TEACHER PERSPECTIVES OF FACTORS THAT CAUSE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES FOR LATINO STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

by

Isis Gonzalez

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. This study was beneficial as it informed school administrators and teachers on the factors that cause Latino students to drop out of high school and highlight successful strategies and interventions used to retain at-risk students in school. The theory that guided this study is the cultural ecological theory by John Ogbu. Focus groups, open-ended semi-structured interviews, and observational field notes were the tools utilized for data collection. Data analysis further indicated that a lack of educational and social factors contributed to high school dropout for at-risk Latino students. The findings included five major themes that collectively outline the factors needed to support high school retention for at-risk Latino students: creating trusted relationships, prevention programs, school climate, student intrinsic factors, and family support. Future research needs to be conducted to broaden the scope of the five themes to include high school retention in different parts of the Unites States. Additionally, research should also consider dropout rates for at-risk Latino students in more affluent school districts and the positive impact providing educational opportunities for Latino parents.

Keywords: autonomous minorities, dropout, immigrant, involuntary minorities, Latino, nonimmigrant minorities, voluntary minorities

Dedication

First and foremost, I want to give all the Glory and Honor to Him who is the only one worthy of it, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As I complete this educational journey, I am forever knowing that God is with me in every situation I will face, "do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (New International Version, 2011, Isaiah 41:10)

I acknowledge my amazing husband and best friend, Pastor Christian Gonzalez for providing me with all the love and support that I needed when embarking on this journey. Thank you for always pushing me to do my best no matter the situation. Thank you for believing in me when I doubted myself. I love you so much Mijo.

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List of Abbreviations

Acting White Accusation (AWA)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Cultural Ecological Theory (CET)

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

English Language Learners (ELL)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Latino Critical Race Theory (LCRT)

National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA)

Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR)

United States Department of Education (USDOE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the factors that cause at-risk Latino students to drop out of high school. This chapter will highlight the historical background of the causes for dropping out of high school, the social implications of dropping out of high school, the theoretical frameworks that guide the current research study, the purpose and problem statement, and the significance of the study. The historical background of educating at-risk Latino youth has shown that an increase in cultural bias correlates to a decrease in academic success (Moreno & Bullock, 2015).

President Obama and federal legislation attempted to place safeguards for at-risk Latino students through the creation of school policies and reforms (Dussault, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The social implications of dropping out of high school may include the inability to be a self-sufficient adult. Relevant theories such as the critical race theory and cultural ecological theory explain the increased dropout rate for at-risk Latino students (Ogbu, 1978; Solorzano, 1998). The final section of the chapter presents the problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and chapter summary.

Background

Beginning in the early 1980s and to the present, the United States has seen a dramatic transformation in the demographic makeup of its population. In 1980, Latinos accounted for 6.5% of the population living in the United States while the current population of Latinos is 18.3% (Pew Research Center, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). As a result of the increase in population, Latinos are now considered to be the largest minority group in the United States (Sawe, 2019). In addition to identifying as the largest minority group, Latino students also have

one of the highest high school dropout rates (NCES, 2017). The effects of dropping out of high school are far-reaching. Earning a high school diploma provides opportunities in the labor market, improves job qualifications, and increases salary potential. A lack of high school credentialing creates job instability, lower incomes, and may impose dependency on government assistance (Corry & Stella, 2017).

Multiple studies have been conducted to understand the factors that lead to high school dropout in Latino students; little is known of the contributing factors of success for at-risk students in preventative programs according to teachers' observations (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Giraldo-Garcia, Galletta, & Bagaka, 2019; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). The focus of this study was to identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. This study was beneficial as it informs school administrators and teachers on the factors that cause Latino students to drop out of high school and highlight successful strategies and interventions used to retain at-risk students in school.

By the year 2050, one out of four school-age children will be of Latino descent in the United States (Howard et al., 2015). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2015), there is a significant graduation gap between Caucasian students and Latinos. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) reports that dropout rate for Latino student was 8.2% in the school year of 2016-2017 compared to Black students at 6.5%, Caucasian students at 4.3% and Asian students at 2.1%.

Latino students drop out of high school at a rate higher than that of other ethnic groups. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) confirms that Latino students have the highest dropout rates compared to Blacks, Whites, and Asian students. The

definition of "dropout rate" represents students of ages 16-24 that have not enrolled at school and have not obtained a high school diploma or certificate of completion (NCES, 2017). For Latino students schools are located where students come together after one's own family. Schools instruct a child and shape students' knowledge of social norms, values, and culture, as well as how students come to understand their civic orientations and engagement (Peguero & Bondy, 2015). Latino students have developed a perception that their schools are not just and fair because of the lack of adequate instruction. The problem is due to teachers not receiving the necessary training to understand the unique academic needs and cultural values of Latino students (Peguero & Bondy, 2015). One of the challenges contributing to high school dropout may be attributed to the limited professional development given to teachers that work in diverse settings. The absence of appropriate professional development results in an increase in cultural bias and a decrease in cultural sensitivity to aid Latino students who are struggling with academic success or demonstrating challenging behaviors (Moreno & Bullock, 2015).

Historical

For the past 30 years, Latino youth are severely affected and injured by the dropout crisis (MacDonald, Botti, & Clark, 2007). In 1972, the dropout rate among Latino youth was 34% compared to 21% for non-Hispanic Black youth and 12% for non-Hispanic White youth (U.S. Census Bureau, 1970-2016). Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dropout rate in Hispanic youth increased to 36%. In 2016, the dropout rate for Latino students dropped at a record of 9%, while the rate also dropped for Black youth at 6% and Asian youth at 3% *(Child Trends,* 2017). Although high school dropout rates have decreased in the youth of different ethnic groups in the last 30 years, Latino youth are more likely to drop out of high school compared to youth of other ethnic groups (Child Trends, 2017).

Due to the increased incoming of Latino students born in the United States, immigrant children entering our country, the Obama administration worked diligently to help meet the needs of this population. President Obama and his administration created school policies and reforms that would address the academic, cultural, and emotional needs of Latino newcomer immigrants (Dussault, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). As a result, the Obama administration presided over a country that contained a population of more than 40 million foreign-born (Pew Research Center 2017; Suarez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). According to Sulkowski (2017), from the 11 to 12 million immigrant youth that enrolled in school, who were undocumented youth, faced many barriers in receiving an appropriate education. The issue was that many school reform policies such as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) failed to recognize the academic, cultural, and emotional challenges of newly newcomer immigrant students. It was going to be extremely difficult for immigrant children to compete academically with their native-born peers when they had not learned academic English. There is a disconnect between immigration policies and the cultural adjustments and language barriers that Latino students are encountering in the school systems. This disconnect creates an imbalance in academic equity for at-risk Latino students (Garver, 2017). At that time of the 46 million immigrants residing in the United States, two-thirds were children of immigrants which composed 20% of the students enrolled in U.S. public school grades K-12 (Planty et al., 2008).

As a result of the difficult problems Latino and immigrant students were facing a (1) failing educational system, (2) cultural and linguistic disconnect, (3) failed policies, (4) structural barriers, and (5) failed institutions (Noguera, 2017). The Obama administration decided to create school policies and reforms that would help meet the academic, cultural, and emotional needs of Latino students and newcomer immigrants. The Obama reforms included

programs to (a) improve collaboration (b) increase pre- and post-secondary education opportunities, and (c) ensure access to the academic curriculum. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009; Jaffe-Walter, Miranda, & Lee, 2019). Researchers Salomon-Fernandez (2018), Makarova and Birman (2015), and Wong, Correa, Robinson, and Lu (2017) reinforced the legislation of the Obama administration stating that immigrant students required a specialized focus on supporting the academic achievement of minority students through research of acculturation with the school culture.

In October of 2015, the White House, under the Obama administration established an initiative titled Educational Excellence for Hispanics that declared 150 Commitments to Action – the initiatives would aid the public and private sector and had combined approximately $340 million to educational support and opportunities for Latino students living in the U.S. (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic American, 2015). On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which took effect in the 2017-2018 school year. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorized and updated the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established in 2001 under President George W. Bush's administration (Adler-Green, 2019). The federal government, operating under Every Student Succeeds Act and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has mandated school districts to create plans on the ways they would mitigate of inequality in school staffing especially found in high poverty areas where Black American and Latino students attend, as well as to recruit and hire fully qualified teachers (Adler-Green, 2019). Supporters of ESSA believed that the act would fully equip all teachers with the instruction and academic programs, especially minorities, to accomplish success at the university level and in the workforce (Klein, 2016). Researchers argued that at-risk minority students required assistance to

adjust to the newly acquired cultural identity, psychological adjustment, and behavioral adaptation (Keyes, 2019). Teachers and parents who supported students in the areas of cultural identity, psychological adjustment, and behavioral adaptation provided students with self-validation, which in turn, facilitates academic achievement (Makarova and Birman, 2015).

In 1999, W.K Kellogg Foundation set up a multi-year education initiative targeting Latino students from K-16 with the intent to support those who were experiencing failure in education (Abdul-Alim, 2011). The Engaging Latino Communities in Education (ENLACE) is a multi-year Foundation initiative whose goal is to provide better educational opportunities to marginalized Hispanic/Latino communities with the intent to equip Latino students to achieve academic success at every level of education, ranging from early elementary, high school, and culminating with college by securing a strong educational foundation (Springer et al., 2007). ENLACE also hopes to build partnerships and affiliations with Hispanic-serving school districts, companies, communities, and other entities to support and bring more opportunities for Latino students (Abdul-Alim, 2011). The initiative has raised $28 million to help finance 16 projects in seven states, such as California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Illinois, New York, and Florida, where a high concentration of Latino students live in urban and rural Latino communities (Springer et al., 2007).

Social

While Latino students can attend school, become part of the American educational system, and achieve academic success, there are numerous Latino students who are not academically successful and choose to drop out of school prior to graduation. There are negative consequences when a student drops out of high school (Molnar et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The lack of earning a high school diploma increases the likelihood of earning

a decreased wage, contributing less to the tax system, and becoming dependent on government subsidies (Corry, Dardick, & Stella, 2017). Furthermore, those who drop out of school typically lack the skills to be competitive global citizens in the economy (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), dropouts earn $20,231 annually, which is less than $10,000 that a high school graduate. In the long run, a high school dropout will earn $260,000 less than a graduate in the span of a lifetime. Additionally, students who do not earn a high school diploma cost the United States government an estimated $292,000 more than the average high school graduate (Zaff et al., 2016). Student dropouts cost the government money. According to *The Advocate* (2015), half of the individuals depended on government assistance are high school dropouts. Also, young women that did not complete high school and relied on government assistance were more than nine times likely to become a single mother (Shester, Allen, & Handy, 2019).

Another disadvantage of being a student dropout was that over 80% of individuals incarcerated were high school dropouts affecting society (*The Advocate*, 2015). Young adults that have not completed high school are more likely to become incarcerated compared to young adults that have completed high school (*Child Trends*, 2017). Taxpayers are providing the funding for government assistance for individual high school dropouts, as well as providing the Federal funds to pay for the care of incarcerated inmates. Based on the information given by the *Office of the Federal Register* (2017), the cost to support an incarcerated individual for the fiscal years 2016-2017 was $34,704.12, while the cost of spending for a student in California is $8, 694 (Burnett, 2018; Scruton, 1996). Based on these numbers, taxpayers pay $26,010 more to support an inmate over the cost of educating a school-age student. Students who do not graduate high

school are less likely to be employed, live below the poverty level, and are more likely to be incarcerated compared to individuals that graduate from high school (Zaff et al., 2016).

Theoretical

The academic success of students of the non-dominant race has been a topic of research for several decades (Amiot, Mayer-Glenn, & Parker, 2019; Knaus, 2009; Solorzano, 1998). Previously, researchers have focused primarily on the cultural ecological theory, critical race theory (CRT), and the Latino critical race theory (LCRT). The cultural ecological theory is used to address the performance of minority students in school. The critical race theory is used to address the way in which systems of power negatively influence and oppress minorities. However, Latino critical theory (LCRT) is used to specifically address the inequalities experienced by the Latino population (Solorzano & Delgado, 2001).

Guiding my study will be the conceptual framework of the cultural ecological theory of John Ogbu (1978), which focuses on minorities and their response to education. Ogbu's theory considers the societal and school factors that impact at-risk students. While his theory is founded on the academic disengagement of black student, Ogbu's research on minority students can be utilized, in combination with the critical race theory, to examine the disengagement of at-risk Latino students (Ogbu, 1990a).

Critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical race theory (LCRT) research have commonalities in aspects of discrimination and oppression of minority populations. When used as a framework for understanding the Latino experiences, LCRT also examines how race, socioeconomic status, and gender, intersect (Perez-Huber, 2010). Additionally, LCRT acknowledges the unique forms of subordination within the Latino community based on citizenship, primary language, and ethnicity (Perez-Huber, 2010). LCRT contrasts from CRT in

that LCRT employs the multiple structures of oppression that come together to shape the experiences of the Latino population (Malagon, Perez-Huber, & Velez, 2012).

Latino critical race theory is implemented as a means for exposing and challenging the ways in which racism produces inequality in the classroom, home, and community (Perez-Huber, 2010). The LCRT theory uncovers the marginalization of Latinos. For example, visual representation of ethnic groups perpetuates generalized stereotypes of specific races. Stereotypes such as, "Asians are academically advanced, African Americans have advanced athletic abilities, and "Latinos are known for extravagant friendliness" (Makarova & Birman, 2015). The sweeping generalizations of the ethnic stereotypes support the negative affirmations placed on the Latino population (Solorzano & Delgado, 2001).

Situation to Self

What motivated me to conduct this research is my Latino heritage. Although I was born in the United States, I am disheartened to learn of the number of Latino students in this country that are high school dropouts. The purpose of this research was to use its information to educate teachers, administrators, lawmakers, and residents about the struggles that Latino students are experiencing in the classrooms and the interventions and strategies needed to help motivate them to stay in school. My epistemological assumption was based on the belief that when teachers who work with at-risk Latino students know the best practices for keeping students in school, they will implement the strategies and provide the support needed for keeping at-risk students in school (Keyes, 2019). My ontological assumptions for this study addressed the existence of high dropout rates for at-risk Latino students. The reality of a lower high school retention rate for Latino students was the catalyst for my research. My axiological assumption of this study was that the Latino community values family unity over education and this is a compelling factor for

a high dropout rate among at-risk Latino students. As a Latino student and teacher, my desire was for our educational system to understand that Latino students need to feel that their culture and language are valued in schools (Lo, Correa, & Anderson, 2015). Teachers and staff must endorse the concept of cultural pride within the classroom. Latino students need to be permitted to speak their native language in the classroom without the fear of being reprimanded (Dee & Penner, 2017).

Long-term benefits and academic success are more prevalent when a student's native language and cultural heritage are incorporated into the educational setting (Fehrer et al., 2018). Allowing Dual Language Learners (DLLs) to sustain their home culture and language in a school setting allows DLLs to form strong self-perception of oneself, which will become important protective factors as the students progresses developmentally (Fehrer et al., 2018). Additionally, a continuation of language and culture across the home and school environments supports the student's ability to develop strong bonds with their teachers and classmates (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Tekin, 2016). In contrast, when a child's home and school cultures are separated, the student may view themselves as "bad learners" and experience low self-esteem (Fehrer et al, 2018; Souto-Manning, 2013). Students who do not see their race, ethnicity, or culture recognized and understood within their learning environment, may become isolated or alienated (Dee & Penner, 2017; Hepburn, 2004).

To motivate students to stay in school, high expectations need to be set in the classroom for each student. Additional teacher and administrative interventions may include ESL and bilingual classes which will assist Latino students who need more language support, assistance with a successful exit from intervention programs, and encouraging more college recruiters to visit schools where a large population of Latino students attend. When districts set high

expectations for students, it is very probable that students will be motivated to reach those expectations. Through this research, school districts will provide teachers with the funding needed for staff development and intervention programs training that better prepare them with the strategies needed to work with this population. Having taught in Los Angeles for years, it has been my experience to see that many of our new teachers are having a difficult time educating our Latino populations simply because they have not received the staff development training from the district due to the recent budget cuts (Ansari et al., 2017). Enlightening the district to realize that to keep Latino students in school and help alleviate this epidemic, the district needs to allocate additional money to equip our educators to help meet the academic, cultural, and emotional needs of our Latino students (Lopez, 2016). This topic is very important to me because I have two older siblings that dropped out of high school at an early age, and I became the first member of her family to earn a high school diploma. I have personally observed the consequences of not earning a high school degree with my siblings who have suffered the consequence of not being able to find a stable job, work in low-income jobs, and become dependent on government assistance.

This research adopted a post-positivism interpretive framework. Researchers that decide to use qualitative research using a post-positivism interpretive framework approach will take a scientific approach in their research and engage using a social science theoretical lens (Creswell, 2013). Through the use of a post-positivism framework, I implemented a series of logical steps that are based on rigorous qualitative methods, data collection, and data analysis (Creswell, 2012). Post-positive researchers implement strategies that are logical, empirical, and are based on a cause to effect assumptions (Barbour, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a post-positivist approach, this research sought to understand the factors that contribute to the high rate of Latino

youth who drop out of high school (Abdul, Sanaullah, & Asif, 2017). The advantages of using a post-positivist framework were to focus the research using a pluralistic lens (Abdul, Sanaullah, & Asif, 2017).

Problem Statement

The high school dropout rate for Latino students began to decline in 1998 (NCES, 2018). Despite this decline in the dropout rate, Latino students continue to drop out of high school at a higher rate than that their peers (Obinna & Ohanian, 2018). During the 2016-2017 school year, 4,077 Latino students dropped out of California high schools (California Department of Education, 2017). Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature between identifying the best practices for high school retention and the implementation of best practices that result in the reduction of high school dropout rates for at-risk Latino students (Marrero, 2016).

The problem is that 30% of at-risk Latino students will drop out of high school prior to graduation (Alliance for Education, 2015; Giraldo-Garcia, Galletta, & Bagaka, 2019). Students who do not graduate are less employable, have greater poverty, and are prone to incarceration than students who graduate (Zaff et al., 2016). Researchers have argued that the major cause of the high dropout rate among Latino students is the lack of academic equity in the school systems (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). The California educational system does not consistently provide Latino students with equitable access to the academic curriculum (Gonzalez & Immekus, 2013; Leavitt & Hess 2017). Students who are not (a) engaged in classroom activities, (b) supported in instructional content, and (c) lack academic progress, are at risk for dropping out of high school (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. For this study, dropout was generally defined as a high school student who left school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). The theory that guided this study was the cultural ecological theory by John Ogbu (1978). Ogbu's theory considers the societal and school factors that impact at-risk students. Societal and school factors may include (a) lack of authentic relationships between teachers and students, (b) a feeling of connectedness to adults and peers, (c) appropriate instruction, (d) teacher preparedness, and (e) instructional equality. These factors contribute to the disengagement of at-risk Latino students and impact their ability to successfully graduate high school and become college and career-ready (Garza & Huerta, 2014). An inequitable learning environment deters at-risk students from achieving academically and reaching high school graduation (Ogunyemi, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The qualitative case study was utilized to report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout. To facilitate change, it was important to understand the reasons Latino students' drop out of high school at a rate higher than their Caucasian, Black, and Asian peers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Additionally, it was important to identify the strategies most successful in motivating Latino students to graduate from high school (Carey, 2016).

Empirical Contribution of the Study

My study supports empirical findings of Keyes (2017) and Merlin-Knoblich, Harris, and McCarty Mason (2019) that stated that the major source of student engagement is directly connected to a teacher's ability to develop a strong and trusted relationship with their students. The researchers also identified that that when teachers use educational practices that motivate students to attend school, they will work to achieve academic progress. Gay (2010) stated that implementing culturally responsive instruction in the classroom where a Latino students heritage and traditions are validated will form better connection with students and will help increase learning and engagement. Marsh et al., (2016), also stated that all immigrant students want to feel a part of the American culture; therefore, using classroom instruction that supports a student's native language and cultures, will help improve self-confidence, which will lead to academic achievement and increase of high school graduation.

Adding to the literature is the research of Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006), Rands & Gansemer-Topf (2017), and Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) which states that when students expressed lack of support and motivation from an adult, along with lack of student resources, it limited their ability to be academically invested. The students further stated that lack of motivation did not make school rewarding or enjoyable therefore this led them to feel unmotivated and uninterested in working hard. The research of Makarova and Birman (2015) confirmed that when teachers and parents supported students in the areas of cultural identity, psychological adjustment, and behavioral adaptation provided students with self-validation, will facilitates academic progress.

Theoretical Contribution of the Study

Guiding this study was the theoretical framework of cultural ecological theory (CET) of John Ogbu (2003), which focuses on minorities and their response to education. His theory is founded on the academic disengagement of Black students. Ogbu (1978) described cultural ecology as the study of the reciprocal connections between the dominant and minority cultures and the manner in which society accepts or dismisses the behavior and actions of immigrant community members. The theory of cultural ecology of the performance of minority students in school describes two sets of factors that are affecting the academic achievement of minority students in school: how society treats minorities as a whole and how schools treat minorities at school (educational system) (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Also, it analyzes how minority groups reply to the treatments and the school environment (community forces) (Ogbu, 1985). Furthermore, the theory also focuses the viability on the different school performances of immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities based on the differences of their community forces (Ogbu, 1999).

This study shows the viability of Ogbu's theory within the content research by examining the academic issues at-risk Latino youth minorities are facing with the intent of finding solutions to those problems. Researchers have used Ogbu's theory to focus and analyze the implications that minority students encounter in school. Based on the cultural ecological theory, this investigation explored how society treats minorities as a whole and how that treatment is reflected in their experiences in school. The cultural ecological theory lays out the community forces that influences at-risk Latino youth and affects their approach to schooling.

Practical Significance of the Study

Using a case study approach allowed me to understand this phenomenon based on the perspectives of teachers that work in a high school preventative program. Working closely with participants provided me with a firsthand look at the reasons Latino students are dropping out of high school and determine what intervention measures are working to keep them in school and motivate them to graduate. This approach permitted the stakeholders to acquire an understanding of this phenomenon and the reasons for dropping out of high school prior to graduating (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study will provide data needed to examine the academic issues minorities are facing and collectively find solutions to those problems. Teachers may then utilize this information to avoid assumptions on a student's academic performance and actions on a group's association (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The importance of the theory was to guide teachers in comprehending the reasons students act in a particular way inside and outside of school when they are just following their identified group's forms of behavior (Ogbu, 2003). Benefiting from this research were students, teachers, administrators, school districts, school boards, and policymakers (Knight-Manuel et al., 2016). They will benefit by understanding the repercussions of how performance and school adjustment affect Latino students. Also, educational policies need to be written and implemented so that Latino students will feel more supported and welcomed in American society and schools (Godreau et al., 2015). Society needs to be more cognizant of how the treatment of minorities in society and classrooms affects their academic success and teachers need to make an effort to provide students with stronger teacher-student connections and relationship bonds (Sengul, Zhang, & Leroux, 2019).

Research Questions

Latino students are dropping out of high school at a rate higher than that of their Caucasian, Black, and Asian peers. The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers working with Latino students who are at risk for leaving high school prior to graduation.

RQ1. Why are Latino students dropping out of high school at a rate higher than their Asian, Black, and White peers? In the past ten years the dropout rate for Latino students has decreased, however at risk-Latino youth continues to leave high school at a rate higher above that of their peers *(Child Trends,* 2017). Bringing societal awareness to the social and academic consequences that occur due to unjust treatment of minorities may help to reshape the way in which Latino students are viewed and, in turn, improve their academic success (Osorio, 2018).

RQ2. What intervention programs or strategies are high schools currently using to keep Latino students in school? Students who are not (a) engaged in classroom activities, (b) supported in instructional content, and (c) lack academic progress, are at risk for dropping out of high school (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). Recent qualitative studies have shown that Culturally Responsive Teaching for ELLs has many benefits, one being, increased student achievement across classroom subjects (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

RQ3. What is the impact of the student-teacher relationship on decreasing the high school dropout rate of at-risk Latino students? Societal and school factors that may cause Latino students to drop out of high school may include (a) lack of authentic relationships between teachers and students, (b) a feeling of connectedness to adults and peers, (c) appropriate instruction, (d) teacher preparedness, and (e) instructional equality. These factors contribute to

the disengagement of at-risk Latino students and impact their ability to successfully graduate high school and become college and career-ready (Garza & Huerta, 2014).

Definitions

1. *Autonomous minorities* - A group distinguished by different racial, linguistic, and cultural identities based on the national composition (Foster, 2004).
2. *Dropout* - A high school student who left school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential (e.g., a GED) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018).
3. *Immigrant* - Immigrants in the United States have been referred to as undocumented, foreigners, and illegal alien; often, those terms signify any person who does not hold legal residency in the United States, including not holding an appropriate visa, green card, or U.S. citizenship (Salinas, Malavé, Torrens, & Swingle, 2019).
4. *Involuntary minorities* - Are those whose minority position is a result of historic suppression, forced migration, or enslavement (Ogbu, 1983a). Involuntary minorities have an oppositional approach to their host society and its institutions (Ogbu, 1983a; Ogbu, 1983b; Ogbu, 1985; Ogbu,1995).
5. *Latino* - A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin (Pew Research Center, 2017).
6. *Nonimmigrant minorities* - Nonimmigrant individuals believe that they were forced to be in the U.S. by White Americans (Ogbu, 1995).
7. *Voluntary minorities* - Are those who immigrate to a host country by choice and are said to have an instrumental approach to their host society and its institution (Ogbu, 1983a).

Summary

Latino students' drop out of high school at a rate higher than that of other ethnic groups. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) states that Latino students have the highest dropout rates compared to other ethnic groups. Although improvements have been made to decrease the dropout rates in Latinos, 30% of Latino students will not graduate from high school (Alliance for Education, 2015; Giraldo-Garcia, Galletta, & Bagaka, 2019). Improvements within the school's infrastructure include the opportunity to attend school and become part of the American educational system. Legislative improvements include school policies and reforms that would address the needs of Latino students and newcomer immigrants (Dussault, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). The Obama reforms included programs to (a) improve collaboration, (b) increase pre- and post-secondary education opportunities, and to (c) ensure access to the academic curriculum. (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009; Jaffe-Walter, Miranda, & Lee, 2019).

Cultural ecological theory, critical race theory, and Latino critical race theory have been introduced to outline the commonalities in aspects of discrimination and oppression of minority populations. The theories help explain the lack of equitable access to the academic curriculum that contributes to the increased dropout rate for at-risk Latino students. The theoretical basis of the critical race theory outlines a means for exposing and challenging the ways in which racism produces inequality in the classroom, home, and community (Perez Huber, 2010).

Students who fail to complete high school will face socioeconomic consequences in their lifetime (Mughal, & Aldridge, 2017). Dropping out of high school carries negative effects as it denies the individual the skills necessary to be competitive global citizens in our economy (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The benefit of earning a high school diploma will not only

provide individuals with the opportunity to compete in a global market but also improve their health and increase their salary potential.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The Latino population is the largest minority group in the United States, and it is estimated that the population will double in size by the year 2060, accounting for 55 to 119 million people (Colby & Ortman, 2015; Karkouti, 2016). This population shift will become quite noticeable in our United States educational system as the number of Latino children attending school is expected to grow from the current population of 24% to 34% by the year 2060 (Karkouti, 2016). Due to the rapid increase of the Latino student population in this country, many of the educational system in the United States is striving to provide our Latino youth with the resources needed to help them achieve academic success, however, they continue to experience high levels of academic failure and high school dropout (Corry, Dardick, & Stella, 2017; Garcia- Feijoo, Jensen, & Johnson, 2012). This chapter provides the reader with details about the theoretical framework of the cultural ecological theory of John Ogbu (1978) and why the cultural ecological theory was chosen to guide my study. This theory was used to explain the way Latino students respond to education in the U.S. This chapter will provide a synthesis of the literature pertaining to the means in which Latino youth become motivated to remain in school when teachers engage them in the classroom, connect the classroom curriculum to be culturally relevant, and create a school environment where students feel recognized, valued, and have a cohesive relationship with their peers and teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Guiding this study was the theoretical framework of cultural ecological theory (CET) of John Ogbu (2003), which focuses on minorities and their response to education. His theory is founded on the academic disengagement of Black students. Ogbu (1978) described cultural

ecology as the study of the reciprocal connections between the dominant and minority cultures and the manner in which society accepts or dismisses the behavior and actions of immigrant community members. The theory of cultural ecology of the performance of minority students in school describes two sets of factors that are affecting the academic achievement of minority students in school: how society treats minorities as a whole and how schools treat minorities at school (educational system) (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). It analyzes how minority groups reply to the treatments and the school environment (community forces) (Ogbu, 1985). The theory also focuses on the different school performances of immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities based on the differences of their community forces (Ogbu, 1999).

The cultural ecological theory is used to explain the way public schools perpetuate societal inequalities (Ogbu, 2003). Ogbu describes the societal discrimination imposed on minorities as instrumental discrimination, relational discrimination, and symbolic discrimination (Sinha, 2016; Neumann & Moy 2018; Wingfield & Alston, 2013). Instrumental discrimination occurs when minorities are presented with barriers in opportunities that include unemployment, significantly lower wages for comparable work, and underrepresentation in the political arena. Relational discrimination occurs within social settings and includes residential segregation and the real or perceived threat of violence. Symbolic discrimination occurs when the minority culture is devalued, denigrated, or exploited. Ogbu (2003) posits that the compilation of these forms of discrimination, directly and indirectly, impedes equitable academic access for the minority student.

The cultural ecological theory further considers the broad societal and school factors as well as the dynamics within the minority communities. Ecology is the setting or environment of the people of minority, while culture largely refers to the way in which the people of minority

see their world and respond to it (Ogbu, & Simons,1998). The cultural ecological theory adopts the philosophy that culture frames and guides human behavior. This includes the minority students' behavior within the educational setting (Ogbu, 1995). The cultural ecological theory is composed of two parts. The first part considers the way minority groups in the U.S. are treated or mistreated in the school system. The second part considers the way minority groups view themselves and reply to schooling because of the treatments or mistreatments of the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1978).

In his theory, Ogbu (2002) proposed that minorities exhibit a difference within each group that had to do, in part, with the community forces found within each group. Community forces have been perceived as the element that shapes the collective identity and cultural frame of reference in a minority group (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The way people view themselves and obtain a sense of who they are is defined as collective identity. For minority groups, this sense is formed based on their shared experiences and the external, historical, and structural forces that shape their formation (Ogbu, 2004).

The degree of compliance, as perceived by the dominant culture, will shape the academic success of the minority culture (Ogbu, 1995a). The cultural frame of reference for a minority group is determined by the views, behaviors, and verbal speech styles they portray. The cultural frame of reference represents the minority group's perceptions regarding the manners, behaviors, and social interactions that are required to be accepted by the majority group (Ogbu, 1978). These views, behaviors, and speech styles are then deemed acceptable or unacceptable by the majority group (Ogbu, 2003).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) provided greater depth of information regarding the impact of community forces regarding the cultural ecological theory. Their study of community takes into

consideration the correlation between the dominant culture's perception of minorities and their success in the academic setting. Ogbu and Simons (1998) presented four factors that influenced the perceptions held by the dominant culture regarding the minority culture (a) a comparison of the affluent versus non-affluent schools, (b) the importance of a solid education for professional achievement, (c) trusted relationships between the schools and families, and (d) the effects of cultural acculturation on the minority group. Ogbu (1995) further posited that oppositional identities between the dominant and non-dominant cultures had the potential to impose educational hardships for minority students.

Ogbu's theoretical framework was utilized to show the reciprocal connection between a minority culture and their ability for academic success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The cultural ecological theory identified two sets of dynamic factors that influence a minority culture's ability to engage with the community and achieve academic success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The first set of factors were societal and educational effects (Ogbu, 1990). The second set of factors considered the influence families and peers impress on at-risk students (Ogbu, 1990).

This framework analyzed how different ethnic groups in America function in society. It examines the patterns and belief systems of a dominant group in society and how they differ against those of a minority group (Ogbu, 1985). Ogbu's research explains a visible (social) pattern that can be formed in a minority group when attitudes and habits apply to ample members of the group even though not all members of a minority group act or believe the same things. Also, some groups will act or react much differently than the dominant group (Ogbu, 1990). This perspective is evident in Ogbu's (1998), research conducted in Oakland, California, where he was able to observe a Black community and the manner its people spoke an English dialect they called "regular English" while other members of the community spoke standard

English, or White people's "regular English", when conversing with others outside their community. Ogbu also discovered a similar pattern when studying the behaviors of voluntary immigrants living in Oakland and the attitude to school based on their influences "back home" (Ogbu, 1995). Latino immigrants believe that they have more opportunities to succeed in the U.S. as compared to their native country. Many of the immigrants that fall under this category came to this country for the purpose of giving their offspring an "America education" thought to be the best education possible (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). According to Latino immigrants, having their children receive a higher education in the U.S. is providing them with the opportunity to gain a professional career that they would not have access to in their native country (Ogbu, 1985).

Ogbu's theory of cultural ecology provides a framework to understanding the perceptions and actions of members belonging to a minority group including their beliefs, mindset, approaches, and behaviors who guide the patterns established by a dominant group (Ogbu, 1983a). It compares the differences that exist within a variety of ethnic minority groups in behavior and beliefs. When discussing the perceptions, attitudes, and actions of middle-class minority groups, it does not mean that amidst White, middle-class Americans all members perceive and behave the same way, nor does it associate the lower class meant that in White, lower-class American behave the same way. The same is when discussing the thoughts and behaviors found in voluntary and involuntary minorities.

Ogbu's goal was to understand the academic achievement of minority students and be able to distinguish between minorities described into three categories (Ogbu, 1983a; Ogbu 1985); therefore, he divided the minority groups into involuntary minorities, voluntary minorities, and autonomous minority groups. According to Foster (2004), Ogbu believed that it

was not possible to teach minority students without first addressing the issues of academic achievement found in each of the different kinds of minorities. Foster (2004) also believed that Ogbu was convinced that each of the kinds of minorities had a distinct set of experiences that connected them to their association to schools and instruction; therefore, each had formed a contrasting approach to education.

A group's history is based on the reasons of how and why they migrated to the United States and became a minority group. The portrayal of the dominant group in their attainment of minority status-that will dispose of its involuntary and voluntary status instead of its ethnic group or race (Hagan, 1994). For example, Chinese Americans are voluntary minorities because of the manner they entered the U.S, note based on their Chinese ethnicity (Weiwen & Qingnan, 1993). On the other hand, Black Americans are considered to be involuntary minorities because they were transported to the U.S. as slaves against their wishes, not because they are Black. The reasons Black immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean in this country are considered voluntary minorities show that to be identified as the voluntary or involuntary status it will solely be based on the group's history and not racial ethnicity (Ogbu, 1985). When the same treatment is viewed in a different manner by the two types of minority groups, it depends on the history of the arrival of the groups. For the same reasons, when each of the groups has experienced related cultural or language variation, they translate and answer to them differently (Ogbu, 1995). During his study in Oakland, Ogbu (1995b) asked people from the two minority types about learning standard English in school; the responses were different because they connected diverse meanings to a conversation in standard English (Ogbu, 1995b). As Ogbu's (1995b) studied Black, Mexican, and Chinese Americans in Oakland, he concluded that students that were born to immigrant parents understood that they had greater opportunities to succeed in the U.S. if the person

became educated and worked hard, while family members back home had a better chance to succeed only when receiving help from friends and relatives by connections, commonalities, or family name (Suarez-Orozco, 1989).

Voluntary minorities are those who immigrate to a host country by choice and are said to have an instrumental approach to their host society and its institutions (Ogbu, 1983a). Ogbu (1985) believed that voluntary minorities were groups of immigrants that have arrived in the U.S. with the purpose of achieving a better life. There are two features that distinguish voluntary minority which are: 1) they have made a voluntary decision to move to the U.S. to seek a better future, and (2) they do not view their presence in the U.S. as enforced by the government or by the dominant culture, White Americans (Ogbu, 1983b). For example, many students of Latino descent have arrived in this country with the intent to find better employment opportunities, educational opportunities for their children, and freedom of religion and politics (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Children of voluntary immigrants usually have trouble in school due to the inequitable educational policies, command of the language, and cultural barriers (ARC 1982; Low 1982; Wang, 1995; Wollenberg, 1995). Initially, voluntary minorities have trouble in school due to language and cultural barriers; however, the long-term effects will not experience the same difficulty as involuntary minorities (Wollenberg, 1995). Examples of Latinos that may voluntarily immigrate to the U.S. are Cuban, South American, Caribbean (Dominican Republic), and Mexicans.

There are several factors that make a group fall under the voluntary minority group according to the cultural ecological theory such as refugees, migrant workers, and bi-nationals (Ogbu & Simons, 1990). If a group has arrived in the U.S. due to a civil war crisis affecting their countries, the group is not considered to be a voluntary minority group (Ogbu & Simmons,

1998). They do not meet the definition of a voluntary minority because they did not willfully choose or plan to immigrate to the host country. However, many refugee immigrants share similar experiences, about school success, as immigrants of the voluntary minority group (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Refugees are not considered voluntary minorities because they were forced to come to the U.S. due to civil war in their native countries. Refugees do not have the opportunity to willingly come to the United States to improve their lives (Ogbu, 1999). They also share very similar beliefs and behaviors of immigrant minorities that state that attending school will help them achieve success. Refugees that come to the United States enter the country with different languages and cultures and with the mindset of a tourist, which means they will exhibit an attitude to cultural and language differences (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Refugees find greater success with assimilation when they are immersed in White American culture in behavior and speech (Hagan, 1994). The tourist mindset helps refugees speak like White Americans without suffering or losing their language or culture (Hagan, 1994). Some examples of refugees in the United States are Vietnamese, Hmong, Haitians, Cambodians, Central American, and Ethiopians (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Migrant workers are also not considered voluntary minorities because they plan to stay in the U.S. for a limited time for work-related opportunities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). However, since migrant workers stay temporarily, they often become familiar with the language and culture of the host country with the intent of achieving their temporary goals (Castro et al., 2018; Hagan, 1994). Often migrant workers do not include educational aspiration in their plan for short- term residency (Castro et al., 2018; Hagan, 1994). Lastly, undocumented immigrants or

bi-nationals are not considered voluntary immigrants. They do not meet the definition of a voluntary immigrant because it is difficult to gather accurate data on undocumented immigrants. The occurrence of undocumented immigrants fluctuates therefore, identifying their intentions to stay in this country permanently, as well as documenting their children's school experience or cultural adaptation is difficult (Castro et al., 2018; Hagan, 1994).

In terms of bi-national Latino immigrants, studies show that many of them maintain financial and other connections with their native country and these ties make their socio-cultural adjustments different compared to immigrants from their same native country (Baca, 1994). Consequently, the influences that community forces have over the education of bi-nationals are very different from the influences in education found in other immigrants. For example, most Latino immigrants believe that bringing their children to the U.S. will equip them to live and work in this country. On the other hand, bi-national Latino immigrants are unsure whether they will prepare their children to have a future in the U.S. or another place (Baca, 1994).

Involuntary minorities are those whose minority position is a result of historic suppression, forced migration, or enslavement. Involuntary minorities have an oppositional approach to their host society and its institutions (Ogbu, 1983a; Ogbu, 1983b; Ogbu, 1985; Ogbu,1995). Different from the voluntary minority group, involuntary, or nonimmigrant, minorities are considered to be groups that have been a part of society but live in the country against their will (Ogbu, 1985). Two features that distinguish voluntary and involuntary minorities are that nonimmigrants did not decide to live in this country on their own but were forced to become part of the U.S. society. Secondly, nonimmigrant individuals believe that they were forced to be in the U.S. by White Americans (Ogbu, 1995). Compared to voluntary

minority groups, involuntary minorities tend to be less financially secure and have experienced greater difficulty adjusting to cultural and language barriers. In addition, they have the most difficulty in school (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Examples of groups that fall under this category are Native Americans, who at one point were original owners of the United States land but were overpowered. Other Latino groups are Mexican Americans that lived in the Southwest and were also overthrown by the government and Puerto Ricans who view themselves as a colonized group (Ogbu, 1995).

Involuntary minorities are also distinguished for having a dual frame of reference (Ogbu, 1985). The first frame of reference deals with the social and financial conditions in the U.S. The second frame of reference is the social and financial standing of the middle-class White Americans. Involuntary minorities negatively view these connections because they perceive their financial and social conditions, as well as educational opportunities to be inferior compared to middle-class White Americans (Ogbu, 1983a). As a result of their negative experiences, involuntary minorities are offended that White Americans have greater opportunities than them. Involuntary minorities purport additional negative feelings regarding inequality in the educational setting, stating that any student who works hard to pursue educational goals should achieve success regardless of their ethnicity. Involuntary minorities also believe that they will not be accepted or rewarded for their educational successes or hard work when being compared to the successes of their White peers (Benjamin, 1992; Cose 1993; Matusow 1989; Valdez, 2020). Because of the perception that they have been discriminated against for many years, involuntary minorities believe that this will continue to be the case in U.S. society.

There is a difference in the pattern of beliefs and behaviors that exists between voluntary and involuntary immigrants (Wang, 1995). Amongst each of the minority groups, there is a diversity in the way in which each of the groups displays the dominant pattern of perceptions and actions represented by their minority group. For example, Black Americans who fall under the involuntary group category are the most susceptible to identify as underprivileged (Wallenberg, 1995). They fall into the involuntary group category due to the beliefs and actions that are characteristic of this type of minority group such as slavery and segregation (Wallenberg, 1995). Mexican Americans are also considered an involuntary minority group with a different history, skin color, and came to this country due to diverse circumstances but show less submission to this minority category (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

Another difference between voluntary and involuntary minorities under Ogbu's theory of cultural ecology states that individuals may leave the group and break from subordination, by an act called "passing" (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). "Passing" is the term used when a person belonging to a specific ethnic group is regarded as a member by the group or a group different than its own, which can include sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, or racial identity (Burma, 1947). According to Burma (1947), for Black Americans, "passing" is very challenging because of the social order system in which they live, describes any descendent of a Black and White mix, no matter what the color or skin tone the offspring might be, as long as they are Black, they are forbidden from being a part of the White community. However, a process of assimilation can occur among Mexican immigrants that are a part of the involuntary minority group (Gibson, 1997). An option exists between members of Mexican immigrants compared to Black immigrants when "passing" occurs. The option is that when a Mexican immigrant marries a White American if their offspring has features considered to be White, they can become part of

the White majority (Gibson, 1997). In conclusion, in terms of minorities that fall into the voluntary category, the more recent their arrival has been to this country, the faster they can conform to the patterns of the group (Ogbu, 1983b).

Ogbu had a final minority group that he studied he called the autonomous minority. The autonomous minority group was distinguished by different racial, linguistic, and cultural identities based on the national composition (Foster, 2004). This minority group could be victims of prejudice but were not an inferior group in a stratified class system (Ogbu, 1983a). Ogbu placed under this category, minority groups such as Jews, Amish, and Mormons which possess a cultural frame of reference that tend to inspire success (Ogbu, 1985).

Under the cultural ecological theory (Ogbu, 1978), immigrant minority groups were not classified by race but were categorized by the constructs that explain the beliefs and behavioral patterns that shape academic success and social interactions (Ogbu, 1999). The comparisons between the groups are based on the study of each ethnic and racial group and analyze how the position of the group influences the educational and economic success of the group (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The cultural ecological theory is utilized to analyze the way a minority group functions within the U.S. Additionally, this theory strives to understand the major patterns of beliefs and behaviors within each of the different types of minority groups (Ogbu, 1998).

One goal of cultural ecological theory was to analyze the community forces and schooling for voluntary and involuntary minorities, especially when discussing the behaviors and attitudes they developed toward school (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Voluntary minorities have formed a positive attitude towards U.S. society in terms of cultural and language differences due to their strong communities and commitment to seeing their children succeed (Ogbu, 1983). Most voluntary minorities hold high academic expectations for their children and make sure to

teach them that academic success will depend on them and not the school. Voluntary minorities are extremely supportive of the fact that it is imperative that their children learn English as well as comprehend and master the school curriculum (Ogbu & Simons, 1990). Voluntary minorities highly motivate their children to learn the language and school curriculum with urgency because they believe that if they master both skills, they will experience success in the job market and academic setting (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Since academic support is extremely important to voluntary minorities, the parents typically organize their children's time to ensure homework is completed even when they are unable to assist their children with its completion. Like voluntary minorities, involuntary minorities strongly support their children's academic success and have taught them that they must learn English to do well in the job market and succeed at school (Ogbu, 1995). However, involuntary minorities believe that education is the key to success in life, but they blame the educational system for failing their children and prohibiting them from gaining economic success (Ogbu, 1983a). While many involuntary minorities state that their children are responsible for earning academic achievement, they contradict this message by holding the educational system, teachers, and schools responsible for the lack of academic success experienced by their children (Ogbu, 1983b). If their children exhibit poor grades, involuntary minorities blame the school's educators for providing their children with poor teaching and blame teachers for not communicating their children's school failure to them in time as well as blaming teachers for exhibiting discriminatory behavior towards their children (Foster, 2004). Ogbu (1983a), suggests that many of the parents in this category, have also formed an oppositional group identity, a sense of who they are, in terms of the way they are treated by White Americans (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Unfortunately, their group identities have been formed based on the racism and discrimination they have experienced with Caucasian

Americans. Oppositional groups identify their influences based on the opinions held by members of minority communities regarding school as educational environments are often viewed as White institutions (Foster, 2004). When students of the minority culture are unable to gain success within the academic setting, they interpret the failure as a deliberate attempt to deprive minorities of their identities (Ogbu, 1995a).

At the end of Ogbu's study and examination of all three groups, he concluded that the voluntary minorities were able to succeed academically, while the involuntary minorities were less likely to achieve academic success and experienced constant failure (Ogbu, 1990). The cultural ecological theory connects well to understanding the problems of the high rates of Latino dropouts because it analyzes how minorities are treated or mistreated in schools, with regard to school policies and instruction that will help minorities to succeed in school. The cultural ecological theory will be used as a foundation for this study to demonstrate how minorities views and react to schooling as an effect of their treatment.

Oppositional behavior of involuntary minority groups may be further fueled by what Ogbu defines as the "burden of acting White". According to Fordham & Ogbu (1986), young Black Americans have been taught a well-defined fear of "acting White" which is a fear of excelling academically which traditionally have been associated with the privilege of White Americans. An example of the effects of the "burden of acting White" can be observed among African Americans. Although efforts have been made towards the academic progression of African Americans in the United States, the academic underperformance of African American students is often characterized as a problem connected with being a minority group (Webb & Linn, 2015). When comparing African American students with other ethnic groups, studies show that they struggle academically due to poor test scores and high dropout rates (Durkee et al.,

2019; Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010). Reasons for explaining the deficiency of social progress within certain minority groups often arise several of systemic and individual origins (Durkee et al., 2019). In the areas of social psychology and race relations, the essence of the “acting White" accusation (AWA) is an additional burden for minorities and impedes their ability to fully achieve equitable success (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The AWA implies that minorities who resist opposing stereotypes are denounced by their minority peers. For example, Cokley (2005) discovered that minority students may purposely sabotage their academic grades due to the probability of being ridiculed by their peers.

In general, having good grades or performing well in school may be seen in a negative manner since the behaviors may be related to exclusively acting White or strange among certain minority groups (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Examples of Black students classified as acting White according to Fordham and Ogbu (1986) are actions such as: (1) speaking correct standard English; (2) listening to music or radio stations that most White Americans listen to (3) attending and opera or ballet performance (4) going to the library and dedicating a large amount of time preparing for a test (5) engaging in hard work with the intent of receiving good grades in school; (6) getting high grades in school, i.e., being called a "brainiac"; (7) attending any Smithsonian museum; (8) attending a Rolling Stones concert held in Washington, D.C; (9) dedicating your time to volunteer work; (10) involved in activities such as mountain climbing, and other outdoor activities; (11) participating in a cocktail party or drinking a cocktail ; (12) attending symphony orchestra concerts; (13) organizing a celebration with no music; (14) listening to classical music; (15) not running late, always being on time; (16) enjoying reading and writing poetry; and (17) pretentiousness or “ putting on airs”, etc. Although the list can be lengthy, it clearly outlines the type of behaviors in a school setting that is negatively portrayed and therefore avoided by many

Black students (Ogbu, 2002). Examples of the negative comments said are statements such as "You talk like a White boy" or "You act like a White girl" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Webb & Linn, 2015).

"White", the question is, does a Black students' racial identification contribute to their poor academic progress?" (Toldson, 2010). Racial identity is the manner Black children view themselves in comparison to other ethnic and racial groups (Toldson, 2010). Some researchers affirm that if an African American student experiences a low level of racial identification, it will be very probable that it will hinder their academic success (Ford & Moore, 2004). Psychologist William Cross asserted that culturally distorted social and environmental participation can affect a Black student's racial identity (Cross, 1991). A study conducted by Wakefield and Hudley (2007) demonstrated that Black children that had inarguable positive racial identity and a firm self-perception are more likely to succeed academically.

Ogbu (1995a) states that a strong influence leading to low school performance among minorities is structural fortifications or discrimination. However, this is not the main cause of low educational performance, in that case, all minority groups would not perform well in school due to racial discrimination. Anthropologists that focus on education believe that cultural and language differences are the major reason why minorities perform low academically (Emihovich 1995; Jacob & Jordan, 1993). It is a truth that cultural and language differences cause learning issues for minorities; however, for the most part, these components do not account for the school achievement of minority groups that encounter the same similar gap as others that are less accomplished (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). It is because of these reasons, Ogbu has suggested that evidence to the differences of performance between ethnic minority groups is dependent on their community forces (Ogbu, 1995b).

This proposed research examined the academic issues minorities are facing and collectively search to find solutions to those problems. Researchers have used Ogbu's theory to focus and analyze the implications that minority students encounter in school. Based on the cultural ecological theory, this investigation explored how society treats minorities as a whole and how that treatment is reflected in their experiences in school. The cultural ecological theory, as presented by previous researchers, outlines the community forces that influence at-risk Latino youth and affects their approach to schooling.

A goal of cultural ecological theory (CET) was to outline the differences in academic achievement between voluntary and involuntary minorities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The objective of the theory was not pedagogical since it does not provide teachers with strategies to teach students that fall under the voluntary or involuntary category (Noguera, 2017). What the theory did do is discuss the essence of the problem which is giving educators some academic strategies to help improve learning (Foster, 2004). In no way did the theory state that belonging to any particular group determines a student's academic achievement or failure. What the identification of a group does was assist educators in informing them what the differences subsist between each of the groups (Ogbu, 1995). Teachers may then utilize this information to avoid assumptions on a student's academic performance and actions on a group's association (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The importance of the theory was to guide teachers in comprehending the reasons students act in a particular way inside and outside of school when they are just following their identified group's forms of behavior (Ogbu, 2003). The cultural ecological theory was utilized to support students that fall into the involuntary minority group. Additionally, when educators understand the untrusting relationship that this group has regarding the educational

system, the fear of being categorized as “acting White” (Ogbu & Foster, 1998) avenues for open communication regarding these sentiments can be identified and discussed.

Benefiting from this proposed research were students, teachers, administrators, school district, school boards, and policymakers. They benefitted by understanding the repercussions of how performance and school adjustment affect Latino students. Also, educational policies need to be written and implemented so that Latino students will benefit by feeling more supported and welcomed in American society, and schools and teachers need to make an effort to provide students with stronger teacher-student connections and relationship bonds. Bringing societal awareness to the social and academic consequences that occur due to unjust treatment of minorities may help to reshape the way in which Latino students are viewed and, in turn, improve their academic success (Osorio, 2018).

Other Related Racial Theories

Solórzano (1998) discusses five elements of the critical race theory that encompasses education. The first element defined in critical race theory was the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism (Solorzano, 1998). Racisms were the focus when analyzing this theory, but also takes into account the different manners of injustice, based on sex, class, and gender (Osoria, 2018). The second element was the protest of dominant philosophy (Solorzano, 1998). Critical race theory when applied to a school setting can be used to identify the current educational system as insensitive, color-blind, focused on merit pay, instead of being racially neutral and fair (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The third element was based on the desire for social justice (Garcia, 1995). Critical race theory helps guide educators to visualize social justice as they attempt to defeat racism and other forms of subservience while granting educational rights to groups that have been subordinated (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). The goal of

the critical race theory was to facilitate the social justice agenda (Bell, 1987). The fourth element was the focus on experiential education which takes the experiences of people of color in a justifiable, fair, reliable, and critical manner to understand and evaluate and instruct about racial discrimination in education (Solorzano, 1998). Educators and researchers used critical race theory as a guideline for considering the counter-story experiences of students of color by using teaching tools such as storytelling, family trees, biographies, stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Delgado 1989). Finally, the fifth element discussed the values of multifaceted viewpoints through the perspectives of various disciplines, epistemologies, and research paths (Scheurich and Young, 1997). Critical race theory can be used by educators to examine the etiology of racism, challenge the status quo of inequity of education for students of color, and analyze the historical implications of interdisciplinary work of educational teams (Delgado 1993; Garcia, 1995).

The critical race theory compliments the CE theory and speaks specifically to the challenges of the Latino population. Critical race theory (CRT) and Latino critical race theory (LCRT) research have commonalities in aspects of discrimination and oppression of minority populations. When used as a framework for understanding the Latino experiences, LCRT also examines how race, socioeconomic status, and gender, intersect (Perez-Huber, 2010). Additionally, LCRT acknowledges the unique forms of subordination within the Latino community based on citizenship, primary language, and ethnicity (Perez-Huber, 2010). Critical race theory focuses on how race affects Latino students in society today. In addition, LCRT focuses on Latino's experiences in the United States, including the differences in culture, immigration to this country, language diversity, and others, to understand the real-life experiences of Latinos (Osoria, 2018).

Valdés (1998) further purports that the LCRT theory should be utilized for the consideration of four additional functions: (1) to include the voices of populations that are most often ignored, (2) the continued sharing of revolutionary stories of the Latino population, (3) research that identifies the continuation of racism encountered by the Latino population, and (4) the development of an expanded community that builds alliances to extinguish racism towards the Latino population.

Related Literature

Researchers have considered a variety of variables for determining the students who are at risk for dropping out of high school. The socioeconomic status continues to lead the predictors for the successful completion of high school (Holt, Bry, & Johnson, 2008). The early and adolescent drawback that influences a person to not to earn a high school diploma leads to a higher risk of experiencing financial problems (Campbell, 2015). Additional variables that may identify students at risk for dropping out of high school include poor attendance, a lack of academic engagement, and weak relationships with peers and teachers (Kent et al., 2017; Keyes, 2019).

Classroom Engagement

The data gleaned from a review of the literature was utilized to highlight the importance of teachers ensuring that their students are being encouraged and motivated to remain engaged in classroom instruction. Research studies have shown that quality educators increase student engagement and reduce boredom through the implementation of strategies that (a) support a connectedness between students and teachers, (b) create real-world connection to the curriculum, (c) endorse and validate strong peer group interactions, (d) establish an atmosphere of mutual respect, and (e) introduce activities that are fun and meaningful (Ní Uigín, Higgins, & McHale,

2015). Educators, policymakers, and researchers strive to discover the most successful and meaningful way to enhance the at-risk student's academic motivation, raise high school graduation rates, decrease dropout rates, increase enrollment in post-secondary institutions, and prepare students to enter the workforce (Keyes, 2019). However, despite the resources that have been dedicated to ensuring academic success for all students, our nation continues to face high rates of high school dropouts for students of Latino descent.

Researchers from the America's Promise Alliance (2015) recorded that in the United States a student leaves high school at a rate of 26 students per second. Regardless of established school policies and new teaching practices, student disengagement remains to be an issue in retaining students in high school. To increase student engagement in schools, teachers must clearly communicate learning expectations and differentiate instruction to support the individual students' learning possibilities (Kent et. al, 2017). Research conducted by Marsh et al., (2016) recognizes that many students fail to graduate with a high school diploma because they experience academic difficulties dating back as far as the third grade. Marsh (2016) connects the perspectives of the social comparison theory to the academic accomplishments and formation of self-concepts of the Latino student positing that the success of their peers directly relates to their own frame of reference for academic success. Researchers Guay, Marsh, and Boivin (2003); Marsh and Craven (2006); Marsh and Yeung (1997), further purport that the formation of an academic, positive self-concept is equally as important for predicting future academic success as school-based or standardized achievement tests.

Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006), Rands & Gansemer-Topf (2017), and Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) completed research examining students from a variety of ethnic groups, economic backgrounds, family composition, community size, and family education. Their

collective research showed behavioral patterns that proposed that students who were bored at school, participated in passive learning activities, and lacked classroom resources identified with feelings of disinterest and academic disengagement. The research results of Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006), Rands & Gansemer-Topf (2017), and Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) showed that students expressed a lack of adult encouragement, low motivation, scarcity of resources, and a shortage of student resources as the key factors that limited their ability to be academically invested. The students further stated that being in school was not enjoyable or rewarding and led them to feelings of discouragement, low motivation, and disinterest in working hard.

Research conducted by Keyes (2017), Kim and Cappella (2016), and Merlin-Knoblich, Harris, and McCarty Mason (2019) concurred with the findings by Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006). Each of the researchers concluded that classroom engagement was directly linked to academic success. Collectively, the research studies identified multifaceted constructs that shaped student engagement. The factors for academic engagement, as addressed by these researchers, focused on connectedness to social associations, academic interest, and personal relationships. Additionally, the participants were asked to report on their sense of connectedness to peers and teachers in their school. Findings of the study revealed that teachers implemented two main strategies to increase students' sense of belonging in the classroom and engage students in meaningful academic tasks. Keyes (2017) and Merlin-Knoblich, Harris, and McCarty Mason (2019) identified the teacher's ability to foster a strong relationship with their students as a primary source for student engagement. A second strategy collectively identified by the researchers was to establish educational practices that motivate students to work toward academic success. Their research showed that when these strategies were effectively

implemented, the students and teachers mutually reported a sense of meaningful relationships and a learning environment where students felt validated and supported. The implementation of these strategies increased students' sense of belonging and increased student engagement (Keyes, 2019; Kim & Cappella, 2016; Merlin-Knoblich, Harris and McCarty Mason, 2019). Students who are engaged and validated feel comfortable taking risks while learning from their peers in collaborative groups and constructing new knowledge (Burden, 2016; Kim & Cappella, 2016). Research conducted by Rogers and Feller (2016) illustrates the need for communication between parents and schools as a means for reducing absenteeism and encourages the parties to shift their perspective away from the legal requirements for school attendance to the benefits of school attendance on student success. Chronic absenteeism is an additional factor that leads to a lack of classroom engagement. The California Attorney General's Report (2016), it reports that California is in a state of crisis regarding school truancy and absenteeism. The California Attorney General's Report (2016) indicates that when students miss school, they are more likely to demonstrate a lack of academic progress and are at greater risk for dropping out of school. Data derived also from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, (2020) indicates that in the school year of 2015-16, chronic absenteeism for California students of Hispanic descent was three times higher for Latino students than that of their Caucasian peers. Additional data revealed that Latino students were more than twice as likely to be suspended from school as that of their Caucasian classmates (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2020).

Connection to Curriculum

There are currently 44.7 million legal and illegal immigrants living in the United States. Of those 44.7 million immigrants, 10.5 million of them are living here as undocumented immigrants *(Pew Research Center*, 2019). There are 18% of Latinos that make up the U.S.

population and is to be the largest minority group in the country (Lopez, Passel, & Rohal, 2016). There are many challenges immigrant children experience in the U.S. Immigrant children are 1.5 more times than other children born in the U.S. to live in poverty, 26% live in an only Spanish speaking home where many of the household adults do not speak English accurately (Samalot-Rivera, Treadwell, & Sato, 2018) also one-third of most immigrant children have a mother that did not complete a high school education (Chase, 2017; Hernandez & Napierala, 2012). Another challenge that most immigrant children face is that many of the schools they attend lack educational resources (Ansari et al., 2017; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). Immigrant children are more likely than U.S.-born youth to attend schools that have a high rate of poverty, are segregated, and have issues with safety (Crosnoe, 2011; Gándara & Mordechay, 2017). Due to the risk factors experienced by immigrant children in the U.S. and their desires to achieve academic goals, immigrant children continue to experience low proficiency in reading and math and high school dropout (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

The American classroom has become culturally diverse; however, most teachers are Caucasian, middle-class females (Knotts & Keesey, 2016). The lack of diversity among teachers leads to an absence of culturally relevant instruction (Knotts & Keesey, 2016). To increase culturally relevant instruction, teachers must be given the training and curriculum needed to provide their students with educational programming that exposes them to different cultures and cultural experiences. When students lack the ability to connect their educational learning to life experiences beyond school and become disengaged and will often refrain from attending school (Kent et al., 2017). For Latino students residing in the U.S., peer interaction is vital for developing cross-cultural associations and interactions with their classmates. Students who

report low self-confidence and a lack of self-efficacy are unable to fully access instruction provided by English-speaking instructors (Lopez, 2016).

When educators become familiar with the Latino students' native culture, they are then able to use the students' cultural information and experiences to develop the social skills needed for promoting academic engagement and peer interaction (Lo, Correa, & Anderson, 2015). English Language Learners (ELL) that speak native Spanish often experience difficulty with social adaptation to school and express perceptions that their non-native peers view them as unacceptable (Chang et al. 2007; Valentino & Reardon, 2015). Recent qualitative studies have shown that culturally responsive teaching for ELLs has many benefits, one being, increased student achievement across classroom subjects (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Also, recent longitudinal research shows that culturally relevant instruction strategies benefit varying minority groups and other minority groups that feel marginalized (Dee & Penner, 2017; Sharif Matthews & López, 2019). Considering Gay's (2010a) study, a student's cultural beliefs and customs should be regarded as a method in teaching and learning instead of considering it an issue to minimize (Gay, 2010a).

Creating connections to the curriculum for Latino students requires teachers to provide culturally responsive instruction. Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as the ability to include familiar experiences, cultural traditions, well-established references, and individual learning styles to make learning experiences more relevant. Culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to expand their knowledge base on the diversity of cultures found in the U.S. (Gay, 2010). This can be challenging for new or inexperienced teachers (Lew & Nelson, 2016).

School systems are experiencing a widening of the achievement gap with the increased enrollment of minority students (Rockich-Winston & Wyatt, 2019). A widening achievement

gap is evidenced by a decrease in academic success, an increase in behavioral interventions, and an expansion of students found eligible for special education services. Culturally responsive teaching strategies create an educational environment that positively influences student success and increases self-esteem (Gay, 2010). Using culturally responsive teaching in a classroom is composed of five essentials teachers need to embrace, (a) provide numerous teaching strategies to meet the academic needs of their students, (b) create opportunities for cultural socialization, (c) know the different cultural heritages of your students, and (d) teach a diversified curriculum that demonstrates compassion for other cultures (Rockich-Winston & Wyatt, 2019). While culturally responsive teaching is not an ultimately a goal for an immigrant student in American schools, supporting them in their native language and embracing their culture, builds self-confidence and academic success which leads to an increase of high school graduations (Marsh et al., 2016).

Although immigrant students face educational challenges, parents continually carry the strengths that are communicated to their children in a matter that can effectively encourage school performance and can be channeled by forming collaborations among schools, families, and communities (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). When planning classroom policies and practices, effective educators consider the cultural values of their students. Collectivism, an action highly valued by Latino families, incorporates interconnectedness between family support systems, educational teams, and social resources (Chang, 2015). Establishing a class environment that is supporting is a very important factor in students achieving academic success is school (Donahue-Keegan, Villegas-Reimers, & Cressey, 2019).

Positive Relationships

The emotional engagement has been defined as the way a student relates with his or her school community through perceptions of belonging, a feeling of appreciation and recognition, and valuing the successes related to school (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Gonzales, Brammer, & Sawilowsky, 2015). Researchers also suggest that teachers play a vital role in students' attitudes regarding previously failed subject matters (Keyes, 2017). The development of teacher social-emotional skills is important to encourage students to feel supported and engaged in the classroom to be successful in academics as well as developing strong social-emotional skills (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Typically, a student who has failed a subject in the past experiences a lack of connection to a class and feelings of disengagement. However, distinguished educators could change such feelings (Keyes, 2017).

Many of the students ranging from ages 16 to 19 attend high school and live with their parents. A great number of young students must adhere to the demands of improving academically as well as stay motivated to attend school and maintain themselves emotionally (Krane & Klevan, 2019). The teacher-student relationship (TSR) has been a key factor in helping students remain motivated to learn and reach academic success (Song, Kim, & Luo, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Recent research connects students' mental well-being, high school dropout, and TSR. TSR works both as a safeguard and risk factor when dealing with student mental health and risk of dropout (Krane, Karlsson, Ness, & Kim, 2016). A teacher who has the ability to build a strong relationship with her students creates an environment where students feel a sense of belonging and this, in turn, boosts motivation (Krane, 2017). Measuring the groups' strengths (e.g., family relationships) and sources of risk (e.g., poverty), a constructive alliance among schools, families, and school communities are extremely

vital to these students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Students identified the key factors that create an engaging classroom environment. The factors identified are (a) strong trusted relationships with teachers and peers, (b) setting clear rules and expectations, (c) organized instruction, (d) and individualized intervention support (Keyes, 2017).

Although dropout rates have gradually increased in recent years, Latino students continue to experience the highest, since 13% of Latino ages 16 to 24 drop out of high school (compared to 4% for White and 8% for Black students (America's Promise Alliance, 2015; Kent et al., 2017). Compared to Caucasian and Asian American students, Latinos perform academically lower in reading and math through all grade levels (Marrero, 2016). Based on self-determination theory, human individuals have needs, one of which is the desire to experience relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The necessity for relatedness is defined by the importance of establishing relationships with others, the desire to look for attachments, and encountering feelings of security and belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Since a school setting is an important place for students and their learning, establishing positive connections and experiences at school is vital to promoting academic achievement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Niehaus, Irvin, & Rogelberg, 2016). Uniformed with this framework, students who view school as a positive environment where they are able to establish strong relationships with their teachers will eventually become more engaged in school, experience higher grades and test scores as well as academic self-efficacy (Joyce, 2018; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). In addition, when students experience increased levels of bonding at school (i.e., connections to school and dedication to school assignments) they are less likely to drop out of high school or repeat a grade (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004: Niehaus, Irvin, & Rogelberg, 2016).

Societal Implications

Often immigrants arrive in the United States with an optimistic frame of mind, which allows them to trust schools controlled by White Americans, also trusting the benefits that education will bring to their families (Gibson 1988). Ogbu (1985) calls this practical trust. The problem begins to occur when immigrants are denied their educational rights, like exclusion or segregation in the schools (Ogbu,1985). Immigrant minorities of this country do not interrogate school authority, and they integrate the rules set in schools because they are aware that providing their children with a good education will lead them to succeed in society (Gibson, 1988). In the case of involuntary minorities, the negative experiences they have had with White-controlled schools such as feelings of segregation, prejudice, discrimination, and other conflicts, have led them to completely lose the trust in White-controlled schools. For many involuntary minorities, they are to treat school with suspicion because they feel that their children will not receive the same fair schooling compared to White children (Ogbu, 1987). For example, there are schools in the U.S. where Black Muslims, who are to be involuntary minorities, have established their own schools with the purpose of offering their children the right education based on their perceptions (Gibson, 1988).

Voluntary minorities for the most part come to the United States to seek a better life for themselves and their families. They enter the country with a tourist model or mentality, mentioned before, ready to learn the culture and language in their new country (Ogbu, 2002). Due to these reasons, many voluntary minorities do not have difficulty learning and speaking English and integrate into the rules and policies established in public schools (Ogbu, 2002). This positive mindset is extremely important because it is what is needed to trust an institution, a school, which immigrants view as the goal to becoming successful in the United

States (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Knowing English and respecting school rules are necessary for success, unfortunately, they are not sufficient to equip a minority group to learn and act as is necessary. What helps immigrants to adapt to the language and culture in the U.S. is that they define language and cultural differences they face as obstacles to be conquered by studying those differences (Gibson, 1997). Also, they are desirous to adopt because they do not see that learning White behaviors and language affect their ethnic group in any negative way (Wang, 1995). On the contrary, voluntary immigrants believe that adapting to White behaviors and language as an additive to further help them achieve success, while still holding on to their ethnic culture and language (Wang, 1995). One example is the manner some immigrants arrive in this country and quickly enroll in an adult school to learn English as a way of learning another language with no intentions of substituting it for their native language (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

Ogbu complements the critical race theory in stating that there are involuntary minorities that feel that they did not have the choice to become minorities in a new country and accomplish a better future (e.g., a better job, or education opportunity, etc.) (Ogbu & Simmons, 1994). Some of these minorities do not have a tourist attitude and do not have a desire to learn how to think and act like White Americans. Like immigrant minorities, they believe that to succeed in life, attending school is necessary and fully grasp speaking standard English and even adapt to some White American behaviors (Ogbu, 1995a). Although these minorities believe that cultural and language differences may be obstacles to be overcome by being aware of the difference, they find it challenging because they feel like these differences are being forced upon them by White American culture and they view cultural and language differences as a way of collective identity to be established, not obstacles to be conquered (Gilbert, 2009). Due to the feelings of having

these differences or requirements imposed on them by the White society and the history they have endured being mistreated or treated unfairly, they have formed a collective identity due to the resistance to White American doctrine (Ogbu, 1995b). Having this sense of emotions, some minorities feel that if they are to learn White behaviors or "White talk" they will lose their minority or ethnic identity (Ogbu, 1995b). For them to assimilate to White ways of speaking and behaving is like taking away and threatening their minority identity and therefore they are resisting it (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Social Cognition

Social cognition, or one's capacity for understanding the beliefs, perspectives, and emotions of others, is vital for successful interaction within society (Tarassenko, Morris & Kenward, 2006). A student's ability for successful school performance and academic achievement has multiple factors. However, an often-overlooked factor that is crucial for academic achievement is the student's development of social cognition (Derks, Jolles, Rijn, & Krabbendam, 2016). When students possess an undeveloped process for social cognition, they are at a greater risk for identifying with low self-esteem, psychosocial issues, and have a greater likelihood of being the recipient of bullying behaviors (Rageliene, 2016).

Developing and improving social cognition for at-risk Latino students is imperative. Conceptual understanding of oneself emerges through positive and negative interactions with others, predominantly via language and cultural identifications (Farmer & Maister, 2017). The studies on the relationship between the conceptual self and prejudice have a long history. Tajfel (1974, 1982) discussed the crucial role that in-group/out-group differences played in how people view themselves. He suggested that feeling a sense of belonging in a group is extremely important in forming an individual's identity and self-worth and allows the individual to feel

strongly connected to the in-group (Farmer & Maister, 2017). Perspective-taking is imagining yourself in the place of another person. This process is important because it reduces the feelings of prejudice against other individuals, and it helps create a connection between others and oneself. Several studies have shown empathy to be putting oneself in the shoes of another individual belonging to a social out-group can help lower in-group bias and increase positive perceptions about that group (Todd & Burgmer, 2013; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Furthermore, Muller et al. (2011) discovered that an in-group bias in motor interference dissipated when White Americans, participants of the study, took the views of their Black speaking partner.

Summary

Statistics show that our U.S. educational system is changing and becoming more diverse due to the increased number of immigrants migrating to the U. S (America's Promise Alliance, 2015). The largest minority group in the United States is the Latino population and it is estimated that will increase in size by the year 2060, accounting for 55 to 119 million people (Colby & Ortman, 2014; Karkouti, 2016). Data derived from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, (2020) indicates that in the school year of 2015-16, chronic absenteeism for California students of Hispanic descent was three times higher for Latino students than that of their Caucasian peers. There is a gap in the literature between the identified best practices for decreasing the Latino high school dropout rate and the implementation of the identified best practices (Marrero, 2016).

Guiding this study was the theoretical framework of cultural ecological theory (CET) of John Ogbu (2003), which focused on minorities and their response to education. One goal of cultural ecological theory was to analyze the community forces and schooling for voluntary and

involuntary minorities, especially when discussing the behaviors and attitudes they developed toward school (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Based on the cultural ecological theory, we are to investigate how society treats minorities as a whole and how that treatment is reflected in their experiences in school (Ogbu, 2003). The cultural ecological theory, as presented by previous researchers, outlined the community forces that influence at-risk Latino youth and affect their approach to schooling (Foster, 2004).

To help motivate at-risk Latino students to stay in high school and receive a diploma, researchers have concluded that teachers must help students become engaged in the classroom (Ní Uigín, Higgins & McHale, 2015). Students who are more engaged in the classroom and school activities, tend to exhibit better grades, demonstrate consistent attendance behaviors, and earn a high school diploma (Keyes, 2019). Another factor for student engagement is to provide a curriculum that is culturally relevant to Latino students (Gay, 2010a). Effective instructors teach curricular lessons that connect the customs of the Latino community to instructional content, which is a strong agent of academic success (Civitillo et al., 2019). Lastly, to stay in school Latino students must establish positive relationships with peers and teachers. Based on current research, the teacher-student relationship (TSR) is an important factor in encouraging students to stay in school and reach their academic potential (Kim & Capella, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). When at-risk Latino students are not provided with equitable access to education, emotional connections with their teachers, and validation through culturally responsive teaching, students will have a higher likelihood of exiting high school before graduating (Civitillo, 2019; Kim & Capella, 2016).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. This study is beneficial as it will inform school administrators and teachers on the factors that cause Latino students to drop out of high school and highlight successful strategies and interventions used to retain at-risk students in school. This qualitative research single case study provided a description of the research design and guided this researcher to a better understanding of the teachers' perspective on factors that contribute to high school dropout rates. Researchers who implement the case study design intentionally gather and thoroughly document data over a well-established period (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995), describes a single instrumental case study as appropriate when there is a need for general understanding, that may be acquired through insight into the question by studying a specific case. Semi-structured individual interviews served as the primary process for data collection. Open-ended interview questions were used to advance an understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences. The study's participants were selected via purposeful sampling and the research study observed and analyzed the intervention strategies and programs proven to be most successful according to the perceptions of 12 teachers experienced with working with at-risk Latino students. The research context will occur in a public high school in Los Angeles, California. The Julio Cesar Chavez High School (pseudonym) was identified as the appropriate research setting due to the school's high dropout rate of Latino students.

Design

This study was conducted utilizing a qualitative method. Qualitative researchers strive to construct an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon. Additionally, a qualitative research method is utilized to capture, and report, the experiences of the participants and interpret the narrative data in the form of descriptive themes (Rogers & Willing, 2017). A qualitative case study was appropriate as the results provided a description of the context and structure of the experiences of the intervention teachers' educational background, level of administrative support, and confidence for reducing the drop-out rate for Latino students. Therefore, a qualitative research method, as opposed to a quantitative research method, will garner the data required to complete the intended research (Yin, 2015). Qualitative research encompasses five designs: (a) ethnography, (b) narrative, (c) phenomenological, (d) grounded theory, and (e) case study (Sauro, 2015).

Method

A quantitative method focuses on popular opinion, tendencies, attitudes of a group of people, or tests for association among variables of a group of people by carefully investigating a sample of the population (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative method is utilized to examine the problem or situation from the group being investigated and discuss the best principles to acquire that information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative method focuses on examining things in the natural setting with the intent to strive to make sense or explain, phenomena in terms of the participants' interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Case study design, according to Yin (2018), is an inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in the context of the natural setting and typical behaviors. This design is appropriate when the relationship between phenomenon and context is not clearly evident.

Case Study

Case study designs embrace the study of real-life experiences occurring in the present day and may comprise a single case (contemporary bounded system) or multiple cases (multiple bounded systems) (Yin, 2018). The case study design, as defined by Stake (1995), is employed when there is a need for gaining an understanding of a particular phenomenon where the questions can only be examined by studying a specific case. Researchers who implement the case study design intentionally gather, and thoroughly document, data over a well-established period describes a single instrumental case study as appropriate when there is a need for general understanding, that may be acquired through insight into the question by studying a specific case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). The use of a qualitative method with a case study design and a single case study approach is the best design as it guided the researcher in examining the behaviors of Latino high school students at-risk for dropping out through the perspectives of the high school teachers. A qualitative single case study will allow the researcher to inquire and collect data in the natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inductive approach will provide verification of limitations between the phenomenon and perceptions (Yin, 2015).

The case study design, as defined by Stake (1995), is employed when there is a need for gaining an understanding of a particular phenomenon where the questions can only be examined by studying a specific case. Case study designs embrace the study of real-life experiences occurring in the present day and may comprise a single case (contemporary bounded systems) or multiple cases (multiple bounded system) (Yin, 2014). Researchers who implement the case study design intentionally gather and thoroughly document data over a well-established period (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995), describes a single instrumental case study as appropriate when there is a need for general understanding, that may be acquired through insight into the

question by studying a specific case. Lastly a case study, according to Yin (2002), is an inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in the context of the natural setting and typical behaviors. This design is appropriate when the relationship between phenomenon and context is not evident.

Approach

Using a case study approach allowed me to understand this phenomenon based on the perspectives of teachers that work in a high school preventative program. Working closely with participants provided the researcher with a firsthand look at the reasons Latino students are dropping out of high school and determine what intervention measures are working to keep them in school and motivate them to graduate. This approach permitted the stakeholders to acquire an understanding of this phenomenon and the reasons for dropping out of high school prior to graduating (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative single case study guided this researcher to a better understanding of the teachers' perspective on factors that contribute to high school dropout rates. Data was collected through narrative interviews discussing the interventions utilized to maintain Latino students in school and graduate. To maintain confidentiality and IRB regulations, participants were obligated to sign a written consent.

Research Questions

Research Question One

Why are Latino students dropping out of high school at a rate higher than their Asian, Black, and White peers?

Research Question Two

What intervention programs or strategies are high schools currently using?

Research Question Three

What is the impact of the student-teacher relationship on decreasing the high school dropout rate of at-risk Latino students?

Setting

The research context occurred in a public high school in Los Angeles, California. The Julio Cesar Chavez High School (pseudonym) was identified as the appropriate research setting due to the school's high dropout rate of Latino students. Statistically, Julio Cesar Chavez High School has been reported as having the highest dropout rate for Latino students within the Los Angeles school district (U.S. News, 2018).

Julio Cesar Chavez High School's mission, as identified on their website, (Los Angeles School District, 2018) stated that they are committed to providing academic instruction that: (a) is effective, engaging, and student-centered, (b) provides students with an environment that promotes physical and emotional well-being, and (c) supports and promotes multicultural awareness (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). The goal of Julio Cesar Chavez High School is to not only provide a free and appropriate education but to also support the emotional well-being of its student body. However, as the school is noted to have the highest dropout rate for Latino students in the Los Angeles School district, the current strategies for supporting the whole student are not reaching the students at-risk for dropping out of high school prior to graduation.

The school administration team were composed of a principal, three assistant principals, three school deans, and a restorative justice teacher. The principal was enthusiastic and charismatic. According to the school's website, the principal's belief was to be a "passionate champion for staff and students" (Santa Ana School District, 2015). The principal created a school culture that generates positivity and respect. A school setting that facilitated and grows a positive school climate employs students and staff that report a reduction in conflict, greater

feelings of well-being, and increased academic success (Orpinas & Raczynski, 2016). The school staff felt appreciated and supported under this administrator's leadership.

The Julio Cesar Chavez High School was selected for this study because it provided a strong and supportive administrative leadership. The administrators and school staff understood the guidelines for resolving conflict, implementing positive behavioral interventions, providing academic interventions, and supporting a positive school climate. The school clearly defined and recorded the policies for including administration with resolving conflict and supporting the academic success of the student body.

The Julio Cesar Chavez High School was identified as the appropriate setting for this research study by carefully researching the Los Angeles School District website. Each school's website listed details regarding demographic information, intervention programs, number of general and special education teachers, and high school graduation rates. The Julio Cesar Chavez High School was noted to have the highest number of Latino students as well as the greatest number of intervention teachers. The demographics of Julio Cesar Chavez High School, as noted by the school's website, is 99.9 % Latino and 1% African American. The school is composed of students who are 14-17 years of age, with 48 % of the student body identified as female and 52 % of the student body identified as male.

Participants

The sample population for this study encompassed 12 high school teachers working with Latino students who are at-risk for dropping out of high school. The population encompassed teachers who are employed in a school that provides intervention programs that encourage Latino students who are at-risk for dropping out to stay in school through graduation. Eligible participants were employed by the school district for a minimum of two years, have two years of

experience working with Latino students, and are actively engaged in instructing at-risk students who are enrolled in a dropout prevention program.

A purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit participants (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling is the best sampling procedure as it allows the researcher to choose the location and individual to be studied. The purposeful sampling technique was appropriate as it utilized to select participants who possess specific knowledge and experience providing targeted intervention programs for Latino students who are at risk for dropping out of high school. Additionally, this sampling procedure guided me in inquiring purposeful information, and understanding of the research problem, and the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures

Prior to data collection, I requested permission from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A) and the high school where the study was conducted (Appendix B). Data collection began following IRB approval from the two institutions. For this qualitative case study, data were collected using open-ended semi-structured interviews, observational field notes, and focus groups.

Participant recruitment for the study occurred through soliciting email addresses for each high school teacher involved in a preventive dropout program (Appendix C). Addresses were obtained from the school's website under the tab labeled *school staff*. The teachers were contacted via email and were asked to sign a consent form to participate (Appendix D). After participant consent had been granted, demographic information was obtained via survey. A demographic survey was utilized to gather targeted information for each participant (Appendix E). Demographic data included the number of years employed within the school district, the

number of years working with at-risk Latino students, special training received, teaching credentials, and the number of years teaching in the preventative high school dropout program. Participants who meet the study's criteria were sent a follow-up email describing the purpose of the study and how their participation will provide an understanding of the programs used to support at-risk Latino students. The email provided details on the collaborative interview scheduling process and the principal's approval procedures.

I contacted the participants to determine the most convenient time and place for conducting the interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews was the main source for collecting data as it allowed me to record the participants' narrative responses on their perceptions of the factors that cause Latino high school students to drop out, and the interventions that successfully help to maintain Latino students in school (Appendix F). According to Gergen (1994), narrative researchers must be able to recognize that all people have a story to share. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain the teachers' perspectives on what has been the most successful prevention strategies for Latino students who are at risk for dropping out of high school. To supplement the accuracy and precision of the handwritten notes, interviews were audio and video recorded (Patton, 2002).

According to Mitchell (2010), noteworthy methods for qualitative research are the use of sound, visual, and digital methods. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in person or Zoom video conferencing. Audio and video recording of the interviews occurred with participant consent. For the security of the participants, all audio- and visual recording were stored in a secure and safe location where their confidentiality was safeguarded (Yin, 2015). An interview protocol was utilized to promote consistency of the interview process (Appendix F).

Field note data (Appendix G) were collected using a form that provided consistency across the setting, teacher, and time of day. The date, time, and setting were recorded. A description of the intervention and participants' behaviors was noted. Subjective data were collected through the description of the activity and the students' behavior. Additionally, the interaction between student and teacher was described.

The focus group and interview data were audio-recorded utilizing Dragon Transcription professional recording software, then precisely transliterated and reviewed for precision and reviewed for precision and correctness (Yin, 2015). All transcription and recordings were secured for protection in a secure location to ensure the information is safe to protect their confidentiality (Yin, 2015). The data for this study utilized Dragon Transcription for audio recordings from the semi-structured, Zoom, and face-to-face interviews.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's role for this study was to be the human instrument and catalyst for research completion. As the researcher, I was responsible for collecting data from a focus group, observations, and interviews. Additionally, I ensured that all ethical criteria were consistently applied and implemented. As the researcher, I had no authority over the participants.

As the researcher, I have a master's degree in educational leadership, and 23 years of teaching experience. I also had received additional training in the instruction of minority students. Most of my years in teaching have been dedicated to working with at-risk Latino students. The high school teachers that participated have been inspirational for this study. They work tirelessly with the at-risk Latino student population but continue to witness an increase in the high school dropout rate. I entered the interviewer and interviewee relationship with an open mind regarding procedural strategies and teacher interventions. Some biases I brought to the

study included my acquaintances with the potential participants of the study and firsthand experience as a Latina student. The district for the proposed study, the south district, is the smallest of the local districts in our area, providing me with the possibility of being familiar with the teachers. To control for this bias, I ensured that no acquainted participants were invited to participate in the study. Another bias that might be brought to the study was that the I identified with the Latino population and culture. To address this bias, I frequently checked in with the participants in the study (member checking) and reviewed with them some of my preliminary findings to make sure that their experiences were accurately recorded in this study. The use of interviewing, recording, and coding the responses of 12 different teachers permitted me to gather multiple perspectives of the same research topic. I used bracketing to offset potential researcher bias as well as isolate any potential prejudgment about teacher perspectives of factors that cause high school dropout rates for Latino students (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

Focus groups, open-ended semi-structured interview, and observational field notes were the tools utilized for data collection. Observation and interview methods are commonly used in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Field notes were used before and after each interview session (Appendix H). Qualitative researchers employ the use of field notes and interviews to construct knowledge through the connections made between interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Observation notes of the interviewee's body language, behavior, and attitude during the interview were carefully recorded (Stake, 1995). Field notes were transcribed into a narrative format at the completion of each interview format (Yin, 2009). Data were recorded through various media forms such as field notes, recordings, interview notes, and mapping (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). When the field notes were transcribed

into narrative form, they were digitally organized and saved into a secure computer format with the intent of creating possible questions that the researcher might need more elaboration from the interviewee (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Included in the field notes were the date, time, and location where notes were taken. The researcher also took notes of any issues that arose during the interviews, such as lack of connection with the interviewee, postponements, etc.

Focus Groups

Focus groups, in qualitative research, are used as an instrument for gathering empirical information and are often used in conjunction with additional interview instruments to support research triangulation (Duarte, Veloso, Marques & Sebastião, 2015). Implementing data collection via a focus group permits the researcher the ability to ask questions that are not easily asked in a survey or structured interview question (Appendix I). Focus group interviews are designed to use facilitated or unfacilitated discussions and address a specific research topic (Kruger, Rodgers, Long & Lowry, 2019).

Data were collected through semi-structured, open-ended focus group questions that provided contextual knowledge of the groups' perceptions that contributed to at-risk Latino student's decision to leave high school prior to graduation. The focus group questions were used to encourage the focus group to discuss the interventions that successfully helped maintain Latino students to achieve high school graduation. The semi-structured focus group questions were provided the researcher with the flexibility to ask probing questions regarding the participants' experiences and perceptions (Kruger, Rodgers, Long & Lowry, 2019). The focus group questions were used to supplement and support the answers provided during the one-to-one interview. A focus group protocol was used to facilitate the group discussion.

Focus group questions:

1. Please think about the high school dropout rates for at-risk Latino students. What comes to mind?

2. In your experience, what is the greatest catalyst that causes at-risk Latino students to drop out of high school?

3. How significant is the problem?

4. What strategies or interventions best support academic success for at-risk Latino students?

5. What is the importance of peer interaction in supporting academic success for at-risk Latino students?

6. What is the importance of student-teacher relationships in supporting the academic success of at-risk Latino students?

7. What is the importance of student engagement in the classroom when supporting the academic success of at-risk Latino students?

Focus group questions 1-3 addressed the participants' perception of the antecedent causing at-risk Latinos to drop out of high school (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). Focus group question 4 discussed the participants experiences when implementing strategies and interventions to support at-risk Latino students (Keyes, 2019). Focus group questions 5 and 6 asked the participants to consider the importance of classroom interaction and student-teacher relationships in facilitating academic success (Garza & Huerta, 2015). Finally, focus group question 7 asked the participants to address the importance of student engagement for promoting scholastic achievement in the educational setting (Peguero & Bondy, 2015).

Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured, open-ended interview questions that provided contextual knowledge of the participants' perceptions that contribute to at-risk Latino students leaving high school prior to graduation, and the interventions that successfully helped to maintain Latino students to achieve high school graduation. The semi-structured interview questions provided the researcher with the flexibility to redirect the participant's answer or ask to follow up questions that glean more in-depth details of the participant's experiences (Jones & Holloway, 2013)

The participants' schedules dictated the time and frequency of the data collection events. The interviews were conducted via Zoom or face-to-face meetings. Data was recorded through handwritten notes, audio and visual recordings. An interview protocol was utilized for the development and refinement of the interview questions. Castillo-Montoya (2016) describes the four-step interview protocol refinement framework that will be implemented during the development of the interview questions and protocol: (a) align the interview and research questions, (b) formulate an inquiry-based discussion, (c) solicit and implement informative feedback regarding the interview protocol, and (d) test the interview protocol on subjects that are similar to the study's participants.

Semi-structured open-ended interview question (Appendix F)

1. What is your perspective of the current prevention programs that encourage at-risk Latino students to stay in school?

2. What is the role of the high school intervention teacher in helping at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school?

3. What do high school intervention teachers believe are the reasons Latino students are

dropping out of high school at a high rate?

4. As an experienced high school intervention teacher working with Latino students, what do you believe are the contributing factors of success for the retention of Latino students in high school?

5. What do you perceive are the negative consequences of being a student who drops out of high school?

6. Would you please explain why you do, or do not, believe that the culture and climate of a school is an important factor for providing at-risk Latino students with the support required to remain in school through graduation.

7. What strategies do high school intervention teachers use to encourage Latino students to stay in school?

8. What intervention programs or strategies are high schools currently using to retain students through graduation?

9. What curricular intervention and prevention programs are your school district providing to help maintain at-risk Latino students in high school?

10. If a student drops out of high school, but decides to return, what support are they receiving to encourage them to stay in school?

11. How do the intervention programs include collaborative opportunities for teachers and parents of at-risk Latino students to work together to encourage their children to stay in school.

12. What school incentives are given to at-risk Latino students who have stayed in school and have maintained good grades?

13. Please describe how the training and professional development programs did or did not provide you with the skills required to work with at-risk Latino students?

The purpose of the interview questions 1-6 is designed to gain an understanding of the participants' beliefs regarding the interventions necessary to keep at-risk Latino students in high school through graduation. According to Van Manen (2014), individuals who have encountered the same phenomenon are able to effectively communicate their lived experiences. Examining the individual and collective perceptions of the participants helped build an understanding of the experiences that reveal the foundational beliefs held by the participants regarding the success of the programs and interventions utilized for keeping at-risk Latino students in high school. An authentic qualitative research study was designed to detail the different perspectives that shape and create the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The process of qualitative research immerses researchers in the daily life and setting of other individuals. It also encouraged the researcher to value and seek the manner participants view the world through their perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Interview questions 7-11 were designed to build an understanding of the programs, strategies, and interventions implemented to encourage at-risk Latino students to stay in school. Past researchers have discovered that students benefit from "positive personal interactions that include individual and social counseling, customized learning plans that use a variety of teaching and learning techniques, social skills development, and collaborative communication between teachers and staff regarding the student's well-being and academic progress (Bauman, 1998). Similarly, De La Rosa (1998) states that teachers that trusted relationships are vital to any successful program, and students must feel that their teachers have a genuine concern for them. Recording the perspectives of high school teachers that work with

dropout prevention programs provided the interventionist with opportunities to analyze the curriculum used in the programs and communicate with the district the program's challenges and successes. Renihan and Renihan (1995) highlight the importance of the school's role in providing students with the strategies needed to build a positive self-image.

Question 12 addressed the professional development and training programs provided to the high school intervention teachers who are working with at-risk Latino students. Historically, research has shown that teachers face many challenges during their career, however, schools that provide appropriate professional development create an environment that improves pedagogical thinking and student learning (Hauge & Wan, 2019; Korthagen, 2010).

Observational Field Notes

Observations are often used in qualitative research to monitor and note conditions and experiences that occur in the natural setting (Lashley, 2017). Observations of the participants as they work within the classroom provided data to answer the research questions. The researcher acted as a non-participant and did not directly interact with the intervention teacher or students. Observational data focused on the interactions between student and teacher as well as the types of interventions implemented. Scheduling the observations with the teachers was accomplished through teacher-to-teacher collaboration and approved by the school's principal. Each teacher was observed a minimum of two times during a core academic course for the duration of the class.

Field notes regarding the activities, interventions, and strategies were manually recorded followed by descriptive notes regarding the process. Narrative reflections were organized into categories and used for identifying themes (Creswell, 2013). An observation protocol was

utilized to guide the data collection process, document the setting, special events, activities, and researcher reactions (Appendix G).

Data Analysis

Yin (2018) suggested that the first step to analyzing data in a case study was to begin with the questions in the case study protocol. He also suggested starting with a small question and recognizing the verification that addressed the question and connected the data to concepts of interest. In the same matter, Creswell (2013) described a six-step process to analyzing data. The first step was for the researcher to prepare the data to be analyzed. This step involved the researcher organizing all interview documents, observations, and visual collections and write out all information into text to be used to prepare for analysis. The second step was for the researcher to submerge themselves into the data by reading and reviewing all the information collected; in this case, interview transcripts (Clark, Ponjuan, Orrack, Wilson, & Flores, 2013). Reading through the data collection prior to coding provides the researcher with a comprehensive and unfettered view of the information being shared. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Agar (1980) suggested for the researcher to read and look over the transcripts several times, submerging themselves in the details trying to get a good sense of the interviewers as a whole before breaking data into patterns. This step involved data to be analyzed and compared with the narrative text and field notes to gain a global understanding of the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), data interpretation occurs when the researcher makes sense of the data while analyzing the lessons learned through the process. It is recommended to read through the entire transcripts making carefully considered judgments about what is meaningful in the patterns, themes, and categories generated by the analysis (Patton, 2015). The third step of analyzing research data was to organize the codes into themes. Coding requires the

researcher to organize the data in meaningful patterns that will be used for analysis. According to Yin (2018), if empirical and predicted patterns show to be alike, this can help your case study by reinforcing its internal validity. After coding, step four consisted of identifying distinguished patterns, themes, or key concepts (Clark & Creswell, 2014). In this step, transcribed data from interviews and observations were coded to permit themes and key concepts to become evident. Focusing on the procedures and outcomes in a case study will serve as an avenue to begin casting the "how's" and "whys" to be pattern-matched (Yin, 2013). Step five involved representing and visualizing the data. In this last phase, researchers represent the data by making visual representations of information, such as creating charts that compare the data. According to Creswell (2013), analyzing the text involves identifying patterns, themes, and concepts and interpreting these themes with visual representation figures or tables. The final phase is to interpret collected data for meaning (Creswell, 2013, p. 63).

Data analysis tools were used in this case study research to gather the data dealing with a teacher perspective of factors that cause high school dropout rates for Latino students into findings. The data were collected through focus groups, semi structured interviews, and observational field notes. These three data collection tools allowed for triangulation to take place in order to accurately understand the factors contributing to high school dropout rates in Latino students based on teacher perspectives. Case study data allowed for participants to share their perspectives based on their experiences and personal beliefs (Yin, 2018).

Focus group data were collected through open-ended questions that solicited contextual knowledge of the groups' perceptions that contributed to at-risk Latino student's decision to drop out of high school before graduation (Yin, 2018). The focus group interviews, and semi-structured individual interview data were audio-recorded utilizing Dragon Transcription

professional recording software. During each of the observations and interviews, I took accurate notes of what was asked, and observed, from each of the participants in terms of their body language and their behaviors during the interview (Stake, 1995). Interviews where then transcribed into a Word document using text-to-speech software application. In addition, I included in the computer field notes, the location of the interview, technical difficulties, cancelation of interview participants, and other difficulties encountered when carrying out interviews.

After focus group and individual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed on separate Word documents, I uploaded all documents on NVivo data analysis program. After data samples were then uploaded to the NVivo qualitative data analysis program, I then highlighted frequency of repeated words or phrases used by participants for each of the interview questions. Each category or theme was color coded to create organization and division in the data to identify overarching themes (Patton, 2015).

Observation field notes were obtained via Zoom. Observations provided me with the opportunity to see natural interactions between teacher and student. The classroom teacher provided virtual instruction while I observed teacher-student interaction. Prior to the observation, teachers were provided with a copy of the Teacher Observation Checklist. The checklist measured 17 characteristics commonly seen in effective student-teacher interactions (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre, & Pianta, 2015). The data were collected using a form that provided a teacher-student rapport checklist. When conducting the classroom observations, the teacher's picture was pinned at the top of my screen. Pinning the teacher on my screen ensured that they were the only person visible on the screen eliminating my ability to directly see the students. During the classroom observation a description of the intervention and participants'

behaviors were noted and recorded at the bottom of the page. Memoing was used to make note of teacher and students' interaction during classroom observation (Yin, 2018) During the classroom observations, the students were actively engaged as noted by their willingness to answer teacher posed questions, contribute personal experiences to the conversation, and remain on topic through the lesson. The strategies used by the teachers to maintain student engagements included interesting visual graphics, topics relevant to the student, and activities that encouraged peer collaboration. Data from the observational field notes highlighted positive interaction between teacher and students, which in turn supported the data from the focus groups and individualized interviews (Yin, 2018). The observations provided evidence of trusted relationships between teacher and students.

The use of data triangulation was another manner of assuring that the data was accurate. Data triangulation motivates researchers to collect information using several different sources that can confirm the same findings (Yin, 2018). Triangulation reinforces and increases the credibility of the data collected from the participants by using different forms of data to increase the richness of the data collection (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2012). Once the data are considered accurate by me, the use of triangulation and member checking was necessary when analyzing data (Yin, 2009). Once I analyzed the data by reviewing the Word documents from the focus group, individual teacher interviews and observations field notes with memos, I was able to identify my five overarching themes. Reviewing the documents thoroughly more than once and keeping memos of ideas and key concepts is recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) so the researcher gains an overall sense of the data before the next stages of data analysis takes place.

Trustworthiness

The first step in analyzing trustworthiness is to record the data and use the member checking process to make sure that the information from the interviews represents their perspectives and beliefs (Yin, 2009). The use of internal validity is important in data analysis as it is used to examine the depth, breadth, and quality of the evidence needed to support the research claims. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), internal validity in qualitative research deals with credibility: the probability that the results will be found to be credible and to be approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied. For interviewees to confirm their claims, they were given a copy of the interview transcript and were given the opportunity to change or delete any information given during the interview process (Yin, 2009).

Data triangulation was used when analyzing data to make sure information is correct. The trustworthiness of the research study was supported through methods of data triangulation, observational field notes, and member checking. Triangulation in qualitative research is defined as the implementation and combination of several methods used to examine one phenomenon (Houghton *et al*, 2013). Triangulation enables the researcher to generate a clear and genuine narrative that reflects the lived experiences of the participants. When the data has been reviewed and edited for accuracy, member checking and triangulation will be completed, and data analysis will begin (Yin, 2009). Patton (2015) mentions that the interpreting phase of data analysis requires the researcher to discern the data using creative and critical logic to carefully bring into view emergent themes, patterns, and classifications.

Credibility

Credibility is dependent upon the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The credibility of the research study was ensured through the process of member checking. Member checking is a qualitative research technique used to determine validity (Brear, 2019). Member checking was also used to confirm the findings of research to be faultless and reliable. When conducting member checking, the researcher discussed findings with the participants and asked additional questions to ensure that the participants' answers were recorded correctly. The use of member checking allows the researcher to analyze data or results with members of the participant group and detect underlying researcher biases and/or identify errors of fact (Miles et al., 2014). Member checking provides the participant with the ability to transform, shape, or reshape their responses to reflect their priorities and perspective of the phenomena (Stringer, 2003). Additionally, the member checking process affords the participant with the power to affect how they are represented in the research study (Torrance, 2012). Teachers participated in a 30-60-minute interview and follow-up. One-on-one interviews were audiotaped to ensure verbatim transcriptions. Follow-up interviews may be necessary to establish credibility for the participant's narrative. Transcriptions were included, and each participant was allowed to read their responses for accuracy.

After the interview process was completed, each participant's audio interview was transcribed into a Word document and returned for their review. The participants were asked to confirm, deny, or revise the document to ensure that the transcribed document matched the meaning and intention of their proposed interview questions. Member checking post-interview process was secured research credibility (Stake, 2005). Member checking was utilized to confirm

responses that are not clear or to supplement the details provided on a specific interview question.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability in qualitative research is achieved through data consistency and the ability to recreate the research study and achieve similar results (Doucet, et al, 2019). Dependability was increased using field notes. The data were coded into categories that represent the perspectives of the participants. The codes and themes were classified by pattern. All data was password protected. Data were audited to ensure accurate records. Confirmability, the process of establishing the research findings and interpretations is derived from the data, was preserved through the use of researcher neutrality and objectivity (Bengtson, 2016). An audit trail was an additional technique used to support confirmability. The completion of an audit trail requires the researcher to detail the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. This technique considers the unique and interesting topics generated during the data collection. The coding topics are written down and a rationale of why the codes were merged together is explained (Patton, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability considers the extent to which the results of the research can be generalized and applicable to other settings and contexts. Transferability was obtained using a detailed and accurate description of the research study. Explicit details were used to connect the experiences and contexts that occur during the data collection process.

A detailed description of the research study was implemented to support the transferability of research procedures and results. Transferability was supported by making explicit connections to the cultural and social contexts as they occur during data collection and

analysis. I provided specific details regarding where the interviews occurred, the time and duration of the interview, and detailed descriptions of how the data was recorded and stored. While the results of this study were not generalized to all high schools, the results were generalizable to teachers who work with at-risk Latino students who attend schools outside of the Los Angeles, California school districts (Burchett, Umoquit, & Dobrow, 2011; Drisko, 2005).

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, a researcher observes and conversates with her chosen participants while assuring that participant that the research will be conducted with truth and honesty. It is important for the researcher to be fully involved with the participants to establish a relationship (Angrosino, 2007). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), three ethical guiding principles need to be taken in consideration when collecting and analyzing data. The first principle is respect for people. The researcher needs to protect the participants' identity by using pseudo names or using numbers to identify individuals. The researcher must also be able to protect participants from harm and treat them fairly and respectfully. To protect participants, the researcher must create files that will prevent participants from being identified in the study. For the researcher to gain the trust of the participants, I must work with transparency and notify them of the purpose of the study as well as ensure them that there is no deception involved in the study. Also, another guiding ethical principle in research is for the researcher to maintain confidentiality with any information shared "off the record". The researcher is to focus on the matter she retrieves and records information from the participants and ensures it is done appropriately. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that she becomes familiar with the research context and participants and be able to communicate with participants in a variety of ways (Frey, 2018).

To maintain ethical consideration, the researcher participated in the CITI research modules that clearly outlined the procedures of conducting research. To conduct research, I obtained the approval of Liberty University Institutional Board before interviewing the 12 high school teachers in the city of Los Angeles. Participants agreed to participate in the study by signing a consent form.

Summary

The goal of this qualitative single case study was to analyze the perceptions of 12 high school teachers in a rural high school in Los Angeles, California. This single case study addressed the factors that contribute to at-risk Latino students dropping out of high school at a rate higher than their White, Black, and Asian peers. This research study observed and analyzed the intervention strategies and programs proven to be most successful according to the perceptions of 12 teachers experienced with working with at-risk Latino students. Data was collected using focus group, open-ended semi-structured interviews, and observational field notes. A single case study was the best qualitative design for this study because the researcher was able to observe and analyze teachers' perspectives on the factors leading to high school and intervention strategies that have been successful in encouraging students to stay in school (Yin, 2009). The type of participant interviews used in this study is semi-structured interviews. After the interview process occurred, each participant's audio interview was transcribed into a Google document and returned for their review. The participants were asked to confirm, deny, or revise the document to ensure that the transcribed document matched the meaning and intention of their proposed interview questions.

The narrative data was organized into themes and patterns. The patterns were used to identify the contributing factors that lead to at-risk Latino high school students who attend school

in a rural setting in Los Angeles, CA to drop out of high school. The implementation of dropout prevention and intervention programs relies on the use of school data that recognizes students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school (Spencer et al., 2016).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify and report the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. This chapter includes the results of the data analysis in addition to an overview of the participants in the study, the overall themes that emerged through data interpretation, and the way in which the themes afforded a richer insight into the research questions. Research questions guided the development of the themes which were then separated into greater themes that were identified though the data analysis process.

Participants

The sample population for this study was 12 high school teachers working with Latino students who are at-risk for dropping out of high school. The population encompassed teachers who were employed in a school that provides intervention programs that encourage Latino students who are at-risk for dropping out to stay in school through graduation. Eligible participants were employed by the school district for a minimum of two years, had two years of experience working with Latino students, and were actively engaged in instructing at-risk students enrolled in a dropout prevention program. Pseudonyms were given to all participants and sites to protect their identities. A description of participants, their pseudonyms, and their demographic data followed (Table 1).

Table 1

Description of Participants

Participants	Yr. received Credential	Yrs. teaching	Yrs. teaching in current district	Yrs. worked with Latino students	Yrs. worked with at-risk Latino students
Participant 1	2004	16	16	16	16
Participant 2	2006	15	15	15	15
Participant 3	2008	12	12	12	12
Participant 4	2007	15	15	15	15
Participant 5	2018	2	2	2	2
Participant 6	2002	24	24	24	24
Participant 7	2015	5	5	5	5
Participant 8	2014	6	6	6	6
Participant 9	2007	13	13	13	13
Participant 10	2015	6	6	6	6
Participant 11	2017	3	3	3	3
Participant 12	2001	19	19	19	19

Participant 1

Participant 1 obtained her teaching credential in 2004 and had been teaching for 16 years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past 16 years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she used techniques and curriculums that actively engaged her students by incorporating articles that are relevant to their lives and are current. She assigned work that clearly defined the why, what, and where of the instruction. The "why" of the instruction addressed the reason why learning the material was important. The "what" of the instruction addresses what common core state standards were being discussed. The "where" of the assignment discussed where the instructional content was applicable to their life.

Participant 2

Participant 2 obtained his teaching credential in 2006 and had been teaching for 15 years. He had been teaching at his current school district for the past 16 years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In his classroom instruction, he used techniques and curriculums that actively engaged his students by using a social-emotional curriculum, PowerPoint presentations, current event topics, breathing techniques, daily emotional check-in, and encouraged students to email him privately to discuss any emotional issues.

Participant 3

Participant 3 obtained her teaching credential in 2008 and had been teaching for 12 years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past 12 years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she used techniques from the curriculum called *Chemistry the Next Generation.* This curriculum actively engaged

her students through interactive activities and digital content. Much of the curriculum was provided online and easily accessible regardless of where the student chose to log on from.

Participant 4

Participant 4 obtained her teaching credential in 2007 and had been teaching for 15 years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past 15 years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she used techniques and curriculums that actively engaged her students by incorporating relevant and/or current events curriculums based on trending topics students view as interesting on social media. To encourage student engagement in her class, she used educational applications where students were asked to compete with other classmates. For example, she used the program Kahoot which is an online application that teachers use to tie classroom curriculum to learning games.

Participant 5

Participant 5 obtained his teaching credential in 2018 and had been teaching for two years. He had been teaching at his current school district for the past two years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In his classroom instruction, he used activities and a curriculum that actively engaged his students. Participant five allowed his students to choose topics of interest that they would like to learn about. Teaching social-emotional skills was also a big part of his curriculum. He liked to do daily check-ins and ask his students how they were doing or feeling every morning. He provided his students with a choice between selecting a class project or taking a test. Additionally, he believed that creating a flexible schedule for students was a priority.

Participant 6

Participant 6 obtained her teaching credential in 2002 and had been teaching for 24 years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past 24 years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she provided instruction using the provided district curriculum, like Newsela reading program that allowed students to have classroom discussions on their thoughts on current event articles. The reading program also provided students with relevant articles that taught them strategies for maintaining good social-emotional health.

Participant 7

Participant 7 obtained her teaching credential in 2015 and had been teaching for five years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past five years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she engaged her students by teaching a decolonized curriculum that discussed United States history from an alternative perspective. She also used a curriculum that studies the histories of Latin X, African American, and American society in a way in which students of color can relate.

Participant 8

Participant 8 obtained her teaching credential in 2014 and had been teaching for six years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past six years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she engaged her students through the creation of two reading labs setups in the class. Reading labs are similar to learning centers in that students were divided into smaller groups and were assigned a teacher assistant to assist students to improve in reading comprehension and vocabulary. She used English 3D, which consists of topics that were interesting for students. Recently she introduced

the *Achieve 3000* curriculum and its supplemental online literacy program. This curriculum provided nonfiction reading content to students PreK-12. In addition to the RSP labs and Achieve 3000, Participant 8 used self-created resources that encouraged a desire and motivation to remain engaged and learn the required content.

Participant 9

Participant 9 obtained her teaching credential in 2007 and had been teaching for 13 years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past 13 years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. In her classroom instruction, she maintained engagement and student interaction by gamifying lesson content and activities. For example, Participant 9 introduced her class to the program Kahoot, a game-based learning platform. Kahoot was a user-generated multiple-choice quiz that was accessed online. She taught content at a foundational level in way that built student understanding on a hierarchical level. Participant 9 incorporated reading skills in her class by providing her students with a book in digital or hard copy format, where students sat around her as she read the book to them. She also divided the class into smaller groups and asked students to read portions of the book with assigned teacher assistance. Participant 9 stated that the students told her how much they enjoyed hearing her read aloud.

Participant 10

Participant 10 obtained her teaching credential in 2015 and had been teaching for six years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past six years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. Her classroom instruction utilized only teacher-created material. She implemented a curriculum planning technique of backward design. The Backward design provided teachers with the ability to create curriculum maps, and

instructional units by analyzing the end of the unit assessments. This method allowed teachers to have the end goal in mind while planning their instructional units, instead of figuring it out as she went. Participant 10 ensured that the instructional material she taught was aligned with the California Common Core History standards. She also borrowed material created by other department teachers. To encourage her students to actively participate in class, she created group assignments where her students were placed in small groups. The group collectively completed the assigned project.

Participant 11

Participant 11 obtained her teaching credential in 2017 and had been teaching for three years. She had been teaching at her current school district for the past three years and had worked with Latino students for the same number of years. Participant 11 wove Latino cultural history and events into her general education classroom instruction. Most students in this classroom had recently arrived in the United States. Knowing that the students were new to the American educational system, she wanted to ensure her classroom was culturally relevant. She believed that learning the English language would be easier if it were connected to pieces of their Latino culture. She taught a class that included instruction in life skills into her curriculum, such as teaching them how to get around their city using public transportation. She created groups and opportunities for the class to go on field trips and learn about different cultures, outside of the classroom within the city of Los Angeles. She believed that these instructional strategies were the most important in keeping her students engaged and retained through high school graduation.

Participant 12

Participant 12 obtained her teaching credential in 2001 and has been teaching for 19 years. She has been teaching at her current school district for the past 19 years and has worked with Latino students for the same number of years. Participant 12 taught using a vertically aligned core curriculum originating in grade 9 and building through grade 12. This year a new teacher has been assigned to head the social studies department and has brought a more structured curriculum, that involves organized social studies themes that are aligned with the state standards. Although teachers in this department have agreed to teach the structured curriculum in place, participant 12 has also integrated supplemental material that focuses on writing. The overarching goal for this class was to instruct students in writing at a collegiate level.

Results

The following section contains the results of the data analysis process. The results are organized and seriated according to the research questions. The findings are further examined by separating the results between the data collection instruments of the focus group, individual interviews, and observation field notes.

Theme Development

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify and report the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. Semi-structured individual interviews served as the primary process for data collection (Yin, 2018). Open-ended interview questions were used to advance an understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences. I created the interview questions to specifically address all the research questions. The study's participants

were interviewed in a secure location with high-speed internet access via Zoom to provide the researcher with accurate perceptions of the participants in this study (Yin, 2018). Data was also collected through a focus group conducted on Zoom. The individual semi-structured questions were asked of the participants conducted in Zoom video conferencing. Audio and video recording of the focus group occurred with participant consent. The focus group and interview data were audio-recorded utilizing Dragon Transcription professional recording software. Finally, data were collected through observations that I documented with a teacher-student rapport checklist (Table 3). When conducting the classroom observations, the teacher's picture was pinned at the top of the screen being the only person visible on the screen. I was only able to observe the teacher and not any of the students present in the class. A description of the intervention and participants' behaviors were noted. Subjective data was collected through the description of the activity and the student's behavior (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the interaction between student and teacher was noted. Finding from the analysis of focus group, semi-structured interviews, and observations of 12 high school teachers revealed five overarching themes: The themes that emerged from the data were: (a) trusted relationships, (b) prevention programs, (c) student intrinsic factors, (d) family support, and (e) school climate (Table 2).

Table 2

Themes generated through NVivo

Name	Description	Frequency
Family	Dependent factors	79
Financial issues		20
Lack of family support		48
School	Dependent factors	471
Prevention programs		142
School Climate		31
Trusted Relationships		312
Student	Dependent factors	145
Academically fall behind		18
Emotional issues		48
Lack of goals		51
Lack of opportunities		13

Figure 1

Teacher Interviews: Generated Themes Frequency

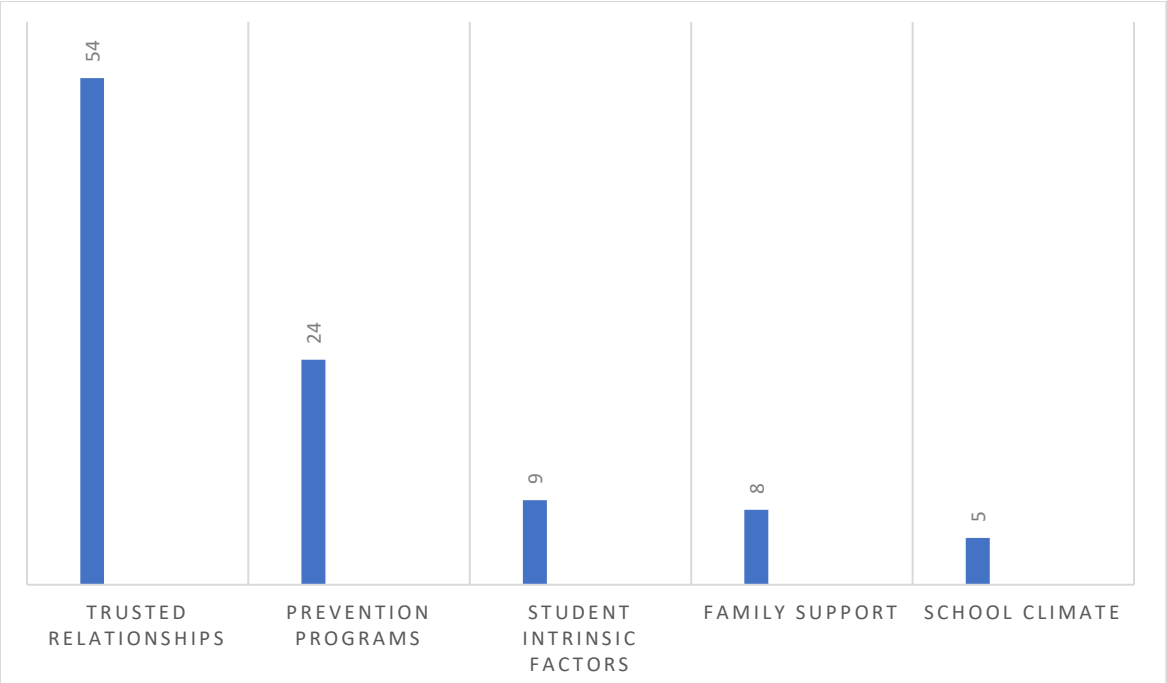

Figure 1 presents the frequency of the themes generated from the NVivo data analysis program. Of the five themes generated during the teacher interviews, 54% of the generated reference codes went towards the importance of trusted relationships, 24% went to prevention programs, 9% to student intrinsic factors, 8% to family support, and 5% went to school climate.

Figure 2

Focus Group: Generated Themes Frequency

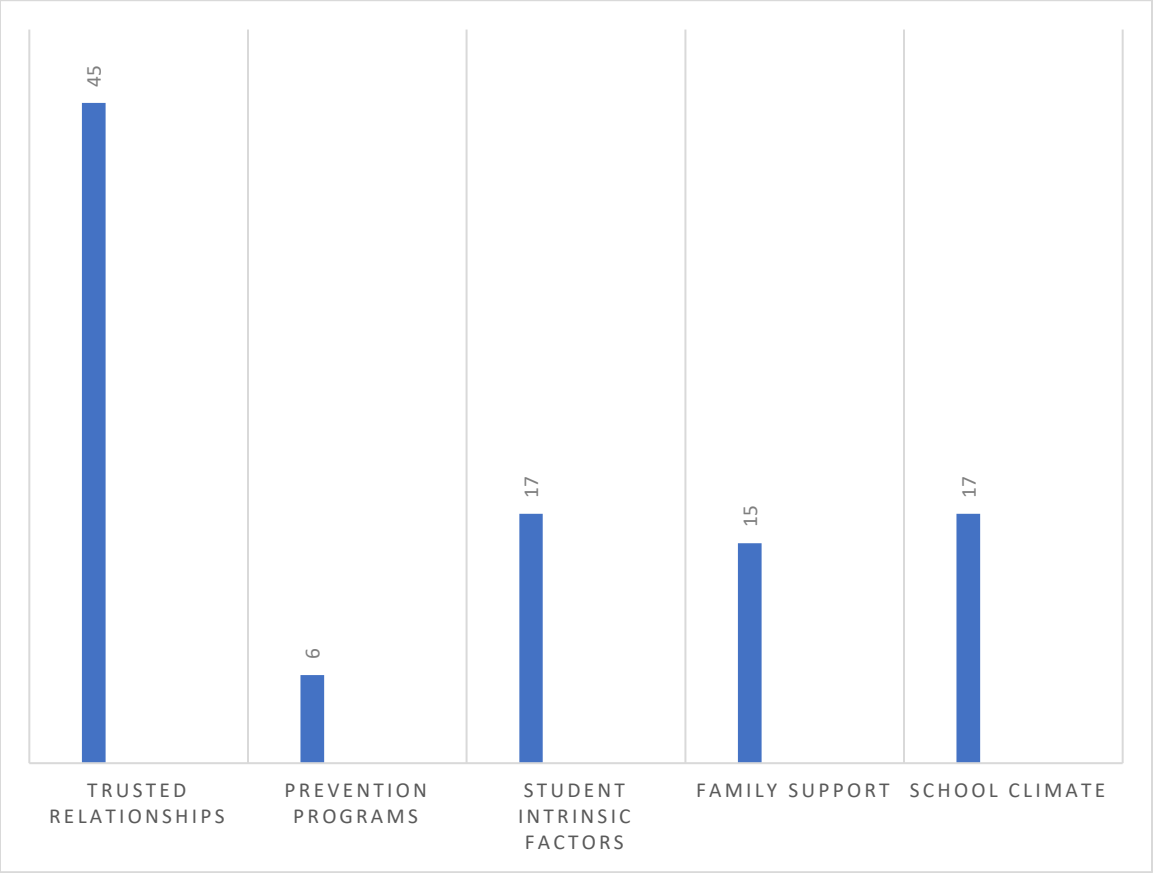

Figure 2 presents the frequency of the themes generated from the NVivo data analysis program during the focus group interviews. Of the five themes generated by NVivo, 45% of the generated reference codes went towards the importance of trusted relationships, 6% went to prevention programs, 17% to student intrinsic factors, 15% to family support, and 17% went to school climate.

Table 3

Teacher Observation Checklist

Characteristics	Yes	No	N/A
1. Good rapport with students*	22		
2. Well prepared	22		
3. Respectful	22		
4. Self-confident	22		
5. Good listener	22		
6. Encourages class discussion	19	2	2
7. Gives constructive feedback	14	1	7
8. Good communicator	19	3	
9. Passionate about teaching and topic discussion	21	1	
10. Foster critical thinking/thought provoking	19		3
11. Cheerful/funny/optimistic	19	3	
12. Compassionate/Understanding	22		
13. Well informed about subject matter	22		
14. Friendly/personable	20	2	
15. Flexible/open minded	22		
16. Inventive and fascinating	18	4	
17. Motivates and care for his students	22		

Observation field notes were collected using a teacher-student rapport checklist. A description of the intervention and participants' behaviors were noted. Subjective data was collected through the description of the activity and the student's behavior. Additionally, the interaction between student and teacher was described on 22 observations (Table 3).

Trusted Relationships

Each of the 12 participants interviewed spoke about the importance of building trusted relationships as the main factor that contributed to the retention of at-risk Latino high school students. All participants made sure their students knew they were there for support, emotionally and academically. Based on the bar graph (Figure 1) that presents the results from the teacher interview and observations, 56% of the references focused on the theme of trusted relationships.

Spending individualized one-on-one time with students was a strategy for preventing at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school described by five of the 12 participants. Participants 6, 8, 9, 11, and 12 expressed the importance of taking the time daily to connect with their students one-on-one before or after school. Based on all 22 observations that I conducted in January, 2020, all participants showed excellent rapport with their students by happily greeting each student by name, as they entered their Zoom class. During the observations, I observed most teachers extending their office hours to assist students with completing classwork assignments or making themselves available to discuss any personal difficult situation they might be encountering. Participant 6 stated, "I am the kind of teacher that will sit with a kid under the rain or drive to his/her house to help them do well in school and see them graduate." These teachers described how spending time with their students after school and dedicating extra hours with them has helped them build a stronger relationship with their students. As a result, the participants stated that they saw improvement in student participation and performance. Participant 12 stated that it has been advantageous for her to live in one of her student's community and that she takes every opportunity to interact with them after class to build a closer relationship with her students. The participants reported that spending additional time every day

getting to know their students, their family background, their boyfriends, or girlfriends shows the students how much they care for them.

A second strategy that participants used to prevent their students from dropping out of high school is establishing personal connections with their students. All 12 participating teachers in this study expressed how important it is for teachers to genuinely connect and help their students succeed academically and see that they graduate. Participant 1 recollected that when she was hired, her principal told her that the reason he hired her was because she was able to recall a specific student that she connected with and that she helped during difficult times. She also expressed in the interview that her most important factor as a teacher was building a strong relationship with students. She stated, "If I don't make the right connections with my students, then they will not want to come to school." Students will have a different perspective on teachers when you are looking after them and letting them know you will be there for them every step of the way. Participant 3 stated, "My role is trying to make connections with my students and hope that those connections will keep them in school." Another participant expressed how having good insight into her students' lives and making connections to their families, will keep them knowing that someone will be on their side encouraging them to finish school.

Four of the 12 participants agreed that what helped prevent their at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school was being open with their students and sharing their personal struggles with them. Based on all 22 observations that I conducted in January, 2020, all participants showed compassion and understanding for their students by sharing with their students the experiences they also endured as an immigrant family in the U.S. Participants 5, 6, 7, and 12 described how important it was for them to be open with their students and share some of the same struggles they faced when they were young. The purpose for sharing this information

is to allow students to build a stronger relationship with their teachers. Participant 9 shared how one of her students expressed to her that if it were not for the close relationship the teacher has built with her, she would have dropped out of high school a long time ago. Participant 5 stated, "learning to be vulnerable with my students and sharing with them the struggles that I have endured as an immigrant in this country, has allowed me to connect with my students and form a closer relationship." One of the participants expressed that sharing her personal story about having to work three jobs to help her pay for school, her parent's rent, and household bills have encouraged her students to know that the sacrifices she made were worth it. Another participant reported that her students expressed respect for her when she told them she lives in their community and that she attended school in which she now teaches. She further shared that although she grew up in poverty, she did not allow her lack of financial security to impede her ability to attend university and reach her dreams of becoming a teacher. She stated, "running into my students all the time, since I live in the community, has allowed me to create a better rapport with my students. Having a personal relationship with my students makes it easier for me to teach them." Participant 6 stated that he shared with his students how he came to this country illegally with his family and also faced many of the same challenges many immigrant students face. However, he told his students that while he faced many challenges, he was committed to graduating from high school. He was determined to pursue his dream following the steps of his mentor teacher.

All 12 participants concurred that telling students how much they are appreciated, is a strategy used to prevent their at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school. Based on my 22 classroom observations, all participants wanted to demonstrated care toward their students. All 12 participants mentioned the importance of letting the students know how

important their success was to them. Participant 2 stated, “if we show our students that we really care about them, they might reciprocate that behavior and stay in school. “If you’re the type of teacher who asks students how they are doing and how is everything at home?” it will show students that you are invested in them and their personal success.” Participant 5 stated that acknowledging the presence of his students in class every day and thanking them for joining his class, has worked well with him. Expressing his concern for them daily allowed him to make better connections with his students thus creating greater consistency in his student’s class attendance. Multiple participants expressed the strategy of using the Zoom chat to send private messages to at-risk students letting the student know of their importance and that they are happy to see they attended class. The private message Zoom chat feature has also been utilized by at-risk students informing the participants of difficulties they are having with classwork, health, or home.

For students who prefer personalized sessions, several participants stated that they invited their students to meet with them during office hours in case they wanted to discuss any difficult situation they might be experiencing outside of school. When conducting the 22 classroom observations, all teachers demonstrated good listening skills and self-confident when guiding their students through a difficult situation. During the observation, participants patiently sat to listen to their students sharing a difficult situation and then confidently offered them several solutions to their problem. In 14 of the observations, I observed the participants giving constructive feedback to student when they felt students had made wrong decisions. Participants 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12 stated that providing this personalized availability has allowed students to see that they are cared for and loved. Participant 9 shared a story that one of her students was having trouble with distance learning and rarely attended class and while speaking to the student, she

learned that his father had lost his job and the family was having difficulty gaining basic life-sustaining provisions. This participant then reached out to her school colleagues and managed to create care packages and daily food distribution boxes to help his family during these difficult times. The personal connection and trusted relationship built between the participant and students demonstrated a genuine concern for the student's well-being. He now attends class daily and is actively engaged in school because he realized how much his teachers care about him.

Participants 2, 10, and 11 mentioned that completing daily emotional check-ins and forming social-emotional circles was a strategy used to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school. These activities helped the students gain strategies for managing difficult situations. Participants 2, 10, and 11 also expressed that many of their students experienced compound traumas, such as physical and mental abuse experienced at home. Many of the students were also experiencing life events that were beyond their control such as having parents lose a job during a pandemic and experiencing a lack of essentials such as food, toiletries, and clothing. Consequently, many participants began their classes by asking students how they felt and if they wanted to talk about anything that was bothering them privately, on Zoom chat, or as a group discussion with the class. Participant 2 stated, "I like having daily check-in with my students since it is a strategy that is important for at-risk students." With their parents' permission, Participant 2 stated that last school year he invited a school psychologist to evaluate a group of ten of his students. To his surprise, the psychologist determined that 80% of his students suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to witnessing or experiencing domestic violence, gang violence, physical abuse, or sexual abuse. Participants agreed that many students in their classes were suffering from many emotional issues. They also

stated that one of the strategies the school district was using to help students persevere through adversity is incorporating social-emotional instruction in the classroom-a program where students are taught how to improve their attitudes and perceptions of school, others, and themselves (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Multiple participants also stated that they are also providing at-risk students with counseling services to encourage them to stay in school. Instead of sending students with behavioral issues straight to the principal, many participants opted to use restorative justice circles or social emotional circles to calm a disturbed child in the class. Lastly, these participants expressed how they like to engage their students in restorative justice circles to allow them to discuss what bothers them and their feelings. Most participants agreed that the benefit of forming these groups is that when students discuss how they are feeling and sharing their struggles, other students are able to relate to those same struggles and make connections with one another. They also agreed that students are showing each other skills to deal with difficult situations and learning from one another how to make the right choices to change the directions in their lives. When conducting the 22 classroom observations on January 2020, 19 of the observations demonstrated participants fostering critical thinking skills and encouraging discussion when conducting restorative justice circles.

Another strategy participants have used to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school is working with students in a mentor-mentee relationship that provides students with a supportive and encouraging role model. When conducting the observations, the participants demonstrated a personal and friendly with their students. Participants 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, and 12 said that many of the students in their class resided in a single-parent home; therefore, they look to them for advice and guidance. Participant 10 stated, “many of our kids do not have those examples at home, therefore for many of them, they only have their teachers to look to for

support." Participant 9 stated that although her students have graduated high school, she continues to have contact with many of them as a mentor and friend. Participants 10 states, "for many of our students we are the stable, consistent adults in their lives, and they look to us for support." Participants 2, 5, 9, and 10 concurred that they are the trusted adult in their students' lives and students have expressed feelings of safety when turning to them for help. Participant 5 said, "It is important to let my students know that I am here for them and they can count on me. It is my duty as their teacher to be a role model for them as they learn science and grow into adulthood."

To prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school, five of the 12 participants agreed they had become their students' biggest supporters. When conducting the observations, the participants were well-informed of any subject matter students need to discuss with them about, whether it was college or any personal advice. Nine of the 12 participants stated that one of their roles is to be their students' academic cheerleaders. All nine participants mentioned that they constantly remind their students that they are smart, capable, and can achieve anything they set their minds on. Participants 2, 5, 6, 9, and 10 said that they meet one-on-one with their students to discuss their academic strengths and weaknesses. They then wrote a referral to the guidance counselor who created a plan with the purpose of motivating students to stay on track and in school. Additionally, in collaboration with the guidance counselors would meet with the students to help them complete the necessary paperwork and assignments required to qualify for graduation. Participant 5 expressed, "being flexible with my students is a way to encourage her students to continue coming to school." Participant 10 commented that if her students were failing her class within the first four weeks of school, she extended the due date providing them with additional time to complete the work and improve their overall

grade. Participant 2 stated, “As teachers, we must understand that some of our students have a lot going on in their lives and we are not there to make their lives more difficult, on the contrary, we are to be their biggest supporters.” Participant 2 and 5 stated, “if another teacher’s goal is to have students meet deadlines, not accept late work, and refuse to be flexible, then that is their issue, but for me, the goal for my students to learn, coming to school, and graduate.”

Lastly, a strategy the participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12 have used to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school is by facilitating positive peer relationships in the classroom. When conducting classroom observations, all the observations demonstrated teachers’ flexibility and open-mindedness as students worked in groups; they gave them ample time to complete group projects. Five of the participants discussed the importance of facilitating positive peer groups where students can work cooperatively to complete assignments or discuss difficult situations. Participants 4, 7, and 9 mentioned how important peer interaction is in their classroom. Based on their perception, being an individual is difficult, but when students are in a group even in a small group, there were felt more confident. Participant 10 stated, “the more minds that come together, the better they will think. It's not just putting them in groups or it's not just allowing them to work with their peers, but about the importance of being able to establish relationships.” Participants 6 and 7 declared that when discussing social interaction, teachers hoped their students would find the right group of people to be around. Participants 4 and 5 stated, “I hope my students’ friends will keep them from dropping out of high school and encourage them to continue coming to school.” Participant 12 shared that she likes to create classroom assignments or projects where students work together in a group. She also stated that in all the classes she teaches, students are assigned specific roles in the group and sections portions of the project to complete. In the end, when the group project is completed, all

members in the group received an overall grade for the group project. Giving students a group assignment will not only permit students to obtain the same grade, but it allows each one of the group members to be held accountable for a portion of the project to complete. These group assignments create a team-like environment by building trusting relationships with their peers, connecting them to the school, and encouraging their daily attendance.

Participants also discussed the importance of doing restorative justice circles as a classroom to build peer connections. Restorative justice circles involve a group of students meeting to discuss harmful behaviors in a safe environment and discuss methods on how to work through these harmful behaviors. These circles allow students to open-up in a safe and supportive environment. Participant 11 stated, "having children connect emotionally, or socially with classmates is a way for me to encourage them to stay in school. Participants also expressed that as students share their adversities in the group, they can guide them offering coping strategies. Participants 5, 6, 7, and 9 discussed that having peer interaction is imperative as it offers the opportunity to gain advice from the same age peer who experienced similar situations. Most participants also discussed allowing students to have conversations where they discuss their problems with peers and have them realize that they are not alone in these circumstances. Participant 2 states, "these circles not only allow my students to hear other students talk about going through difficult situations, but they get to hear other students discuss strategies they used to deal with academic and non-academic parts of their lives."

Prevention Programs

From the data of this study, the importance of prevention programs in schools ranked as being the second most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. Seven of the 12 participants interviewed spoke of how schools that offer

prevention programs for students, falling behind academically, was a major factor that contributed to the retention of at-risk Latino high school students. Based on the bar graph that resulted from the teacher observation interviews, 24% of the references were geared towards the theme of prevention programs. Also, the bar graph generated from the focus group codes, 6% of the references were geared toward the prevention program's theme.

Seven of the 12 participants stated that providing students with a current and relevant instructional curriculum was essential in the retention of at-risk Latino students. Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, and 12 concurred that teaching students from supplemental materials that is personally relevant and current on social media has increase their engagement and positively influenced attendance. Participants 3 stated, "my role is to make connections with students and teach them how chemistry is connected to the real world." Participant 3 also stated that to encourage her students to stay in school, she engages them in enjoyable programs such as participating in a NASA Space Station chat where her students were able to ask questions of astronauts stationed on the Commander Spaceship. Participant 8 stated, "To keep my students engaged in my class, I bring topics of interest or relevant current events that will catch their attention." When conducting the classroom observations, the participants brought materials in the classroom that was inventive and fascinating. Participant 8 discussed that she recently created a unit on the passing of Kobe Bryant. This unit garnered student interest and engagement. Students were excited to write a report about a sports legend that played for their city of Los Angeles. Participant 10 mentioned that she introduces poetry in her classroom by having students research poetry from Tupac Shakur, a well-known rapper who continues to influence students 25 years post-mortem. Participant 12 revealed that she modifies the curriculum to be more relatable to her students of color; she selects books that describe the life of African

American families and Hispanic immigrants' families living in the United States. Participant 12 stated, "when teachers provide a curriculum that students are unable to connect with, the students are overheard stating, 'this doesn't matter to me' or 'this information has nothing to do with my life." However, participants stated that when teachers bring a curriculum that is relevant to their students the subject matter becomes relatable which fosters engagement and positively influences class attendance.

Seven of the 12 participants stated that having counseling programs (therapist or school psychologist) or self-esteem-building programs encourage students to stay in school. Trained therapists regularly meet with students who are at-risk to discuss the issues preventing them from achieving academic success. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 12 collectively acknowledged that having student-focused counseling services provide the opportunity for students to discuss difficult issues. Through these discussions, the students are provided with tools and strategies that could enable them to make informed decisions regarding high school graduation. These student-focused counseling services provide the opportunity for students to discuss difficult issues. Participant 2 stated, "at our school, we highly encourage at-risk students to participate in programs that offer mental health service or offer restorative justice groups they can join with the intent of encouraging students to get the help they need." Most participants agreed that these programs offered to students teach them skills that help them cope with peers and adults in a classroom setting. Participant 4 indicated that her school provides students with a program called "ARC"- a program that provides strategies to parents, teachers, and adults for building self-esteem and positive self-concepts at-risk students. Participant 7 said she leads a program called, "Fre-yea"—teaching youth empowerment through guided discussions on the lack of equity in education for students of color. Additionally, this program emphasizes the importance

of staying in school through high school graduation. Participant 12 described a language acquisition program called, "LAD" that helps students of color acquire life skills, strategies, and supports needed to remain in high school through graduation.

Nine of the 12 participants concurred that a strategy they used in preventing at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school is to provide students with credit recovery, tutoring, and academic intervention programs. When conducting the 22 classroom observations in January 2020, participants were well-prepared when delivering instruction. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 agreed that schools need to provide struggling students with intervention programs that will help them better understand the content, redo work in failing classes or help them catch up with missing work. Participants 1 and 2 discussed that her school has response to intervention (RTI) program that meets on Zoom with students after school with the purpose of providing struggling students with the additional support they need to learn content or complete school assignments. Participants also mentioned that their school district provides them with additional funding for them to meet with their neediest student for two hours of intervention instruction a week. Participant 2 said his school has an after-school tutoring program called, "Great Improvement" where students attend online to make up the classes they missed or did not do well; the students are allowed to make-up missing school credits. Some of these programs allow students the flexibility they need to turn in late assignments even though the assignments might be two months late. Participant 4 stated, "the goal is that we must keep every possibility open for our students to earn their class credits and graduate."

One of the participants mentioned that special education classes are creating learning labs in the classroom where students are placed into smaller groups and assign a support staff member to support students to catch up in their classroom assignments while in

class. Participant 5 mentioned that her school has an intervention program called "Grip Tutoring" that the students must attend if they are failing or have failed a class. For example, if a student has a D in the class, they must attend two tutoring sessions, if they have an F in a class, then they must attend three tutoring sessions to raise their grade to a C. Participant 5 stated, "I have a lot of students who do not or cannot attend my class at all and their grades suffer but can make up their grades by attending Grip Tutoring." This is one of the programs this school district has used to prevent dropouts. They also have a credit recovery program that can help students with last quarter's grades. These intervention programs are constant, and students can attend at any time, allowing them the opportunities to make up for any failing class. Participant 7 mentioned that her school has an intervention program called Engenuity that is an online individualized program that helps meet the needs of struggling students and uses a program called "The Star 17" which is an intervention program that allows students to make up missing class credits to graduate. Lastly, Participant 8 said her school provides students with a very flexible credit recovery program that is useful for students. The program was effective because students were allowed to make up their class credits for any of the classes that they may be failing in a shorter amount of time. Participants 9 and 10 stated that the program allows students to make up work in a full semester and complete five class credits in less than a semester. The program can also be completed on Saturdays, or two days out of the week for a period of three to four hours. Most participants also discussed that schools in the district are offering Saturday school, winter break and summer school session for students that need to make-up classes to graduate.

Another strategy described by the participants to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school is referring students to their school guidance counselor or Pupil Services

and Attendance Counselor (PSA). Participants 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 agreed that referring students directly to their guidance counselor for help was beneficial in preventing students from dropping out of school. According to Participant 6, "school guidance counselors spend the time to meet with the students individually to talk about what their plans are and what credits they need to make up to graduate." Many of the participants mentioned that these guidance counselors formed close and special connections with their students. The participants stated that that these counselors provide an outstanding service to make sure students acquired the resources they need to graduate. Participants also stated that school guidance counselors do an amazing job making sure that if a student needs after-school tutoring, or they need to be provided with more time to turn in incomplete assignments, they provided those services for them. Guidance counselors were also always available to assist a student with needs. The guidance counselors also stay in constant communication with teachers. Participant 11 said, "I would say that our biggest prevention program is connecting our students to our guidance counselor and PSA counselor because having that constant communication and having people that really care about the kid, goes a long way." All participants indicated that the guidance counselor is the liaison between the teacher and student.

Participants 10 recounts, "PSA counselors dedicate their resources to meet the needs of our specialized population as well as the needs of students in foster care or who are homeless." The PSA counselor is an additional staff member who provides the support needed to help students stay in school. When a student is chronically absent, the PSA counselor will visit the student's home and facilitate a meeting with the student and their parents. During this meeting, the parties create a contract stating that the student will commit to attending class daily. In addition, the parents pledge to support and encourage their children in fulfilling their

commitment. The PSA counselor also provides resources for the student who is chronically absent through the development of peer networks and support groups. The networks and support groups are additional advocates for regular class attendance and remaining in school through graduation.

Participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12 agreed that encouraging students to get involved in extracurricular activities is an essential motivator for retaining students who are at-risk for dropping out of high school. Participant 3 reported:

> I have a chemistry club that meets after school. The student members are introduced to safe chemicals and are encouraged to learn about the properties of the chemical and how they can be combined to create products to keep and sell. Chemistry club students have discovered recipes for making soaps, bath bombs, and lotions. When the students have created a final product, they display the results and explain the process and materials used to complete the experiment.

More than half of the participating teachers also stated that in addition to the chemistry club, cooking clubs and sports clubs were noted by the participants to be effective means to engage students and actively promote friendship and community. For example, Participant 3 described how making candy and soap is popular with students because they engage in chemistry activities with everyday items; it makes science enjoyable. Participant 4 said she encourages her students to get involved in extracurricular activities to keep them busy and help them stay out of trouble. Participant 6 articulated that her school has a program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) -a preparation program designed to provide support and resources to students who are interested in attending college but are academically underperforming. Participants 7 and 8 stated that their school has a recreational after-school

program, Beyond the Bell -a program that provided students with the opportunity to partake in a supervised academic enrichment program to encourage students to learning beyond the classroom content. Participant 7 discussed that her school provided an extracurricular program such as expressive art classes where students are taught how to play a musical instrument, contemporary dance, and drama. The goal is to help students find a passion to be expressive and stay in school. Participants 10 and 12 noted that their school engaged in active sports programs encouraged strategic collaboration and competitiveness. To be eligible to play sports, students must maintain passing grades in all classes. Students who are part of organized sports intrinsically have a community of teammates and coaches who serve as support systems for achieving passing grades and remaining in school. Finally, Participant 12 affirmed that her school has an excellent extracurricular program called Project Grad LA. The program was very successful because it assigns a one-to-one advisor who connects with the student in middle school and remains with them through graduation. The Project Grad LA advisors meet regularly with the students and discuss topics related to graduation, grades, and academic achievement. Additionally, the program offers summer workshops that assist with applications, simulate the college experience, and prepare them for the rigors of higher education. The students had to attend college workshops in the summer to get them prepared for college rigor. Participant 12 stated, "this was a nonprofit, voluntary program for kids, and it was amazing; the students loved it and spoke highly of it."

Lastly, encouraging students to participate in apprenticeship or mentoring programs, was a strategy 4 of the 12 participants used to retain students in school. Participants 5, 7, 10, and 12 agreed that high school students demonstrate greater engagement and enthusiasm for remaining in school when they are provided with the opportunity to explore careers that are directly related

to their strengths and interests. Participant 5 discussed that his school has a program called, "Link Learning" and it provides students with mentors who work in the student's desired career. The mentorship and guidance programs are known as "Pathway". For example, if the students want to go into law and public services as a future career, they may choose that pathway or if they want to pursue a career in medicine and science, they may choose those pathways as well. In the medicine and science pathway, the students can learn about science, and then they can also apply for an internship in the health field or the medical field. Participant 5 states, "this program allows the students to work while learning and as an apprenticeship program. The pathway program aids in high school retention for at-risk students because they are provided the opportunity to build their resume while, at the same time, they can apply what they learned in class into the field of their choice." Participant 7 mentioned her school had a mentoring program called "Boys to Men" where African American and Latino students are mentored by men that are successful in their careers and serve as role models in their communities. The purpose of the program is to equip young men to make correct choices so they can become the man they wish to be.

School Climate

The importance of creating a positive school climate was the third theme generated by the analysis of data. All 12 participants discussed the importance a nurturing and supportive school climate contributed to the retention of at-risk Latino high school students. Based on the bar graph (Figure 1) that resulted from the participants observation interviews, 5% of the references were focused on school climate. The data from the focus group also reveals that there were 17% references on school climate (Figure 2).

All 12 participants concurred that creating an academic environment that support the students and their parents is a catalyst for promoting a positive school climate. Participant 1 stated that her school created parent workshops in their native language and guided parents through different educational platforms with the purpose of informing them of the programs their children were using during remote learning. When conducting the 22 classroom observations on January 2020, 19 of the observations showed teachers' optimism and excitement when encouraging their students in their academic achievement. All participants also suggested that when a student is failing in school, the guidance counselor schedules a meeting with the teacher, guidance counselor, student, and parent to discuss a plan to support the student academically and help them graduate. In these meetings, a plan is formed, and all parties sign an agreement for accountability in encouraging the student to come to school. Participants 4 and 5 shared that at their school, the administrative team and the school staff worked very diligently to create a more welcoming environment for parents to come on campus. One of the strategies the school used was promoting a format of student-led parent-teacher conferences. Participants 6 and 7 stated, "one of the things that we have begun to do is to shift from teacher- parents conferences to student-parent conferences which allows a parent to come to the classroom and their child will do the conference for their parents." In this process, the student guided their parents to the data system for grades and explained to the parents what their current class grades were and what were the missing assignments. During the student-parent conference, the teacher was there to oversee and provide guidance as needed. The conferences were very effective as it opened the lines of communication about education between the parents and child. Additionally, the conference format created an environment that encouraged communication in the family's native language. All participants stated that their school conducted a monthly, Coffee with the

Principal meeting. Participant 7 explained, “these meetings are like town meetings. The principal, teachers, and the parents come together to discuss any concerns they have about the educational program and the school community.” To encourage participation and facilitate understanding, in the meeting, schools provided a translator that spoke the native language of parents present at the meetings. Participant 9 stated, “the purpose of this meeting is to establish better connections between the parents, school, and teachers and build the trust they need to help students achieve academic success and see them graduate.”

Another strategy participants use to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school was rewarding students with good grades and attendance. All 12 participants spoke to the school-wide reward system that recognized students' reward system. Students that received a 3.0 GPA or higher and had only 4 absences a year, were recognized weekly or monthly for their hard work. Each participant stated that their schools had a monthly raffle drawing for students with perfect attendance. Students who only missed school four days out of the whole year, were provided with a ticket that allowed them to move to the front of the lunch line. The school honored students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher by hosting quarterly assemblies. During the awards ceremony, the student's names were called, and they were given a Certificate of Excellence. Participant 2 stated, “student names with excellent attendance and GPA were called out on the school intercom and a picture of them were placed in a special wall in the school’s main entrance for everyone to see.” Half of the participants shared that their schools also chose a Student of the Month per grade level and the student’s picture was placed outside of the school digital announcement board, and on the school website, recognizing them for excellent grades and attendance. All schools in the district that had students with excellent attendance and grades

were also rewarded with special field trips, gift cards, certificates of appreciation, Air Pod Pros, computers, and even college scholarships.

The importance of creating a positive nurturing environment where all students felt they were welcomed and that they belonged was a strategy eight of the 12 participants agreed using in keeping students in school. When conducting the 22 classroom observations on January, 2020, all the observations demonstrated teachers being respectful towards their students no matter what gender, sexual preference, and culture they came from. Participants 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12, agreed that it was important for schools to create an environment where students felt like they belonged. Each participant reported, "students need to feel comfortable in the classroom in order to want to come to school." Participant 2 stated, "the school must provide a culture of acceptance. A culture that honors and celebrates the diversity of its student body." Students prosper when they belong to a class that builds a culture of belonging and an admiration of diversity. Participants 5 indicated that school climate and culture were very important in supporting Latino students that are at- risk stating that "academic achievement occurs in an environment that supports and promotes physical and emotional safety." Participant 2 agreed that, "It is difficult for students to learn when they believe they are not liked by their peers or teachers." Participants 8 and 9 agreed that when students do not feel liked by their peers or teachers it was very discouraging and dangerous to an at-risk student and will probably lead them to not want to attend class or school. Participants 6, 7, and 8 mentioned that students search for peers and adults who provide them with a feeling of belonging. Everybody wants to belong to somebody, whether it is a group, a family, an organization, or a friendship. Participant 10 agreed that, "if students do not feel that they're welcome or that they are not wanted in a class, why would they want to come around?" Participant 11 agreed, "there is a culture: and if it does

not reflect a culture of acceptance of multi-cultures, or if schools don't recognize that we have kids from all over the world, then those kids no matter how few there might feel that they don't belong. The outcome will be that we end up at risk of losing them."

Seven of the 12 participants mentioned that creating a school climate that was more understanding and accommodating encouraged their students to stay in school. Participants 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 agreed that to have a better understanding of their students they needed to know where they were coming from and what issues they were dealing with to encourage them to stay in school. Participant 2 stated, "I believe that the climate of a school has to be also somewhat accommodating, it can't be too strict because it will turn students off." He explained that at a previous school where he taught, the school was so strict about not using cellphones in school that in one moment he saw one of the students assaulting the assistant principal because he was caught pulling out his phone. The student was then suspended and because he became so discouraged with the incident, he never returned to school. Participant 6 also stated, "You can't make it too strict because when you have students who have different types of backgrounds, they could get violent, they could react to the strictness violently, so you have to be somewhat accommodating." Participant 8 also said in her interview that the school culture should be about showing students that they cared and that they will work hard to provide the resources they need to graduate. Most participants agreed that teachers need to be more understanding of their students and always express to them how important they are. Participants 9 mentioned, "It is not wise for a teacher to mistreat her student or is constantly getting on their case because these negative attitudes can shut students down. These types of attitudes coming from teachers will only discourage students from coming to school." Participant 9 concurred that a school needs to build a culture where students' needs are met academically and emotionally. She further stated

that teachers should show empathy for students who are struggling academically and emotionally. Participant 6 stated, "teacher framework goals is to focus on delivering culturally relevant pedagogy, so adding a student's native slang words in our class instruction will make the Latino students feel like they're part of the class." Participants 10 and 11 also reported that it was important for them to incorporate Spanish in the classroom so that students can feel like the teacher knows where they were coming from and can relate better to her/his Latino students. Most participants agreed that as a society, the Latino students are part of an ethnic group and need to see their culture represented in the hallways. For example, participant 7 mentioned,

> seeing a Cardi B poster saying, "Go to class" is important. It is important for a school to identify with a student's culture through music or having staff vs. students' games to build a culture of camaraderie. Having these types of events in a school will establish a culture and climate that is more accommodating to our students of color.

Lastly, based on the analyzed interviews and observations, a strategy 7 of the 12 participants used to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school was creating a culture where students were to become college-ready and motivated to attend a university. When conducting the 22 classroom observations on January 2020, 19 of the observations demonstrated teachers being excellent communicators, motivating their students to further their educational goals. Participants 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 agreed that a significant role of a teacher was to build the confidence of their students and prepare them to be college ready. Participant 3 stated, "an expectation at our school is that every student will be going to college, even though we know not everyone is going to graduate." Participant 4 stated that schools needed to form a culture where students are given background knowledge about college and discuss information that they

might not be getting at home. She stated, “teachers, many times, help create expectations for their students in order to motivate them to go to college.” Participant 10 mentioned that creating an attending college climate or culture was emphasized at her school. If all schools set expectations that every student will go to college or attend post-secondary education, students will begin to visualize themselves graduating and attaining higher education. She further stated, “I have told my students’ college isn't for everyone, but our job as teachers is to set up every student to go to college whether they want to go or not.”

Student Intrinsic Factors

Student intrinsic factors was the fourth theme generated by the research study. Six of the 12 participants interviewed discussed that the lack of self-motivation contributed to the dropout of at-risk Latino high school students. Also, the lack of family support contributed to students’ self-motivation. Based on the bar graph (Figure 1) that resulted from the teacher observation interviews, 9% of the references were geared towards the theme of school climate. Also, the bar graph generated from the focus group codes, 17% of the references were geared toward the theme of the importance of school climate.

Half of the participants agreed that students who belong to familial and social communities that do not encourage the attainment of a high school diploma are more likely to leave high school prior to graduation. Participants 1, 3, 6, 9, 10, and 12 also agreed that when students were not taught at home how important obtaining a high school diploma is, then they would not have the desire to attend school and graduate. Participant 3 stated, “It's hard to enlist parents in helping us encourage their students to graduate from high school because some of them are not on our side.” Many Latino parents see that education is important, but they do not see the necessity of a diploma and so they want their children to work, versus attaining a high

school diploma. Participant 9 also mentioned that when students are on the verge of failing their courses, parents were contacted and had been warned of their child's situation, however informing parents did not seem to work because students continue to not turn in their homework or attend class. Participant 6 mentioned that students will remain unmotivated to graduate from high school because "attending class is not pushed at home may be because parents are working a lot, or some kids are just stronger-willed than their parents and the kids just absolutely do not want to go to school." Also, participants described that many of their at-risk Latino students had parents who had an elementary school education, so there was minimal academic support for them, and they had no role models for higher education. Most participants believed that when students did not see graduation as an important goal in furthering their education then there was no need for them to graduate.

Participant 12 stated, "as a Latino teacher, one of the major problems of some of our Latino communities is that, unlike some other ethics communities that instill the value of education in their children, our Latino students think that by getting a job that is paying minimum wage is fine as long as they can continue their lifestyle, that will make them happy." Participant 3 mentioned that, "sometimes there is a huge push to go to work and that is enough." Participant 6 stated that, "college is beyond their minds because they cannot think that far ahead." All participants agreed that many of at-risk Latino students just think about the present without considering the importance of education; they are only thinking of a day-to-day basis making sure they are in survival mode. Participant 10 mentioned that some students do not value the importance of obtaining a high school diploma because it had not been taught at home. She continued, "I don't know if it's complacency as much as ignorance, but the thought that 'this is my life and I'm okay with this life,' is very unfortunate." All six participants agreed that their

students did not realize that there were greater opportunities for them if they earned a high school diploma.

Five of the 12 participants agreed that when students had not established future goals, they would drop out of high school. Participants 2, 3, 5, 10, and 12 agreed that the reason at-risk Latino students were dropping out was because they had not made any goals or had found a purpose for continuing their education. Participant 3 said that most of her students did not know how to create personal goals that they could work towards and achieve. Each year she encouraged her students to set goals that they would like to accomplish in the future. Unfortunately, many of her at-risk Latino students did not see themselves doing anything that required an education, and they did not see the benefit of planning for the future. Participant 3 continued and stated, "I teach sophomores and have had them for two years. At the end of two years, many of them did not have purposeful goals set. I often told my students that they needed to have goals planned out, or at least have dreams and ideas to look forward to." Participant 3 also mentioned that she encouraged her students to set goals for themselves every semester, the same way she also sets little goals for herself to achieve every year. Participants 10 and 12 stated that students that would like to improve, were encouraged to develop a plan for personal growth. At the end of the semester, they asked the students if they were able to achieve their goals. Participant 5 stated, "unfortunately, our students don't see the bigger picture and it really comes down to the individual student having goals set and working hard to accomplish those goals." All participants agreed that the problem for some at-risk students was that most think that dropping out of school was a normal part of life if their parents did not view graduating from high school as a priority. Participants 2, 3, 5, and 12 concurred that, "students needed to make it

a goal to graduate from high school and strive to attend university or a trade school. Teaching students the importance of setting goals will guarantee our students a better future."

Five of the 12 participants stated that a major reason for student dropout in at-risk Latino youth was due to a lack of confidence. Participants 2, 4, 5, 9, and 12 agreed that one of the reasons students were not motivated to continue attending school was because they were so far behind academically that they did not see high school graduation as a possibility. Participant 2 mentioned that some of her students could have struggled academically in elementary school and some teachers just continued to pass them on when they were not gaining the skills they needed to move to the next grade. She stated, "there is a great deal of discouragement happening in our students' lives and many seem to be giving up. One of the reasons was that many students were lacking basic math skills and are so behind in math that when they reached the 12 grade and needed to take their PSAT (Preliminary College Admission Test) test, they failed." Participants 4 and 9 stated that many students became unmotivated to attend school because they could not keep up with academic demands, and they continued to fall further behind making it almost impossible for them to graduate. Participant 12 said many of her students who had dropped out of high school began struggling academically in elementary and middle school. Now that they had reached high school and had become aware of the graduation requirements, they had realized they were so far behind that they just preferred to fail school and persistent. She argued, "I believe that they dropout due to the lack of credits and falling behind and are now trying to dig themselves out of a whole that they might not be able to get out of." Participant 5 said, "Just because our students are so behind skill level-wise, teachers just need to be more willing to offer as much scaffolding and support so our students can be successful and not get discouraged."

Lastly, based on the analyzed interviews and observations, a major reason why at-risk Latino youth were dropping out of high school was due to the discouragement they faced due to lack of resources and disconnection of the school curriculum. Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 12 agreed that part of the reason our at-risk Latino students were dropping out of school was because of lack of resources and teachers who did not connect with them, or teachers of other ethnicities who might not understood the Latino community. Participant 10 stated, "unfortunately, there are teachers that come into the teaching profession with this deficit lens and don't seem to understand the struggles that our at-risk Latino students endure, and this will cause them to become motivated to come to school." Participant 5 stated that teachers needed to move away from solely teaching from textbooks or use a scripted curriculum and find ways to bring more culturally relevant supplemental materials that our students could relate with and would be more interesting and engaging to students. Participant 11, a teacher who taught students who were English learners, mentioned that some of her students were coming from countries where the academia is different from the United States. Students were unsure of the reasons they were required to attend two years of elective classes to be eligible to attend college. Teachers 9 and 10 expressed how many of their students came from impoverished communities and did not have the resources to afford non-essential items such as cellphones and computers. Participants 9, 10, and 11 expressed gratitude to the school district for supplying students with school-issued computers. Without the support of the school's equipment, students would have been unable to access remote learning. Participant 12 stated, "If the district wants to see more of our economically disadvantaged students graduate this year, I really hope the district will allow the kids to keep their computers so they can become more advanced and prepared in technology use when they are in college."

Family Support

Lack of family support was the fifth theme generated by this research study. Eight of the 12 participants interviewed discussed that the lack of motivation and familial support contributed to the dropout of at-risk Latino high school students. Based on the bar graph that resulted from the teacher observation interviews, 8% of the references were geared towards the theme of family support. Also, the bar graph generated from the focus group codes, 15% of the references were geared toward the theme of the importance of family support.

One of the factors Latino youth are dropping out of high school was to find employment and contribute financially to the family unit. During difficult times parents saw it as a priority for their children to work and help pay bills than continue going to school. Participants 4, 5, 6, 11, and 12 agreed that a factor causing students to drop out of high school was to help pay living expenses. When students worked, their academic performance decreased due to a reduction of sleep and fewer hours devoted to homework and projects. All the participants also reported that with the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021, families whose parents had undocumented residency, were unable to maintain employment. However, as the students were naturalized citizens, they were eligible for employment. The students then felt responsible for maintaining the financial wellbeing of the family. For this reason, many of the teachers reported a spike in high school dropout rates due to the pandemic and lack of parental employment. Participant 6 stated, "many of the students' parents have lost their jobs and students need to start providing some financial stability for their families such as bringing in additional income to pay for rent or food." She also described that when families are struggling financially, at-risk Latino students are given the responsibility of caring for younger siblings and relatives. Participant 12 stated, "for many of our students' families, education is not a top priority because they're worried more

with day-to-day survival, like food, issues of being undocumented, deportation, and education falls lower on the priority ladder."

Four of the 12 participants argued that that at-risk Latino youth were dropping out of high school because many of our students did not have an appropriate role model within the home or social community. Participants 2, 8, 10, and 12 agreed that at-risk students did not seem to understand why completing high school was important. One of the reasons was because many students did not have an adult or role model to guide them through college. Participant 8 stated, "Many times our students are the first to attend high school and do not have someone at home to guide them and inform them what the next steps will be, they don't have role models to teach them the way." All four participants agreed that a good number of their students were first-generation or second-generation Mexican Americans, so they did not have many educational role models. They did not have members in their homes to tell them that they could go to college and have greater financial security. The first-generation, at-risk Latino students, tended to not have an older brother or older sister who had gone to college and could show them the benefits of achieving a higher education. Unfortunately, these students did not understand the importance of attending higher education because they did not have family members who were college graduates or knew how to navigate through the educational system to be successful.

Latino youth were also dropping out of high school because many were coming to class with unresolved issues. Participants 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 agreed that their students were having a difficult time attending school because they were coming from broken homes and these deficiencies made it difficult for them to participate in school. Participant 2 stated that last year he taught his students how to complete a self-evaluation of emotional wellness. Eighty percent of the students in the class, who chose to discuss their results, shared that based on the evaluation,

they had experienced symptoms of PTSD. He stated, “Eighty percent is a lot of students suffering from so many emotional issues.” Participant 4 mentioned that many of the students that he serves at the school come from single-parent homes. “I'm not saying that that is a bad thing, but it's just that sometimes the parent works so much that these students spend a lot of time by themselves after school and feel lonely.” Participant 5 also states that, “Some students who live with their grandma or their parents don't have the help they need and suffer emotionally for not having a stable home.” When at-risk students are not provided with guidance and appropriate activities, they will make poor choices and end up dropping out of school. Most participants also stated that they had realized that when a student dropped out, it is not because they just hated school. Participants 2, 7, and 8 concurred that, “many of our students don’t want to leave school, but the difficult situations in their lives and the traumatic experience they're going through at that time, was to blame for not being motivated to attend school.” Participant 11, a general education teacher providing instruction to EL students shared that many of her students were left in their home country as their parents decided to come to the U.S. for a better life. These students were left in their home country at six months old, and now were coming to the U.S. at 16, or 17 years old and meeting their families for the first time.

Lastly, lack of parental involvement was a major contributing factor of why Latino youth are not obtaining a high school diploma. Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, and 12 agreed that it was extremely important to have the parental involvement every step of the way, especially with at-risk students. One issue was that parents needed to work long hours to provide financially for the family. Participant 3 states, “I have seen that at the beginning of the year we get a good amount of people showing up to our school meetings and parents’ workshops, but as months pass by, they stop coming.” As an educational institution, teachers suggested that schools needed to

create some incentive or way to encourage parents to attend our workshops and become more actively engaged at our school. Teachers also stated, "although we get to collaborate with parents during parent conferences, many parents do not attend due to a lot of time constraints." A strategy that schools are using to provide parents with workshops was to offer workshops at various times throughout the day.

Research Questions Responses

Research question 1, "Why are Latino students dropping out of high school at a rate higher than their Asian, black, and white peers?" The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) reports that dropout rates for Latino students were 8.2% in the school year of 2016-2017 compared to Black students at 6.5%, Caucasian students at 4.3%, and Asian students at 2.1%. Latino students drop out of high school at a rate higher than that of other ethnic groups. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) confirms that Latino students have the highest dropout rates compared to Blacks, Whites, and Asian students. As discussed in Chapter Four, six of the 12 participants interviewed discussed that lack of motivation and family support contributed to the dropout of at-risk Latino high school students. When family members do not instill in their children the importance of obtaining a high school diploma is, students will not be motivated to continue their education. Participant 12 stated, "as a Latino teacher, one of the major problems of some of our Latino communities is that, unlike some other ethics communities that instill the value of education in their children, our Latino students think that by getting a job that is paying minimum wage is fine as long as they can continue their lifestyle, that will make them happy." Five of the 12 participants also agreed that when students have not established future goals, they are more likely to drop out of high school. Participant 5 stated, "unfortunately, our students don't see the bigger picture and it

really comes down to the individual student having goals set and working hard to accomplish those goals." Many at-risk Latino students are not obtaining a high school diploma because they have not established future goals and do not see it as important to pursue a university or trade school degree. Five of the 12 participants also stated that a major reason for student dropout in at-risk Latino youth is a lack of confidence. Participant 2 stated, "some of my students could have struggled academically in elementary school and some teachers just continued to pass them on when they were not gaining the skills they needed to move to the next grade." Students that have struggled academically and have developed a sense that they are too far behind to catch in-class credits to graduate, lose motivation as see school graduation as an impossibility Lastly, 8 out of the 12 participants agreed that part of the reason our at-risk Latino students are dropping out of school is because of the discouragement they encounter due to a deficiency in resources, and cultural disconnection of the school curriculum. Participant 8 stated, "To keep my students engaged in my class, I bring topics of interest or relevant current events that will catch their attention." Participants concurred that instructional curriculum must be culturally relevant depicting the lives and experiences of the Latino community in the United States.

Research question 2, "What intervention programs or strategies are high schools currently using? Seven of the 12 Participants stated that incorporating curriculum that is current and relevant to students is imperative in the retention of at-risk Latino students. Participants agreed that when students are presented with classroom curriculum that they find is relevant to their lives and is of interest to them, they are encouraged to participate and attend class. Participant 12 stated, "bringing a curriculum that is relevant to my students becomes relatable which fosters engagement and positively influences class attendance." Seven of the 12 participants agreed that having in place counseling programs (therapist or school psychologist) or

self-esteem building programs will encourage students to stay in school. More counseling services have been offered to at-risk students who are experiencing emotional issues preventing them from graduating. To help students effectively manage difficult situations, the counseling sessions provide students with a variety of tools and strategies to help them make better choices through their struggles. Participant 2 stated, "at our school, we highly encourage at-risk students to participate in programs that offer mental health service or offer restorative justice groups they can join with the intent of encouraging students to get the help they need." Nine of the 12 participants concurred that providing students with credit recovery, tutoring, and academic intervention programs is an effective strategy for retaining students through graduation. All participants concurred that schools must provide at-risk students with the intervention programs necessary to help them make up classes they are failing, provide them with time extensions to make up work, and assist them with content comprehension. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 agreed, "schools need to provide struggling students with intervention programs that will help them better understand the content, redo work in failing classes or help them catch up with missing work." Another strategy teachers are using to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school is referring students to their school guidance counselor or PSA counselor. All participants reported the asset the PSA or guidance counselors were for at-risk students because of the direct communication they have had with students and parents. Participant 11 said, "I would say that our biggest prevention program is connecting our students to our guidance counselor and PSA counselor because having that constant communication and having people that really care about the kid, goes a long way." They were essential in creating a plan and path to assure students met all course requirements to graduate. Eight of the 12 participants encouraged students to participate in extracurricular programs to help them stay in

school. When students join a school club, sports team, or art class, it facilitates students in developing closer relationships to peers and staff, encouraging them to stay in school. Participants 10 and 12 stated, "when students are a part of organized sports, they intrinsically have a community of teammates and coaches who serve as support systems for achieving passing grades and remaining in school."

Research question 3, "What is the impact of the student-teacher relationship on decreasing the high school dropout rate of at-risk Latino students?" All 12 participants revealed that the importance of building trusted relationships with teachers, support staff, and peers ranked as being the most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. Participant 3 stated, "My role is trying to make connections with my students and hope that those connections will keep them in school." Five of the 12 participants agreed that dedicating one-on-one time with their students was a strategy for preventing at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school. Participant 6 mentioned, "I am the kind of teacher that will sit with a kid under the rain or drive to his/her house to help them do well in school and see them graduate." Four of the 12 participants also proposed that being open with their students and sharing their personal struggles with them encouraged student retention. All 12 participants agreed that expressing to students how important they are to you and how much you appreciate them is a strategy used to prevent their at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school. Participant 2 stated, "if we show our students that we really care about them, they might reciprocate that behavior and stay in school. "If you're the type of teacher who asks students how they are doing and how is everything at home?" it will show students that you are invested in them and their personal success." Five out of the 12 participants also stated that making themselves available before and after school hours to discuss any difficult situation they

might be experiencing outside of school, was a strategy they used to prevent student dropout. Participant 6 stated, “spending additional time every day getting to know my students, their family background, their boyfriends, or girlfriends shows them how much I care for them.” Moreover, 3 of the 12 participants agreed that conducting daily emotional check-ins and leading social emotional group sessions was a strategy used to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school. Participant 2 stated, “I like having daily check-in with my students since it is a strategy that is important for at-risk students.” Teachers explained how the social-emotional group session allowed students to learn from their peers’ skills for managing the difficulty. Another strategy mentioned by seven of the 12 participants was the importance of establishing a mentor-mentee relationship with their students; this strategy encouraged students to remain in school. Participant 5 said, “It is important to let my students know that I am here for them and they can count on me.” For many of the students, teachers had become their only role model and seek their guidance or advice. To prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school, 5 of the 12 participants agreed they had become their students' biggest supporters. Participant 2 stated, “As teachers, we must understand that some of our students have a lot going on in their lives and we are not there to make their lives more difficult, on the contrary, we are to be their biggest supporters.” Teachers constantly reminded their students that were bright and had the ability to achieve the goal they set for themselves. Lastly, a strategy that 9 of the 12 participants mentioned that they have used to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school is by facilitating positive peer relationships in the classroom. Participant 10 expressed, “the more minds that come together, the better they will think. It's not just putting them in groups or it's not just allowing them to work with their peers, but about the importance of being able to establish relationships.” Participants also discussed how creating group projects

allowed students to form trusting relationships with their peers, connected them to the school and encouraged them to achieve daily attendance. Lastly, encouraging students to participate in apprenticeship or mentoring programs, was a strategy 4 of the12 participants used. Participants concurred that when students can participate in programs where they get to learn skills that they will use in their future career creates excitement and motivation to want students to obtain a high school diploma. Participant 5 mentioned, "this program allows the students to work while learning and as an apprenticeship program. The pathway program aids in high school retention for at-risk students because they are provided the opportunity to build their resume while, at the same time, they can apply what they learned in class into the field of their choice."

Summary

This chapter provided a description that identified and reported the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. The results were presented as they communicated to the research questions asking their opinions on the strategies required to retain at-risk Latino students in school. Based on the analysis of the data collected through video conferencing interviews and two classroom observations, the researcher described the experiences of teachers working with at-risk Latino students. Five overarching themes were generated through this research: building trusted relationships, prevention programs, school climate, students' intrinsic factors, and family support. Researchers suggest that teachers play a vital role in students' attitudes regarding previously failed subject matters (Keyes, 2017). The participants expressed the importance of building trusted relationships with teachers, support staff, and peers. The importance of building trusted relationships in school ranked as being the most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. Secondly, research

conducted by Marsh et al., (2016) recognized that many students fail to graduate with a high school diploma because they experience academic difficulties dating back as far as the third grade. Participants also expressed that a second strategy used by teachers to prevent at-risk Latino students from dropping out of school was providing students with an engaging and relevant curriculum. Thirdly, when educators become familiar with the Latino students' native culture, they are then able to use the students' cultural information and experiences to develop the social skills needed for promoting academic engagement and peer interaction (Lo, Correa, & Anderson, 2015). All 12 participating teachers concurred that creating an academic environment that supports the students and their parents is a catalyst for promoting a positive school climate. Fourthly, collective research showed behavioral patterns that proposed that students who were bored at school, participated in passive learning activities, and lacked classroom resources identified with feelings of disinterest and academic disengagement (Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison, 2006). Most participants also agreed that one of the major reasons for student dropout in at-risk Latino youth is the unimportance of the topic of education at their home. Lastly, participants also agreed that one of the major reasons for student dropout in at-risk Latino youth is because they were coming from broken homes where parents do not provide them the parental support they need, and they deal with many unresolved issues.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify and report the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. The themes that emerged from the data were: (a) trusted relationships, (b) prevention programs, (c) student intrinsic factors, (d) family support, and (e) school climate. This study explored insight to school administrators and teachers on the factors that cause Latino students to drop out of high school and highlight successful strategies and interventions used to retain at-risk students in school. This chapter will present the summary of findings, discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research are discussed in the following sections.

Summary of Findings

Through the course of this case study's data analysis, five themes arose. The five overarching themes generated through this research were building trusted relationships, prevention programs, school climate, students' intrinsic factors, and family support. Each of the theme generated by this study related back to the research questions. The following is a summary of the overall findings of this case study.

Research question 1, "Why are Latino students dropping out of high school at a rate higher than their Asian, black, and white peers?"

This study revealed that there were family and home factors that contributed to the high Latino dropout rate. These factors included family members who were not supportive, parents who were not role models for education, and financial stresses. Additional factors included students who did not belong to a family or social community that do not motivate them to the

attainment of a high school diploma, were more likely to drop out of school. When students are not taught at home the importance of obtaining a high school diploma and the benefits that the diploma will bring, they will remain unmotivated to attend school. Participants described that many parents of at-risk students have an elementary education, therefore many of the students do not have role models in higher education. Due to the lack of educational role models, some of the students are in survivor mode and become conformed with making good money like their parents or older siblings versus earning a high school diploma. The study also revealed that lack of student goals contributed to high dropout rates. Participants stated that many of their Latino youth did not know how to set goals and will find no purpose in continuing their education. When Latino students are taught how to set goals and work hard to achieve them, they will in return, understand the value and benefit a high school diploma brings. Lack of confidence was a factor contributing to school abandonment. Students who report low self-confidence and a lack of self-efficacy are unable to fully access instruction provided by English-speaking instructors (Lopez, 2016). Participants described that many of their students were so far behind academically, that they saw it impossible for them to graduate. Because many students are academically struggling and are missing many of the basic academic skills, students have become discouraged and unmotivated to come to school. Lastly, the lack of resources and disconnection to the curriculum was contributing to Latino students dropping out of high school. A major challenge that most immigrant children face is that many of the schools they attend lack educational resources (Ansari et al., 2017; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). Participants reported that many of their students were of low-income families, decreasing their ability to provide academic tools such as computers, tutoring, and supplemental resources made it difficult for them to graduate. A challenge that most immigrant children face is that many of

the schools they attend lack educational resources (Ansari et al., 2017; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010). Participating teachers also expressed the gratitude they felt when their school district was able to provide each student with a computer making remote learning accessible. Allowing each student to have a computer will enable remote learning and help students prepare to use technology for college. When students lack the ability to connect their educational learning to life experiences beyond school, they become disengaged and will often refrain from attending school (Kent et al., 2017). When Latino students do not relate to the classroom curriculum taught in the classroom, they are more likely to lose interest and not want to attend school. Therefore, teachers suggested that moving away from scripted text and using supplemental material that is more culturally appropriate for Latino students will make instructions more engaging and exciting.

Research question 2, "What intervention programs or strategies are high schools currently using?

The strategies and intervention programs that teachers were currently using with their at-risk Latino students were consistent with what other researchers have found to be strategies and interventions to maintain students in school. Students who are not (a) engaged in classroom activities, (b) supported in instructional content, and (c) lack academic progress, are at risk for dropping out of high school (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). The results of this research study indicated that when teachers used intervention strategies such as: providing students with a curriculum that connected with their students, developed meaningful relationships with peers and teachers, and were provided with school intervention programs to help them recover lost classroom credit, these strategies encouraged students to stay in school.

Creating a positive class environment conducive to learning and forming meaningful relationships in the class, were strategies most participants stated encouraged students to stay in school. Keyes (2017) stated that when teachers allow students to form meaningful relationships in the classroom and create a learning environment where students feel validated and supported, it increases student engagement. Based on these research findings, the importance of creating a positive school climate was a theme generated. All 12 participants discussed that creating a nurturing and supportive school environment contributed to the retention of at-risk students. All participants suggested that when a student was failing school, resources were immediately provided to help the student achieve academic success. Participants discussed the importance of resources such as guidance counselors to help retain students. These counselors met with students and their parents to discuss the different options available to catch up with their classes and graduate. Participants also stated that their district implemented student-parent conferences to create an environment that promotes communication in the family's native language. Allowing students to conduct their own student-parents conferences, made it possible for parent and child to discuss the importance of education. Having a schoolwide system where students with good grades and attendance were rewarded was an effective way to not only validate a student's success but also increased student engagement. All 12 participants stated that district-wide, all students who were able to maintain a 3.0 GPA and missed less than 3 days of school, had the opportunity to participate in awards assemblies and were chosen as Student of the Month. The Students of the Months' picture was placed outside the school digital board and school website. Students who have maintained good grades and attendance were also rewarded with special field trips, certificates of appreciation, store gift cards, personal computers, and even college scholarships. Creating an environment where students felt appreciated and that they

belonged was a strategy used by participating teachers to increase student motivation. Creating an environment where students feel supported by their teachers and are comfortable being a part of, encourages students to want to come to school.

Research question 3, "What is the impact of the student-teacher relationship on decreasing the high school dropout rate of at-risk Latino students?"

In this study all participants stated that building trusted relationships with teachers, ranked as being the most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. Researchers also suggested that teachers play a vital role in students' attitudes regarding previously failed subject matters (Keyes, 2017). All participants also stated that expressing to their students how important they are to them and how much they appreciate them was a strategy they used to maintain students in school. The need to develop social-emotional skills to encourage students to feel supported and engaged in the classroom to be successful in academics as well as developing strong social-emotional skills (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Half of the participant of this study also agreed that making themselves available to students before and after school to address any difficult situation students were experiencing was a strategy used to prevent student dropout. Along with helping their students deal with difficult situations, half of the participants also expressed using daily check-ins with their students and forming social emotional groups in their classrooms as a strategy preventing at-risk Latino students from dropping out of high school. Another strategy for retaining at-risk Latino students in school used by more than half of the participants was developing a mentor-mentee relationship with their students. For many of the students, their teachers had become their only role model to go to for guidance and support. Participants expressed they had become their students' greatest academic supporters and were constantly reminding them of how bright they were and how

much potential they had to achieve any goals they set for themselves. Lastly, half of the participants stated that encouraging students to take part in an apprenticeship or mentoring program, was a strategy they used to encourage at-risk Latino students to stay in school. These apprenticeship and mentoring were very important because they helped students learn skills they might use in a future careers which motivates and created excitement to want students to obtain a high school diploma.

Discussion

Empirical Literature

Mason (2019) identified the teacher's ability to foster a strong relationship with their students as a primary source for student engagement. Most participants stated they have made it a goal to create a classroom environment where all cultures and diversity is admired (Moreno & Bullock, 2015). Most participants stated that when students do not feel connected to their teachers and peers it is very likely that they will not attend school therefore, it is imperative for teachers to show love and care for their students to facilitate academic success (Garza & Huerta, 2015). Participant in this study stated that creating a classroom environment that is understanding and accommodating is a strategy used to keep students in school (Keyes, 2019). It is extremely important for a teacher to understand their students' struggles knowing where they come from because you are able to provide them with the support and encouragement they need. Participants also stated that expressing their love and care for their students, helped them form meaningful relationships instead of mistreating them and getting on their case because these negative attitudes will shut students down and discourage them from coming to school (Merlin-Knoblich, Harris, and McCarty Mason, 2019).

Forming meaningful relationships in the class with peers is a strategy all participants stated was key to the retention of Latino at-risk students which corroborated with past and current research (Ragelienė, 2016). Half of the participants reported the importance of forming social-emotional circles was a strategy they used to motivate students to come to school. These circles were very helpful in helping students learn how to deal with difficult situations. Since most of the students have experienced compound traumas, meeting with their classroom peers to discuss experiences allowed them to learn how to remain calm when they dealt with issues beyond their control (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Creating restorative justice circles were very helpful in creating meaningful relationships with their classroom peers. A teacher described how many of their students were able to meet daily with their groups and discuss with their groups any issue that could be bothering them. The benefit of the groups is seeing how students begin to open their hearts to their peers and learn to rely on them for support, encouraging them to build strong relationships and encouraging them to come to school to meet with their friends (Dussault, 2018; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

The development of teacher social-emotional skills is important to encourage students to feel supported and engaged in the classroom to be successful in academics as well as developing strong social-emotional skills (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). In being part of a group, students are able to learn coping skills from one another and learn how to make the correct choices to better their lives. A second method teachers used to help foster meaningful relationships with their peers is creating classroom assignments where they were able to work together as a group. According to several of the teachers putting students in a group or allowing them to work with their peers, was vital in establishing relationships in the classroom (Dussault, 2018). When students build personal relationships with their peers and establish connections, teachers are

hopeful that they meet the right people to encourage them to stay in school. Another benefit of assigning group work assignments is that it allows students to be held accountable for completed work since the group project members will receive the same overall grade (Ogunyemi, 2017). Most teachers discussed how group assignments are important because it creates a team-like environment by forming strong peer bonds, connecting students to school, and motivating them to attend school daily (Kent et al., 2017).

Teachers working with at-risk Latino students described that supporting student in instructional content is another strategy that the past and current research confirmed. Students who lack the ability to connect their educational learning to life experiences beyond school and become disengaged and will often refrain from attending school (Kent et al., 2017). All teachers agreed that incorporating Spanish in the classroom instruction makes students feel like they can better relate to them. Most teachers stated that in most of their schools, Latino culture was represented by the music they played on the school intercom and posters placed around the hallways. Most teachers also stated that the importance of incorporating cultural representation in a school will establish a culture and climate that is more accommodating to our students of color (Peguero & Bondy, 2015). Recent qualitative studies have shown that culturally responsive teaching for ELL has many benefits, one being, increased student achievement across classroom subjects (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). One of the participating teachers, who teaches English Language students mentioned that she started a Spanish club to encourage her newcomer students to participate in school. The program was specifically geared for at-risk new coming students, to provide them the support her students needed (Marsh et al., 2016). The Language Acquisition Program provided conferences for kids that are newcomers and provided a conference every year in their native language allowing them to meet with other international

students throughout the district. She stated that her newcomer students, by joining her Spanish club, began to make connections with the school and peers, increasing their desire to attend class daily (Dee & Penner, 2017; Sharif Matthews & López, 2019) .

Theoretical Literature

This study was guided by the theoretical framework of cultural ecological theory of John Ogbu (2003), which focuses on minorities and their response to education. Ogbu (1978) describes cultural ecology as the study of the reciprocal connections between the dominant and minority cultures. The theory of cultural ecology describes two sets of factors that affect the academic achievement of minority students in school: how society treats minorities as a whole and how schools treat minorities at school (educational system) (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The theory analyzes how minority groups respond to interactions with others and school culture (community forces) (Ogbu, 1985). The theory also focuses on the different school performances of immigrant and nonimmigrant minorities based on the differences of their community forces (Ogbu, 1999).

The findings of this study support Ogbu's (1978) cultural ecology theory in several ways. First, when students feel connected to their teachers and peers it is very likely that they will continue in school. Therefore, it is important for teachers to develop appropriate student-teacher relationship and show love and care for their students to facilitate academic success (Gonzales, Brammer, & Sawilowsky, 2015). Secondly, the importance of prevention programs in schools ranked as being the second most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. Seven of the 12 teachers interviewed spoke of how schools that have prevention programs for students, falling behind academically, was a major factor that contributed to the retention of at-risk Latino high school students. One goal of cultural

ecological theory was to analyze the community forces and schooling for voluntary and involuntary minorities, especially when discussing the behaviors and attitudes they developed toward school (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The results of this research study collaborated with Ogbu' theory which states that when teachers used intervention strategies such as providing students with a curriculum that connected with their students, developed meaningful relationships with peers and teachers, and were provided with school intervention programs to help them recover lost classroom credit, these strategies encouraged students to stay in school. The importance of creating a positive school climate also contributed to the retention of at-risk Latino high school students. The importance of creating a positive nurturing environment where all students feel they are welcomed and that they belong is a strategy 8 of the 12 participants agreed to use in keeping students in school. In contrast, contributing to Latino students' dropout was the lack of motivation and familial support contributed to the dropout of at-risk Latino high school students. Half of the participants agreed that when students who are not taught at home how important obtaining a high school diploma is, will not have the desire to attend school and graduate. Lastly, half of the participants also agreed that the reason at-risk Latino students are dropping out is that they have not made any goals or have not found a purpose for continuing their education.

Implications

Empirical

When conducting this research study, the first theme that extended on previous research, was lack of motivation was the top reason why at-risk Latino students are dropping out of high school (Makarova and Birman, 2015). Lack of student motivation was the first contributing factor that led to at-risk Latino student dropouts. Research conducted by Marsh et al., (2016)

recognizes that many students fail to graduate with a high school diploma because they experience academic difficulties dating back as far as the third grade. Under this same theme, students were dropping out of high school because they lacked self-confidence. Half of the teachers that participated in the study stated many of their students could have struggled academically in elementary and some teachers passed them to the next grades although they were not gaining the skills needed to pass to the next grade (Marsh et al., 2016). Many of the students have experienced a great deal of discouragement because they feel they cannot keep up with the academic demands, therefore graduation seems almost impossible. Based on participating teachers, half of them agreed that students are unmotivated to graduate from high school because they have not set any goals to achieve. Unfortunately, many at-risk students cannot picture themselves doing anything that requires an education and they do not see the point of planning for their future (Makarova and Birman, 2015). Unfortunately, many of these students think that dropping out of school is a part of normal life and graduating from high school is not a priority. If teachers and parents work in collaboration, to emphasize the number of opportunities a high school degree can provide, then our students will learn to plan for a better future (Ní Uigín, Higgins, & McHale, 2015).

When conducting this research study, the second theme that extended on previous research, was how lack of parental support was the second-highest reason why at-risk Latino students are dropping out of high school (Makarova and Birman, 2015). Data derived also from the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, (2020) indicates that in the school year of 2015-16, chronic absenteeism for California students of Hispanic descent was three times higher for Latino students than that of their Caucasian peers. Based on the current research students are dropping out of high school because they need to contribute financially to the family

unit. During these difficult times, many students' parents lost their jobs therefore the biggest priority is for children to work and help provide for their family, then continue attending school. Unfortunately, when students work, their academic performance drops due to the lack of sleep and fewer hours dedicated to completing classwork. All participants also reported that with the current pandemic, parents who are undocumented are unable to maintain employment, making the student, a naturalized citizen, the one to seek employment (Krane, Karlsson, Ness, & Kim, 2016). Latino youth are also dropping out because many are coming to school with unresolved issues. Many of the students are coming from broken families, where parents work so much that students are left at home by themselves for extended amounts of time, making them feel lonely. Lastly, the lack of parental involvement was a contributing factor for at-risk Latino dropout. Half of the teachers interviewed stated that although schools have scheduled parent conferences and workshops at different times to accommodate working parents, many parents do not attend due to a lot of time constraints (Krane & Klevan, 2019).

Theoretical

This study was guided by the theoretical framework of cultural ecological theory of John Ogbu (2003), which focuses on minorities and their response to education. The cultural ecological theory is used to address the performance of Latino students in school. Previously, researchers have focused primarily on the cultural ecological theory, critical race theory (CRT), and the Latino critical race theory (LCRT). The critical race theory is used to address the way in which systems of power negatively influence and oppress minorities. However, Latino critical theory (LCRT) is used to specifically address the inequalities experienced by the Latino population (Solorzano & Delgado, 2001).

Practical Significance

The results of this research study corroborated previous findings that the teacher-student relationship was the most important factor in retaining at-risk Latino students in school. All the participants of this study revealed that building a trusted relationship with teachers and supported staff ranked as being the most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. A teacher could have the ability to build a strong relationship with her students creates an environment where students feel a sense of belonging and this, in turn, boosts motivation (Krane, 2017). Spending individualized one-on-one time with students was a strategy for preventing students' dropout, based on perceptions of half of the participating teachers. Teachers expressed the importance of taking time every day to connect with their students one-on-one before and after school hours. These teachers expressed that allowing themselves that one-on-one time with their students helped them build stronger relationships with them. In turn, the teachers that reported spending extra time to meet with their students, saw an improvement in participation, attendance, and academic improvement. Students identified the key factors that create an engaging classroom environment is (a) building strong trusted relationships with teachers and peers, (b) setting clear rules and expectations, (c) organized instruction, (d) and individualized intervention support (Keyes, 2017). Teachers also reported that spending that additional time knowing their students' family background, culture, and boyfriend and girlfriend, showed students how much they care. All 12 teachers expressed how important it is for them to make connections with their students to encourage them to stay in school. If students do not feel their teacher likes him or they, then they will not want to come to school. Most teachers also expressed that when you allocate additional time to meet with them, they will see their teacher in a different perspective, they are sending them the message that you

are there for them every step of the way. Being open with your students and discussing with them your personal struggles is a strategy used to prevent student dropout. Based on self-determination theory, human individuals have needs, one of which is the desire to experience relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers expressed the importance of building a meaningful trusted relationship with their students by sharing with them some of the same struggles they faced when they were their age. Teachers mentioned that on many occasions several of their students notified them that if it were not for the relationship they had with them, they would have dropped out of high school long ago. Showing students how much, they are appreciated is a strategy all teachers agreed they used to encourage students to stay in school. One teacher mentioned how important it was for them to express to their students how significant their success in school was for them. Expressing that kind of sentiment to their students showed them how much they cared for them and believed in their capabilities to succeed in school. One of the teachers expressed that every day she makes it a goal to greet every one of his students by name as they come into the classroom, which has allowed him to see a better connection between him and the student as well as greater consistency in attendance. For students who preferred personalized sessions, several teachers stated that an intervention used to motivate students to attend class was making themselves available for students to discuss any difficult situation. Teachers expressed how allocating that special time to listen to their students' struggles discuss any area of concern with them, showing the student how much you really love and care about them. One of the teachers shared how one of her students that was not chronically absent, began to attend class daily when teachers rallied around him to provide him with the basic resources, he needed to attend class. The personal connection and trusted relationship that was built between that student and teacher showed a genuine concern for the

student's wellbeing. The need of having daily emotional check-ins and forming social- emotional circles was a strategy teacher used to encourage student attendance. Recent research connects students' mental well-being, high school dropout, and TSR (Teacher-student relationships). TSRs work both as a safeguard and risk factor when dealing with student mental health and risk of dropout (Krane, Karlsson, Ness, & Kim, 2016). Due to the pandemic, students reported experiencing events beyond their control such as a parent losing their job and experiencing the lack of essentials. Experiencing such events causes emotional and physical distress causing students to not engage in school. Due to these negative student experiences, teachers are asking them daily how they are feeling and if they need to talk to them about anything, they can privately add them to the Zoom chat, or if they feel comfortable, they may share information in a group class discussion. Another strategy participating teachers used in the dropout prevention of at-risk students is working with their students in a mentor-mentee type of relationship. Most participants stated that this type of relationship provided students with a role model to look up to for guidance and support. Students lacked role models at home and teachers were the only adults in their lives to fit the role of a mentor and friend. Participants concurred that teachers were trusted adults in their lives and that they felt safe turning to them for help.

Ultimately, teachers needed to find ways to motivate students to stay in school. Lastly, becoming their students' biggest support is a strategy teachers used to motivate students to stay in school. Most of the participants mentioned that letting their students know they are intelligent, talented, and have the capacity to reach anything they set their mind to, helped build a stronger relationship. For students that are on the verge of failing academically, collaborating with the guidance counselor allowed them to create an intervention plan to help students stay on track and graduate. Since a school setting is to be an important place for students and their

learning, establishing positive connections and experiences at school is vital to promoting academic achievement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Niehaus, Irvin, & Rogelberg, 2016).

This research study revealed implications for at-risk Latino students and the strategies and interventions they need to stay in school. Intrinsically, at-risk Latino students need to understand that difficult situations will occur in their lives and that having strategies for managing the situations will guide them through. Although they might not belong to a familial and social community that encourages the attainment of a high school education, they are very fortunate to have their teachers, community leaders, and support staff to seek guidance and support from. Research indicated the teacher-student relationship (TSR) has been a key factor in helping students remain motivated to learn and reach academic success (Song, Kim, & Luo, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Students who are willing to reach out to their guidance counselor for assistance when on the verge, it is their responsibility to reach out to their guidance counselor and work alongside them to help them create a plan of action that they can follow to see that they graduate. Also, if someone in the family did not graduate from high school and decided to find employment, that is not a reason why they should follow the same lead. It is their responsibility to inspire their future generations the importance of earning a high school diploma and attending university or trade school. Doing so will allow you to experience the benefits of what earning a degree or certification will bring.

Students must also be able to set goals and work hard to achieve them. The teacher-student relationship (TSR) has been a key factor in helping students remain motivated to learn and reach academic success (Song, Kim, & Luo, 2016; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Meeting with their guidance counselor and expressing what they would like to do as a future career will allow him/her to guide you to the different mentorship and apprenticeship

opportunities to get you to be led on the right path. If students do not know how to set goals, seek help from your favorite teacher or support staff and ask them to help you set attainable goals with the intent of meeting them in a time frame. If for some reason you are not able to reach some goal, do not become discouraged, push forward, and do not give up.

When students lack self-confidence, they should talk to their teachers for support. Students identified the key factors that create an engaging classroom environment. The factors identified are (a) strong trusted relationships with teachers and peers, (b) setting clear rules and expectations, (c) organized instruction, (d) and individualized intervention support (Keyes, 2017). If for any reason a student is failing school, they are not to give up and need to connect with the people that will provide them with all the different options to complete school and graduate. If a student is struggling academically, they are to inform themselves as to all the intervention programs or tutoring sessions available to help you make- up missing work or better understand the content. Another option would be to talk to their teacher and ask them for an extended dateline to make up work instead of giving up and not attending school.

Implications for Families

Research states that family support is very important in encouraging students to be successful in school. The research results of Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006), Rands & Gansemer-Topf (2017), and Lancaster and Lundberg (2019) showed that students expressed a lack of adult encouragement, low motivation, scarcity of resources, and a shortage of student resources as the key factors that limited their ability to be academically invested. Latino families need to motivate their children the importance that earning a high school diploma is. If there is no one in the immediate family to guide their children into the steps needed to attend a university, find other family or community members that are knowledgeable about the process

and connect with the child. Parents should also be able to contact the school guidance counselor and have a meeting to explain what the steps are to attending college. Many participants in the study indicated that some students had to find employment to contribute to the daily house expenses. In case a student needs to contribute to the home financially, allowing a student to work part-time and not leaving school can be a better option. Parents need to make it a goal that obtaining a high school diploma is a higher priority than earning money. Teaching their children the importance of having an education will inspire them to set a goal and work hard to achieve it. Rewarding children and recognizing them for good grades and attendance is a message parents need to send to their children to encourage them to strive for bigger and better things. Participants also stated that many of their students are attending school with unresolved issues stemming from home. Parents need to be in constant communication with their children to find out if they are going through a difficult time. If they are struggling with any difficult situation, it is the responsibility of the family to discuss a plan to solve the problem. If the student is facing an emotional issue, then parents need to seek all the available resources provided by the school or community to help their child find the help they need. Lastly, for parents to encourage their children to graduate from high school, they need to be involved in their children's education. Most school districts use computer applications where the working parent can quickly check what grade their child has in their classes and what assignments they might be missing. It is the parent's responsibility to be in constant communication with the teacher and support staff to ensure that their children are making progress and will graduate from high school.

Implications for Administration, Teachers, and School Support Staff

To encourage at-risk Latino students to graduate from high school, the school administration team needs to provide teachers with yearly training on how to build meaningful and trusting relationships with their students. During professional development, the administrative team needs to bring to light what current research studies say on how important building a trusted relationship with their students is for at-risk Latino student dropouts. During teacher evaluations, one of the criteria a principal should evaluate a teacher in is to observe the rapport a teacher has with their students. If the teacher or support staff seem to lack in this area, the responsibility of the administrator is to provide the teacher with the additional support they need to build on that teacher lacking skill. If there is a staff member that has established an excellent rapport with their student, that teacher can serve as a mentor to those teachers that need to work on establishing better rapport with their students.

For teachers and support staff to better support their at-risk Latino to stay in school, teachers need to allocate additional time each time they get to know their students better. Teachers will need to set extra time before or after work hours to make themselves available to help their students deal with difficult situations or simply to learn more about their student's family background, culture, hobbies, and interests. Doing so will help build a stronger relationship and encourage the student to want to come to school. Teachers will also need to be open with their students and not be afraid to share their personal struggles with them. Allowing their students to know that just like them, they have had the same experience when young, and can help students develop a closer relationship with their teachers. All participants in this study stated that when they had established strong relationships with their students, not only did it increase academic success, but also attendance. Teachers also need to verbalize to their students

how much they love and care for them. They also need to show them that they are there for them no matter what is going on in their lives.

Implication for School Boards and Policymaker

Board members and policymakers should consider the need to educate school districts to keep Latino students in school and help alleviate this epidemic, the district needs to allocate additional money to equip our educators to help meet the academic, cultural, and emotional needs of our Latino students. Shareholders will benefit by understanding the repercussions of how performance and school adjustment affect Latino students. Also, educational policies need to be written and implemented so that Latino students will feel more supported and welcomed in American society and schools (Godreau et al., 2015). Society needs to be more cognizant of how the treatment of minorities in society and classrooms affects their academic success and teachers need to try to provide students with stronger teacher-student connections and relationship bonds (Sengul, Zhang, & Leroux, 2019).

Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students in public schools in Los Angeles, California. The study's participants were selected via purposeful sampling and the research study observed and analyzed the intervention strategies and programs proven to be most successful according to the perceptions of 12 teachers experienced with working with at-risk Latino students. This group was selected because of their experiences working with at-risk Latino students. Their experiences were utilized to examine the gap in the literature between identifying the best practices for high school retention and the implementation of best practices that result in the reduction of high school dropout rates for at-risk Latino students (Marrero, 2016). The field of education was selected because The National Center for

Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) confirms that Latino students have the highest dropout rates compared to Blacks, Whites, and Asian students.

With these delimitations stated, there were several limitations of the current study. One major limitation of the study was that due to COVID-19, I had to conduct all interviews and observations via video conferencing. I was also unable to conduct a classroom observation for Participant 8 due to her lack of completing the necessary paperwork required for the completion of the observation. Another limitation was that 83% of the participants were female. The percentage of male participants in this study was an under-representation of the population of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD, 2017).

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research based on the findings of this research study. The first recommendation is to expand the research to include more affluent school districts and compare dropout rates between affluent and impoverished school districts. Researchers have argued that the major cause of the high dropout rate among Latino students is the lack of academic equity in the school systems (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013; Leavitt & Hess, 2017). Conducting research to compare academic equity between affluent and impoverished school districts will address the disparities that exist between one district to another.

The second recommendation to expand this study is to include middle school teacher participants. Based on the information generated by the teacher interviews, half of the participants stated that some of their Latino at-risk students dropped out of high school because they began struggling academically in elementary and middle school. Participating teachers also expressed that although many teachers knew their students were struggling academically in

elementary school, many teachers continued to pass them to the next grade when they had not acquired the skills to move to the next grade. Based on previous research, Latino students have difficulty progressing through elementary and middle school due to low academic achievement (Moreno & Bullock, 2015).

The third recommendation for future research is to provide educational opportunities for Latino parents to learn of the resources available to their children. Research conducted by Rogers and Feller (2016) illustrates the need for communication between parents and schools as a means for reducing absenteeism and encourages the parties to shift their perspective away from the legal requirements for school attendance to the benefits of school attendance on student success. Half of the participants agreed that as an educational institution, teachers need to create some incentive or method to encourage parents to attend our workshops and encouraged them to be more actively engaged at our school. Half of the participants stated schools need to create parent workshops in their native language and guides parents through different educational platforms with the purpose of informing them of the programs their children are using during remote learning.

The last recommendation is to identify and report the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school drop out in other parts of the United States. The purpose is to measure if the strategies or intervention generate from this study of high school students in Los Angeles, might be different if the study was conducted in another city in the U.S. It would be interesting to know if the results of the study will generate different results if you interview teacher from Los Angeles versus teachers of Latino at-risk youth from Brooklyn, New York.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California. The themes that emerged from the data were: (a) trusted relationships, (b) prevention programs, (c) student intrinsic factors, (d) family support, and (e) school climate. This was achieved by asking teachers about the factors that cause Latino students to drop out of high school and highlight successful strategies and interventions used to retain at-risk students in school. One of the important conclusions from this study was how having a strong teacher-student relationship may prevent at-risk Latino high school dropouts is Teacher-Students Relationship (TSR). The results of this research reported that when a student develops a trusted relationship with their teachers, they will engage more in classroom instruction, improve behavior, increase student attendance, and help students achieve higher levels of academic success. The second conclusion is the importance prevention programs are in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. It is imperative that high schools serve at-risk Latino students have prevention programs available for students that might be falling behind academically. Also, schools need to provide struggling students with intervention programs that will help them better understand the content, redo falling classes or help them catch up with missing work. Findings from the analysis of interviews and observations of 12 high school teachers revealed five overarching themes. Participants of this study also revealed that the importance of building trusted relationships with teachers, support staff, and peers ranked as being the most important factor in preventing Latino at-risk students from dropping out of high school. These results add to the body of research in identifying and reporting the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino

students on preventing high school dropout in public schools. The finding indicated that the importance of building a trusting relationship with students was the main factor that contributed to the retention of at-risk Latino high school students. The research also found that when schools have prevention programs for students that are falling behind academically, this will contribute to the retention of at-risk Latino students. The research further proposed that creating an academic environment that supports the student and their parents is vital for promoting a positive school climate. In contrast, the research also concluded that students who belong to familial and social communities who do not encourage the attainment of a high school diploma are more likely to leave high school prior to graduation. Lastly, the research also stated that the lack of motivation and self-confidence contributed to the dropout of at-risk Latino high school students. Future research should focus on expanding the research to include more affluent school districts and compare dropout rates between affluent and impoverished school districts and expanding the study to include middle school teacher participants. The third recommendation for future research is to provide educational opportunities for Latino parents to learn of the resources available to their children. The last recommendation is to identify and report the experiences of 12 high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on prevention high school dropout in other parts of the United States.

In conclusion, Participant 6 said it best, "If I cannot reach the heart of the student, then I can't teach the student. Personal connection is the biggest contributing factor for retaining students in school. Students need to know that they are personally and individually important to their teachers. They also need to know that we will be there for them, and they can count on us for anything, based on those reasons, our students will most likely stay in school."

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 6, 2020

Isis Gonzalez
Phyllis Booth

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-114 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES OF FACTORS THAT CAUSE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES FOR LATINO STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

Dear Isis Gonzalez, Phyllis Booth:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: November 6, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB. These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL/ADMINISTRATOR SITE REQUEST FORM

Teachers Perspectives' of Factors that Cause High School Dropout Rates for Latino Students: A Case Study

Dear Principal

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research that will identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research. Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey. 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. The participants and all data collected will remain completely confidential.

Please contact me for any questions or concerns at [redacted]

Sincerely,

Isis Gonzalez

APPENDIX C: TEACHER PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Teacher Participant Consent Form

Dear Teacher:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research that will identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my study. Teachers of grades nine, ten, eleven, and twelve who are willing to participate, will be asked to participate in an interview via video conferencing, participate in a focus group via video conferencing, and allow me to observe them teaching for one to three non-consecutive class periods via video conferencing. The interviews and focus groups should take about 30-60 minutes each. The participants and all data collected will remain completely confidential.

If you would like to participate, please contact at [redacted] and I will send you an informational survey to complete to confirm that you are eligible to participate.

A consent document is attached to this email. If you are selected as a participant, you will need to sign the consent form and return it prior to or at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,
Isis Gonzalez

APPENDIX D: TEACHER CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Teachers Perspectives' of Factors that Cause High School Dropout Rates for Latino Students: A Case Study

Isis Gonzalez

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study examining the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California.

You are a possible participant because you are a high school teacher of at-risk Latino students. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Isis Gonzalez, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify and report the experiences of high school teachers working with at-risk Latino students on preventing high school dropout in public schools in Los Angeles, California.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1.) Participate in a 30 to 60-minute interview via video conferencing and a follow-up. One-on-one via video conferencing interviews will be audio recorded to ensure verbatim transcriptions. Follow-up video conferencing interviews may be necessary to establish credibility for the participant's narrative. Transcriptions will be made, and each participant will be allowed to read their responses and field notes for accuracy.
2.) Participate in a 30 to 60-minute focus group via video conferencing.
3.) Allow up to one to three 50-minute classroom observations via video conferencing.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The risks for this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.
There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation:
You will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records and recordings will be stored securely, and password-protected, and only the researchers will have access to the hard copies, which will be kept in a locked cabinet. All data collected is strictly confidential, and pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the 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.

How to Withdraw from the Study:
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address below. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you 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 Isis Gonzalez. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [redacted] You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, Dr. Phyllis Booth [redacted] 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, Green Hall 2845, 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 received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

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

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E: TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. What year did you obtain your teaching credential?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How many years have you been teaching at your current school district?
4. How many of those years taught, have you worked with Latino students?
5. How many years have you worked with at-risk Latino youth?
6. What type of instructional curriculum are you using to actively engage at-risk Latino students to stay in school?

APPENDIX F: TEACHER INTERVIEW

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions:

1. What is your perspective of the current prevention programs that encourage at risk Latino students to stay in school?

2. What is the role of the high school intervention teacher in keeping at risk Latino students from dropping out of school?

3. What do high school intervention teachers believe are the reasons Latino students are dropping out of high school at a high rate?

4. As an experienced high school intervention teacher working with Latino students, what do you believe are the contributing factors of success for the retention of Latino students in high school?

5. What do you perceive are the negative consequences of being a student who drops out of high school?

6. Would you please explain why you do, or do not, believe that the culture and climate of a school is an important factor for providing at-risk Latino students with the support required to remain

in school through graduation?

7. What strategies do high school intervention teachers use to encourage Latino students to stay

in school?

8. What intervention programs or strategies are high schools currently using to retain students through graduation?

9. What curricular intervention and prevention programs is your school district providing to help retain at risk Latino students in high school?

10. If a student drops out of high school, but decided to return, what support are they receiving to encourage them to stay in school?

11. How do the intervention programs include collaborative opportunities for teachers and parents of at-risk Latino students to work together to encourage their children to stay in school.

12. What school incentives are given to at-risk Latino students who have stayed in school and have maintained good grades?

13. Please describe how the training and professional development programs did or did not provide you with the skills required to work with at-risk Latino students?

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APPENDIX G: OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES

Contact teacher to coordinate observation time and setting.

Submit a request to the school principal for approval.

Confirm day, time, and setting with the intervention teacher and principal.

APPENDIX H: TEACHER CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Teacher-Student Rapport Checklist

	Yes	No	N/A
1. Good rapport with students			
2. Well prepared			
3. Respectful			
4. Self-confident			
5. Good listener			
6. Encourages class discussion			
7. Gives constructive feedback			
8. Good communicator			
9. Passionate about teaching and topics discussed			
10. Fosters critical thinking/thought-provoking			
11. Cheerful/funny/optimistic			
12. Compassionate/Understanding			
13. Well informed about subject matter			
14. Friendly/personable			
15. Flexible/open-minded			
16. Inventive and fascinating			
17. Motivates and cares for his/her students			

APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions

1. Please think about the high school dropout rates for at-risk Latino students. What comes to mind?
2. In your opinion, what is the greatest catalyst that causes at-risk Latino students to drop out of high school?
3. In your opinion, how significant is the dropout rate for Latino students?
4. In your experience, what strategies or interventions best support the academic success for at-risk Latino students? Why?
5. What is the importance of peer interaction in supporting academic success for at-risk Latino students?
6. What is the importance of student-teacher relationship in supporting the academic success of at-risk Latino students?
7. What is the importance of student engagement in the classroom when supporting the academic success of at-risk Latino students?

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