved English as second language skills in reading and writing as a result of the online learning experience. They emphasized that having to constantly read instructions and write assignments online improved their English vocabulary and reading and writing skills. Also, they reported that overall they did fairly well in their online course.

Researcher's Recommendations

Future Research

Research should be conducted to investigate how international students transfer knowledge with the use of different technological applications as learning tools. It is useful to understand whether the students apply the learning strategies and learning experiences they use in the language lab to the traditional classroom and vice versa.

Instructional Designers

Instructional designers should take into consideration the possibility of cultural differences among students when designing curriculum. The online course curriculum should incorporate more audio and visual material to facilitate the development of ESL listening and speaking skills. The use of clear and comprehensible English throughout the course syllabi, assignment instructions, and assessment tools is highly recommended.

Course Instructors

The instructor plays a very important role in the teaching and learning process of English language learning. Therefore, it is recommended that an online instructor uses

precise and academically appropriate language. It is also recommended that they incorporate an eclectic instructional approach by using multiple resources or supplementary reading that will support comprehension of difficult content material.

Institution

The most important recommendation is for this particular institution to continue to promote cultural diversity awareness and provide opportunities for students, faculty, and the administration to build a culturally responsive community. Perhaps the institution can offer a summer bridge program for these international students and the program instructors to meet and discuss syllabi, course assignments, and the norm for online course interaction. It is also recommended that the international undergraduate program closely monitor the number of online courses these students are allowed to take in a given semester and determine when it would be recommended for an international student to take their first online course.

Conclusion

As the provision of online course offerings proliferates quickly throughout U.S. universities, researchers continue to explore the digital medium. Research in online design has previously included the investigation of varying course components dependent upon discipline and audience. Significant differences in student achievement between traditional (i.e., face-to-face) and online courses have not been consistently identified. The overall effectiveness of online learning continues to pose questions from both the academic world and the general public. The purpose of this study was to better understand undergraduate international ESL learners' perceptions of second language and academic acquisition through online learning in a single college. In person individual and telephone interviews were conducted to capture the essence of participants' perceived experiences of interaction in online undergraduate education courses.

Practical implications revolve around ways to design online courses where international students' interests and needs are acknowledged.

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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation to Participant

Dear Potential Participant,

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in Lynchburg Virginia. I am also a faculty member in the School of Education at this institution. I am inviting you to participate in a research study that I am conducting for partial fulfillment of the requirements of my degree program. The focus of my study is on the perception of undergraduate English Language Learner on second language and academic development through distance learning.

You have been identified as a potential participant. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interview sessions: individual and focus group. The interviews will include questions about your perception of language and academic acquisition through the online teaching/learning experience. The interviews will take about 45-60 minutes to complete each time. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interviews. This task will be completed during your regular class schedule at this institution. If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign and resend attached content form. You will obtain a copy of the consent form for your record at the time of your scheduled initial interview on campus during the spring semester.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (omitted) or via email at (omitted).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Olga N. De Jesus

Appendix B

Screening Questionnaire

Identification of participants

Please answer the following questions:

1. **Name**:_____

2. **CWID**:_____

3. **Email**:_____

4. **Sex**: __ Male__ Female

5. **Age Range**:__ 18-29 __ 30- 39 __ 40-49 __ 50 +

6. **Native Language**:_____

7. **Years in the U**.S:_____

8. **TOFEL Score**:_____

9. **Education background**:

__ I am an undergraduate international first year student taking online courses.

__ I am an undergraduate international first year student taking traditional on campus course

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Individual Interview

Introduction

1. What is your name?

2. Where were you born?

3. How long have you been in the U.S.?

4. What was your level of education prior to coming to the US? How many online courses have you taken?

5. Did you study English in your native country? If so, for how long? How often? How long ago?

6. Describe your English language learning experience.

7. Is it difficult for you to learn English? If so, what is it that makes it most difficult for you?

8. In terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, in which aspect do you think you have made the most progress since you started learning English?

9. What obstacles have you experienced in learning English?

Focus Group Questions

10. What has been your online learning course experience? Likes or dislikes?

11. In your perception, what impact has online learning had on your English language acquisition process?

12. In your perception, how has the online learning experience address your individual learning styles?

13. In your perception (opinion), did the online learning experience have an impact on your individual attitude, motivation, and anxiety toward learning?

14. How do you perceive cultural differences have affected your online learning experience in comparison to face-to-face class experiences?
15. Do you feel you have gained academic content knowledge through online courses?
16. How would you describe your interaction with the online course instructor?
17. Do you feel that the online instructor was culturally sensitive and responsive?
18. How would you describe your understanding of the online computer system (blackboard)?
19. Do you think that online learning provides equal opportunity to communicate with teachers as compared to traditional learning? Please explain how it does or does not facilitate student teacher relationship?
20. What grade did you earn in the online course?

Appendix D

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

TITLE OF PROJECT: UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC ACQUISITION THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

INTRODUCTION:
You are being asked to take part in a research study of how undergraduate English language learner perceptive language and academic acquisition through online learning. We are asking you to take part because you are an international student in the Liberal Arts program registered for at least one online course in the fall 2013. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to investigate the undergraduate international English Language Learners' perceptions and experiences of academic and language acquisition through online learning. The results of this study will not only help the students who participate better understand their learning experiences but also help the online instructor better understand recommended pedagogical practices geared toward online instruction.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF STUDY:
Your participation in this study will last for approximately one academic semester and will take place at the college campus.

PARTICIPANT EXPECTATION:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interview sessions: individual and focus group. The interviews will include questions about your perception of language and academic acquisition through the online teaching/learning experience. The interviews will take about 45-60 minutes to complete each time. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:
I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. The data collected in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The only authorized person who will have access to all data will be the researcher who will keep names and data secured. However, because you will participate in a focus group interview, although confidentiality will be encouraged, I will not be able to guarantee it. Therefore, a breach in confidentiality is a potential risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept

in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records.

PART TAKING IS VOLUNTARY:
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with institution. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

HOW TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY: You may withdraw at any time from this study by notifying the researcher of your wish to withdraw via email at ondejesus@liberty.edu. You will not be contacted again by the researcher.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS:
The researcher in this study is Olga N. De Jesus. If I have questions as a participant, I may contact the researcher at (omitted). You may also contact the Dean of the School of Education, Dr. Alfred Posamentier (omitted) or Brian C. Baker, MD, JD, Chair of the IRB committee at (omitted).
You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:
I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.
Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on [1/09/14].

Appendix E

IRB Approval

Re: IRB Approval 1739.010914: Undergraduate English-Language Learners' Perception of Language and Academic Acquisition through Online Learning: A Qualitative Phenomenology Study

Date: 1/09/14

Dear Olga,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

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Appendix F

Audit trail Confirmation Letter

March 14, 2014

Mi-Hyun Chung, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Chairperson
Department of Literacy and Multilingual Studies
School of Education

School of Education
Liberty University
1971 Lynchburg, VA

RE: Olga De Jesus

To The Dissertation Committee,

I have reviewed the data analysis process and have given my feedback to the doctoral candidate Olga De Jesus. The research and data analysis methods include different levels of interviews to collect data and discourse analysis using phenomenological method.

If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Mi-Huyn Chung

Appendix G

Selected meaningful Statements of Participants and Related Formulated Themes

Focus Group Interview Questions	Meaningful Statements	Meaning Units
What has been your online learning experience, likes or dislikes?	"I have liked the luxury of learning at the comfort of my home" "I really don't like it when I ask a question and it takes a day or days for the professor to answer"	T1. Perceptions of Online Learning • Likes • Dislikes • Technology Competency • Time Management
How would you describe your understanding of the online computer system (blackboard)?	"Very easy to navigate, I only have difficulty uploading document from my macbook" "I understand computer very well and I know how to use the blackboard system good"	
Did the online learning experience have an impact on your individual attitude, motivation, and anxiety toward learning?	"It definitely was very stressful to complete all the work on time because of how busy I was with everything else" "It made me work faster and motivated me to do work on time" "I really don't learn as much online as in class. If I am in class I will ask questions because I know I will get the answer usually right away"	
How have cultural differences affected your online learning experience in comparison to a face-to-face class experience?	"Well you do get to know the students' personal and cultural background a little"	T2. Perceptions of Cultural Differences • Cultural Differences • Lack of Cultural

How would you describe your interaction with the online instructor? Do you feel that the online instructor was culturally sensitive and responsive?	"I find it difficult to communicate with the professor because I feel silly writing to someone I don't see" "I felt that I could not understand others well, nor could I be understood by others. I prefer to take the classes where professors and students can meet and discuss" "Yes, I feel like he was not culturally sensitive and responsive to me" "I have no complaints about any of my online professors" "A little"	Responsive Teaching • Age & Gender Differences
Is it difficult for you to learn English? What obstacles have you experienced in learning English through online learning? In terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, in which aspect do you think you have made the most progress since learning English? In terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, in which aspect do you think you have made the most progress since	"It was difficult for me to learn because my mom spoke Spanish to me all the time" "My biggest obstacle is expressing myself in English" "At the beginning was difficult because I didn't know the meaning of words" "I still get confuse with English words" "I always have a dictionary with me at all times, especially when your classmates knew English and professor assume you knew English" "you have to spend time	T3. Perceptions of SLA • Vocabulary • Reading & Writing • Listening & Speaking

learning English?	translating everything in your head and trying to understand at the same time" "At the beginning was hard to understand when a person was speaking to me, I would not understand right away" "I still have problem with words"	
How has the online learning address your individual learning style? What grade did you earn in your online course?	"I personally don't like it because I like the interaction of professor and student" "I have learn that I learn better in person than online" " I did ok, but I feel that I could have done better in a face-to-face class, online classes is more intensive" "To be honest, I only learn things for the moment or test; or maybe I never had a professor that cared. It does not mean I never cared for my class, but the professor never made it interesting" " I pass the course" "I did ok" "I earned a 'B+' "I got a 'B' "I got an 'A-'	T4. Perceptions of Academic Content Acquisition • Learning Style • Academic Achievement