A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF OBSTACLES FACED

BY EIGHTH-GRADE LATINO MALES

by

Stanley Michael McQueen

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to investigate teacher perceptions into the educational obstacles of eighth-grade Latino males. For the purpose of this research, educational obstacles are generally defined as anything which obstructs Latino males from receiving a high school diploma. Critical Race Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory provided a lens to view the perceptions investigated in the study. Participants included 12 teachers from different middle schools across Northern Georgia. Teacher perceptions of educational obstacles (intentional or unintentional) were investigated through interviews, focus groups, pilot studies, and observations. Guiding the study was the research question: What are teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eight-grade Latino males which may affect their educational achievement? Thematic analysis identified to identify four important and emergent themes: teacher-created obstacles, parent-created obstacles, student-created obstacles, and environmental-obstacles.

Keywords: academic achievement, Latino/Latina, middle school, parent support, teacher perceptions, educational obstacles

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Joy, and my children, Victoria, Hannah, and Kelsey, who have sacrificed immensely in allowing me to pursue my dream of earning my terminal degree. I am so thankful to have loving families who routinely have placed my needs ahead of their own so that I could spend the time needed to complete this project. I thank God for blessing me with such a devoted, loving, and Godly family whose love I feel daily.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me the strength to pursue this endeavor. I would also like to thank my wife and children for giving me the support I needed in times when the journey was tough. Your support and encouragement did not go unnoticed. I also want to thank all of my friends and family who were so supportive of my project. I wish to thank the school district, which gave me the opportunity to conduct my research and the teachers who gave freely of their time and opened their classrooms so I could complete my research. As for my principal who allowed me the flexibility to take time to observe classrooms, I cannot thank him enough. To my chair, Dr. Jared Bigham, I wish to say thank you for your patience and support in guiding me through the process. I also wish to thank my research consultant, Dr. James Swezey, and my committee, Dr. Ralph Marino, Jr., and Dr. Kristi Goodwin. Your wisdom and guidance has allowed me to complete this research project and realize my dream of completing a doctoral degree.

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List of Abbreviations

AYP - Adequate Yearly Progress

NCLB - No Child Left Behind

CCRPI - College and Career Readiness Predictor Index

CRT – Critical Race Theory

SWDI - School Disengagement Warning Index

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Article VIII, Section I of the Georgia Constitution states public education prior to college or the postsecondary level shall be free and provided to each individual by taxes collected by the state (Justia, 2015). The fact that education is free to all does not mean that all perform equally. Statistics show Latino males fall below other subgroups in terms of academic achievement (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). This study will attempt to look into this phenomenon by exploring teacher perceptions of obstacles Latino males face during their eighth-grade year.

This chapter will introduce the background of the problem, the situation to self, the problem, and the purpose statement. The chapter will continue with the significance of the study, research questions, an outline of the research design used, and delimitations and limitations. Definitions will be provided and a summary will conclude chapter one.

Background

The Latino population in the United States educational system reached 20% in 2010, but Latino male student's academic achievement falls well below other subgroups in terms of dropout rate, completion of a high-school degree, and test scores/performance (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). Latinos overall had a dropout rate of 15.1%, with Latino males having a dropout rate of 17.3%. Perhaps the most staggering statistic of all is that one half of all Latino students do not finish high school within four years (Hispanics & Education, 2013). With the dropout rate well below this number, it poses the question: Why does it take so many Latino students longer to complete their degree? This statistic tells educators there is a problem concerning Latino males that needs to be addressed. The question then becomes what exactly is

the root of the problem and how should it be addressed? If educators know there is a problem, it would seem logical to look into the situation to see if interventions are working.

In a tri-county area in Northeast Georgia surrounding and including the county of the school system in this study, the Hispanic population exploded from 13,000 in the late 80s to over 200,000 in the late 2000s (Georgia Hispanic, 2007). This explosion was evident in the local school systems, as Latinos quickly became the fastest growing subgroup. Data from this subgroup began to show a significant gap between Latino males and other ethnic groups within the school system (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). An achievement gap was noted and was essentially the beginning of the thought process into this research study. This achievement gap drove the researcher to begin searching the literature for the issue, and the need for the research study was discovered in terms of teacher perceptions of Latino, middle school males (Becerra, 2012; Hayes, Blake, Darensbourg, & Castillo, 2015; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Gonzalez, Stein, & Huq, 2013; Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015;). Upon finding this gap in the literature, the researcher began to construct research questions to reflect the problem and the purpose began to take shape.

Research shows a student's ninth-grade year is the most pivotal in terms of completing high school (McCallummore & Sparapani, 2010). With this in mind, it is important to look at how middle schools are preparing Latino male students for this pivotal year. If the ninth grade year is so crucial, the transition from middle to high school becomes an important time to be examined. This study attempts to look into teacher perceptions of obstacles Latino males face in their eighth-grade year in preparing for that transition.

As teacher accountability in education increases, it is important to look at the teacher perceptions of obstacles that may be placed, either intentionally or unintentionally, in the way of

Latino males. This study seeks to shed light on these teacher perceptions of obstacles for eight-grade Latino males. The Critical Race Theory and Expectancy Value Theory provided the framework of the study and the lenses with which the research was conducted. This study seeks to provide a study that will address the gap in the literature as well as to provide vital information that will be useful for future studies into this phenomenon.

Situation to Self

I am currently an assistant principal in a middle school in Northeast Georgia. Part of my job is ensuring that subgroups are identified and any achievement gaps that may arise between them are addressed. I have seen first-hand how Latino students are falling behind other subgroups in our system. Our alternative school is filled with Latino male students who are behind in their high school tracks, yet they are doing everything possible to finish their public education with a high school diploma. The thought of Latino students falling behind is something that has bothered me for a while.

In qualitative research, the principal researcher begins with a worldview or a set of beliefs that provide a foundation for the study to be conducted (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism holds the belief that culture and context is important in understanding what occurs in society (Kim, 2001). I will be taking a social constructionism worldview for this study and I will be relying on the views and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2013). The rhetorical assumption that I will not be seeking a truth but rather reporting a perception through the participants' eyes is important to note in the beginning of this study. The motivation that drove me to this study is the axiological assumption that teacher expectations and perceptions play an important role in the academic success of Latino male students. In addition, the epistemological assumption that a positive eighth-grade transition year for Latino male students

is essential for a successful high school experience is important to acknowledge as I begin the research process.

Before becoming an assistant principal, I was an eighth-grade teacher in the school system. I have had experience teaching Latino male students and it is important for me to take my own prejudices out of the study. I have seen how some teachers feel empathetic towards Latino males and believe they are doing them a favor by passing them on to high school when they are not prepared for the rigor they will be experiencing. I have witnessed teachers who have felt sorry for their students because of their plight and gave them passing marks because of their effort in spite of their limitations. It is important that I not allow any preconceived notions of mine enter into this study so as not to taint the research in any way. However, I am very interested in the results of the study as it pertains to my past as well as my present and future careers.

Being the assistant principal in a middle school, I see how students are to be prepared for their ninth-grade year. I have also sat in transition meetings with high school principals and analyzed the data of the different subgroups. The thought that we may not be doing everything humanly possible to prepare our students for success is something that neither I nor any of my colleagues are prepared to accept. I feel my research work is something that can add to the literature that already exists and benefit educators in middle schools containing high Latino populations. The problem of low academic achievement for Latino males is something that will be studied through teacher perceptions.

Problem Statement

The problem this study seeks to research is the low academic achievement of Latino males by investigating the teacher perception of the obstacles they face as eighth-grade students.

Latino graduation rates increased gradually in the state of Georgia between 2004 and 2010 (State of Georgia, 2010). However, in examining the increase in the Latino graduation rate, it was evident that there was a major gap between the graduation rates of Latinos when compared to other ethnic groups in the same report (State of Georgia, 2010). One half of all Latino students do not finish high school within four years if they finish at all (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). This has implications to their future earnings as it has been reported that those with a bachelor's degree earned 103% more than those without a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Educators know completion of high school is vital for all students in regard to their future (ACT, 2015). With Latinos being the largest and fastest growing minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), it is imperative the obstacles this subgroup face is addressed to ensure the academic success of the Latino population. The future of America's economy is only as strong as its work force, and it only makes sense for the educational system to produce the most skilled work force possible to aid in these endeavors.

Improving the poor academic achievement of Latinos involves researching the perceptions of the obstacles these students face through the eyes of their teachers. It has been said a student's ninth-grade year is crucial in determining a successful high school career (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Past research has called for a closer look into Latino students' eighth-grade year to determine obstacles that might hinder their successful entrance into high school (Tribuzio, 2010). By examining the eighth-grade year, the perception of obstacles the students face during their transition year will aid in finding themes that may be beneficial to explore to increase the performance of Latino males in high school. There is also a gap in the literature in regard to research conducted in terms of teacher perceptions of Latino students. Hayes et al. (2015) call for future research to study this phenomenon in order to

explore variables which might contribute to the achievement of Latino youth in their early adolescence (p. 153). Research has proven teacher perceptions are an important factor in the success of English Language Learners (Tran, 2015). Therefore, teacher perception of obstacles is something that can be beneficial to investigate in regard to this subgroup, and this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by studying the teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males in their pursuit of a high school diploma.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory instrumental case study was to investigate teacher perceptions of educational obstacles for eighth-grade Latino males. The educational obstacles are defined as anything that obstructs Latino males from receiving a high school diploma. Teacher perceptions were used to help identify either intentional or unintentional obstacles that pose a threat to academic achievement of the Latino male subgroup. The research was conducted through the lens of Critical Race and Expectancy-Value Theory.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in communities that have large Latino student populations. Local school systems in Northeast Georgia are experiencing growth in their Latino populations at a record pace. In just over 17 years, the Latino population in the tri-county area around the school system in this study expanded from approximately 13,000 to 200,000 (Georgia Hispanic, 2007). A study concerning obstacles to academic achievement of Latino males from a teacher perspective will benefit educators involved in school systems who have experienced high populations of Latino male students. With the importance placed on graduation rates that began with No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and continue today with new

reforms such as CCRPI, it is important to explore avenues improving Latino academic achievement.

Being in an educational setting with an increased number of Latinos, I have been privy to the plight of the Latino student, and I have seen how many Latinos fail to complete high school and obtain a diploma. When the housing industry was booming, there were plenty of jobs for these former students to enter and earn a comfortable living. However, when construction began to disappear, the jobs also went away, and these students were left with no hope for a well-paying job. Placing hope in the construction occupation, many students unfortunately found themselves unemployable. Many Latino families had to move out of the area in order to find work elsewhere. Those that were not able to move took contracted, short-term jobs. It is imperative that educators exhaust every effort to resolve any issues that may lead to situations such as these before they arise and become obstacles.

The intent of this case study is to add to the literature by addressing the gap in and to implicate future research that may help to alleviate the issue and aid Latino males in their plight. Without research into the problem, Latinos will continue to face the same issues as time continues. Educators only want the best for their students, and it is imperative to provide the background knowledge necessary to aid educators in regard to Latino male students.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide this study explored the phenomenon of teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males and are listed in this section. Each question was developed from a review of the literature leading up to the development of the research plan.

Central Question: What are teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males which may affect their educational achievement?

Sub-Questions

SQ1 - How do teacher perceptions of obstacles of eighth-grade Latino males affect the academic achievement of these students?

SQ2 - What accommodations and/or interventions do teachers use to overcome the perceived obstacles to Latino male education?

SQ3 - What do teachers perceive as obstacles that affect the transition into high school of Latino male students?

The central question was obtained from a vast review of the literature pertaining to Latino male academic achievement. Teacher perceptions of obstacles were missing from the literature and was suggested as a topic for future research in studies completed on Latino male achievement (Beccara, 2012; Hayes et al, 2015). In addition, the need to examine the differences for each gender in middle school contributed to the question's development (Gonzalez, Stein, & Huq, 2013). This central question directly related to the purpose statement in this study and provided guidance in the completed research.

The first sub question attempted to examine any connection teacher perceptions had to academic achievement. A need to examine the connection between school personnel and Latino students (Vega et al., 2015) led to the development of this question. This question afforded teacher perceptions to be examined in data analysis in hopes greater connections could be made between recurring themes.

The second sub question examined any interventions teachers may attempt to overcome obstacles faced by Latino males. The need to examine interventions was discovered in the

literature (Henry et al., 2012), and the question intended to provide depth into the thought processes of the teachers and their perception of overcoming the obstacles faced by Latino males.

The third sub question gets to the heart of the middle school reasoning. The ninth-grade year is deemed as a critical year for high school students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Studies on Latino males graduation rates have ignored the middle school transition; therefore, the need to examine Latino male students before reaching high school to see what obstacles affect their transition to their ninth-grade year is necessary (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). Examining teacher perceptions of any obstacles ties the need into the study and addresses this gap in the literature more thoroughly.

Definitions

1. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* - A title given to schools by the United States Educational Department for meeting standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Steffan, 2004). The state of Georgia identifies whether or not a school or district meets AYP.

2. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - A*n educational reform act implemented by the United States Government in 2001 (Steffan, 2004). NCLB and AYP are used to determine if a school is successful and addressing the needs of the students (Kayler, 2009; Steffan, 2004).

3. *Latino* - A term used to identify various Latino, Spanish, or Hispanic sub-groups, cultures, and ethnicities (Jasinski, 2000). In the purposed study, the term Latino refers to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, Columbians or any other student with Spanish-related ancestry (Jasinski, 2000). Immigration is the number of foreign-born individuals entering a nation as typical residents over a certain period (Heer, 1996).

4. *Familism* - A social pattern in which the family assumes a position of ascendance over other individual interests. Familism can have various meanings and affects cultures differently but is known to have a particularly important affect and value for Hispanic cultures (Horton, 2006).

5. *Machismo* - relating to behaviors as well as ideals such toughness, aggressiveness, honor, courage, authority figures, protector, and risk taking (Saez, 2009).

6. *Educational Obstacles* – anything that obstructs Latino males from receiving a high school diploma

Summary

Chapter One included the problem for the proposed study and an overview of the methodology that was used. Also included in Chapter One was the sample population, geographical location, background of the study, and the significance and purpose of the study. The research problem addressed was the low academic achievement of Latino males and the lack of preparation to complete a high school degree. The issue of teacher perceptions of obstacles in relation to Critical Race Theory and Expectancy-Value theory helped to shed light on possible themes which arose. A case study methodology helped to identify and explore themes, behaviors, and beliefs of teachers in terms of educational interactions with Latino males in the eighth grade (Crewel, 2013; Yin, 2014). Chapter One gave an overview of the literature and methodology while Chapter Two and Three respectively will explore each in more detail.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two provides a theoretical framework for the study and a review of the relevant literature pertaining to the teacher perceptions of educational obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males. This study was grounded in Critical Race Theory (Creswell, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ortiz & Jayshree, 2010), and Expectancy Value Theory (Green, 2002; Jones, 2014; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Critical Race Theory applied to this study as it sought to explore racial issues embedded in society and Expectancy Value Theory applied since the study looked at teacher perceptions of obstacles and the expectancy they place on the value of education for Latino males either consciously or unconsciously. The relevant literature denoted issues in regard to the theoretical framework as well as the issues surrounding Latino male academic achievement, the obstacles they face, and teacher perceptions.

Latino males are one of the most intriguing categories to look at statistically within the United States educational system. They almost seem to be an enigma when compared to other subgroups, and while Latinos in general have extraordinarily high dropout rates, Latino males lag behind their female counterparts in terms of academic achievement and in terms of receiving a high school diploma. From educational barriers to teacher perception to empathy, there are many theories as to why these statistics are the way they are. The following attempts to look at the plight of the Latino student in America, where they are, how they got there, and what steps can be taken to improve their situation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was based on Critical Race Theory (Ortiz & Jani, 2010) and Expectancy-Value Theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Given Latino males are a

minority in this country, Critical Race Theory was vital in providing insight into the perceptions of the Latino male students from their teachers. This combined with expectancy-value theory, which shed light on the expectancy of a teacher along with the value the students place on learning, helped illuminate possible themes that arose in the research.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theory that focuses attention on the matter of how race and racism is embedded within the individual aspects of American society (Creswell, 2013). Race is at the forefront of many political conversations today, and CRT scholars tell us that without giving the proper attention to racism and its effects within society, policies and practices implemented will fall short of creating equitable solutions within the systems which they are placed (Rocco, Bernier, & Bowman, 2014). These scholars and researchers believe without looking at just how deeply racism is embedded within society, only the worst and most obvious forms of racial prejudices would be noticed and denounced while minorities would still be left as secondary citizens (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus is the plight of Latinos in America. Many native to the American culture see Latinos as second-class citizens because of their propensity to take jobs that many would not dream of doing themselves (Hutchinson, 2009). In North Georgia, the poultry industry saw a boom of Mexican-immigrants who were looking to improve their way of life and flocked to take the low-paying jobs by American standards in the plants (Shaw, 2002). They migrated from an area of extreme poverty in search of improving their economic situations, and their lower standard of living as compared to the natives of the area afforded them the luxury of taking these jobs which drastically improved their way of life from their previous situations (Shaw, 2002). This unskilled labor force helped to drive the economy for years helping to keep it strong and robust (Guthey, 2001). The construction

industry also had a need that was filled by this uneducated work force that was simply happy to be working and earning a living (Guthey, 2001). Soon, they began to see the other side of immigration as there began to be a backlash against the newly immigrated Latino people (Shaw, 2002).

Racism against the Latinos began to grow as many claimed they were taking jobs away from people who were native to the area (Guthey, 2001). Hate began to spew from some groups who simply did not like the way that the landscape was beginning to change (Shaw, 2002). This follows the pattern proposed by CRT and the suppression of minorities (Rocco et al., 2014). The truth is business owners were unable to fill these jobs for years until the immigrants began to arrive and then business began to boom (Weinberg, 2004). Therefore, it is not fair for anyone to be upset when a group fills a void left by society. However, when the majority looks at a group as being uneducated and unskilled labor, the CRT claims the prejudices from the majority voice in society will suppress this group to minority status without interventions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Using this background knowledge along with the theory of CRT, the research had a focus with which to examine the findings of the study. This information proved useful in the examination of the study's data while considering the Latino people and their struggles in education.

As time began to pass, the immigrants began to wish for their children to have a better way of life via the American education system (Plata-Plotter & de Guzman, 2012). The immigrants began to see how education was the key to success in their new country and the belief that the system would educate their children and lead them to better paying jobs encouraged their faith in local educators (Bae, 2008). The Critical Race Theory claimed

American society will not allow this to happen because it would need to keep the Latino population suppressed (Rocco et al., 2014).

It is interesting to look at the population of Latinos represented in the American Educational system who are educators in light of this theory. Latinos are underrepresented within the educational system in terms of school personnel. Latino teachers in the United States educational system represent 7.8% of the workforce while the number shrinks to 2% when examining the number of Latino male teachers in the workforce (White House, 2015). With only 15% of Latinos holding a college education (Krogstad, 2016) and only 2% of Georgia's teaching profession being Latino, it is imperative America find ways of getting Latinos not only through high school, but college preparatory programs which would allow them to teach and make a difference in the future of American children (Boser, 2014). If it is important for children to have role models who look like them, how is it possible for them to have teachers fill that role with the low number of teaches of Latino descent (Egalite, Kisida, Winters, & Harvard University, 2014)? This is an important reason why the research has to continue on the low academic performance of Latino males and how to overcome the obstacles of success that are either real or perceived, and this study can help to address the gap in the literature regarding this subject and the Latino males. CRT can shed an important light on research of this type and when paired with Expectancy-Value theory, can help to identify underlying themes that may be present within the educational system at varying levels which could be conscious or unconscious or even intentional or unintentional (Rocco et al., 2014).

Expectancy-Value Theory

Research has shown teachers influence student motivation through experiences and communication of their belief and expectancy (Green, 2002). Perceptions of a student's ability

play a prominent role in motivational theories (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Motivation is crucial in the Expectancy-Value theory. Positive motivational consequences come from attributing success to ability while attributing failure to lack of ability has negative consequences (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). With Expectancy-Value theory, the expectancy is the "probability that behavior will achieve the aim; the value is the level of significance of that aim" (Burak, 2014, p. 124). Teachers need to have the expectancy that their students can complete the task in order for students to value their educational ability and possess the motivation to succeed. Both expectancy and value are necessary for motivation (Jones, 2014). Initially, Eccles and her colleagues developed the model of Expectancy-Value theory to help articulate gender differences in the expectancy and value of mathematics and how the differences influenced the different gender choices of math courses and majors (Jones, 2014). In looking at gender differences within the Latino population, this theory shone a light on exploring differences in academic achievement in the eighth grade.

The Expectancy-Value Theory Model states expectancy and value are directly related and affect one another as they both predict achievement related choices and performance (Jones, 2014). The model also states perception and motivation are affected by beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, child's interpretation of events, expectations of others, and gender roles (Jones, 2014). Teachers play an important role in many, if not all, of these factors and when teachers have higher expectancies of their students, the students gain a positive impact on their perceptions and achievements (Green, 2002). Middle school teachers would play a very important role in their student's motivation and achievement and thus one would hope they would have high expectancy of their students.

A student's ability-related beliefs in many subjects such as math and reading decline throughout middle school with the largest decline coming in the transition year to ninth grade (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This decline was also evident in the children's value of the usefulness of the subjects (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). If students do not believe what they are learning is useful, it is almost impossible to get them concerned with completing their education (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Critical Race and Expectancy-Value Theories were both critical to this study and are not mutually exclusive. These two theories together bring the central idea of the study into a clear focus. Both theories provide their own unique perspectives, but the guidance they provide when used together is what made them vital to this research. The study could not have been conducted without the aid of each theory and each one's respective contribution. When the data was examined, the two lenses worked together in order to highlight recurring themes in the data which addressed the gap in the research as well as aided the direction of future research on the subject.

Related Literature

Latino males face a daunting reality when examining their educational futures. Latino male students have the highest attrition rates of any subgroup in Georgia's education system (Hispanics & Education, 2013). The future of Latino academic achievement will continue to fall below other subgroups unless the trends are reversed and Latino males begin to graduate with higher frequencies and in less time. With the high number of Latino males in the educational system today, it is important that the history, current situation, and future of this subgroup are explored in order to provide interventions and support for the Latino subgroup that is in the American educational system.

Latinos Role in America's Future

The term Latino is not considered to categorize race, but in the United States, the experiences of the group has most definitely become radicalized and categorized (Irrizarry & Donaldson, 2015). In the United States today, the Latino population is the largest and fastest growing minority group (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). In 2014, Latinos made up over 17% of the United States' population. In California alone, Latinos have overtaken non-Hispanic whites as the largest racial/ethnic group in the state. This has already been true for New Mexico for years, and Texas will see the same results before the year 2020 (Barreto & Segura, 2014). It was estimated by the United States Government that in the year 2020, Latinos will make up 19% of the American workforce (U. S. Department of Labor, 2012). With a number this large, this group of people will have a direct impact on America's ability to compete in the global economies of the future. The American economy is now and will then only be as strong as its work force which it employs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). America's workforce of all ethnicities should be comprised of a vastly skilled and educated population because statistics revealed in 2013, those with a bachelor's degree earned 103% more than those not completing high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). While college or technical school degrees are desirable, completion of a high school degree is the minimal for most Americans who wish to find gainful employment in their adult lives (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Education is the key to the success of all people, but when looking at the history of the Latino male students and the potential impact on America's economy in the coming years, these figures warrant a closer look into the educational plights of the Latino people to ensure a competitive future for America (Hernandez, Cohen, & Garcia, 2011).

In the year 2000, 24% of Latinos ranked in the lowest category in terms of income and monetary earnings compared to 17.6% of Caucasians (O'Conner, 2009). Coupled with the earlier statistics, this number shows how tough it is for Latinos to compete in today's American society. Research revealed that living in poverty permits lower intelligence scores and cognitive functioning, academic achievement which falls behind their peers, and social and emotional problems which are greater than their peers (McLoyd, 1998). When the children experience poverty during their preschool and/or early school years, school completion becomes more difficult and those who experience living conditions consistently below the poverty line perform worse than those who experience occasional or temporary experiences below the poverty line (Boyce, Gillam, Innocenti, Cook, & Ortiz, 2013). Education is key to providing the support necessary for parents to provide a stable financial environment for their children.

The number of Latino people in the United States has steadily risen since the 80s and the educational system concurs. The Latino population in the American educational system reached 23% in 2010 (Hispanics & Education, 2013). However, an alarming statistic from the same report stated the dropout rate for Latinos was 15.1%, the highest of any subgroup classification (Hispanics & Education, 2013). This disproportional dropout rate becomes even more staggering when looking at the numbers for Latino males. Latino males had a 17.3% dropout rate during the same year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). These statistics paint a picture of a bleak outlook for Latino male futures. Each piece of data fits together to paint a future for the American workforce behind other parts of the world if these numbers are not reversed. Every aspect of Latino education should be studied to search for trends and themes to contribute to the correction and reversal of this trend and the improvement of the plight of Latino males and their pursuit of academic achievement (Becerra, 2012).

Immigration

Immigration control is the one of the longest running debates in United States history (Esses & Abelson, 2017). During the early years of the United States, the government did not have laws relating to immigration. It was considered a natural way to build a workforce and was encouraged by Alexander Hamilton (Brigg, 2001). The United States saw an influx from the Chinese, Germans, Irish, and Canadians in the early days of immigration due to the conditions of oppression they were facing in their own countries and the expansion of land, agriculture, and industry in the United States (Brigg, 2001). The United States became a refuge for all people who wanted to come and start a new life.

Nearly every member of the United States Citizenry is a descendant of some people who came to this country to escape some degree of oppression, whether political, religious, economic, or social (Griswold, 1960). New York City was the harbor through which many immigrants passed and is home to The Statue of Liberty, which has these lines written by Emma Lazarus inscribed at its base: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of our teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden door" (as cited in Griswold, 1960, p. 216). This inscription on one of the beacons of American freedom paints a clear picture of one idea of American beliefs on immigration. Throughout history, many felt that immigration was a key component to the greatness of the American spirit and economy (Esses & Abelson, 2017). Proponents of immigration in the 1950s said arguments that immigrants take jobs away from American citizens does not take into account immigrants are also consumers and expand the market creating more employment (Hutchenson, 2009). People are still arguing this fact today proving as Ecclesiastes 1:9 (King James Version) says "there is nothing new under the sun."

Prior to 1920, people in the West used both legal and illegal means to suppress the Asian populations, which were mostly Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino (Molina, 2010). Groups deemed different were ostracized by many who feared change. In 1923, it was argued by Carl C. Brigham that the United States was made up of Nordic, Alpine, and Mediterranean races of Europe and the Negro, and he believed if these four types blended, the subsequent American would be less intelligent than the present native-born American (Hutchenson, 2009). The climate of segregation and racism was rampant almost 100 years ago and many believed this argument (Molina, 2010). Mexicans were the "negro problem of the Southwest" and White-Americans did not believe the Mexicans were like them, and thus compared them to groups who had already been defined, non-normative, and unfit for self-government (Molina, 2010, p. 156). The immigration debate was beginning to heat up with people lining up on both sides of the argument with each being passionate about their beliefs.

The 1924 Immigration Act saw the creation of the border patrol and Mexicans began to have more difficulty in crossing the border (Molina, 2010). While this sounds like a direct attempt at controlling Mexican immigration, the Immigration Act of 1924 was created primarily to control southeastern Europeans who were entering the United States through its southern border and left a loophole due to the need for agricultural help the Mexican immigrants could bring (Molina, 2010). Thus, the groundwork was laid for the unskilled labor of the Latino immigrants to enter the country.

President Johnson signed the Immigration Act of 1965 which amended previous immigration acts and ended the nation's discriminatory policies regarding immigration to the United States (Friedman, 1973). The act increased access into the United States for many groups whose access had been limited in the past (Friedman, 1973). The request for visas quickly

became more than could be handled, and thus illegal immigration became a real issue from groups who chose not to wait (Brigg, 2001). Illegal immigration has been and will continue to be one of the most polarizing topics in America as good people from each side become agitated at the mere mention of the subject. Many illegal immigrants come to the country in this manner because it is much more expensive to enter the country legally than illegally (Esses & Abelsen, 2017). Some people understand and respect these people for attempting to better their lives while others consider them as lawbreakers who should be deported and not allowed back into the country under any circumstances (Brigg, 2001). Both sides are passionate with their arguments and the conversation continues given today's political climate (Esses & Abelson, 2017).

Latino Immigration

Perhaps no topic is more controversial in today's political climate than Latino immigration, especially Mexican immigration (Seate & Mastro, 2017). Immigration reform seems to be at the center of every politician's platform today. However, the United States was once called a melting pot where people from all over the world were welcomed to assimilate to the culture and pursue the American Dream (Hirschman, 1983). This became especially true for the Latino people during the 1990s and into the 2000s as America saw an influx of immigrants from South and Central America (Jacobson, 2015). In the 1990s, California increased security at its border, causing the Mexican and Central American immigration issue to shift eastward across the United States (Hutchinson, 2009). In the first decade of the 2000s, the 10 states with the greatest Latino population growth saw an increase of Latinos of 103% collectively (Jacobson, 2015) . These states were primarily concentrated in the Southern and Southeastern United States (Jacobson, 2015). Recent Presidential platforms included immigration reform to stop the flow of immigrants entering into the United States via the Mexican border (Kerwin, 2017). Even if

efforts are stepped up to stop this flow, the population of the United States will still look very different in the future (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012).

While Latinos account for over 17% of the population, their birth rate is much higher as Latinos in the United States account for 25% of the new births in the country each year (Jacobson, 2015). This elevated statistic of birth rates is important in looking at the landscape of the country in the coming years. The term "Browning of America" reflects the change in the racial and social makeup of America in the coming future (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). Even if immigration reform passes and slows or stops the flow of immigrants entering the country from the Mexican border, the birth rates will allow for the Latino population in the United States to sustain its long-term growth (Jacobson, 2015). When examining the fact that more than half of today's children under age five are non-white, it is shocking to think that when Ronald Reagan was elected president, the United States population was almost 80% Caucasian (Barreto & Segura, 2014). Consideration of the number of Latino children currently served in the American education system is extremely important when the statistics involving Latino dropout rates are added to the equation.

The state of Georgia has seen an influx of Latino immigrants since the 1980s. North Georgia is home to one of the largest chicken exporting operations in the United States and the need for unskilled labor led to the migration of immigrants to fill the positions (Rivera, 2017). This led to a population of Latinos who were lacking in education and working in unskilled labor jobs, which trapped them into lower socioeconomic status even though they were working diligently and chasing the American dream (Rivera, 2017). Georgia's Latino population rose by 103% in the first decade of the 2000s and its agricultural, construction, and poultry industries provided jobs for the unskilled workers who were now migrating into its borders (Jacobson,

2015). This population change came swiftly for many small towns and the change in the makeup of the communities was immediate and brought many new obstacles.

Latino families were coming to America with the hope for a better life and education was a part of that life. There were many obstacles they would have to face in the pursuit of the American Dream, and one such obstacle was education (Hutchinson, 2009). Latinos were now flooding Georgia's schools at a record pace and many teachers had no experience teaching them. (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). With this background in place along with the high concentration of Latino students in Georgia schools and the lack of a long generational history in the United States, the area provides the perfect setting for the proposed research. In addition, the school system in this case study has several teachers who either teach or have had experience teaching Latino male eighth-grade students in several different subjects.

Latino Family Influence

Latino families in America face challenges in the educational system other subgroups do not face. The level of family involvement of parents of Latino high school students was proven a significant factor in improving academic achievement (Clark, Penguin, Orrock, Wilson, & Flores, 2013). With this being reality, it is imperative that barriers to Latino family involvement be investigated and overcome by school districts across the United States. One barrier that parents have stated to be one of their greatest fears is that if they showed even the slightest level of proficiency of the English language, teachers and others within the school system assume they have a full grasp of the language and no longer need translation services (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). This can lead to a lack of family involvement, which can be fatal. Family involvement is a predictor of success for all students so it is no surprise that when Spanish-speaking students have bilingual teachers, family involvement as well as literacy skills have been

shown to increase (Tang, Daring, & Weiss, 2012). Many schools do not have the luxury of having bilingual teachers, so this is an issue that may continue to plague school systems for some time to come. The feeling that a parent/teacher meeting is cut in half due to translation services also makes Latino parents feel like there is somethings not being communicated effectively (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). This feeling, while not necessarily breeding mistrust, can make families feel like they are unable to communicate effectively with teachers and school personnel and that they are not able to help their children with their educational struggles, even though they wish to provide them the necessary support to overcome the obstacles they face. The feeling of hopelessness can sometimes be more than the parents can understand and thus lead to a disconnection between the school and its educators. This is a sad situation because it is not one that is born of apathy or malcontent, but one that is sometimes fostered by monetary decisions when there is not enough money in the budget to ensure communications are translated effectively or a misunderstanding of how much English the parents can comprehend.

One perception the Latino community perceives is that schools and teachers label their students as having learning or behavior problems if they are not proficient in the academic side of the English language (Becerra, 2012). With many families needing a translator to communicate with the school, the feeling is that they are not able to communicate the real issues with the school and that things will be lost in translation (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). This causes families to feel frustrated with the process and helpless to help their children succeed academically. When teachers think a student does not understand a concept but in reality, it is a language issue, it can be frustrating for students and parents alike. This can lead to a feeling of hopelessness as to how to move forward, and the parents will not know what to do in order to help their students.

Some research suggests that Latino families can play an extremely important role in the academic success of their students if they place importance on the curriculum being learned (Hayes, Darensbourg, & Castillo, 2015). Academic socialization has been proven an important factor contributing to the motivation of students in middle school. When parents present education as a means of social mobility to their children, students become motivated to learn, improve their academic achievement, and subsequently their futures (Hayes, Darensbourg, & Castillo, 2015). On the other side of the spectrum, when families within a culture perceive there are barriers to education, it can have negative impacts on their children's academic success. Cultural and ethnic characteristics perceived to be educational barriers include language. Forty-five percent of all Latino students in the United States are classified as English Language Learners, and 79% of ELL students in elementary schools are Latino (Becerra, 2012). These are some very high numbers which makes one wonder about the depth of language acquisition these students have as well as their parents who are trying to aid them in their academic pursuits. If the academic language is missing even though they are adept at conversation, there can be some different perceptions as to cognitive abilities of students by both teachers and parents. These misunderstandings can have devastating consequences in terms of achievement, cooperation, and trust.

Depth of the English language is a predictor of the educational achievement of a child (Wojtkiewicz, 1995). Academic English is defined as "the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills" (Bailey & Huang, 2011, p. 350). It is critical that English Language Learners develop the depth of the language necessary to grasp the concepts being taught in the academic classes. When English is not spoken in the home, Latino children tend to display academic struggles which are disproportionate to other groups

(Tang, Daring, & Weiss, 2012). Children acquisition of language skills comes from interaction with parents and peers, thus a child may not become proficient in English if this language is not practiced in the home and with his/her peers (Suet-ling, 2007). This language barrier has been interpreted as apathy of some Latino parents when in reality; they may be highly concerned with their children's education. This misinterpretation is a created barrier that is hard to overcome, especially when the teacher may not be bilingual and has to rely on the parent's grasp of the English language. The lack of funding school systems have faced since the economic downturn in the late 2000's has helped to further some of these issues in that translation services are sometimes not available due to the lack of funding

Latino Educational Experiences

Latino dropout rates are the highest of any subgroup in the United States and with the projected growth, it is important that the educational experiences of Latino youth be explored. Numbers of Latino men and women who attend college have increased over the past few decades, but the proportional representation of Latino men is a number that in regards to their female equivalents continues to decrease (Clark et al., 2013). This fact led to the belief more research needs to be done to aid the Latino male population in their educational endeavors. From early interventions to the time last contacted within the institutions of learning, all facets should be examined to see if more interventions could be implemented to aid the issue.

Acculturation is a process of cultural adaption where immigrants adopt new values, norms and attitudes which mirror the ones of their new country (Hernandez et al., 2011). Latino families saw acculturation bring a negative impact in the areas of health, behavior, and academic achievement (Becerra, 2012). Each of these negative areas of acculturation plays an important role in the academic achievement of Latino males. Subsequent generations living in a society

adopt norms from the majority culture and English acquisition facilitates the incorporation of these norms (Becerra, 2012). Both of these issues could lead to perceived barriers for Latino males which could in turn lead to misbehavior. Misbehavior is another obstacle for Latino males. One reason is the process of dealing with the behavior is not perceived to be equivalent for Latino males when compared with other racial subgroups.

There are several types of theories and policies in terms of school discipline (Simson, 2013). Zero-tolerance is one discipline theory that has been around for a long time but is one deemed ineffective (Martin, 2015). Students excused from the classroom for misbehavior only appears to compound the problem (Martin, 2015). When discipline is not perceived to be dealt with in a fair and equitable manner, people can quickly lose faith in the educational system (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). Many Latinos believe school misbehavior is not appropriated in a fair and equitable manner when compared with White students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Family involvement, socio-economic status, and student engagement were linked to decreasing student misbehavior but not to school punishment which has been shown to be skewed in terms of Latino students' (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). Discipline can be enforced in many ways such as verbal correction, counseling, parent-teacher conferences, behavior contracts, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and referral to an alternate educational program, and/or expulsion (Kajs, 2006). The statistics show minorities are overrepresented in discipline referrals and the Latinos see disproportionate punishments for similar events when compared to Caucasian students (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). It is important for students who are already behind to be in the classroom and not in an alternate setting such as in-school suspension due to disciplinary action, but this is the case many times for minority students and especially Latino males (Kajs, 2006). In facing this reality, it is hard for

Latino families to not feel like they are facing an uphill battle in their educational pursuits. This is true for both parents and students alike.

Latina girls have routinely shown they outperform their Latino male counterparts, thus providing evidence of the prevalent gender gap within the subgroup (Vasquez-Salgado & Shaver, 2014). This may have to do with a term known as "machismo" which can be a term of endearment for Latino males (Saez, 2009). The phenomenon known as "machismo" relates to behaviors such as toughness, aggressiveness, and risk taking and can influence Latino males both positively and negatively (Saez, 2009). The social connotation of a successful student may not fit into this persona which is not unique to the Latino community, but does seem to be more prevalent than it is in others. When adding the fact of perceived barriers with the factor of machismo, it would help to understand the achievement gap between the genders. There is definitely a need for more research to add to the literature discussing the achievement gap and especially with emerging adolescents located in the eighth grade.

Familism is an example of how cultural beliefs can manifest into educational barriers (Horton, 2006). Students may choose to participate in a family event as opposed to completing an assignment due to the importance of family through the cultural phenomenon. Teachers understanding of this phenomenon may choose to give the student extra time whereas an unaware teacher might not understand the students' needs. More than 70% of Hispanic households with school-aged children speak Spanish at home with almost a quarter of these children developing difficulties speaking English (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). This phenomenon increases the reach of the language barrier from the classroom into the home because the parents of these Latino students have an inability to speak English. While these parents wish they could help their students, they feel hopeless in terms of their situation.

Teachers, students, and parents are all caught in a quandary in how to best move forward in situations such as this.

Equality in Education

What is fair and equal? Being fair does not necessarily mean equal when looking at equality in education. Various laws and policies opened educational doors for various groups and created a more equitable environment within the classrooms (Ford & King, 2014). Politics and race had enormous impacts on the educational opportunities within the United States of America (Goldberg, 1990). One such example was in the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) which broke the barrier of segregation in the United States. The Supreme Court ruled segregated schools, classrooms, and programs based on race were illegal and unconstitutional (Ford & King, 2014). Although it took time for this ruling to lead to the desegregation of school in America, it did lead to equal opportunities for all racial groups within the United States and laid the groundwork for the future of American education.

Desegregation did not exactly allow all schools to be equal. Prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), teachers did not have to be highly qualified to teach a subject and many teachers in low-income schools were not (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In the years before NCLB, less than 30% of high school math teachers in low socioeconomic school districts majored in mathematics during college as opposed to more than 40% of high school math teachers in higher socioeconomic districts (Garcia-Reid, 2008). Though NCLB mandated all teachers be highly qualified and current legislation has continued this requirement, it was left to the individual states to define exactly what that means (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Even though it is moving in the direction of equality, inequalities in the educational programs for high-level education still exist (Steffan, 2004). School systems with higher socio-economic

status are better at retaining highly qualified teachers while the attrition rate for teachers shows that 27% of new teachers hired leave the profession after one year and 50% leave the profession or transfer in less than five years (Heck, 2010). These statistics speak bleakly for the future of education in America, especially for students in high poverty areas. Schools have to do a better job of recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers in order to move the educational opportunities for all towards equality.

High School Dropout Information

High school dropouts cost society an estimated $240,000 over their lifetimes while costing themselves an estimated $630,000 (McConnell, 2012). When factoring in how much this dollar figure means to the economy, it is imperative the Latino dropout rate be examined closely to find solutions to the problem. Students entering the workforce who do not have job-ready skills are a strain to the economy, and America's future depends on the students its educational system sends out to sustain its workforce (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The ninth-grade year is the critical year for high school students in terms of whether or not they will complete their high school endeavors (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Initially in ninth grade, students' grades tend to decline and over 40% of students fail a subject during their first semester of high school (Weiss & Barman, 2007). Many schools see their freshmen class size shrink by 40% or more by the time the class reaches their senior year (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). With the ninth grade year being so important, it is imperative to look for early intervention programs, which may aid in preventing issues when students reach high school.

The School Disengagement Warning Index (SDWI) is something that can help predict dropout rates for students in their ninth grade year (Henry et al., 2012). Using the five categories of students who score not proficient in one or more subjects on standardized tests, miss 20% or

more of required attendance days in a given school year, fail one or more core subjects, receive one or more days of suspension from school, and had a prior grade retention, school personnel can come up with an arbitrary score which can be applied to the SDWI to predict students who are at risk for dropping out during their high school careers (Henry et al., 2012). This applied this to students in their eighth- or ninth-grade year. Although a plethora of research on high school students was found, a gap in the literature occured in the middle school years, especially the eighth-grade year (Henry et al., 2012). By applying this index to Latino male students in the eighth grade, this may encourage school personnel to create an early intervention to assist in the problem these students face.

The teenage years are the time when both male and female students develop perceptions of obstacles to their development of a career (Cardoso, 2008). If a person's outlook for his or her career is one which has perceived barriers, then it is conceivable the person perceives similar barriers in education (Gonzalez et al., 2013). Students indicated a lack of funding or understanding of college financial aid is an obstacle they do not see as something they can overcome (Walker & Pearsall, 2012). Couple this with the fact that many Latinos are in the lower socio-economic brackets, this can be a damning reality for students who have dreams beyond high school. An interesting study on Mexican-American students' educational aspirations indicated 90% of Mexican-American juniors acknowledge education as a critical component of succeeding in the world (Ojeda, 2008). The fact that the aspirations are there should let educational leaders know it is not an apathy factor for an entire subgroup but rather a phenomena and a critical need for exploration. Coupled with the fact that ninth grade is a crucial year, it would make sense to see how prepared students are to come to high school and what role middle school plays in the preparation.

Middle School

Students have shared what makes middle school meaningful for them is family and school professionals who encourage them (Tribuzio, 2010). Students want to be encouraged and feel like they belong, especially in the "middle" years. In the 1970s, educators would come to the students' neighborhoods to engage the students within their environments to do things such as play sports, visit their clubs, or even have conversations with them that mattered (Tribuzio, 2010). This relationship piece seems to be the necessary ingredient needed for student motivation and achievement, especially within the middle school (Tosolt, 2010). Getting teachers to embrace this could be critical to an academic breakthrough needed for the Latino male subgroup.

Middle school is a time of transition for young adolescents as it is a critical time during the maturation process into adulthood. Behaviors impacting social competence may arise and when support is not provided via educational opportunities, many students may exhibit antisocial tendencies which can carry over into adulthood (Buehler, Fletcher, Johnston, & Weymouth, 2015). Conversely, when students believe their learning environments to be positive, safe, and supportive, their first experiences with middle school tend to be labeled as enjoyable and they become engaged in the learning process (Buehler et al., 2015). With this information in mind, it is crucial for middle schools to employ highly qualified educators in order to reach the students and provide them the foundation to be successful.

Research has shown youths' grades tend to decline from eighth to ninth grade (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). Some believe this is because of the emphasis educators place on high-stakes standardized testing required in the eighth grade (Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). For example, the state of Georgia suggests eighth-grade students must pass a standardized test in

order to enter high school according to legislation enacted via NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This rationale does not seem like a viable conclusion, in part because the tests are not directly correlated to the class average. Many in the middle school routinely see students who fail academic classes while passing the standardized tests presented to them at the end of the school year (Muchereh & Yoder, 2008). High school students also have to take end-of-course tests and graduation tests which are also highly emphasized (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Due to this rationale, other avenues were researched to find the reasoning behind why student's grades tend to decline.

The middle school student is one who is caught between the freedoms of high school and the security of elementary school (Tribuzio, 2010). Often times middle school teachers lean too far either way with their students but the delicate balance they have between the two worlds explains the rationale behind the term middle school (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). Students are caught in the middle both figuratively and literally. Their bodies are beginning to develop into young adults but they are still adolescents who are now dealing with hormones which they have never experienced before (Buchanan, Eccles, & Becker, 1992). One can never forget that the students need the perfect balance of freedom and security to help them become successful and find their way in life (Buchanan et al., 1992). The problem comes from determining just exactly where that balance lies for each individual student (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014).

Extra-curricular activities help student achievement due to the fact that often grades are tied to participation in such activities (Moriana, Alos, Alcala, Pino, Herruzo, & Ruiz, 2006). Students must regularly pass a certain number of their classes in order to be eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities associated with their schools such as sports (Moriana et al., 2006).

Research suggests Latino males are more likely to engage in school sponsored activities than were their Latina counterparts, and there is a positive relationship between student participation in extra-curricular activities and improved academic achievement (Espinosa, Lunenburg, & Slate, 2013). This information is important for all educators of Latino male students, and, wherever possible, it would seem that getting Latino male students involved in after-school activities would prove to be beneficial for everyone (Espinosa et al., 2013).

Caring teacher behaviors are important to students staying engaged and motivated in school and Latino males are no different. Research has shown males value interpersonal caring behaviors which have traditionally been associated with girls (Tosolt, 2010). Behaviors such as hugging, complimenting one on their appearance, and/or offering protection or a feeling of security are examples of behaviors that males find beneficial in the middle school years (Tosolt, 2010). With the middle school student caught between adolescence and adulthood, it is the protection piece that is often overlooked by teachers and administrators alike within the middle schools across America (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). These students are not quite adults, but yet they are not perceived the same as the elementary school students which are just below them. Many times the teachers are not perceived to be as caring towards the middle school students as they seem to need, and thus they may seem to exhibit behavior which is seen as less caring than their elementary colleagues (Tribuzio, 2010). However, some wonder if the opposite is true of some teachers when looking at Latino males and their plights (Martin, 2015). Many people have questioned if there could there be another issue plaguing their successes that is rooted in the best possible cause. Empathy could be something that despite good intentions could have negative ramifications to students, especially the subgroup of Latino male students.

Empathy

Teachers feel empathy for their students for different reasons and at different points in time, and the implications of a non-empathetic teacher have been written about by brilliant minds such as Albert Einstein. He was quoted on the consequences of a non-empathetic teacher insaying, "Mental suppression and humiliation by a self-absorbed teacher leads to heavy, irredeemable damage to a child's mind, which often influences the rest of its life in a fatal way" (as cited in Rodgers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014, p. 137). Teacher-student interactions are extremely important in making a positive influence in a student's life. The interactions between teachers and their students are as important as any factor in the shaping of academic experiences for the child (Warren & Lessner, 2014). True empathy can help teachers try to understand the plight of a student under their tutelage even though they can never walk in their shoes (Martin, 2015). Teacher practices can and are influenced by prior training, but there is no evidence to suggest any type of training affects a teacher's core set of beliefs (Pettitt, 2011). Even though teachers are taught to have empathy in regard to students because one never knows the situation that the students are in, it cannot be said the training he or she received has provided empathy towards neither the students' situation nor whether that empathy is actually beneficial (Martin, 2015). The questions then arise as to whether empathy is something that all teachers naturally possess and if it is always a positive. If a teacher has empathy on a student who is failing but is trying his or her best, does the teacher pass the student on because he or she feels empathetic towards the student? And if so, is that in the best interest of the student? This is a case where empathy could be harmful to the success of a child, even though the teacher had the child's best interest at heart (Martin, 2015).

False empathy can be harmful to students on many levels. False empathy is a concept which can allow a teacher to be lulled into believing that he or she knows more about a group of people's plight than is actually known and can lead them to believe that they actually know what is best for others when engaged in the interpersonal interaction (Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). Critical Race Theory or CRT focuses on the ways in which race is embedded throughout the fabric of our society (Creswell, 2013). When empathy or false empathy is examined through the lens of CRT, it can be seen that teacher education programs should be exposing candidates to the dynamics of race and racism and its social, historical and political backgrounds (Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). This is especially true of Caucasian teachers as they may have no concept of the plight of the male Latino student and his home life even though the educator may possess the best curriculum knowledge of anyone in the building (Jackson, 2013). Sometimes the best intentions can cause the most harm in the future of students, and empathy can be detrimental to the plight of the Latino male students which they teach.

Educational Barriers

The lack of educational achievement of the Latino male subgroup is alarming as educational achievement was linked to overcoming both poverty and lower socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Education is not only necessary but is critical to a person's success in life as is witnessed in potential lifetime earnings (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). As mentioned before, a study on Mexican-American educational aspirations indicated 90% of Mexican-American juniors acknowledge education as a necessity for success in today's world (Owed, 2008). However, approximately half of all Latino students do not finish high school within four years and the majority of those who do are not prepared to engage in the rigors of academic endeavors beyond resulting in fewer than 13% of Latinos becoming college

graduates (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012). For this reason, barriers to their future were explored, identified, and researched in terms of ways for them to be eliminated.

There are many perceived barriers by Latino parents and note was the positioning upon the socioeconomic scale as it plays a significant role in the perception of those barriers. For example, Latino parents with higher incomes perceived schools and teachers labeling Latino students with behavior or learning problems which do not exist is the major reason for Latino students being outperformed by their White peers (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). The fact this subset of parents has a higher interaction rate with teachers could lead to this perception (Becerra, 2012). When students see how teachers interact with students on the educational level, it is easy for them to gain a perspective about those interactions (Green, 2002). Right or wrong, perception is something that becomes reality and in many Latino minds, this is unfortunately reality. Once trust is lost in a teacher or system, it is extremely hard to regain under any circumstances (Green, 2002).

Children whose parents emigrated from another country are usually the first to learn the English language due to their assimilation of the American culture via their peers and school experiences (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014). With this can come a great burden in terms of translation for their parents, representing their parents in various public situations and mediation between people with different views or positions (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014). Students who speak two languages are expected to have a lower vocabulary than students who are monolingual in nature during their early adolescent years as they are learning the language (Boyce et al., 2013). When this issue is compounded from living below the poverty line, students' skills become lacking in terms of literacy activity (Boyce et al., 2013). Research has shown students who are not proficient at reading at the end of the first grade will remain poor readers at the end

of the fourth grade (Juel, 1988). With many Latinos fitting into these categories, this is an educational barrier which can exist for Latino males.

Parents of Latino male students' lack of proficiency of English is another barrier to Latino educational achievement, along with the fact that Latino male students are more likely to be enrolled in overcrowded schools, have teachers who have not been trained properly, have a lower socio-economic status, and reside in schools who have a minimal support staff to address their needs (Clark et al., 2013). While these barriers have been well chronicled, it is unclear if teachers perceive these barriers to be existent for the middle school Latino males. The call for more research on the subject provided the gap in the literature as discussed in this paper and provided a pertinent reason for the researcher to pursue the topic of the study.

Educational barriers could very well be a reason for the low academic achievement of Latino males in the state of Georgia. Data researched revealed how Latino males experience lower levels of academic success than other subgroups or minorities (State of Georgia, 2015). Migrant failure rates are comparable to economically disadvantaged students. A concept of concern is the similar failure rates of limited English proficient students and students with disabilities (State of Georgia, 2015). Limited English Proficient and Students with Disabilities failure rates appear nearly identical in English language arts and social studies (State of Georgia, 2015). These are two subjects where reading may be a dominant part of giving instruction. Regardless of how the sub-groups are broken down or what rates are analyzed, the data clearly indicates the low performance of Latino students and the need for further research into why Latino students have low levels of academic achievement (Reyes et al., 1999). The study into the obstacles faced by Latino males during the eighth-grade year should aid in addressing the gap in the literature and allow for more insight into the phenomena of Latino males' lower academic

achievement when compared to other subgroups and their academic performance in the educational system.

Summary

Immigration was found to be the number of foreign-born individuals who enter a nation as residents over a certain period (Heer, 1996). Different circumstances have led Latinos to the United States but mostly in search of better jobs and a greater quality of life for them and their children (Brigg, 2001). Both legal and illegal immigration have implications to American citizens and thus the highly contested political debates of today have been born without giving pause to the effects it has on Latino children, whether right or wrong (Kerwin, 2017). These debates have crossed political lines and have become polarizing to constituents across the board (Kerwin, 2017). Indicators tell us that American society is experiencing a metamorphosis and policy makers need to examine the change as it affects all aspects of society (Fine & Lyon, 2017).

Equal education is a term which is tough for Latinos to hear because their perception of education is not equal (Vega et al., 2015). From dropout rates to school punishment, Latino statistics do not seem to be equal to the White students with which they share schools (Becerra, 2012). In looking at the challenges through the lens of CRT, Latinos are misrepresented in the American education system as students, teachers, and other school personnel (Ojeda, 2008). Latino students cannot look around and see very many people who look like them in positions of authority (White House, 2015). It is important to look into teacher perceptions while viewing this reality which Latino male students face every day (Jackson, 2013). The teacher perspectives of their students can help to overcome these issues and should be explored in terms of how Latino students are perceived and whether the perceptions might lead to obstacles whether

intentional or unintentional (Jackson, 2013). Teacher perspectives of their students are one area where research is lacking and is needed to be explored because it has been proven that a teachers' level of expectancy of a student is crucial for academic success (Bae, 2008). If this level of expectancy is not the same for Latino males, whether intentional or unintentional, this could open doors to research in the future regarding this phenomenon.

Latino students face challenges unique to them and their culture. From the language barrier to socioeconomic status to misinformed perceptions, Latinos are behind other subgroups in terms of their academic endeavors (Janinski, 2000). With the "Browning of America" occurring in the very near future, it is imperative this subgroup be explored as to ways to improve academic achievement (Thomas & Dockter, 2017). Data revealed Latinos are statistically behind other subgroups in terms of graduation rate and academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Data also showed Latino males are significantly behind their female Latina counterparts in terms of graduation rates and academic success as well (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The literature review provided the background for the researching the questions dealing with Latino male academic achievement found in the research question section. The call for more research into teacher perceptions within the middle grades was evident in the literature as well as the need to explore variables contributing to the achievement of Latino eighth-grade students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to explore teacher perceptions of educational obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males. Chapter Three contains the fundamental aspects of the research design including the research questions, setting, participants, procedures, and researcher's role, as well as data collection and data analysis procedures. Also included will be the trustworthiness and the ethical considerations of the study. At the end of the chapter, a conclusion summary is provided.

Design

Human behavior is always bound to the context in which it occurs (Ary, 2006). Qualitative research is defined as a process which seeks to address the meaning of individuals or how a group of individuals attributes to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, qualitative research was the most appropriate method for this study as it allowed for the participants and their behaviors to be studied in the context of their own environment where the behavior is prevalent. Qualitative research methodology can be in the form of grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenological, or case studies (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach is not appropriate as that design focuses on intense, emotional experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This study did not investigate the emotional experiences associated with the teacher perceptions of obstacles for Latino male students therefore phenomenology was not appropriate. Grounded theory was not appropriate as it focuses on building a theory from collected data (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Ethnography design was inappropriate due to time frame necessary for data collection. Ethnography requires the researcher devote a

substantial amount of time investigating the subject (Creswell, 2013). This led to the decision to use a case study design for this research study.

According to Yin (2014), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that seeks to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). An instrumental case study focuses on an issue and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the study (Creswell, 2013). In order for a case study to be exploratory, it should have some direction or purpose and rationale as it begins (Yin, 2014). The exploratory instrumental case study approach was appropriate for this study as teacher perceptions of obstacles to eighth-grade Latino males were explored in depth through the use of multiple sources of information.

Research Questions

The research questions used to guide this study explored the phenomenon of teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males follow:

Central Question: What are teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eight-grade Latino males which may affect their educational achievement?

Sub-Questions

SQ1 - How do teacher perceptions of obstacles of eighth-grade Latino males affect the academic achievement of these students?

SQ2 - What accommodations and/or interventions do teachers use to overcome the perceived obstacles to Latino male education?

SQ3 - What do teachers perceive as obstacles which affect the transition into high school of Latino male students?

Setting

The study took place within the seven middle schools comprised in a school system in Northeast Georgia. The school system received a pseudonym to allow for anonymity and was comprised of 29,176 students in 2013-2014, with 11,331 of them being of Latino heritage. The system had 35 schools which broke down into 20 elementary, seven middle, and eight high schools. Seven middle schools within the district was the focus of the study. The names of the schools were also given pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity of everyone during the study.

The school system was chosen based on its high population of Latino students as well as its convenience to the researcher. The system provided ample opportunities to conduct the research and the proximity of the system to the researcher allowed plenty of time to complete the study.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used for this study and its definition states all cases meet some type of criterion (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2002) states participants should have experience with the phenomenon explored and criteria should be set forth to ensure this to be the case. The participants in this study all had experience teaching eighth-grade Latino males. Some teacher's classes had a more diverse make-up than others as research has shown that Latino males are more times than not underrepresented in advanced classes (Walker & Pearsall, 2012). In an attempt to control for a teacher having a limited number of experiences due to this phenomenon and to not limit a teacher who only teaches advanced classes, a time parameter was implemented. For the sake of this study and in an attempt to provide validity to the study, teachers had at least three years experience teaching eighth-grade students within the system studied to ensure they had experience teaching Latino male students and also to stay consistent with prior studies

(Jackson, 2013). The school system itself ensured Latino males were in the population due to its ethnic makeup. This established criterion ensures the teachers had a variety of experiences with the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Participants were comprised of six teachers in the focus group study, four teachers in the pilot study, and 12 teachers interviewed who were contacted via their school email address. None of the focus study participants or the participants involved in the pilot study were used in the interviews in order to keep the perspectives of the teachers fresh. After the 12th interview, the goal was for data saturation to be reached (Creswell, 2013). Administrators at the various schools were asked to help with the search criterion before any outreach to the teachers was performed. Teachers who fit this criterion were asked to volunteer and the first who responded and fit the criteria were chosen. Face-to-face interaction as well as email was used to contact participants. Once the participants were identified and agreed to participate, a time and location was determined that would fit both schedules. A consent form was presented and signed by all participants (see Appendix E).

Procedures

To explore the perspectives of teachers regarding obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males, an exploratory instrumental case study design was used (Creswell, 2013). By exploring the viewpoint of the teachers, an understanding of what they feel Latinos face helps to understand obstacles that may be intentionally or unintentionally placed in the way of Latino students. Findings add to the literature and address the gap found in the initial literature search in Chapter Two.

The study took place in a school system located in North Georgia that has seen an influx in Latino students over the past 20 years. The location picked was due to its ease of proximity to

the researcher and the large number of Latino students that reside within the system. The participants were chosen based on criteria the teachers met in order to be interviewed. Data collection took place through focus groups, pilot studies, interviews, and observations. Data was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, looking for important and emerging themes, which were organized into categories for investigation (Neuman, 2006).

For the purposes of planning, a semi-structured, open-ended interview schedule was designed and was used in gaining Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix D). After approval, purposeful sampling helped to identify a focus group of six educators that evaluated the interview questions developed initially by the researcher. Next, a pilot study comprised of four educators tested the recommendations made by the focus group to determine if the questions being asked provided the pertinent information needed for the study. These steps aided in the validation of the instrument used during the interviews, which was next conducted with 12 educators from the school system chosen. Finally, observations within the educational settings of the teachers aided in the triangulation of data during the analysis. Digital audio and video recordings were transcribed for later analysis and notes from the observations were outlined and written into narrative form.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this study was as principal investigator. The primary responsibility was to facilitate and lead the semi-structured interviews along with the pilot studies and the focus groups. Analyzing the findings, reflecting on the data, researching the previous literature and synthesizing it into a narrative literature review also fell under the role of the researcher.

I am from a small town in North Georgia that has seen an influx of Latino immigrants over the past 20 years. I chose a system in which the make-up of the community is reflected in the student demographics within school system chosen as Latinos are the most prominent student subgroup within the system. Seeing the struggles faced by Latino males inspired me to conduct research into obstacles faced by these students. One challenge I had to overcome was to avoid leading questions that would have unintentionally produced answers reflective of my own personal views of the subject. It was important that I set aside any preconceived biases and experiences resulting from working with these students in order to increase reliability and validity of the research. .

Data Collection

Data collection methods in a case study follows a plan but the researcher must be quick to review the evidence, ask why, and be ready to adapt to unexpected procedures if the need occurs (Yin, 2014). With this in mind, the data collection procedures began by including focus groups, pilot studies, interviews, and observations. Each was described in detail in its own section below. As the study unfolded, it became clear that the instruments asked the questions necessary to complete the research project.

Interviews

Interviews are essential to a case study according to Yin (2014). One of the methods I used for the collection of data was interviews and these occurred from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 certified teachers within the designated school system identified through a pseudonym. The interviewer used the interview schedule (see Appendix A) to ask the questions and document the demographic information and take notes. Teachers were allowed to participate if they taught eighth grade within the system for three or more years, with this criteria used to

help provide validity to the study and again were kept consistent with other studies (Jackson, 2013). The interviews were recorded and the researcher/interviewer had a backup recorder going in case of failure of the first. The researcher reached out to the interviewees and met them at a place of their convenience to complete the interviews in a time that was agreeable to all parties involved. If telephone or video-conferencing was preferred by the interviewee, the interviewer provided that option as well.

Standardized open-ended interview questions

Demographics

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. How long have you taught in this system?

3. What subjects are you certified to teach?

4. What grades are you certified to teach? I.e. Pre-K, elementary, middle school, high school, etc.

5. Describe the various settings in which you have taught that have contained Latino male students.

Educational obstacles

6. What obstacles do eighth-grade Latino males face which may affect their academic achievement?

7. How do these obstacles differ, if so, from other students?

8. How have some of these obstacles to Latino male academic achievement been presenwithin your educational experiences or classroom?

9. What obstacles to academic achievement if any, have you seen teachers create for Latino males? What grade levels were these barriers created?

10. In your educational experiences with Latino males, what are some of the obstacles the students have created which affect their academic achievement?

11. What behaviors do Latino male students exhibit in your classroom?

12. What strategies have you implemented to encourage motivation in Latino male students?

13. How do you incorporate Latino culture in your classroom?

14. How do you contact Latino parents?

15. What behaviors do you observe in Latino parents during your interaction with them?

16. During a Latino male student's eighth grade year, what accommodations are in place to help them have a successful transition to high school?

17. What are some obstacles which could affect Latino males' transition to high school?

Future implications

18. What other ideas or beliefs you wish to share about Latino male student achievement?

19. What changes would you make to the interviewing process?

Qu and Dumay (2011) have suggested a good interview follow a well-planned interview schedule design to increase the validity of responses. The interview design for this study was planned to provide a guide for the researcher to ask the appropriate questions and stay focused on the questions needed for the study. The purpose of the questions in the demographics section was to provide background knowledge on each participant in the study (see Appendix A). Interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes and no more than one hour. Questions 1-5 were developed to gather information about the participants and their experiences with Latino male students. This information was helpful in the data analysis phase when looking for themes. Question 1 was designed to provide validation that the teacher has taught for a minimum of three years and Question 2 validates that he/she has been in the system for a minimum of three years.

This addresses the qualifications of the participants and ensures they have had experience with the desired students (Jackson, 2013). Questions 3 and 4 were both designed to show the qualifications of the teachers and provide a basis for comparison of answers. Question 5 was created to provide the setting in which the teacher has experienced teaching Latino males and also to provide a comparison basis in the data analysis phase. These questions were intended to be ice-breakers as well as ones which provide information for coding during analyzation.

Questions 6-11 were designed to address the driving research question as well as subquestion 1 by dealing with how teacher perceptions of obstacles affect Latino male achievement. Question 6 and 7 both get to the heart of the research question by giving the teachers a chance to answer regarding their perceptions of obstacles for Latino male students which may differ from other students. Teacher perceptions of Latino male students have been underemphasized in past research (Vega et al, 2015). These two questions attempt to address this issue.

Teachers can sometimes create obstacles for students whether consciously or unconsciously. Teacher instructional practices have a direct impact on student motivation and achievement (Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999). Question 8 was developed to assess if teaches feel these obstacles have permeated into their own classrooms, while question 9 investigated if teachers feel that other teachers create barriers for Latino students in other grades which could affect their education. However, students can create their own obstacles for education as well. When teachers have high expectations for Latino students but yet they still become disengaged, the student's themselves should then be examined to see what if any issues they may be creating for themselves which may hinder their academic achievement (Reyes et al, 1999). Questions 10

and 11 looked at any barriers which the teachers perceive Latino male students may create for themselves.

Questions 12-15 examined any intervention strategies the teachers may use to overcome the obstacles faced by Latino males. The call for future research to investigate how interventions can help with the problem of school disengagement has been placed by past researchers (Henry et al, 2012). Question 12 explicitly asked about any strategies which teachers may be incorporating within their classrooms to address the issue. Question 13 looks at the teachers' perception of incorporating Latino culture into the classroom. The purpose of this question was to investigate how deeply teachers address the cultural barriers Latino male students face. Cultural identity variables and perceptions of barriers can have an affect of how students view their educational aspirations (Gonzalez et al, 2013). Along with culture, language is a barrier that is important to address. Communication is a key component of any successful endeavor, but when teachers have a false sense that the parents can understand them completely, many issues may arise (Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012). Question 14 was created to examine how teachers communicate with Latino parents in an effort to see how the language barrier is navigated. Question 15 was also created with the parent communication in mind, but it went deeper into looking at how the teachers perceive the parents to behave during interactions. Academic socialization had emerged in recent studies as an important part of parental involvement in middle schools where the strongest achievement has been measured (Hayes et al, 2015). It is important that this study included the teacher's perspective on parental involvement while attempting to investigate the obstacles Latino males face.

Questions 16 and 17 were created to address sub question 3 in regards to transitioning to high school. Studies have shown that girls outperform boys during the transition to high school

(Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). Question 16 examined accommodations or interventions which may be in place to address the Latino male students transition to high school while question 17 examines what the teacher perceives as obstacles to a successful transition to high school. Questions 18 and 19 were created in order to provide the interviewees an opportunity to express any thought they may have about Latino males or about the study in general, and hopefully allow the interviewees an opportunity to feel like their opinions are valued and allow the interviews to be completed in a non-threatening manner (Neuman, 2006).

Pilot studies included an exploratory study to discover the feasibility of completing a study concerning teacher perceptions of obstacles for Latino males. The pre-test pilot study helped to validate the instrument as it tested recommendations made by the focus group and arranged by the researcher. The pilot study contained three sections: demographics/background, teacher perceptions of obstacles for Latino males, and a future implications section. The demographics/background section used five questions to uncover basic educational information such as certification, number of years teaching, subjects taught, etc. These answers allowed for the data to be grouped. Sections concerning Latinos included 12 questions exploring the phenomenon. The final section on future implications allowed for the interview to conclude in a calm, non-threatening manner (Neuman, 2006).

Focus Group

A focus group is defined as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic of research (Powell, 1996). The study included six educators, each representing a different category in regards to gender, race, and content/subject taught. The preliminary focus group was used to ensure provide data for triangulation in addition to interviews and observations. The focus group questions (see

Appendix B) followed the research questions closely and were open-ended to promote as much discussion as possible. Members of the focus group were excluded from the remainder of the study to ensure that fresh viewpoints were gathered. The focus group was videotaped so the entire meeting could be transcribed, including the gestures of the participants.

Patton (2002) states in focus groups, participants get to hear other's responses and then get to make additional comments beyond their original responses while not necessarily having to agree with one another. This approach gave the opportunity to allow for deeper conversations than the interviews. To obtain the data, the researcher asked seven questions of the group (see Appendix C).

Question 1 of the focus group addressed the research question guiding the study. As stated earlier, teacher perceptions of Latino male students have been underemphasized in past research (Vega et al, 2015). Therefore, this question along with the interview questions attempted to look at what teacher perceive on the subject of obstacles for Latino males. Becerra (2012) called for future research to examine perceived barriers to Latino male academic achievement. Couple this with the fact that teachers have a direct impact on student achievement (Reyes et al., 1999) and this is the basis for sub question two. Focus question two refers to research sub question two and examined how the teacher's perception of any obstacles affects Latino male achievement. Question three gave teachers the opportunity to express what their schools are either doing or not doing in regards to dealing with these obstacles. This again addressed the overarching research question along with sub question one as it looked at teacher perceptions of obstacles and possibly some of the basis of what they perceive to be these obstacles (Vega et al, 2015; Reyes et al, 1999).

Teacher's routinely look at ways to differentiate their instruction in order to reach every student they teach. The goal is always to keep students engaged so they are interested in learning. School disengagement is an issue which Latino males face and researchers have called for studies to examine how interventions or accommodations by teachers have improved student achievement by Latino males (Henry et al, 2012). Questions four and five examined accommodations that teacher may employ to address any obstacles for this subgroup. This directly relates to sub question two of the research question.

The middle school years are important in setting up students for their transition to high school, and Latino males underperform when compared to their Latina counterparts during this transition (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). Questions six and seven addressed the teacher's beliefs in regards to obstacles relating to the transition and is derived from subquestion three. These questions will aid in gaining insight into how the teacher's perceive the obstacles affect the students' transitions and also what they see happening to help with any issues.

Observations

Observations are an important part of qualitative research and can be useful in many ways. Observations can provide the researcher a method for checking nonverbal expressions of feelings, the ability to observe interactions and with whom those interactions occur, provide the avenue to observe communication methods, and check time and frequency of various activities (Kawulich, 2005). All of these provide important data for qualitative research studies. Thick, rich descriptions can be obtained and provided using data from observations, thus adding validation to a qualitative study (Kawulich, 2005). An unstructured non-participant observation allows the researcher to stay virtually unobtrusive to his or her surroundings, write down any observations which seem interesting and pertinent to the study, and also affords the ability to

ascertain whether or not what people say they do is in reality what they do (Mulhall, 2003). The use of an unstructured, non-participant observation in this research study helped with triangulation of data and validation of themes which emerged in the data analysis phase.

Teachers in this study were observed within their natural settings. This data was essential to the study to aid with triangulation. I observed the interactions of teachers and Latino male students in their classrooms while noting instructional methods, cultural acknowledgement, and behavior of students (Olivios, 2009). I observed each participant twice and each observation lasted for 20 minutes. Completing more than one observation was important to this study in order to gain a perspective on the teachers' experiences with Latino male students (Creswell, 2013). The first observations were within their classrooms and field notes were gathered using an observation protocol to aid in and the collection process (see Appendix C). The guide was used to gather and record the data in a systematic format, including verbal and physical communications and interactions with students and other teachers and unstructured field notes to reflect on the relationship between the observations (Chandler & Reynolds, 2013). Glesne (2011) stated observation guides should focus on the subject with relation to the research problem. The guide aided in collecting observational data that focused on interactions between teachers and Latino male students. The researcher took descriptive and reflective field notes. Objectivity was critical in order to examine the interactions between teachers and Latino male students in order to aid in triangulation of data. The observations were scheduled to ensure the teachers were in the classroom on the day of the observations.

The notes taken by hand were then organized into outlines and placed into a narrative form (Creswell, 2013). Taking notes by hand and then transferring to the computer kept unnecessary noise out of the classroom and aided the observer in being less intrusive.

The classroom observations provided an insight as to how the teachers interact with the Latino students in an everyday setting.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the thematic analysis approach (Neuman, 2006). Each step of the process followed guidelines to ensure the study was both valid and trustworthy. Yin (2014) states a vital step in any qualitative study is that the researcher's experiences must be bracketed out in order to maintain an unbiased perspective and this was the first step I took. I tried to pay careful attention to ensure that any relevant experiences were documented in order to achieve this step. Yin (2014) refers to this as reflexivity as it should be reflected in the analysis of the data. Next, interviews and focus groups were transcribed from the audio and video recordings created from the experience. Thick, rich descriptions were used to describe the details of the sessions and participants in the interviews, focus groups, and observations. This data and the transcriptions were stored on the researcher's personal computer which is password protected to ensure the confidentiality of the data. These steps led to the next step in the process, which was coding the data.

Coding is a process which "involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a table to the code" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Key terms were observed and noted and important and emerging themes were explored, and those themes were placed into categories for investigation. Coding the data involved determining frequency, intensity, direction, and space (Creswell, 2013). This allowed for patterns to emerge and be discussed and presented in an unbiased light. An in-depth narrative was created from the observation and the data was triangulated with the other data to provide validity to the findings (Creswell, 2013).

The use of triangulation through different data sources is an effort to corroborate the information gained, thus providing validity to the findings (Yin, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is validation of a study and that validation is explained as the strategies researchers use to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2013). There are four components of trustworthiness: confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is defined as the ability of the researcher to take steps to ensure objectivity in that the findings are the results of experiences of the subjects and not pertinent to the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Conformability can be achieved through triangulation (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation uses at least three data collection methods to corroborate the results and to shed light on the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). The conclusions of a case study which are based on several different sources of information and are triangulated are much more accurate or convincing (Yin, 2014). In this study, a focus group, interviews, and observations were used to gather data that was analyzed. These various sources provided triangulation of the data which aids in the trustworthiness of the study. The use of a pilot study helped to validate the instrument and insure the research study measured what it was intended to measure (Miyata, 2009).

Credibility

The degree to which the researcher accurately interpreted the findings of the study is defined as credibility (Shenton, 2004). Credibility can be achieved through rich, thick descriptions. By using rich, thick description, the researcher will allow the reader to make decisions regarding transferability (Creswell, 2013). Member checking which is also known as

participant validation allows participants to check for accuracy and resonance with the experience (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). By using member checking, I allowed the participants of the study to review the transcripts for accuracy and I used direct quotes and detail in the descriptions to help with credibility.

Dependability

Shenton (2004) states the researcher needs to report in detail the processes of the study so that another researcher could duplicate the work and gain the same results. Efforts were made to explain the process in detail during each step of the study. By describing the process as accurately and with as much detail as possible, the researcher has allowed this study to be duplicated and thus the study has dependability.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of the study can be applied to a wider population and also applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Thick descriptions help to bring transferability to a study as they refer to the detailed account of field experiences (Creswell, 2013). Thick, rich descriptions were used in detailing the observation process of each teacher involved in the study. By providing thick descriptions of the participants, what was said during the interviews, and detailing in the observation process, transferability has been achieved.

By recognizing the four components and providing the evidence needed for each, the study has the trustworthiness needed at its final stage. Even though flawless reliability and validity are practically unattainable (Neuman, 2006), every effort was made to ensure the trustworthiness of this study is as close to complete as possible and this gave validity to the research study.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the safety of all participants, ethical considerations should be given pause. Even though the ethical considerations for this study are at a minimum, they still were considered and addressed. First, all participants were adult volunteers and were identified through pseudonyms. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before any interviews took place. Field notes obtained from observations do not include any characteristics which could identify the participants. All data was stored on the researcher's password protected computer in the office of his personal home.

In order to protect the participant's identities, they were provided with the opportunity to read the final transcript of their individual interviews to verify that actual names and any identifying material was not used. Member checking also ensured that the participants had the opportunity to remove any parts of the interview which they might not have answered in the words with which they meant. The participants were also be informed that all information is subject to the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University.

Summary

The researcher used a qualitative exploratory instrumental case study design to explore teacher perceptions into obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males in a school system in North Georgia. This system was chosen due to the high number of Latino students, which help to comprise its student make-up. The central question driving the study is what teachers perceive as educational obstacles for eighth-grade Latino males. Chapter Three also described the setting and the participants of the study along with the procedures for data collection and analysis. It also set aside the procedures to ensure trustworthiness and accountability in terms of ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

In this chapter, the findings of the case study are examined and discussed in detail. First, the participants are described along with the process involved in identifying the themes discovered. Next, the themes are discussed in detail and the results are presented as they relate to the study in terms of the research question. Finally, a summary of the results is used to present the information in a concise method to complete the chapter.

The purpose of this study originated from a gap in the literature discovered in terms of teacher perceptions of educational obstacles which Latino males face in their eighth-grade year. Detailed interviews conducted with 12 northeast Georgia, eighth-grade teachers comprised the data for the study. The interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into the perceptions of the teachers involved in the study. The case study design allowed for the exploration of the issue of low academic achievement of Latino males by studying the perception of these students in the eyes of their teachers. The case study design proved to be effective for this type of research because it allowed for a lot of rich, deep data to be gathered in detail. Thematic analysis provides an interpretation of participants' meanings (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015) and requires the meticulous reading of text or data in a search for emerging themes which become categories for investigation (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Major and minor themes emerged and thus provided the basis for the grouping of the data (Creswell, 2013). The findings are reported in results section of this chapter.

Chapter Four includes the analysis of the data collected from the research. First, a focus group consisting of six teachers of various backgrounds, all who teach at the middle school level was conducted to make sure the questions asked focused on the over-arching research question

and to validate the testing instrument used to gather the data for the study (Hanbury, Farley, & Thompson, 2015). Each teacher had varying degrees of teaching experience and in differing fields. The group was made up of three males and three females. The focus group centered on open-ended questions which simply opened up a discussion amongst the educators. The focus group questions allowed elaboration which confirmed the questions to be posed in the interview would get to the perception issues being investigated. No new questions arose from the focus group, so the focus then moved to the four-teacher pilot group which tested the interviewing instrument.

The pilot group consisted of two male teachers and two female teachers, all with several years teaching experience in the Anywhere school district (this is a pseudonym used in place of the actual name in order to protect the anonymity of everyone involved). The interviewer used the questionnaire prepared beforehand as a test instrument to see if any flaws appeared in the process (see Appendix A). After interviewing the four teachers, the question asking about changes to the interviewing process was dropped as all agreed it was unnecessary. The teachers were gracious in providing feedback, stating that the interview was not too long and that it made them reflect on their thoughts and practices within their classrooms.

After completion of the pilot study, the interviewing phase began with a final study of 12 certified eighth-grade teachers from the same north Georgia school district which will be called Anywhere school district for the purposes of this study. Observations within these teachers' classrooms then were completed to validate the data collected and provide triangulation (Creswell, 2013). Analysis of the data researched provided themes, which were elaborated upon in Chapter Four. Results from the data analysis relate to the research question, which drove the

case study: What are teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males which may affect their educational achievement?

Participants

The participants in this study were eighth-grade teachers who were all teaching within a single school district in north Georgia. The teachers all came from various backgrounds, taught different subjects across content areas, and were from different schools within the same district. Twelve teachers were used for the interviews and observations, while four other teachers were used for the pilot study. All 16 of these participants agreed upon being contacted to participate. For the focus group, 18 different teachers were contacted before six were chosen due to their ability to participate at the given time. Throughout the process, the participants were informed of progress and when the time of their interview or observation would be completed. Every effort was made to accommodate their schedules. Table 1 presents the participant demographics in terms of gender, ethnicity, years teaching, and number of years teaching within the said system. Each teacher was asked to self-identify with an ethnicity before the interviews began in order to categorize each participant. Each teacher was given a pseudonym in order to protect their anonymity. It should be noted that all quotes from the participants that are induced are verbatim. This includes any spelling or grammatical issues in order to accurately portray the voice of the person being interviewed.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Teaching	Years Teaching in District

T1 - Jesse	Male	White	15	8
T2 - Taylor	Male	White	8	5
T3 - Holden	Male	White	14	13
T4 - Isabella	Female	Latino	6	6
T5 - Fred	Male	White	5	5
T6 - Jose	Male	Latino	9	9
T7 - Stacy	Female	White	15	14
T8 - Alex	Female	White	7	7
T9 - Joanne	Female	White	13	13
T10 - Jackie	Female	White	16	12
T11 - Sean	Male	White	12	12
T12 - Dianne	Female	White	16	7

Jesse

Jesse is a Georgia Studies teacher who has taught in the system for eight years. He has a total of 15 years in teaching and has taught at several different levels. He has previously taught eighth-and-ninth grade reading, seven and eighth-grade math, and eighth-grade social studies, which in Georgia is called Georgia Studies. Jesse has had several classroom experiences in his 15 years and said that he sees a majority of Latino males in his classes that he teaches. While observing Jesse's class, it was obvious that he was a seasoned professional as the routines and procedures had obviously been very well engrained in his students' operations. Jesse was not an authoritarian, but he did make sure that his classroom was very orderly and that everyone was

heard when they spoke. In the first class observed, there were 22 students present and six of them were Latino males.

Taylor

At the time of the interview, he had eight years teaching experience with five of those years being in the Anywhere school district. His certification is in high school English and middle grades social studies. Taylor came from a nearby district where he was a very successful high school English teacher. When a new school opened closer to his home, he jumped on the opportunity to apply and was immediately hired. He taught Georgia studies and ninth grade literature at the school, as well as a remedial course called Read 180. He shared there was a substantial population of Latino students, both male and female, in all of his classes, both in this system and in the one from whence he came.

In observing his classroom, there were fewer Latino males than in most of the other classrooms observed in this study. The class was also smaller in and of itself, housing only 18 students both times observed. Latino males made up 11% of the makeup, two students total. In observing the Latino males in his classroom, it became obvious they were very well adapted and behaved and handled themselves in a manner that would have made any parent proud. This obviously lent itself to a positive bias towards Latino male achievement and it did seem to show during his interviews.

Holden

Holden provided an interesting perspective to the study. A highly qualified special education teacher who provides many services in his school, he provided a prospective others could not provide. Being a co-teacher as well as a lead teacher in a social skills connection class, Holden has taught several classes containing Latino males. He has been in a self-contained

emotional behavior class; co-taught classes; Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) classes; and he even coaches athletic teams historically very heavily weighted by Latino males. He has been a teacher for 14 years and has served in the Anywhere school district for 13 years.

In his classes, there contained a high concentration of Latino males. I also witnessed one Latino male student who had been sent to him from another teacher for the period due to unacceptable behavior in her classroom. This provided legitimization to his interviews when he spoke of how he truly believed in all his students and he did not care who or what ethnicity his students were. He treated them all the same and he had high expectations for them all. The Latino males were mostly working and had no variance in participation from the other subgroups. He called on all evenly and made sure that all were working, participating, and/or staying on task.

Isabella

Isabella provided the first Latina perspective to the study. She has been a teacher for six years and all have been in the Anywhere school district. She is certified in early childhood education, pre-k to fifth, family and consumer science and Spanish, both K-12, and culinary arts for high school. She has taught for the last four years in the middle school setting and has witnessed classes containing both Latino males and females. She provides a perspective of someone of the same ethnicity of the students in the study, and it was very interesting to talk to her regarding her perspective on obstacles these students face.

Isabella's class only contained a couple of Latino males while observed, and the entire class was taught in Spanish. While the teacher spoke in Spanish, a Latino boy spoke to another student in English. It was truly a bilingual experience which was fascinating to watch. The

school in which she taught contained several Latino males; however the fact that she taught an elective class that many may feel is more female oriented could explain the low numbers I witnessed.

Fred

Fred is a teacher of five years and all of them have been spent in the Anywhere school district. Fred is an older, white male as this was his second career, and he came from a construction background. He he has both taught Latino males as well as worked with them in his company. He explained, "If you gave my Latino male workers a set of plans and told them to square the house, they would do it with no problem. However, if I told them I needed them to solve an algebra problem to get paid, we would have been fighting." Fred is an eighth-grade math teacher and is only certified to teach middle grades math. He has taught both on level as well as advanced and has had experience educating Latino males in both.

Fred's classroom housed 14/32 and 1/27 Latino male students respectively in the classes observed. Observed were many behaviors that were not conducive to learning in the class as it was, at times, on the verge of chaos. There were many more males in general in the class than females. Latino males had more behavior issues and Fred had to address them as a subgroup more than any other.

Jose

Jose is a Latino male teacher who provided a perspective of someone who actually comes from the same background as the Latino male students he teaches. Jose personified a very intelligent person who is very passionate about what he does. He has been with the Anywhere school district for nine years and has taught a mixture of students that has reached approximately 50% Latinos from the very beginning. He is certified in various subjects and grade levels, such

as K-12 elementary education, middle grades math and social studies, ESOL, and high school engineering.

Jose taught in a school, which, according to him, has a goal of housing a 50% split between native Spanish speakers and English as first language students. The split in his classes revealed six out of 16 students who were Latino males both times observed. He also taught his class in Spanish, but Latino males again spoke to their Caucasian counterparts in English. Latino males were working together in his class on a project, except for one. One Latino male student was working independently and did not get up to speak to any other students either time observed. It was very evident that when the teacher was in the room, the students were on task and working. However, when he left the room to check on the other students in the hall, the students began to exhibit off-task behavior.

Stacy

Stacy is a passionate teacher who has been teaching for 15 years with all but one of those years being in the Anywhere school district. She has taught math at her school, both advanced and on level and has seen Latino males in both class make-ups. She is certified middle grades education in math, social studies and English/language arts. Upon walking into her classroom, one can sense a state of calmness about this teacher and one who really creates a sense of community within her classroom. Students felt free to speak out in her classroom, both Latino and non-Latino, and all at the appropriate times. Her teaching style and expectations did not seem to change in regard to whether the class was advanced or not. Latino males were not grouped together in any form inside her classroom as they were spread out in all rows, whether intentional or unintentional. There was not a great deal of student-student interaction witnessed, but the Latino male students observed were engaged with the teacher and had no issues with

speaking out in whole group. Students were seated in desks which faced each other with the teacher in the middle facilitating learning. There were five Latino male students in both classes observed which made up 22% and 21% respectively.

Alex

Alex is a female science teacher who has taught at the same school for her seven years in the profession. She is certified in math K-8 and science 6-8. She teaches the Carnegie science classes at her school as well as regular eighth-grade science. Her school has traditionally had a very high Latino population and she sees them in both settings. While observing interactions with a student who spoke very little English, if any. Her ability to use his peers to aid in communication allowed the student to participate just as any other student that was in the class at the time. This action personified the statement from her interview, "…we must do all we can to reach our students."

Joanne

Joanne is a Georgia studies teacher at another highly Latino populated school. Joanne traditionally has a very high concentration of Latino male students in her classes every year. She has been teaching at the same school for her entire career which spans thirteen years. She is a leader in the county in instruction. Her interview was by far the longest, and she was more than happy to expound on any and every answer. Joanne is broad field social studies certified meaning that she can teach 6-8 social studies areas such as history, geography, behavioral sciences, economics, and political science. She is also middle grades English/language arts certified.

Joanne's classes were made up of 28.5% and 18% Latino males respectively. Latino males were actively involved in the lessons and all seemed to integrate into the classroom

seamlessly. There did not seem to be any language barriers or anything else which hindered them from participating with both student-teacher as well as student-student interactions. The teacher played a review game via technology, which the students could use their phones to participate. She also had a supply of iPods for students to borrow that did not possess the necessary technology on their own. All but one Latino male came forth and borrowed one of the school's devices. This correlated with her interview when she mentioned how many Latino males from her school lived in poverty.

Jackie

Jackie is a middle school math teacher in the district that has a very high Latino population. Jackie has been a teacher for sixteen years and has invaluable experience in the profession. She has been in the Anywhere school district for 12 years, teaching at the same school the entire time. She has been in both co-teaching and regular classes that have contained Latino males. She pointed out that she has never had an ESOL co-teacher, but she still sees a large number of Latino males in her classes each year. She is certified to teach middle grades math and social studies, and she possesses her gifted endorsement.

Jackie's classes were not the same in regards to make-up or content. The first class observed was an on grade level class that had eight Latino males out of the 21 total students. The second class was a Carnegie class that contained the higher achieving learners within the school and showed a very different make-up in regard to diversity. Three of the 27 students in the class were Latino males. This provided an interesting perspective to her interview and her perceptions.

In the on grade level class, there was a group of Latino male students working together on a project and one of the students could not speak English. She purposely grouped these

students together so the other Latino male students could aid the non-speaking Latino male with instructions. They were completely on task and worked hard for the entire observation as were all the students. The teacher circulated the room but seemed to gravitate towards the Latino male students.

In the Carnegie class, there were no distinguishable characteristics observed by the Latino male learners. They were dispersed in the class and worked as did all the other students. They participated and added value to all conversations as was evidenced in the observation.

Sean

Sean is a social studies teacher who is also a high school coach, so he brought an interesting perspective to the study. He is certified 6-12 social studies, history, geography, economy, and political science, and he has had experience teaching at the high school. He has spent the last eight years of his 12-year career teaching eighth grade. All 12 of his years of experience were gained in the Anywhere school district. His experience in teaching Latino males is one where they are the minority in a class of approximately 30. He normally sees about three or four in a class on average. He has taught in the same cluster and so his experience with them in high school was about the same, both teaching and coaching.

In the classes observed, Latinos numbered three out of 27 and three out of 30. In neither observation were the Latino males distinguishable. Both times the Latino males seemed to be doing their best to be lost in the crowd. They did not participate in the whole-group discussions and when they began group work, they were all dispersed as one in a group of four different ethnicities from them. They were not observed doing much outside of written work, as communication did not occur very much with either the teacher or the other students. They

seemed to participate but without being vocal or without asking any questions as they seemed not to want any attention brought to them.

Dianne

Dianne is a teacher of 19 years and has been in the Anywhere school district for seven years. In her previous district, she said she also encountered Latino males, at a higher rate than in this district. She is English/language arts certified as well as social studies, both middle grades. She has taught both subjects, but in the Anywhere school district she has only taught language arts. She has had both co-taught and on-level classes and both contain Latino male students.

Dianne's classroom was a typical language arts classroom in terms of content and decorations. The Latino males made up 12% and 9% respectively. The Latino male students were on task for the most part and did not seem to act any differently than the other students. However, in both observations it was noted there was one Latino male who did not participate nor actively question or answer at any point. These two students, though in different class periods, mirrored each other in physical appearance as well as actions.

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Results

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The results of this study are presented in this section, which includes a description of the themes that emerged during the analysis of the data. Narrative forms of the themes are presented along with tables presenting the data in a visual format. Following the themes, a narrative answer to each of the research questions, the central research question as well as the sub-questions, is provided.

Theme Development

The purpose of this case study is to investigate teacher perceptions into the educational obstacles for eighth-grade Latino males in the Anywhere School District (pseudonym). Data analysis of the transcripts of the interview sessions, focus group sessions, and observations were used to identify patterns. Words and word phrases were then assigned to complete the coding procedure. The frequency of occurrence of these codes are found in Table 2.

A pilot study was used to identify any issues in the interviewing format or wording of the questions. The participants consisted of four eighth-grade teachers with each teacher representing each of the four academic content areas. The pool was comprised of an equal representative of each gender, and all members self-identified as Caucasian in the demographic study. At the end of each interview, the question, "What would you change about the interviewing process?" was asked. Each participant explained that nothing should be done and that each question was clear and they were able to answer. They made no recommendations for changes, so the process then moved on to the interviews. By utilizing the participant feedback and the testing of the instrument, the research instrument was indeed validated (Duma, 2009). The information collected was not included in the data gathered for analysis and coding as it was simply for the interviewer to use for practice and refinement.

The focus group began the process by providing initial feedback and validation to the instrument. A panel of six eighth-grade educators with experience varying from 10-32 years was gathered and interviewed. There were three male and three female participants, and all participants self-identified as Caucasian. Content areas represented were physical education, science, Georgia history, Emotional behavior disorder (EBD), self-contained, language arts, and math. As the participants gathered, they were introduced and offered refreshments. A brief

social time was allowed for the participants to reconnect with each other or get to know ones they had just met. The interviewer then asked the panel to be seated at a table which was in view of a video recorder so they could begin. The session was both video and audio recorded. All of the members at this point were reassured of their confidentiality as well as their ability to withdraw from the study if they felt it necessary.

As the session began, the interviewer read the focus group questions while having a copy of the individual interview questions available to check. The open discussion allowed the interviewer to validate the questionnaire as the answers were expounded upon. Each member agreed that there was definitely a need to the study and their answers coincided with the interview questions which validated the instrument. The session was transcribed and analyzed for codes to be used along with interviews and observations in the triangulation process. Upon completion, each member was thanked for their participation and again was reassured that their identities would remain confidential throughout the entire process. The group stayed around for approximately 15-20 minutes as they socialized with each other. Some discussions of the study occurred and as everyone left, they encouraged me to continue with the research as they felt it was necessary to the profession.

During the interview process, researcher bias was a concern due to experiences within the middle school setting. Bracketing during the interview process allowed the interviewer to set aside previous assumptions gained from past educational experiences (Fischer, 2009). After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed into word documents and entered into the software program AtlasTI. This software was used to aide in the analysis of the qualitative data after the research process was completed.

Table 2

Code Frequency Chart

Codes	Frequency From Interviews	Frequency from Focus Groups	Frequency from Observations	Frequency Total
Language	23	11	9	43
No Specific Interventions	11	3	8	22
Parental Support/Involvement	18	9	0	27
Parents Intimidated	14	3	0	17
Parents Unable to Help	12	5	2	19
Parental Expectations	9	3	1	13
Not Completing Schoolwork	13	5	6	24
Employment	7	3	0	10
Low Respect for Teachers	3	1	2	6
Apathy	10	6	5	21
Looking "Cool"	5	3	2	10
Attitude Towards Education	12	3	1	16
Poverty	11	8	0	10
Out of State Tuition	2	1	0	3
Male Figures	3	1	0	4
Legal Status	7	2	0	9
Crime	8	4	0	12
Gangs	5	4	2	11
Racism	6	3	0	9
Immigration Reform	5	3	1	9
Cultural Differences	3	3	1	7

Major and minor themes were discovered with the aid of the software program and thematic coding. Major themes were identified as teacher-created, parent-created, student-created, and environmental obstacles. Minor themes emerged under each and are discussed in further detail with each theme.

Teacher-created obstacles.

The first major theme that emerged was teacher-created obstacles. These obstacles varied in scope, but were found to be prevalent in the teacher perceptions. The three minor

themes under teacher-created obstacles that appeared were communication, expectations, and special considerations. Each will be discussed in more detail.

Communication.

Communication with Latino parents was a theme consistently reiterated in the interviews. Many times, it was the language barrier that caused the obstacle. T9 commented "We have a teacher on our hall who speaks Spanish very well, and she will call them for me if they don't speak English. She is great...I don't know what I'd do without her." Many teacher participants reiterated they have to use a parent liaison because of the language issue. Sixty-seven percent stated they do not usually communicate via email because it is not available in the Latino community. When discussing Latino parents, T7 stated, "Most of them don't have an email that stays current…" Many times it was because of the language barrier. T1 stated, "Teachers may also fail to be consistent with parent communication about concerns with Latino male students." Communication emerged as a minor theme in 83% of the participants.

Expectations.

Teacher expectations play a huge role in the success of students, regardless of their subgroup (Pantaleo, 2016). Many of the teacher participants felt peers would sometimes excuse their misbehaviors or lack of academic achievement because they were Latino. T9 said, "Sometimes there is no expectations for them other than manual labor." T2 made the statement, "I think that some teachers don't give them a chance because they don't feel like they will graduate anyway. They feel like they are going to do manual labor and they are just here until they can drop out so they are not going to put a...invest a lot of time with those students. I know of some teachers who have actually said this out loud, both seventh-and eighth-grade teachers." T8 made the comment, "…but I think that the biggest thing is that teachers tend to ignore it

because they don't know how to work with them." T6 made it known "when the teachers are not Latino, you see that barrier, ok we cannot expect much from them…." Low teacher expectations represent 75% of the participants.

No special considerations.

One of the questions asked of the participants was if their particular school has any specific programs designed for Latino males during their transition year to high school. When there are deficits within a subgroup's academic performance, it is necessary to introduce specific interventions in order to bring about a positive outcome (Kennelly, Monrad, & American Institute for Research, 2007). Seventy-five percent of the teachers interviewed could not think of any interventions specifically targeted towards Latino males. T4 said, "I think it's the same as for any other child." T6 made the statement, "Special accommodations, for them, I think it's not that special." T5 said, "I don't think we make any extra accommodations for them." In knowing that the ninth-grade year is the most important in determining graduation rates, it would seem there would be more specific interventions in place for Latino males of which teachers are aware. Table 3 shows a breakdown of the minor themes in relation to the major theme of teacher-created obstacles.

Table 3

Teacher-Created Obstacles Minor Themes

Minor Themes	Description	%
Communication	How teachers communicate with Latino parents	83
Expectations	Teacher's expectations of a student	75
No Special Considerations	No specific interventions	75

Parent-created obstacles.

Parental involvement to promote academic success has long been rooted in research (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Therefore, the lack of parental involvement is a major concern for a school, and especially on a subgroup, which traditionally shows low academic performance such as Latino males. Therefore, parents not being involved for whatever reason can create major obstacles for students. Parent created obstacles emerged as a major theme in the study as the interviews continued. Three minor themes related to parent-created obstacles emerged which were inability to support their students, lack of value of education, and lack of technology.

Inability to support their students.

When parents are intimidated by the educational system, this can create an obstacle that can be difficult for the students to overcome. When discussing Latino parents, T11 stated in his opinion, "they seem somewhat intimidated by our education system and tend to shut down a little....I mean, it's hard to get them involved, but I think it's because they don't know how and it seems like they are facing a giant and just feel like their kid should handle it." T5 went on to say, "Not to stereotype, but most of those kids' parents, at least in my experiences, don't speak English, work all the time and have no idea what their kids are doing.....often it's single parent homes......just a bad situation." These views demonstrate that even though the perception of the parents not being able to support their student's learning is there, it is not always intentional. Fifty-eight percent of the teachers interviewed believe parent support is a hard obstacle for the students to overcome.

Lack of value of education in the family.

Teachers in this study continually brought up the point that many times students were pulled away from education by a lack of value being placed on completing a degree from within the family. One teacher, T4, stated, "I've had kids who've told me their parents have said you're not going to go to college." It also showed up in the form of parents seeing the monetary value of a job as more important than the monetary value of an education. T2 identified this as an obstacle when he answered, "I think some Latino parents expect them to help out more around the house and possibly get a job to help with money, that sort of thing…." when asked about obstacles. T7 discussed the issues when she answered, "They may see an older sibling or an older friend who has already dropped out of school and who's making money and that may be appealing to them and that could pull them more than staying in school and just getting their education." T6 made the comment, "I have a lot of them who have said that my parents didn't go to college and my siblings…..or excuse me, high school and my siblings dropped out when they got to high school……that's just like what happens in their family, they're just used to it." When the parents do not value education, that unfortunate ideal can pass on to the students and cause a lack of desire to continue the schooling process. A lack of value of education within the family showed up in 50% of the interviews.

Lack of parental involvement.

While many of the subjects interviewed perceived parents were supportive when contacted, the overlying majority believed Latino parents were not as involved as other subgroups. Whether it be because of the language barrier, work schedule, or lack of value, the message was clear about how parental involvement of Latino parents are perceived by the sample. T3 briefly touched on it when he stated, "one of the biggest obstacles is whether or not

the parents are involved." He did not elaborate, but that began the theme of parental

involvement or lack thereof. T12 stated, "It is hard to get parents involved from the Latino

community. I think their work schedule and their…..you know, the culture differences are hard

to overcome." T1 added, "For the home support aspect, I have experienced Latino males with

significantly low averages throughout the year and they will not attend a parent conference or

contact me with any concerns. I have even been in parent conferences when the parents do not

understand how their child's average relates to the overall grading scale for my classroom." T11

also continued the theme by stating, "Latino parents are generally very supportive when we

contact them or have a conference with them. The problem is getting them involved. Maybe it

is the language barrier or work, or maybe something I am not smart enough to figure out."

Overall, 50% of the subjects indicated that the lack of parental involvement was a perceived

obstacle. Table 4 shows a breakdown of the minor obstacles related to the major obstacle of

parent-created obstacles

Table 4

Parent-Created Obstacles Minor Themes

Minor Themes	Description	%
Inability to Support Their Students	Parental help with educational issues	58
Lack of Value of Education	Value parents place on an education	50
Lack of Parental Involvement	Parents involvement with their child's education	50

Student-created obstacles.

Student-created obstacles was a theme that reoccurred during the interviews. Teachers perceive students can at times be their own worst enemies. Teachers perceived this to be a major obstacle to Latino male student success. The theme of student-created obstacles was broken down into three minor themes: attitude, apathy, and peer pressure.

Attitude.

A student's attitude towards school is extremely important in their academic achievement (Ojeda, 2008). If a student feels defeated before they begin, they are more likely to give up than their peers. The perception of Latino males' attitudes as determined from this study are not positive when it comes to academia. T5 stated explicitly their attitudes hold them back by saying, "In my experience, Latino males attitudes towards school is what keeps them down. For the most part, they don't believe they can ever achieve through college, so they don't want to put forth the effort now which gives them a sour taste towards school." T12 reiterated this perception in stating, "Many 8th grade Latino males have bad attitudes due to external forces and that plays into their lack of academic success." This was echoed several more times, as attitude was noted in 50% of the interviews.

Apathy

Apathy is an issue for eighth-grade students in general, but Latino males seem to face this obstacle in a much greater volume than their counterparts. There are many instances that appeared in the interviews. One was in the first interview with T1. He began the interview by stating, "…they put their kind of emphasis and priorities elsewhere whether it's girls or sports or something like that." The desire for other vocational trades can take away from a student's

educational desire. T7 focused on the vocational desires of some students and answered, "So they kind of shut out the educational part because they are completely focused on that vocation right at the time." T12 was visibly frustrated when discussing Latino male apathy. She made the statement, "Sometimes I feel like I'm fighting a losing battle." The lack of desire in Latino males showed up in 50% of the participants.

Peer pressure.

T1 felt peer pressure was the biggest obstacle and actually stated so when he said, "I believe the biggest obstacle they face is peer pressure. I have experienced Latino male students not want to be successfully academically because they did not want their friends to think they are smart." In his opinion, the lack of educational value within the community is the basis for this pressure. T9 reiterated this fact by stating, "I think the pressure of not wanting to appear too smart to their peers is another." T11 also felt peer pressure was a valid concern and stated, "I find in my classes sometimes it might me a Latino who is...has the ability, but they don't want to look like....look different from their peers, therefore they're not going to perform up to the level of their abilities." Peer pressure was a minor theme which emerged with 42% of the participants. Table 5 represents the minor themes which emerged from student-created obstacles.

Table 5

Student-Created Obstacles Minor Themes

Minor Themes	Description	%
Attitude	Lack of positive attitude towards education	50
Apathy	Lack of desire	50
Peer Pressure	Not wanting to appear intelligent	42

Environmental obstacles.

Family and school significantly shape the lives of teenagers (Flook & Fuligni, 2008). According to the study, many teachers perceive Latino male students do not have the greatest home environments to promote success amongst their students. Home life, gangs, and immigration reform were minor themes which emerged during the interviews.

Language.

Students who speak English as a second language are at a decided disadvantage over their peers. Many Latino students are identified as ELL and receive extra support, but not all students qualify. For those students, it can be difficult in the eyes of educators to keep up with other subgroups. T2 stated, "I guess language would be the biggest.....if they speak.....well if they or their parents can't speak English very well, then that would be one. Content vocabulary....that would be huge. I mean even if they speak English, if they don't have the academic vocabulary then they are going to be behind their peers." T1 continued the theme with the statement, "With not having an understanding about the spoken or written English language, students struggle to comprehend the content I am teaching." T10 went on to elaborate about the concerns of the language between the students and all involved. "Yeah, so, yeah I think that there is definitely the language barrier between the parent and the student and the parent and the teacher, and if student is new...newer to the country or to English that would definitely present a problem." Language was a prevalent theme for student issues, reoccurring in 75% of the interviews.

Home life.

Many of the participants felt like the main obstacle faced in terms of the student's environment were the home life they have beyond the school walls. T2 provided an interesting perspective in stating, "Not doing homework......Some of them, if they don't finish their classwork or we have homework, they won't do it.....and, I don't think it's sometimes that they won't do it as much as they don't have time to do it. Like, I know this one student comes to mind.....his dad made him take care of his siblings and the house when he got home because the mom was not around....I don't know what happened to her and I didn't ask, but I know he had to do most everything or at least help and he didn't have time to do homework. I heard that he dropped out in his 10th grade year and it's a shame because he was very smart....but that goes back to the expectations......and reality." T8 reiterated this comment in saying, "I do have a lot of boys, females as well, the Hispanic population that says that they go home and they end up doing work around the home or they end up watching siblings while their parents go to work and that's keeping these kids from excelling further." T5 went on to elaborate a little more on the perceived home life of Latino males by saying, "Not to stereotype, but most of those kids' parents, at least in my experiences, don't speak English, work all the time and have no idea what their kids are doing.....often it's single parent homes......just a bad situation." T9 went so far as to say, "…for some of our Hispanic boys, it's where's the next meal going to come from, it's where, you know, are we going to have enough to eat over the weekend, what's going to happen to us next." These perceptions stemmed in experience teaching Latino male students and are embedded deeply. Home life was evident in 92% of the interviews.

Immigration reform.

Latino students have immigrated from all over to the United States and immigration reform has become a hot topic in the political landscape of today's America (Esses & Abelson, 2017). Latino male students are forced to suffer the brunt of the burden in the educational environments of America's schools (Espinoza-Herold & Gonzalez-Carriedo, 2017). Immigration reform is a perceived obstacle that these students must overcome to be successful in academics. T3 stated, "I think they face the pressure of being under attack from the government with immigration reform…..I think they face a lot of things that white teachers like myself cannot even begin to understand." He went on to say, "Oh, you hear students joking about building the wall, and different racial jokes which are veiled to hide the severity of the issue." T5 answered, "As you know, there's the political climate that is changing so we have some fear in the community…" T9 actually believed things outside of school affect academic performance more than anything else. "ICE deporting family members or others from their neighborhood could be an issue....I just feel like the factors that happen outside of their eight to five days have more impact on them than anything else." She went on to say, "You know, immigration is a hot topic right now with Trump and the wall……these kids...they.....at home, they are hearing this stuff and it is real to them. They live this where we just hear it." T11 said, "Personally, I feel like they perceive a lot of hatred from the government and from other subgroups. I think that this is different from other students.....I guess other subgroups might feel hatred from others but I think when you throw in the government, that takes it to another level for them." This statement showed how teachers from a different race see the situations other ethnicities face and can distinguish between levels of racial discrepancies with the issue still being the perceived obstacle

of immigration reform. Fifty-eight percent of the teachers in this study saw immigration as a minor theme relating to environmental obstacles.

 Gangs.

 As a whole, Latinos have strong family ties and have a collective orientation that supports community life (Espinosa, 1995). Within this community, if there is not a passion for education, students will gravitate towards the inner workings of the community (Horton, 2006). One perceived section of the Latino community is gang life. In discussing community obstacles, T6 stated, "For the obstacles....I would say their....their friends, who they are choosing to hang with, where they live, what kind of area they are in and if it is heavy in gang stuff. They tend to start getting pulled that direction and I've seen a lot of kids get, um, on the wrong track and end up....losing....um, falling behind at the high school or just, you know, giving up and going the whole gang route and just getting out." T7 replied, "I have had two or three students not in the recent years, who are active gang members who are really good students and are really intelligent and they find themselves being pulled between wanting to do good in school, but then the outside force is pulling them a little harder than the educational force." When discussing how these differ from other students, she stated, "A lot of them are more along the lines of vocational issues, or, um, providing with family issues, um, or unfortunately even gang issues at certain times." The response of gangs was present in 42% of the interviews. Table 6 represents the minor themes associated with environmental obstacles for Latino males.

Table 6

Environmental Obstacles Minor Themes

Minor Themes	Description	%

Home Life	Way of life outside of school environment	92
Language	Language barrier	75
Immigration Reform	Changes to current immigration policy	58
Gangs	Organized groups of people usually formed to commit crimes	42

Research Questions

Analysis of the data retrieved from the interviews, focus group, and observations aided in answering the research questions. Beginning with the central research question, each one is answered below.

Central research question.

What are teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males that may affect their educational achievement?

During this study, it became evident that the teachers interviewed have similar perceptions when asked about Latino males and their plights. The interviews identified four major themes in terms of the obstacles. The first was teacher-created obstacles and communication due to the perceived or real language barrier became first. The teachers overwhelmingly believed communication plays a major role in Latino male achievement or lack thereof. The inability to communicate directly with parents came up in almost all of the interviews. The disconnect between parents and schools is an obstacle teachers perceived to be the biggest one to their student's successes.

The second was parent-created obstacles. Teachers stated they believed parents wanted to be supportive of the education process, but only to a point. They felt education did not, for the

most part, have a higher priority than work and helping around the house. Once Latino males reach a certain age, the perception is they are needed to perform other duties such as childcare, home maintenance, aid in earning money for the family, etc. This idea was prevalent amongst the teachers interviewed.

The next theme identified was environmental obstacles. Gangs played a huge part in how Latino males were perceived as many stated there was a heavy influence from the gang activity in the area that pulled the subgroup away from education. The neighborhoods the students lived in as well as their socio-economic status was another. It is perceived by the majority of the teachers interviewed that poverty is a major obstacle within Latino neighborhoods they must overcome. The lack of higher education is a perceived prohibitor to a higher paying job that would allow for a "better" neighborhood to get them away from the gangs that permeate these neighborhoods.

The final perceived obstacle is student-created. This group of teachers believed students sometimes create their own obstacles by being apathetic towards school because of other issues, which begin to cloud their academic vision. This obstacle is not unique to Latino males, but the feeling was that it is compounded when added to the other obstacles they face. The belief they face a multitude of obstacles separates them from their peers.

Sub-questions.

SQ1 - How do teacher perceptions of obstacles of eighth-grade Latino males affect the academic achievement of these students?

Teacher-created obstacles came up as a major theme during the interviews. The interviews demonstrated the issue of teachers' empathy sometimes getting in the way of what is best for the students. Many times teachers would say they have known of situations or have

actually been the teacher who would not call on a Latino male student at any time in their class because they have felt like they are not able to participate in the discussion or answer a comprehension question. The teachers admitted this was an issue, but did not know how to address this because it becomes an emotional issue when feeling they are doing right by the student.

SQ2 - What accommodations and/or interventions do teachers use to overcome the perceived obstacles to Latino male education?

Most of the teachers interviewed stated they did nothing specific in terms of interventions for Latino males. Many times, the question of whether we were specifically talking ELL students arose because they knew of those interventions. Within the classroom, nothing specific was noted in terms of Latino males having accommodations designed for them as a subgroup. Many teachers would have different strategies based on differentiating the needs of the individual student, but that was regardless of the student's ethnicity. There were several times the phrases "I have seen others" or "I've heard some teachers say" were uttered and both the researcher and teacher being interviewed took pause at the things being said. The conversation came up several times that maybe this was something the Anywhere School District should look at in terms of training for the teachers.

SQ3 - What do teachers perceive as obstacles that affect the transition into high school of Latino male students?

Teachers interviewed did not feel like their schools had any specific intervention programs targeted at Latino male transitions to high school. All agreed this was an issue because of the external forces they perceived to be pulling on these students in opposite directions from education. Teachers perceived these students have more issues to deal with such as gangs that

take the focus away from education. When these students transition to high school, if there is not

a strong parental force refuting the noise from these external forces, the chances are these

students will become disinterested in school and follow the noise (O'Connor, 2009). The data

identified student-created obstacles and environmental obstacles as two major obstacles Latino

males face during their transitions. Peer pressure and apathy are two of the student-created

obstacles that can directly affect their education during the transition phase.

Immigration reform, gangs, and a student's home life are three of the environmental

obstacles teachers perceive as difficulties Latino males face, especially during their transitions.

The fact that no direct intervention programs were noted by most who were interviewed opened

their eyes to the need for schools to intervene. Most said they would begin the dialogue with

their administration on what would be the best methods to help their students during the

transition. Many said they hoped that the dialogue would reveal programs of which they were

unaware and that some interventions were already in place. However, if there were not any, the

prevailing thought was hope that programs could be developed to aid with this problem.

Summary

Chapter Four laid out the findings of the research project. A case study allowed for the

exploration of educational obstacles for eighth-grade Latino males. The data emerged from

interviews with 12 North Georgia teachers who had experience teaching eighth-grade Latino

males within the past three years in the same school system. Analysis of the data was based on

thematic analysis of the information using the software program AtlasTi.

The use of a pilot study helped to validate and refine the instrument used. A

demographics section broke down the background of the participants by providing their years'

experience, subjects taught, grade levels certified, and the school settings in which they have

experienced Latino males. Upon analysis of the data, major and minor themes emerged and were identified. Major themes included teacher-created, parent-created, student-created and environmentally obstacles. Each of these major themes included minor themes that were discussed with quotations from the participants. Major emergent themes address the research questions guiding the study.

Chapter Four provided an overview of the data collected and the analysis procedures, as well as providing the discoveries of emergent themes. The major themes emerged answered the research questions and allowed for the emergence of minor themes to be discussed. Chapter Five includes a detailed analysis of the findings as well as a summary of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study is to gain insight into teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males in their educational careers. The final chapter of this study consists of five sections that will provide the final discussions of the findings and implications of this research study. The sections of this chapter will include a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, implications of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

In order to answer the research questions of this study, I conducted an exploratory instrumental case study with teachers from the Anywhere school district (pseudonym). The case study design provided sufficient data for analysis. The data sources were observations, interviews, and a focus group. Using these three sources of data allowed for the triangulation of data. Researcher bias was accounted for through a process known as bracketing (Fischer, 2009). However, researcher bias could have affected how the text of the interviews was coded into major and minor themes. Limitations of access, certification of participants, and location did not affect the interpretation of the results, but did affect the gathering of data due to the limited sample of participants. The findings of the study presented four major themes: teacher-created, parent-created, student-created, and environmental obstacles. Analysis of these major themes revealed 12 minor themes. These major and minor themes all have implications for future research on the subject as well as answering the research questions for this study.

The first research question dealt with teacher perceptions of obstacles faced by eighth-grade Latino males that may affect their educational achievement. Four major themes helped to

answer this question: teacher-created, parent-created, student-created, and environmental obstacles. Minor themes were synthesized into these four major themes, which answered the research question. Data sources were consistent in revealing these four major themes from various teachers with various backgrounds and teaching differing subjects.

The second research question dealt with how teacher perceptions affect the academic achievement of these students. Teacher-created obstacles was a major theme during the data collection. Teachers felt sometimes that even though they were trying to empathize with their students, they were creating more obstacles by not holding them accountable for whatever reason. If a student is academically behind but tries, many times they felt as if they should pass them along, even though this would eventually catch up to the student. Teachers did not know how to address this due to the good-natured thought process that drives the thinking.

The third research question dealt with specific interventions that accommodations or interventions teachers use to overcome obstacles for Latino males. The data analysis revealed overwhelmingly there are not many (if any) specific interventions which schools or teachers use to address the obstacles these students face. Many times during the study, the participants revealed they felt like this was something the district should consider in terms of interventions for students and training for staff.

The fourth research question dealt with how the perceived obstacles affected these students' transition to high school. The overwhelming response discovered through the data analysis is that there are external forces that take the students' focus away from education. During middle school, it is perceived from this study students are not old enough to get an outside job and thus are still involved in the education process. However, high school becomes a different narrative, as they are then old enough to drive, drop-out, and get an education.

Teachers perceive these obstacles play a huge role in the developing apathy and peer pressure noticed during their eighth-grade year. Immigration reform, gangs, and students' home life were perceived to affect a student's transition to high school.

Discussion

Theoretical Discussion

The theories creating the framework for the study were Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Expectancy-Value Theory. Both of these theories provided relevance to the study in different ways. Both will be discussed in their own section to follow.

Critical race theory.

As defined by Creswell (2013), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theory that focuses attention on the matter of how race and racism is embedded within the individual aspects of American society. At the time of the interviews, racism was prominent in the news media no matter which medium you encountered (Seate & Mastro, 2017). Executive orders were implemented in an attempt to limit immigration from other countries (Mayda & Peri, 2017). This may explain why it was at the forefront of the dialogue engaged upon within this study. Teachers were quick to point out how immigration reform is prevalent in the conversations heard within their schools regarding the Latino population. Many felt the Latino males within their classrooms were carrying a visible burden since the election and the discussion of the wall being built on the southern border of the United States. When viewing the results, it is impossible not to think how this theory is applicable. In her interview, T12 discussed how during the showing of the inauguration, Caucasian students would stand up, look at their Latino peers, and wave good-bye. This is heart breaking, but cannot be ignored in terms of how the teacher responses were shaped. Living with racism is something that Latino students face every day, and follows

the belief of CRT of how minorities are suppressed by a society (Rocco et al., 2014). Teachers

shared stories of how Latinos have tried to joke their way through racist comments, but still seem

to be carrying a heavy weight upon their shoulders. This also lends credence and background to

how their perceptions of peer pressure and not wanting to stand out by looking smart in

comparison to others of their race are formed. T1 felt the peer pressure was the biggest obstacle

and stated, "I believe the biggest obstacle they face is peer pressure. I have experienced Latino

male students not want to be successfully academically because they did not want their friends to

think they are smart." However, she said she did not want to expound upon the perception

further for fear of being thought of as a racist.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) claim the majority will suppress minorities voice without

interventions. This belief can be carried from societal expectations into examining the data

within the school setting where this study was conducted. By viewing the data through this lens,

it begins to shed light on the fact that their peers continually outperform Latinos. The vast

majority of teachers in this study did not feel that there were any specific interventions or

accommodations for Latino males in their school and perceived that this was an obstacle that was

hard for them to overcome. CRT sheds light as to how this pertains to Latino academic

achievement as investigated in this study.

Expectancy-value theory.

In Expectancy-Value theory, it is necessary to have expectancy and value for motivation

(Jones, 2014). Many of the participants brought up the fact that apathy was an obstacle Latino

males had to overcome in the eighth grade. As mentioned above, T1 was visibly upset when

discussing apathy within the Latino community in regards to school achievement. This theme

arose several times in the course of data analysis. Value from the parents also came up several

times in terms of how external forces are valued more than education. When parents do not

value education, it is hard for the students to see the necessity of it in their lives. The perception

of apathy and perceived value applies to one component of the theory, but the data also revealed

the expectancy component as well. These intricacies were highlighted on several occasions

when viewing the data analysis through the lens of expectancy-value theory.

Teacher expectancy is another component that is needed in this theory. When analyzing

the data, it was evident that teacher expectation is a teacher-created obstacle that is perceived.

Many times teachers stated that they do not treat them any differently and that they can perform

if one holds them to high expectations.   While this was stated, it was definitely not the norm.

Low teacher expectations was mentioned in 75% of the participant interviews. Even in those

mentioned that they held their students to the same expectations, they articulated other teachers

do not do the same. It is easy to see how the data reflect this theory in terms of the Latino

subgroup.

Wigfield & Eccles (2000) stated students have a decline in their value of the usefulness

of school subjects. When students feel that way, it is imperative teachers provide a constant to

which the students can find relevance and someone who believes in them. The perceptions

found in this study show teachers are prone to creating obstacles, whether intentional or

unintentional, by not providing special interventions to help them "catch up" to their peers and

by the low expectations that are placed on the subgroup. Until this is addressed and reversed,

Latino students will be at a definite disadvantage as compared to other subgroups.

Empirical Discussion

The findings aligned with information that was gathered for the Chapter Two literature

review of the study. Language, Latino family influence, immigration, apathy, gangs, socio-

economics, and empathy were all noted as reasons why Latino male students do not achieve at a rate comparable to other subgroups. A literature review suggested multiple obstacles or explanations for low Latino male achievement. The analysis of the data from this study also suggests the same.

Review of the data collected allowed thematic analysis and the coding of information to discover four major themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). These themes aligned with information discovered during a literature review in terms of obstacles faced by Latino males. The following are the themes that emerged and each will be expounded upon below.

Teacher-created obstacles

Teacher-created obstacles emerged as a major theme based on the interviews of all the participants. Participants noted a teacher's perception and expectations as unintentional obstacles created by some teachers. Teachers equated treating students differently in educational settings to the perception of expectations of students. Participants indicated teachers do not intentionally create obstacles for Latino male students, but unintentionally do so largely due to underlying perceptions in regards to these students. Awareness of the creation of obstacles is the first step in removing this educational obstacle. Warren & Lessner (2014) stated the interactions between teachers and students are important in shaping the academic experiences for the children. Empathy can cause irreparable harm when the teacher believes he or she has the best interest of the child at heart without holding them accountable for the learning necessary for promotion to the next grade. At some point, these learning deficits have to be addressed, regardless of how good a child is. Becoming aware of teacher-created obstacles is the school and classroom can allow system and building leaders as well as teachers to remove these obstacles. However, the fact there has been diversity training in the district confirms the

statement of Pettitt (2011) regarding the lack of evidence suggesting that any type of training can affect a teacher's core beliefs.

Tosolt (2010) stated males need behaviors such as hugging, complimenting one on their appearance, and providing a feeling of security in the middle school setting. One thing that was missing from the data was this. It was noticeable the only feeling associated with the subgroup was empathy and providing this was never mentioned. It would seem that this would be a great starting place for training in terms of how to advance the Latino male subgroup and their academic achievement.

The significance of identifying obstacles can hopefully lead to training and interventions that will result in an increase in Latino achievement. By helping this subgroup of students, the measure of a school in terms of effectiveness will obviously increase. In the state of Georgia, this would result in points on the CCRPI index that measures a school's ability to prepare its students for college or career.

Parent-created obstacles

The participants in this study identified a lack of parent participation and the lack of value for education from the Latino male's parents as parent created obstacles. Participants indicated the importance of external factors such as work being more important, Latino males being used to watch other siblings, and parents not seeing the value in a college degree as an obstacle to their children's success. This can directly affect the academic success of students.

The level of family involvement of Latino high school students has been proven a significant factor in improving academic achievement (Clark et al., 2013). This study expounds upon that statement by providing evidence that teachers perceive this also to be the case in middle school. Teachers perceive a lack of involvement is a barrier to achievement. The reason

for lack of involvement vary from value of education, being intimidated by the education process, inability to help, cultural values, and a language barrier. Familism (2003) is an example of how cultural beliefs can become an educational barrier and this study demonstrates how it can carry over into the perceived obstacles of middle school Latino students.

Teachers, principals, and system leaders are always looking for ways to involve parents in their children's education. Educating parents can help with the cultural divide perceived in some teacher's minds. By involving parents and educating them regarding the educational environment, increased parent participation could be seen in all aspects of the school culture. When a teacher relies only on students to communicate with their parents, they are setting a dangerous precedent where there is a divide in communication between the school and community. An increase in parental involvement is yet another way to increase a school's CCRPI scores.

Student-created obstacles

Students can possess an intrinsic motivation that will drive them to succeed. Such students will overcome any obstacles placed in front of them. Unfortunately, these types of students are rare. Most students need direction in order to be able to be responsible for their own education. Work ethic and expectations can directly affect their academic achievement. Subjects identified student work ethic, peer pressure, and attitude as student-created obstacles to their education. All of these attributes were given to high school students when observing the dropout rates of Latino males (Ojeda, 2008) and this study passed them to middle school students. With the innate dangers of the transition from middle school to high school, it is obvious that interventions are necessary to change the attitudes of most of these young males in the Latino subgroup.

Machismo is a term of endearment for Latino males and it relates to behaviors such as toughness, aggressiveness, and risk taking and it can influence Latino males both positively and negatively (Saez, 2009). This lends credence to the perception that students are apathetic and succumb to peer pressure more than other subgroups. This can relate to a cultural difference seen in the Latino community and can work in conjunction with some of the environmental obstacles that are also perceived.

Environmental obstacles

The teachers interviewed identified the student's environment as a possible obstacle to Latino male achievement. A student's environment is not something that the child can control. Students have no control over where they live, where they go to school, who their teacher is, or how their teacher perceives them. Teachers in this study indicated a student's home life, immigration reform, and gangs were obstacles Latino males faced.

Literature supports the concept of environment affecting an individual's life and behaviors (Bates & Stuart, 2013). The teachers believe the Latino males suffer from a vicious cycle where their lower socioeconomic status reserves them to gang infested neighborhoods. Without the financial progress that could come from education, this is a cycle difficult to break. With all the perceived obstacles to Latino males, it is difficult to imagine when this turning point will happen without influence from the Latino community.

Latinos tend to reside in schools who have a minimal support staff to address their needs (Clark et al., 2013). This was true in this study as many times teachers commented they had trouble communicating due to the lack of language skills. The district provides an interpreter, but those have to be scheduled in terms of meetings. If a parent request information on a specific day or if the teacher wants to communicate with a non-English speaking parent, they are at the

mercy of personnel within the building who speaks Spanish. It was pointed out by T12 that not all schools have a parent liaison that speaks Spanish and that alone can make it tough to overcome this barrier.

Teacher perceptions of environmental obstacles are very prominent as is evidenced by the data analysis of this research study. Identifying these obstacles are important if educators are truly to improve Latino male academic achievement and it will take a joint effort from teachers, students, parents, and community leaders in order to see effective change truly happen.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study were Critical Race theory and Expectancy-Value theories. Findings from this study have significant theoretical implications. When viewed through the lens of Critical Race theory, race and social status plays a role in shaping the perceptions of obstacles for Latino males in the eighth grade by their teachers. This supports the literature on the subject and coincides with the theory that racism is embedded deeply within the society and it is difficult to change a minority's plight without specific interventions (Rocco et al., 2014). The fact that immigration reform was prevalent throughout the time of the study and teachers were constantly discussing how it was top of mind to their students also shows how this theory relates to the study.

Findings also correlate with the Expectancy-Value theory when it states there must be motivation as well as expectancy and value from all parties to effect the desired outcome (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Data showed teachers perceive apathy from the students as well as a lack of high expectations for their Latino male students. There were many reasons as to why they felt that way including coming from the culture, but the over-reaching perception was that

peer pressure and apathy kept the students from providing the necessary motivation. Many teachers in the study stated their colleagues felt this way, and they have witnessed that with high expectations, the student motivation increases. With necessary training and support from these teacher leaders, it would be interesting to see if the perception would change with an initiative towards higher expectations. The Anywhere school district provided a view into the beliefs and perceptions of obstacles that are within a bounded system for Latino males in the eighth grade.

Empirical Implications

The Anywhere school district prides itself on educating all students sent to them, regardless of race, creed, socio-economic background, or any other classification. Gleaned from this study is that though the district is well intentioned in its efforts, there are still some significant gaps that prevent this from happening. The fact that more interventions are needed specifically to address Latino males in the eighth grade. This expands on the previous research that shows interventions are needed in the ninth grade (Ojeda, 2008). Participants discussed how there were no specific interventions in many of their schools and they did not know of any that were available within the district. There was an underlying feeling that more should be done for the subgroup in order to see effective change.

While many of the perceive obstacles were out of the teacher's control, the perceived obstacle of low expectations was highlighted and is something that teachers can specifically target. By raising their expectations, they can provide one of the constants that is necessary in the expectancy-value theory that will help students to see relevance in the necessary content to be successful academically. This is an important step in trying to make things equitable to all subgroups, especially Latino males.

Another perceived obstacle, empathy, is one that is more difficult to target but one that is just as necessary. Teachers saw, whether it was from them or their colleagues, that Latino students who are perceived as academically lower than peers are allowed to slide by in their classes as long as they do not pose a behavior problem. While showing empathy to the students due to their situations, they are sometimes doing more harm by delaying the inevitable day of reckoning that will come academically in high school. Previous research states it is then too late to turn the issue around (Ojeda, 2008).

Practical Implications

Practical implications also resulted from the current study. Teachers were able to self-assess their beliefs, opinions, and perceptions while answering questions regarding Latino males. Some saw needs within their own classrooms for specific interventions to target Latino males, while most all saw the need for district wide initiatives to address the perceived obstacles. Many faced the reality that empathy for students is not the best way to address deficits. In addition, many felt that the language barrier is something to consider as to how to address in the future as situations arise. There are several things that teachers can do to help with the perceived obstacles:

- Attend diversity training,

- Attend training for ELL students,

- Hold students accountable for the standards taught without simply passing them along,

- Schedule regular meetings with their parent liaison/district interpreter to discuss student progress, and

- Seek multiple avenues to educate and involve the family in matters of education.

By attempting to seek ways to eliminate as many of the perceived obstacles from their classrooms, teachers can begin to effect change within their own buildings. By then becoming leaders in their buildings, they can have their voices heard at the district level where even more change can occur.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of the study include certification level, school assignment of the participant, gender, age, experience in education, and content area. Certification level of the teachers did not determine nor did it limit those who could participate, as those with a bachelor, masters, specialist, or doctoral degree were eligible to participate. The assigned school or grade did not limit the research as long as the teacher had experience teaching Latinos in the eighth grade for three years. This ensured the data was triangulated during observations. The final delimitation is the content area that the teacher instructs as all teachers were allowed to participate regardless of their area of certification and subject taught.

One of the major limitations of this study was teacher availability or access. Some teachers who were recommended were unable to participate due to time constraints or availability issues. Some issues in regards to availability were extra-curricular activities, time schedules, and educational policies. The time required to complete the study limited the researcher from using other subjects who had conflicts of time, as research had to be completed within one year of IRB approval.

In addition to this information, I tried to corroborate the information by sitting into other meetings where data from the students is the focus, as this could provide a more in-depth look at the possible approaches taken by the various teachers in regards to their Latino students. The strategies discussed in content meetings, ELL, or RTI meetings could shed light on whether

actions displayed in the classroom were planned or merely staged because of the researcher's presence. This approach would have lent credence to the validity of the findings. Unfortunately, these were not an option during the time allotted for the study. Every effort was to get into planning sessions, RTI meetings, and ELL meetings to observe these participants in collaboration with their peers, but they were to no avail. These meetings would have helped provide a more accurate portrayal of teacher interactions because of the more natural setting.

Location was another limitation of the study. The data derived in this study was from a specific region of the United States and may not be applicable across the country or even the entire state. Participants in this study were all part of a chosen school district in the North Georgia region. In addition, participants were required to have been employed for the past three years by the district and hold a valid teaching certificate. Non-certified educators, retirees, or teachers with under three years' experience could have provided valuable information to the study.

Participation of individuals was also a limitation of the study. A few teachers contacted chose not to participate in the study. Efforts to limit researcher-based biases during the data collection and data analysis processes involved bracketing (Creswell, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

Research in this study was relegated to Latino males, but other discoveries are noted here, as obstacles to other students became known. One idea for future research derived from this study is to look into the obstacles faced by Latino females. Latino females are a component of low Latino student achievement even though they are not as low performing as Latino males. Several teachers mentioned during the interview how the question either applied solely or also to their Latino female population. An exploratory case study into their plight could add to the

cultural knowledge of teachers and could help eliminate obstacles to Latino academic performance.

Another recommendation would be a phenomenological study investigating how various Latino cultures assimilate into the American educational system. Research in this area could help to shed light on various cultural issues that could themselves create obstacles to the Latino population. Finally, quantitative research in the area of parent outreach programs would be beneficial, as it would aid in investigation the question of parent involvement. Researching programs that invest time and resources in parents of Latino males would be beneficial to determine effectiveness in eliminating language and cultural barriers that Latino males face.

Summary

Chapter 5 concludes the research study. The purpose of this exploratory instrumental case study was to investigate teacher perceptions of educational obstacles for eighth-grade Latino males. Chapter 5 provided a detailed analysis of the process. The process involved interviewing a 12-teacher sample of Northeast Georgia teachers. The detailed analysis discovered four major themes and 13 minor themes. Implications and recommendations for future research were also discussed in Chapter 5.

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Appendix A

Demographic Information

Male   Female

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. How long have you taught in this system?

3. What subjects are you certified to teach?

4. What grades are you certified to teach? I.e. Pre-K, elementary, middle school, high

school, etc.

5. Describe the various settings in which you have taught that have contained Latino male

students.

Educational Obstacles

6. What obstacles do eighth-grade Latino males face which may affect their academic

achievement?

7. How do these obstacles differ, if so, from other students?

8. How have some of these obstacles to Latino male academic achievement been present

within your educational experiences or classroom?

9. What obstacles to academic achievement if any, have you seen teachers create for Latino

males? What grade levels were these barriers created?

10. In you educational experiences with Latino males, what are some of the obstacles the

students have created which affect their academic achievement?

11. What behaviors do Latino male students exhibit in your classroom?

12. What strategies have you implemented to encourage motivation in Latino male students?

13. How do you incorporate Latino culture in your classroom?

14. How do you contact Latino parents?

15. What behaviors do you observe in Latino parents during your interaction with them?

16. During a Latino male student's eighth-grade year, what accommodations are in place to help them have a successful transition to high school?

17. What are some obstacles which could affect Latino males' transition to high school?

Future Implications

18. What are some ways a community could improve Latino male student achievement?

19. How could a local college or university aid in increasing student achievement?

20. What are some concepts you have seen businesses do to improve education?

21. What other ideas or beliefs you wish to share about Latino male student achievement?

22. What changes would you make to the interviewing process?

Appendix B

Observation Guide

Time	Action	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. What are some obstacles Latino males face which may affect their academic achievement?

2. How does a teacher's perception of these obstacles affect Latino male achievement?

3. What are ways in which your schools deal with obstacles faced by Latino males?

4. How does your department plan lessons which address these obstacles?

5. What are some things you do in your classroom naturally to address these obstacles?

6. What obstacles do Latino males face in their transition to high school?

7. What does your school do to make sure Latino males are prepared to be successful in high school?

Appendix D

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
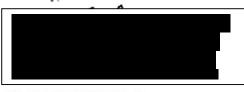## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 19, 2016

Mike McQueen
IRB Approval 2696.121916: Teacher Perceptions of Obstacles Faced by Eighth-Grade Latino Males

Dear Mike McQueen,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. 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 were attached to your approval email.

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

Sincerely,

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UNIVERSITY.
Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

Appendix E

CONSENT FORM
Teacher Perceptions of Eighth Grade Latino Males
Mike McQueen
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of teacher perceptions of eighth grade Latino males. You were selected as a possible participant because you have taught 8th grade students within the ███████████ district for a minimum of three years. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Mike McQueen, doctoral candidate in the school of education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this exploratory instrumental case study is to investigate teacher perceptions of educational obstacles for eighth-grade Latino males. At this stage of the research, the educational obstacles will generally be defined as anything which obstructs Latino males from receiving a high school diploma. Teacher perceptions will be used to help identify either intentional or unintentional obstacles which pose a threat to academic achievement of the Latino male subgroup. The research will be conducted through the lens of Critical Race Theory as well as Expectancy-Value Theory.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
Participate in an interview answering questions regarding eighth-grade, Latino, male students and their academic endeavors and be observed a minimum of two times for approximately 20 minutes each, OR participate in a focus group lasting for approximately 1 hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal.

The benefits to participation are for educators and society alike. Research into teacher perceptions can aid in providing insight into educator practices whether intentional or unintentional because of said perceptions which could be beneficial for individual classrooms. Educational leaders could benefit from said research by having insight into these perceptions about the subgroup and possibly provide support to teachers who deal with them. Future researchers could benefit from the findings as it could aid in crafting future research into helping this subgroup, thus helping the subgroup in their future educational endeavors.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for the participants in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Your name will be kept confidential, and the interviews will be recorded and kept stored on a password-protected computer. Confidentiality could be compromised if the data were stolen, but the researcher will take every precaution to ensure that it is locked and kept where it will not be

accessible.

The researcher will do everything possible to keep the information regarding the identification of the participants confidential by storing the information on a password protected computer of which only the researcher will have access. Participants in the focus group will be asked to keep everything discussed confidential, but the researcher will be able to control conversations initiated outside the focus group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw. *(*

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Mike McQueen. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at smmcqueen@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

 The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix F

School District Permission Letter

November 20, 2016

Dr. ███████████
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
███████████████
███████████

Dear ████████

As a graduate student in the school of education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate degree. The title of my research project is Teacher Perceptions of Eighth Grade Latino Male Students and the purpose of my research is to investigate obstacles whether intentional or unintentional which may impede academic achievement of Latino male students.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in the █████████████ System.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview at a location of their convenience. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on approved letterhead indicating your approval to me at ███████████ ███████████████

Sincerely,

███████████