ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TRANSFER-LEVEL ENGLISH

by

John David Hart

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Floralba Arbelo Marrero, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Justin Necessary, Ph.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover what English language learners attribute their successful completion of transfer-level English at a California community college. Attribution is generally defined as the internal and external factors that English language learners identify as aiding in their successful completion of transfer-level English. The theory guiding this study was Tinto's theory of student integration and persistence, or theory of persistence, as it identifies student characteristics and support systems that theoretically lead to student persistence. It also incorporated elements of Weiner's attribution theory, as past experiences play a significant role in motivation, persistence, and success. Fourteen participants who all took ESL courses at the same community college in California and subsequently passed a transfer-level English course contributed to this study. Data was collected using a questionnaire, focus groups, face-to-face interviews, and document sharing, as they are essential parts of most qualitative studies. The data was analyzed using a framework analysis. After reading the transcripts of each interview and focus group line by line to create hierarchical frames to organize codes and establish relationships among codes, several themes evolved that included the significance of peer relations, institutional support systems (specifically the institution's Writing Center), and self-confidence in personal abilities.

Keywords: English-language learner, transfer-level English, attribution, persistence

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father who taught me to value education. To my children: Jared and Rianna, Jaden, Jacey, Jackson, and Joely. May you never cease to better yourselves through learning. To my wife, Janna, the love of my life, who supports me in everything I do. And finally, to God, who blesses me daily with the greatest joys and sustains me through my greatest trials.

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English Language Learner (ELL)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Transfer-Level English (TLE)

Community College (CC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the factors to which English Language Learners (ELLs) attribute successfully completing transfer-level English (TLE) with a passing grade (A, B, or C) at a community college in California. This community college was referred to in this study as CC. While there was a significant amount of research compiled about the challenges that English Language Learners face in community colleges and accessing transfer-level English, there was limited literature that identified what successful ELLs in community college TLE courses attributed their successful completion of the course (Garret, et al. 2017; Brunk-Chavez & Fredericksen 2008). This chapter will provide historical, social, and theoretical background information about the issue followed by a description of the situation and how it relates to me. The problem statement, purpose statement, and a description of the significance of the study will then be addressed. The chapter will conclude with the research questions, definitions, and a summary.

Background

Statistics reveal that almost half of all community college students quit before completing their second year (Garrett, et al., 2017). Research suggests that the ability to adjust to college during the first year is an indication of student retention, which is why many colleges and universities focus heavily on first-year success programs for new college students (Garrett, et al., 2017; Goodman and Pascarella, 2006; Porter and Swing, 2006; McCurrie, 2009). Embedded in the first-year experience for most college students is first-year composition (FYC). Community colleges generally call this course transfer-level English (TLE), as it transfers to four-year

institutions and fulfills the FYC requirement. Research performed by Garret et al. (2017) indicates that successful completion (a grade of C or better) of FYC or TLE is linked to higher retention rates. Unfortunately, most ELLs who begin community college in California do not complete TLE (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Nevertheless, research regarding ELL retention in relation to TLE is lacking. This study contributes to the literature concerning this issue.

Historical Context

Since the 1960s, local, state, and federal governments have been involved in enhancing adult literacy programs, including English language acquisition programs for non-English speaking immigrants (Brown & Bywater, 2010). The objective of many of these programs is not only to provide English skills, but also to prepare ELLs with language skills that are relevant and useful in professional work environments (National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2013). In the past 5 years, there has been increasing numbers of ELLs who enter college to both improve their English skills and earn a degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). In California, the number of ELLs attending college has increased by almost 20% (NCES, 2020). Many of these students, recognizing the need to improve their English language skills to gain better employment and earn more money for themselves and their families, begin their academic careers at a community college (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Case, 2015; Clark, 2008; Grubb & Gabriner, 2013; Rodriguez, et al., 2019).

In October of 2017, recognizing the need to increase retention among California college students, the California assembly passed Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705). This bill amended placement procedures that California colleges use by requiring that students who may have traditionally been placed into remedial math and English instead (with some exceptions) be placed directly into transfer-level math and English. The goal of AB 705 is to decrease the

attrition rate and increase the number of college students who complete transfer-level math and English within one year. AB 705, however, does recognize the distinct nature of ELLs and allows these students three years to complete TLE.

Despite this flexibility, the vast assortment of ELL programs throughout California's community colleges are not consistent in their designs. Some programs begin at eight levels below TLE and others only three levels below (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). Some programs lead directly into TLE, while others still require that ELLs take a remedial English class before entering TLE (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). In their research, Rodriguez et al. (2019) discovered that only 34 percent of TLEs in California's community colleges completed TLE within six years, and of that group, 56 percent started only one-level below TLE. While Rodriguez et al. (2019) do recognize that many ELLs are not degree seeking, but instead are seeking language improvement or certificates that indicate improvement, the number of ELLs successfully completing TLE is still very low.

Among the group of community college ELLs, there are many former high school ELLs. These are students who designated as ELL while in high school. While AB 705 has allowed American ELL high school students the opportunity to bypass college ESL courses and register directly for TLE, there are a number of previous ELL American high school students who continue to register for ELL courses. Nevertheless, many of these students also struggle to reach and succeed in TLE (Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). Therefore, as ELLs consist of both students who have attended American high schools as well as foreign secondary schools, a thorough understanding of what each group attributes to their success in TLE is useful.

Social Context

The initials ELL, while encompassing all English language learners, represents an

extremely diverse assortment of students with differing socio-economic and educational backgrounds. One group of students includes international students who attend American colleges to improve their English skills. This group is sometimes referred to as international students. They are allowed to study at American institutions on F1 visas. While embodying a large range of academic preparation (Zhang, 2018), this group often comes from strong educational backgrounds and economic support, with 62% of their funding coming from either their own families or their own governments (NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool, 2020).

ELLs are also immigrant students who have come to the U.S. to live and work. The educational background of this group ranges from very little education in their native language to earned professional degrees in fields such as medicine, engineering, and law (Zong & Batalova, 2016). There is also the group of children of immigrants, sometimes referred to as generation 1.5, but more recently referred to as language minority students (Crosson, et al., 2020). These students have spent a significant amount of time in American schools, usually public k-12 schools. However, their parents' native language continues to be the primary language spoken at home. ELLs represent nationalities from around the globe, including Asian, Latin American, and European countries.

Despite the differences in background, ELLs all share the unique distinction of speaking a first language that is not English (Case, 2015, p. 362). They also share the desire to learn English, often with the goal of increasing their earning power (Dimitrova, et al., 2014). Consequently, writing is a significant part of acquiring the language and increasing earning power. Writing contributes to the social and emotional development of individuals through metacognitive development (Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Gordon, 2020). Good writers can reflect

on their own thoughts and feelings and learn to organize them in a coherent manner. Additionally, good writers can evaluate opposing ideas, concede valuable points, and offer refuting arguments. These skills are highly valued in professional workplaces (Gordon, 2020).

It is these distinctions as well as the common cause of acquiring proficient English skills that unite ELLs.

At the same time, it is these distinctions that may lead to pedagogical and social isolation, or separation from native-English speaking courses and students. Placement procedures at institutions often place ELLs in English language programs that are separate from native English-speaking students. This can occur with varying placement procedures at different institutions. Here, the research is somewhat divided as to the efficacy of this isolation. While some researchers argue that interaction with native English speakers in traditional English courses is socially and pedagogically beneficial for ELLs (Callahan, 2005; Gitlin, et al., 2003; Case, 2015), others contend that English courses specific to the needs of ELLs are the most beneficial, at least in terms of TLE (Snyder, 2017). While CC has a program specific to the needs of ELLs, it is not clear if ELLs feel pedagogically and socially isolated within the program. It is also not clear how much these ELLs attribute their success to the program or to other factors, such as socializing with native English speakers in traditional courses.

Theoretical Context

California community colleges act as the gateway for many ELLs in California. These community colleges help prepare these students with enhanced English and other professional skills. They play an integral role in helping ELLs adjust to higher education (Karp, et al., 2010; Morest, 2013). Nevertheless, retention of ELLs through TLE is low (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). Therefore, insight into the factors that help ELLs persist through TLE and understanding what

ELLs attribute their success will benefit ELL programs and students.

There are no explicit and comprehensive theories about second language writing acquisition (Hyland, 2016). Researchers that study second language writing often use a variety of theories both within and outside the discipline of second language acquisition as foundations for their research (Hyland, 2016; Silva, 1993). Some have used *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2011) as either a standard to strictly follow or a set of guidelines that do not always apply to ELLs (Gross, & Alexander, 2016; Lee, 2018; Nazzal, et al., 2019). Other researchers use theories from linguistics like Halliday's (1994) theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), which describes language as a set of choices that users must make to create meaning in social context Those to functions combine to create meaning. Linguists and language acquisition researchers also use Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated cognition, which contends that setting and learning activities are intrinsically connected. In the context of language acquisition, this would mean that language is not acquired abstractly (for example, in a classroom setting), but rather in an environment of real-life situations. For second language acquisition, this is akin to Asher's (1996) total physical response (TPR) teaching method, in which context and physical activity are entwined, resulting in the acquisition of the target language. There are, according to Halliday (1994), two significant aspects of language that lead to structure and text. They are inner and outer reality, and interpersonal relationships. Those to functions combine to create meaning. Linguists and language acquisition researchers also use Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated cognition, which contends that setting and learning activities are intrinsically connected. In the context of language acquisition, this would mean that language is not acquired abstractly (for example, in a classroom setting), but rather in an environment of real-life situations. For second language

acquisition, this is akin to Asher's (1996) total physical response (TPR) teaching method, in which context and physical activity are entwined, resulting in the acquisition of the target language. Nevertheless, for this study, Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution, both from the social science disciplines and used by second language writing acquisition researchers (Finn, 2018; Mohammadi & Sharififar, 2016), were used for this study.

One of the main concepts that guided this study was Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure, commonly referred to as Tinto's theory of persistence (Metz, 2002; Stuart, et al., 2014). Tinto (1993) developed this theory in response to prior research done on attrition at institutions of higher education. Prior research pointed to individual abilities and motivation, or lack of abilities and motivation, as reasons for early departure from an institution of higher education. As a sociologist, Tinto (1993) examined the environment surrounding students as possible factors contributing to attrition. Tinto (1993) found that attrition is analogous to suicide, or at least Durkheim's (1951) theory of why people commit suicide. Tinto (1993) discovered that the same factors that motivate some people to commit suicide, namely lack of social and intellectual integration, also contribute to attrition at institutions of higher education.

In the initial study, Tinto (1993) acknowledged the lack of information about persistence and how it correlated with students from foreign countries, or ELLs. Deil-Amen (2011) argued that parts of Tinto's (1993) theory do not apply to ELLs at two-year colleges because of their non-traditional characteristics. However, Deil-Amen (2011) did suggest that the use of learning communities, which is a type of social integration, among ELLs increases persistence among these students. More recent research implies that ELL relationships with faculty, other students, and administration, also types of social integration, have a positive correlation with ELLs'

persistence (Huerta, et al., 2019). Therefore, Tinto's theory of persistence is a viable theoretical framework and concept to build this study and to identify which of these external factors (if any) successful ELLs attribute to their success.

Another key concept is Weiner's (1985) Attribution Theory as it applies to education and learning and academic success or failure. There are numerous constructs associated with this theory that aim to align outcomes with factors that are either internal or external, controlled or uncontrolled, global or specific, and stable or unstable. For instance, in terms of language acquisition, an adult learner with a high aptitude for learning a language (an internal factor) may attribute success to past experiences (a global attribution). In a new language environment, that learner will carry that experience with him or her (a stable attribution). The opposite could be true for a language learner who had a negative experience learning a language as a youth (an external factor). Perhaps this learner tried very hard to learn the language but never succeeded in doing very well (a specific attribution). That learner may carry that experience with him or her and apply it to the new situation, approaching the new task with a preconceived notion of failure based on previous experiences (unstable attribution).

Many ELLs come to an English class with preconceived notions that they will not do well, which, according to Weiner's (1985) attribution theory, may produce an ineluctable outcome. Therefore, it is beneficial for ELL programs and students to know what successful ELLs in TLE attribute their success, whether it is past experiences or institutional integration.

Situation to Self

I have taught in ESL programs full time in California for over 20 years. I have been at CC for 17 of those years. I have seen very successful ELLs in the ESL program choose not to go on to TLE and other ELLs go on to struggle in TLE. Nevertheless, there are ELLs who go on and

do very well in TLE. These students generally do not come back to tell their story of success, yet their stories would benefit other ELLs who may feel anxious about entering TLE. While none of the participants in this study were current students, all were previous students.

Three philosophical assumptions as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), including ontology, epistemology, and axiology, guided this study. Creswell and Poth (2018) define ontology as a reality which "is multiple as seen through many views" (p. 50). It reflects and describes the participants concept of existence (Ahmed, 2008; Crotty, 2003). Assuming the reality of external and internal attributions to student success in TLE, I prompted participants through a questionnaire (see Appendix F), focus groups (see Appendix G), and personal interviews (see Appendix H) to describe the reality of their experiences. The methodology of the case study allowed participants to express their "opinions, feelings, experiences and inner thoughts" (Ahmed, 2008, p. 2) about their time in TLE.

Creswell (1984) describes epistemology as an intentional effort by the researcher "to get as close as possible to the participants being studied" in an effort to gain "subjective evidence…based on individual views" (p. 51). It is also a way to explain the manner information was obtained and understood (Ahmed, 2008; Crotty, 2003). The epistemological assumption addressed ELLs distinct perspectives about factors and connections that influenced their ability to succeed in TLE including integration and attribution. Quotes from focus groups and interviews were used to express their reality and their perspectives (Creswell, 1994).

Creswell (1984) describes axiology as the values and biases of the researcher in connection to the context of the study. Others describe it as a type of ethics and what the researcher values (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2007; Biddle & Schafft, 2015). Hartman (1967) described the distinction between "general and specific values" (p. 38). For example, for

someone to value one color over another (a specific value), that person needs to be able to distinguish colors (a general value). The axiology this study adopted is the notion that education is valuable (a general value), as is the ability to write clearly (a specific value), especially for ELL community college students. It is also a valuable metacognitive exercise (a general value) for ELLs to identify the external and internal factors (specific values) leading to academic success.

Despite these axiological values, the paradigm for this study applied a postpositivist philosophy. That is, "virtually nothing is knowable a priori, and, in particular, no epistemological principle is knowable a priori" (Kitcher, 1992, p. 76). Although theoretical frameworks are valuable tools on which to build research and research questions, the truth lies within observation and experience, not a priori. This approach was applied to the participants in this study and what they attribute to success in TLE. There were no assumptions prior to systematic research about what those attributions are. Indeed, multiple levels of data-gathering and analysis were used to form conclusions. These data-gathering and analytical methods included interviewing participants (both individual and focus groups), analyzing teacher feedback on assignments (although there was little to no written feedback that participants provided), and identifying common themes among the collected data. These common themes formed the basis for constructing conclusions.

While a priori conclusions about what ELLs attribute to success in TLE are removed, this study utilized a priori theories as guides, namely Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) attribution theory. These theories are the basis for the assumption that there is a cause-effect relationship between participants' subjective attributions and success in TLE (Creswell, 1994, p. 54).

Problem Statement

In the K-12 public school system, California enrolls the greatest number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the country (California Department of Education, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Ariel & Ruiz Soto, 2016), yet the problem is that the throughput rate – the number of students who complete transfer-level English – for ELLs at the community college (CC) in this study is only 25% (Buitron, 2018). The high school graduation rate for ELLs in California is approximately 70% (California Department of Education, 2020). However, this number includes Ever-ELLs. These are K-12 students who have completed ELL programs and have been reclassified as meeting academic and proficiency standards (Weyer, 2018). Schools can include Ever-ELLs in their data for four years after students have left an ELL program. If these students are extracted from the data, the number of current ELLs who graduate from high school in California is much lower (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). However, many of those students who do complete high school go on to college, often starting at a community college. Nevertheless, only 33% of ELLs enrolled in California community college ESL programs have a high school diploma from the U.S. (Rodriguez, 2019). Approximately 41% of other California community college ELLs have a secondary diploma from another country (Rodriguez, et al. 2018). This leaves nearly 25% of community college ELLs without a diploma from a secondary educational institution. The problem is that the throughput rate (or completion of TLE) from ESL courses to transfer-level English (TLE) is very low at community colleges not only in California, but throughout the country (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

There is a significant amount of research about the obstacles and barriers that ELLs face in higher education. These include financial, academic, and social, barriers among others (Biddle & Schafft, 2015; Liton, 2016; Barhoum, 2018; Caster, 2018; Uman, 2018; Suh et al., 2020).

However, there is very little research about the qualities, characteristics, and support systems that ELLs attribute to their success in TLE. One community college in California's Central Valley (referred to in this study as CC) is among those community colleges with a substantial number of ELLs who generally begin in ESL courses, yet due to several issues including underdeveloped English skills and social and emotional barriers, do not complete TLE. Understanding how and why successful community college ELLs complete TLE can help students, teachers, and administrators at CC and other community colleges better prepare future ELLs. This study focused on the problem of attrition of ELLs in TLE from the standpoint of ELLs who have successfully completed TLE. Knowing what they attribute to their success can lower the attrition rate of other ELLs in TLE. Teachers and administrators can help other ELLs adopt the characteristics and support systems that successful ELLs have attributed to their success.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to understand what English language learners (ELLs) attribute their successful completion of transfer-level English (TLE) at a California community college (CC). Attribution is generally defined as the internal and external factors that ELLs identify as aiding in their successful completion of TLE. The theory guiding this study was Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Integration and Persistence, or theory of persistence, as it identifies student characteristics and support systems that theoretically lead to student persistence. It also incorporated elements of Weiner's (1985) attribution theory, as past experiences play a significant role in motivation, persistence, and success.

Significance of the Study

Researching second language writing acquisition can benefit not only ELLs, faculty, and administrators who work at CC, but also any program that supports ELL writing development.

Programs that support ELLs can benefit from understanding what internal and external factors ELLs attribute to their success. Instructors and administrators can promote and support those factors at their institutions. This study explored areas of second language writing acquisition that are seldom studied: success of ELLs in TLE. Therefore, this study has considerable theoretical, empirical, and practical significance.

Theoretical Significance of the Study

The significance of this study contributes to Tinto's (1993) and Weiner's (1985) theoretical frameworks. It contributes by (1) identifying the institutional and personal support systems that aid successful ELLs to persist in TLE, and (2) identifying the factors that ELLs attribute to their success in TLE. Researchers such as Finn (2018), Lee (2018) and others have adeptly identified multiple barriers and challenges for ELLs in education, including community college writing courses. However, this study highlighted and identified what ELLs attribute to their success in TLE. This is a gap in the literature that is partially filled with this study.

Empirical Significance of the Study

While there are many studies that focus on the challenges that ELLs face in writing courses, there is a lack of research that focuses on ELLs in community college who have succeeded in TLE. For instance, Finn (2018) examines ELLs at a large community college in New York City and the way they communicate the challenges they face in an intensive writing course. This case study focused on four ELLs who were repeating an intensive writing course. Finn (2018) was able to help these students identify their own strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing and found that each had distinct internal struggles. Both internal and external factors contributed to the challenges facing these students in the writing course. While it is valuable to understand what students may be grappling with in writing courses, Finn's (2018)

study does not describe the internal and external factors that ELLs attribute to their success in writing.

In a similar study, Lee (2018) focused on Chinese international students at a four-year public institution and researched why these students were failing their writing courses. In a narrative analysis, Lee (2018) interviewed 10 Chinese international students, 2 writing instructors, and 1 writing consultant from the writing center. The students spanned the writing levels offered at the university: 3 low, 4 intermediates, and 3 high-intermediates. Lee (2018) used the "habits of mind" found in *Framework for Success* in postsecondary writing as the foundation for the analysis. These "habits of mind" stress individual responsibility of the student to develop as a writer. Lee (2018) addressed these habits and added responsibilities that the system must help students improve their writing. For example, the first habit, failure to be responsible, Lee (2018) found that 2 of the participants blamed their instructors for not passing the class because the instructors 1) gave one a 0 on an in-class timed writing assignment and 2) did not help students keep track of due dates. While Lee (2018) acknowledges that students do need to be responsible for their failures, Lee (2018) also suggested that the system could do more to help these students, namely by having a clear and concise rubric for the timed in-class writing assignments. While Lee's (2018) study does help identify internal "habits" and external factors that help ELLs succeed in TLE, it does not identify "habits" or external factors that ELLs attribute to their success.

Practical Significance of the Study

Understanding what ELLs attribute to their success in TLE can help CC improve its writing program. In 2018, CC's Office of Institutional Effectiveness reported that 66% of ELLs did not attempt TLE, and 8.7% of those that did attempt TLE were unable to pass the course,

even after attempting the course multiple times (Buitron, 2018). Therefore, the throughput rate for ELLs at CC is only 25%. Nevertheless, the success rate of those who passed is 5% higher than non-ELLs enrolled in TLE at CC (Buitron, 2018). While there is numerous literature and research about the obstacles that ELLs face in writing courses, understanding what ELLs attribute to their success will be insightful and helpful.

Research Questions

The research questions aligned with Tinto's (1993) theory of integration and Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution. These two theories have distinct yet complementary contributions to pedagogical practices, student learning, and persistence. Tinto's (1985) theory of integration focused on the academic and social factors that aid in student persistence. Similarly, Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution focused on what students attribute to their success and failure in academic settings. These two theories complement each other and provided a strong framework for the research questions of this study.

Central Research Question

What do English language learners (ELLs) attribute their successful completion of transfer-level English (TLE)? Finn (2018) described the internal and external struggles that ELLs face in college-level writing courses. These factors may include issues with self-esteem or struggles with understanding assignments and instructors. Wilder (2017) suggested that increased awareness by faculty of ELL issues can contribute to ELL success in college and university writing courses. Weiner (1985) proposed that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between external and internal factors and what people attribute to their successes and/or failures.

Sub-Questions One

What are the academic skills acquired in community college English as a second language (ESL) courses that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most useful in college-level English? Lee (2018) acknowledged the value of ELLs taking responsibility for their own failures by not acquiring the academic skills necessary to succeed in writing. Lee (2018) called learning from these failures habits of mind, as outlined in the book *Framework for Success*. It is valuable to gain insight into whether successful ELLs attribute their success in TLE to academic skills acquired in ESL courses, in TLE courses, or both. This insight can provide increased awareness for both ELS and TLE instructors (Wilder, 2017).

Sub-Question Two

What are the institutional support systems that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in TLE? Finn (2018) and Lee (2018) identified a variety of barriers that ELLs face in college-level writing courses. The barriers they identified impeded ELL students from passing their writing courses. However, if there is transferability in their studies, then it is safe to say that other ELLs who have successfully completed college-level English have faced the same barriers but have found ways to overcome them. Many of these successful ELLs have used community college support systems to help them succeed. This aligns with Tinto's (1993) theory which suggests that academic and social integration promote student success. It is valuable to know if these ELLs attribute part of their success to integration into the academic communities.

Sub-Question Three

What are the social support systems that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in TLE? Again, this aligns with Tinto's (1993) theory that

academic and social integration promote student success. Academic integration would mean that students are integrated with the faculty and resources with the institution provides, while social integration would mean that students are integrated with peers and other faculty or staff on campus. It is valuable to know if these ELLs attribute part of their success to integration into social communities. Understanding these factors can help TLE instructors more effectively support ELLs (Wilder, 2017).

Definitions

1. *Academic Success* - This is the acquisition of academic skills and knowledge that allow a student to successfully complete college courses (York, et al., 2015, p. 5).
2. *English Language Learner (ELL)* - This is anyone whose first language is something other than English. In higher education, these are students who are acquiring mastery of language skills and knowledge of academic content (Babinski, et al., 2015, p. 118).
3. *Transfer-Level English (TLE)* - This is English composition taught at a community college that transfers to a four-year institution and fulfills the first-year or freshman writing requirement (Achterman, 2019).
4. *Attribution* - This is the act of identifying a cause-and-effect relationship among activities resulting in success or failure (Maymon, et al., 2018, p. 2).
5. *Internal Factors of Attribution* - These are cause and effect factors that are often identified as controllable or changeable (Walsh & Cunningham, 2017).
6. *External Factors of Attribution* - These are cause and effect factors that are often identified as incontrollable or stable (Walsh & Cunningham, 2017).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the problem that this study addresses. The problem is the low throughput rate at CC. Background information offered a historical, social, and theoretical context of the issue. A description of how I am connected to the study as well as a detailed description of the problem, purpose, and significance are included. The research questions and definitions are also given.

Gillon (2018) contended that developing writing competency is a challenging and artificial process. All students must develop writing skills and knowledge that allow them to succeed in academic and professional circumstances. Models of good writing are insufficient to build these skills (Gillon, 2018). Such is the case for ELLs in community colleges. They often begin in ESL programs that do their best to help them acquire the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful in TLE. Nevertheless, partly due to the unnatural nature of second language acquisition and academic writing, many ELLs fall by the wayside before attempting TLE. Unfortunately, for those ELLs who attempt TLE, too many do not meet the standards of successful completion.

Over half of ELLs quit before attempting TLE (Garrett, et al., 2017). Because many ELLs attend college to increase their earning power (Dimitrova, et al., 2014), understanding what ELLs attribute their success has significant theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Research questions founded on Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution guided the research and explained the internal and external motivations that inspired these participants to succeed in TLE. The stories of these successful ELLs and insight into what they attribute their success and persistence will potentially increase

the throughput rate of ELLs to TLE not only at CC, but in other community colleges that serve ELLs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

To obtain an understanding of English Language Learners (ELLs) and the characteristics associated with the successful completion of Transfer-Level English (TLE), a methodical review of the literature was conducted. A review of the current literature which relates to this topic will be presented in this chapter. The first section will introduce two theories relevant to student success. The first theory relates to internal and external features of motivation and how they affect student persistence. The second theory describes the role that attribution plays in student success. This will be followed by a synthesis of the literature regarding obstacles related to ELL student success, followed by a review of the literature regarding personal responsibility and autonomous learning. Finally, a gap in the literature will be identified, which will underscore the need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on an ontological assumption that addressed ELL students' distinct perspectives about factors that influenced their ability to succeed in Transfer-Level English, including integration and attribution. These two factors are expressly aligned with Tinto's (1993) "Model of Institutional Departure" – referred to in this study as Tinto's theory of persistence, as others have referred to it (Metz, 2002; Stuart, et al., 2014) – and Weiner's attribution theory (1985). These two theories have distinct yet complementary contributions to pedagogical practices and student learning. Both educator and student can benefit from understanding their constructs and implications.

Tinto's Theory of Persistence

Vincent Tinto (1993) is a well-known sociologist who has researched and written much about high attrition rates at institutions of higher education. Tinto's (1993) work is regularly cited and used as a theoretical framework for studies regarding student attrition. As a sociologist, Tinto (1993) examined the environment surrounding students as possible factors contributing to attrition. Tinto (1975) first broached the theory of persistence in a literature review in 1975. It was expanded in subsequent articles and detailed in 1993 in the book *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Tinto's (1993) theory is formally known as Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure. However, many refer to it as Tinto's theory of persistence.

Tinto (1993) developed the theory of persistence to explain how student interaction, both socially and academically, within an academic institution in which they are matriculated can affect attrition. At the time that Tinto's (1993) theory was developed, more than half of students dropped out of college before completing a four-year degree (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) acknowledges the fact that some students who drop out do so because they find other means to support themselves and their families that are more inline with their personal interests and abilities. Nevertheless, Tinto (1993) points to the discrepancy in earning power and lack of "access to prestigious positions in society" (pg. 2) for those who do not have a college degree. Ostensibly, a college degree benefits the individual as well as society.

Unlike some theories before Tinto that placed the onus of persistence on personal motivation (Heilbrun, 1965; Rose & Elton, 1966; Rosssmann & Kirk, 1970; Waterman and Waterman, 1972) or intellectual traits (Summerskill, 1962; Marks, 1967), Tinto (1993) argued that persistence has more to do with institutional environment. Tinto (1993) associates this

theory of institutional departure with Durkheim's (1951) work about understanding the underlying causes of suicide. Durkheim was a French sociologist, and probably a Socialist or even Communist, which explains Durkheim's (1951) notion that the state must intervene in cases of suicidal tendencies rather than the family or the church. Durkheim (1951) claimed there are four main reasons why people choose to commit suicide; however, it is egotistical suicide that contains characteristics similar to Tinto's Theory of Institutional Departure. Durkheim (1951) described those who commit egotistical suicide as individuals who were unable to integrate socially or intellectually into society. Failure to integrate socially means an individual is not able to take part in social interactions with others, while failure to integrate intellectually means an individual is unable to share the same values as the dominant social group. Durkheim (1951) argued that the traditional tools to help individuals integrate into society were the family and the church. Durkheim (1951) claimed that these tools no longer functioned in a way to effectively integrate individuals into society and should, therefore, be replaced by the state educational system. This is where Durkheim (1951) and Tinto (1993) part ways.

In Tinto's (1993) book *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*, there is a considerable amount of space devoted to Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide. Tinto's considers academic institutions a social or human community, which can affect people in the same ways as any other community outside an academic institution. The essence of Tinto's (1993) theory is that students who do not socially or intellectually integrate, or who have a difficult time integrating into an institution's environment, are more likely to depart, in essence, committing academic suicide. Ironically, although Tinto (1993) does not necessarily condone Durkheim's (1951) use of state education to mitigate suicide, Tinto (1993) does promote the role of the institution to mitigate attrition rates at institutions of higher education.

There are two main constructs associated with Tinto's (1993) Theory of Integration. First is social integration. This relates to students' ability to integrate socially with faculty, staff, and peers. It also includes the capacity for social interaction in extracurricular activities. The other construct is academic integration. This relates to students' ability to meet academic standards and use institutional support systems to meet these standards. The inability of students to integrate either socially or academically can lead to attrition.

Tinto's Theory of Persistence Applied to ELL Education

Tinto (1993) acknowledged the fact that the theory of persistence painted a broad stroke on student attrition and did not necessarily capture specific student populations. ELL students are a unique demographic of the college population. Therefore, Tinto's (1993) theory of integration may not capture the entire scope of the ELL student experiences. Tinto (1993) contends that the more integrated students are in campus activities, including extracurricular activities, the more likely they are to persist. However, many ELL students have external responsibilities like family and work outside of the institution, which may not allow them to integrate fully by participating in extracurricular activities. For instance, Prins & Schaft (2009) found that for many ELLs, their first responsibility is to the economic wellbeing of their family, those family members who live with them and those who may still be living in their home countries. This financial commitment makes work a high priority, which makes it difficult for some ELLs to fully integrate into an academic institution and become involved in those types of activities that Tinto (1993) identified as conducive to persistence. Tinto (1993) acknowledged this phenomenon, suggesting that "foreign students" (p. 75) may face the same challenges of integrating socially into an academic institution, and, therefore, have the same challenges to overcome as native English-speaking students. Nevertheless, while Tinto (1993) recognized the distinctive nature of foreign-born

students, due to “the paucity of reliable information on their movements within higher education” (p. 10), they are not included in Tinto’s (1993) study.

Consequently, Deil-Amen (2011) contended that parts of Tinto’s theory do not apply to language minority students at two-year colleges because of their non-traditional characteristics. However, the same research suggested that the use of learning communities among language-minority students increases persistence among these students (Deil-Amen, 2011). Additional research suggests that ELL relationships, or social integration with faculty, other students, and administration do have a positive correlation with ELL student persistence (Huerta, et al., 2019; Crisp & Nora, 2010). All this research, therefore, is in line with Tinto’s (1993) theory of the need for inclusion to increase persistence. The challenge for inclusion for ELLs, however, is that many ESL programs are designed as separate courses that may inadvertently isolate ELLs from other members of the academic institution. Gras-Velazquez (2019) suggests that inclusion is an integral part of second language acquisition and recommends curriculum that centers on project-based learning (PBL) as a way for ELL students to acquire language skills and build a sense of community. PBL curriculum can include activities from community service projects to poetry recitations.

Tinto’s Theory of Persistence Applied to the Current Study

Social and intellectual integration do contribute to student persistence at institutions of higher education (Tinto, 1993). Although ELLs may not share the same characteristics as traditional college students, they do share the same issue of high attrition rates (Ariel & Ruiz Soto, 2016; Bailey et al. 2010; Civil Rights Data Collection, 2020). For traditional, native English-speaking students, the attrition rate at 4-year institutions is 39.25% (College Dropout Rate, 2021). At 2-year institutions, it is 48.5% (College Dropout Rate, 2021). For ELLs, the

attrition rate can be substantially higher. In one study of 1,479 ELL community college students in California, Razfar and Simon (2011) found that 62% of ELLs dropped out after attending only two semesters. Additionally, research indicates that persistence of ELLs in higher education correlates with integration within the institution (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Deil-Amen, 2011; Huerta, et al., 2019). Therefore, Tinto's theory of persistence is a viable framework upon which to build a study about persistence among language-minority students at two-year institutions of higher education, especially as it pertains to identifying what ELLs attribute to their success in transfer-level English.

Weiner's Theory of Attribution

The theory of attribution gained recognition with Fritz Heider (1958) who developed it to understand causes related to certain outcomes. Heider (1958) postulated that behavior is not necessarily influenced by events but how people perceive those events. Heider (1958) offers an example of a politician whose speech is not well received. The politician may blame himself, the audience, or the conditions. The problem, however, is with misplaced perceptions. The politician may not place the blame on the true factor that led to the poor speech.

Bernard Weiner (1985) is a social psychologist who is credited with applying this theory to educational situations in research while at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Weiner (1985) aligned motivation with attribution, postulating that students may associate effort (or the lack of effort) with past experiences (good or bad) or perceived inherent characteristics. In essence, there are causal links with academic success or failure. For example, students who may have struggled in the past with reading comprehension may not be motivated to put much effort into reading comprehension situations later in life. They may attribute the reason for their struggles with reading comprehension to what they perceive as internal uncontrollable factors

like intelligence, or perhaps external controllable factors like low test scores. Thus, there is a perpetual lack of success with reading comprehension that students may attribute to inherent characteristics or previous failures. In contrast, students who have had success with reading comprehension in the past, either with test scores or perceived higher intelligence, will put more effort into future academic endeavors that involve reading comprehension.

Hence, attribution theory, which identifies students' past experiences as influencing their future, can help identify the causes related to educational outcomes, namely academic success, or failure (Weiner,1985; Finn, 2018). Past experiences include the ability to access long-term memory, which is stored memory of past events and experiences, or external information acquired from research (books, internet, etc.). Attribution theory can also answer the question of student effort or motivation. Successful past experiences may affect the amount of effort that students put into their current academic studies, like developing academic writing skills. DeKeyser (2007) found that the more students practice a skill, the quicker their reaction time is when producing that skill. In other words, practice helps students master content (DeKeyser, 2007; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019). If students have been successful in the past with practicing a skill, they are more likely to apply that same effort in a new educational activity.

Short-term memory also plays a valuable role in attribution theory. Short-term memory is connected to a student's ability to recall information or skills related to an academic task. The ability to quickly recall information or skills could be a positive specific attribution, whereas the inability to quickly recall information could have negative ramifications. A student who is unable to quickly recall information may attribute this to an uncontrollable factor such as intelligence.

There are numerous constructs associated with this theory that aim to align outcomes with factors that are either internal or external, controllable, or uncontrollable, global or specific,

or stable or unstable (Table 1). Simply stated, the constructs align outcomes with their causal correlation.

Table 1

Description of Attribution Constructs

Locus, Stability and Controllability	Description
Internal Attribution	Learners attribute an outcome to internal attributes, behaviors, or traits
External Attribution	Learners attribute an outcome to external factors or a situation
Uncontrollable Factor	A factor that a learner cannot control or change
Controllable Factor	A factor that a learner can control and change
Global Attribution	When a learner attributes an outcome to a factor that is recognized as being consistent
Specific Attribution	When a learner attributes an outcome to a factor that is significant to a specific situation
Stable Attribution	When learners attribute an outcome to a situation that is stable, or unchanging
Unstable Attribution	When learners attribute an outcome to a situation that changes over time

Note. Derived from Weiner (1985) *An Attribution Theory of Achievement, Motivation, and Emotion*

Additional insight into Weiner's (1985) attribution theory as it pertains to academic success is the role of the educator and the effects of the educator on the learner. Not surprisingly, positive motivational output from educators leads to positive internal motivation from the student. Conversely, negative output from educators leads to negative internal motivation from the student. Students may place a great amount of value on the output of their instructors, which could impact future academic successes or failures. Table 2 describes various attributions including teacher influence.

Table 2

Types of Attributes

Attributions	Dimensions		
	Locus	Stability	Controllability
Ability	Internal	Stable	Uncontrollable
Effort	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Strategy	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Interest	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Task difficulty	External	Stable	Uncontrollable
Luck	External	Unstable	Uncontrollable
Family influence	External	Stable	Uncontrollable
Teacher influence	External	Stable	Uncontrollable

Note. From Vispoel and Austin (1995)

Weiner's Theory of Attribution Applied to ELL Education

While highly regarded, Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution is not without criticism. Pekrun and Marsh (2018) cite the meta-analysis of Rudolph et al. (2004), who found that most research studies which used Weiner's theory of attribution as a theoretical framework used a very low number of participants and convenient sampling methods. Furthermore, Pekrun and Marsh (2018) contend that attributions are not relevant in all situations, as emotions can be aroused or stimulated based on experiences that are happening at the moment. Perkrun and March further argue that better methods for using Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution as a theoretical framework must be applied.

Fortunately, language acquisition researchers have taken heed of this challenge and implemented higher standards for using Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution as their theoretical framework in their research. Bouchaib et al. (2018) conducted a mixed research study using Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution as their theoretical framework. Using Vispoel and Austin's (1985) validated questionnaire as their instrument, Bouchaib et al. (2018) surveyed 113 foreign

English language students at a high school in Morocco. They discovered that the factors which impacted student learning the most were external, the instructor being the most significant factor, and classroom atmosphere being the second most significant.

In a somewhat similar study, Soriano-Ferrer and Alonso-Blanco (2020) conducted a quantitative study of 407 foreign English language learners also using Weiner's (1985) attribution theory as their theoretical framework. Like Bouchaib et al., (2018), Soriano-Ferrer and Alonso-Blanco (2020) conducted a survey of these students using Vispoel and Austin's (1995) validated questionnaire. Soriano-Ferrer and Alonso-Blanco (2020) found that students mostly attribute their success to "some internal but unstable controllable variables such as effort and strategy, and to some external variables such as the teacher influence, task difficulty, and the class atmosphere" (p. 658).

Weiner's (1985) attribution theory, therefore, plays an important role in understanding the internal and external factors related to students and their ability to acquire English language skills. More specifically, attribution theory can affect the ability for ELLs to achieve success with English composition (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Johnson, 2017). In a qualitative study of community college ELLs, Finn (2018) discovered that students repeating a composition course attributed their lack of success to both internal and external factors. Those factors included lack of linguistic ability and issues with previous instructors and tutors. Consequently, the attribution of past language-learning experiences can be a significant advantage or disadvantage in composition courses for ELLs. Similarly, the ability to access short-term memory information such as lexical, syntactic, and mechanical features of language plays an essential role in ELL success. If ELLs have not had positive past experiences, or they if are not able to access accurate

short-term memory, it can cause frustration, especially in inexperienced writers (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Weiner's Theory of Attribution Applied to Current Study

In order to value the success of ELLs in TLE, it is necessary to understand the challenges that these students face. Some of those challenges include language skills like spelling, vocabulary, and grammar acquisition (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). Other challenges include motivation and support from a home environment (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). ELL teachers face challenges as well. These challenges include being under-prepared to teach ELLs (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). TLE instructors also face the challenge of having a range of student writing ability in the classroom. Moses and Mohamad (2019) suggest that understanding the challenges that students and teachers face will help the teachers apply the best approaches to teaching writing to ELLs.

Another challenge that ELLs face is internal motivation. There is a certain type of anxiety associated with language acquisition that may generate "worry and negative emotional reaction[s]" (Shirvan, et al., 2019). Research shows that motivation and language acquisition are inextricably bound (Shirvan, et al., 2019). Internal motivation can be affected by external factors (Shirvan, et al., 2019). This correlation aligns with Weiner's (1985) attribution theory, that past experience can enhance or impede progress, or in the case of ELLs, language acquisition. Therefore, to better understand the factors that ELLs attribute to their success, it is also necessary to understand the challenges they face.

Previous research underscores a correlation between prior learning experiences and successful acquisition of English skills, particularly writing. An adult learner with a high aptitude for learning a language (internal factor) may have had positive past experiences with learning a

language as a youth (a global attribution). Therefore, in a new language environment, that learner will carry that experience with him or her (stable attribution). The opposite could be true for a language learner who had a negative experience learning a language as a youth (external factor). Perhaps this learner tried very hard to learn the language but never succeeded in doing very well (specific attribution). That learner may carry that experience with him or her and apply it to the new situation, approaching the new task with a preconceived notion of failure based on one negative experience (unstable attribution). Nevertheless, this study focuses on the positive side of attribution theory and attempts to identify the correlations between transfer-level English and what ELLs attribute to their successful completion of the course.

Related Literature

Traditionally, programs that teach English to students whose primary language is something other than English have been called English as a Second Language (ESL). However, before learning English, many of these students have learned multiple languages. Therefore, the moniker of ESL is incorrect. To accurately capture the demographic of their students, some programs have opted to call themselves English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and others English for Multilingual Students (ESL). No matter the name, they are all English Language Learners (ELLs). Though Gunderson et al. (2020) argue that all students of English, even native speaking students, are English language learners, the name ELL is comprehensive and encompasses all categories of English language learner. The participants for this study included ELLs whose first language is something other than English and who completed at least 1 ESL course at CC and subsequently completed TLE.

There are multiple categories of ELLs; however, four are relevant to this study and review of literature. This study focuses on adult ELLs who study at a community college.

Therefore, the literature review focuses on adult learners. Nevertheless, the learners in these studies are diverse. There are immigrant ELLs who have immigrated to an English-speaking country from a non-English-speaking country. These learners can be married or single, childless or with children. Then there are the children of these immigrant ELLs who grow up in an English-speaking country, but who speak their parent's first language at home. These learners are sometimes referred to as generation 1.5 or language minority students. Then there are international students who live temporarily in an English-speaking country to learn English or to improve their English skills. Finally, there are learners who study English in their own non-English-speaking country. These learners are often referred to as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. While the participants in the current study are not EFLs, there are a number of EFL studies in the literature review that are relevant to the current study.

While there are several challenges for any student in higher education, the challenges that ELLs face are unique. Their ability to integrate into the higher education landscape extends beyond obstacles of language acquisition. There are also external institutional and cultural perceptions and expectations that can impede success (Oberg, 1960; Weiner, 1985; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Additionally, there are the internal struggles that manifest themselves in ways that can affect self-efficacy (Weiner, 1985). However, research indicates that ELLs who are able to succeed in college are those who can overcome both external and internal obstacles and become autonomous language learners (Lee, 2018; Zaky, 2018; Sugata, 2017, Lai, 2017). There are several studies which pinpoint these obstacles. Nevertheless, this literature review will focus on issues and obstacles specific to ELL composition courses. It will be appropriate for this study to identify the obstacles that the participants faced and discover how they were able to overcome them to be successful in transfer-level English.

The Effects of External Responsibilities

ELLs who do not have as many external obstacles, namely jobs and children, generally acquire English skills more efficiently than those who do have these external responsibilities (Lambert, 2015). Lambert (2015) conducted a qualitative study centered on a writing assessment called the Refugee Education and Employment Program (REEP) that is used at a community college in the United States. Lambert (2015) used a questionnaire to identify learner characteristics. Multiple regression was then used to measure the responses in the questionnaire and to discover if those responses could predict progress in the students' writing classes and on the REEP. While Lambert (2015) does acknowledge the lack of statistical significance for the variable, CHANGE, due to a small sample size (n=76), adjustments to the statistical analysis revealed significant results. Namely, ELLs who tend to do better in college writing courses are usually single, do not work, and plan to return to their native country. Conversely, those students who did not do as well had children to take care of, a job to go to, and a plan to stay in the US. In short, it was the international student that performed better than the immigrant student, and it was mostly external factors that impeded the success of mostly immigrant students.

Lambert (2015) hypothesized that internal factors such as confidence and anxiety would impact student success in writing. Surprisingly, Lambert (2015) discovered that they did not impact student success in writing. However, Lambert (2015) does acknowledge a flaw in the initial questionnaire that asks about confidence and anxiety in relation to speaking rather than writing. These two language skills are fundamentally different and require a separate set of skills. Lambert (2015) cites Cheng et al. (1999) who found that classroom anxiety and writing anxiety "were related but distinct constructs" (pg. 13). Therefore, the identification of internal factors that may impede writing success is somewhat skewed.

Although there is a small sample size that could affect results, the conclusions that Lambert (2015) makes are significant to this study. External factors such as family and job can interfere with writing development. Lambert (2015) does not mention whether students were aware of these external factors interfering with their progress or if they attributed their lack of success with these external factors. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy for this current study that Lambert made a correlation between success and external factors that may act as obstacles to success for ELLs in a writing course.

The Role of the Institution

Institutions should make an effort to understand the external and internal obstacles that ELLs face. In a longitudinal ethnography, Kanno (2018) examined the lack of college preparedness of two ELL high school students. Kanno (2018) places much of the onus on the secondary institution where the two ELL students attended. Kanno (2018) contends that it is the responsibility of the institution to identify the "cultural wealth" (pg. 339), or the skills and resources that these students possess, and build on them. For example, one student was interested in automotive repair and was fluent in Spanish. With guidance from instructors and counselors at this school, this student should be able to hone these skills into a career.

Kanno (2018) claims that the guidance counselors at this school attributed the lack of achievement to "the students' own deficits such as laziness, lack of academic abilities, limited English proficiency, and uninvolved parents" (pg. 353). According to Kanno (2018), these counselors were unable to see the deficits in their own system. This type of attitude seems to correspond with attitudes of the 1960's and 70's that placed the responsibility of persistence on personal motivation (Heilbrun, 1965; Rose & Elton, 1966; Rosssmann & Kirk, 1970; Waterman and Waterman, 1972) or intellectual traits (Summerskill, 1962; Marks, 1967), all of which

preceded Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that these attitudes continue to pervade current academic institutions at any level.

While Kano's (2018) study analyzed the effectiveness of secondary institutions to prepare ELLs for college or careers, it is also relevant to community colleges. Many ELL students come to community college underprepared to meet the demands and expectations of higher education. ESL programs and instructors can be aware of and identify the social and emotional barriers that influence and impede student progress. This awareness can help Community college ESL programs improve the way they help ELL students develop the skills needed to be successful in transfer-level English courses.

In a related study, Yeh (2019) analyzed the impact that parental involvement had on college readiness. In a quantitative study of 2,586 non-native English students from 523 high schools, Yeh (2019) discovered that parental involvement, or guiding their students' work at home, at a significant impact on whether their children attended college. Institutions can be aware of this fact and encourage parents to be involved in their children's education. This could also apply at the college level. Instructors and institutions can encourage students to elicit help and support from their parents.

Acquiring English writing skills is challenging. Some students feel that their writing skills are inadequate. Therefore, many institutions offer an abundance of resources to help these students, including ELLs. Nevertheless, many of these students are unaware of the resources that institutions provide. In a qualitative study of ELL composition students at a community college in New York City, Finn (2018) identified some of the major obstacles facing students who were required to repeat a mandatory writing course. Finn (2018) used a questionnaire to identify these students and then conducted semi-structured interviews with the eight students that were

identified. Finn (2018) identified and specified external barriers that students have, which included faculty or staff who are unsupportive, struggles with technology, and challenges balancing other obligations with schoolwork. Unlike the education system that Kano (2018) identified, which lacked awareness of the obstacles it placed in front of its ELL students, the community college which Finn (2018) described has numerous support programs. Sadly, Finn (2018) identified the lack of awareness for these support systems among the participants in the study.

Finn (2018) also identified students' internal struggles. Nervousness and anxiety over tests, poor study habits, confusion and discouragement, and poor choices in the past were among those internal struggles which students felt were impeding their progress. Finn (2018) stated that some of these internal struggles originated from negative past experiences learning English.

While Finn's (2018) research directly relates to the current study, it is very unusual that the participants where students in Finn's own class at the time of the study. It seems to be an ethical breach of research methods. However, the results correspond with similar studies about attribution and the findings are relevant to the current study.

The Role of the Student

Both ELLs and ESL programs should take responsibility when students fail to meet expectations. In a similar study to study to Finn's (2018), Lee (2018) conducted a qualitative study which included 10 undergraduate Chinese students who had failed an ESL writing course at a college in the United States. The theoretical foundation for Lee's (2018) research was in part based on the work found in the book *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2012), which outlines the habits that students must obtain to be successful writers in college. The other part of Lee's (2018) theoretical foundation was Gross and Alexander's (2016) Framework for

Failure, which asserted that student failure is in part a failure of the institutional system. Lee (2018) combines both internal and external obstacles that students face. For example, some students complained that their instructors would not remind them when assignments are due. Lee (2018) places part of the responsibility on the student, suggesting that it is an internal obstacle of organization and responsibility for which the student needs to be held accountable. Lee (2018) then recommends that instructors make a greater effort to make assignment dates and expectations clear for students, suggesting that it is also an external obstacle created by the institution. Another point of internal and external interference was the failure to engage in class. Lee (2018) discovered that these Chinese international students were reluctant to participate in class. However, Lee (2018) learned that these Chinese students felt that their peers in class were reluctant to engage with them and that these Chinese students were not familiar with what constituted an appropriate level of class engagement. Lee (2018) encouraged instructors to be aware of these concerns and make sure students are aware of the expectations for engagement.

Lee's (2018) research is insightful and valuable. However, it does only focus on one group of ELL student, the Chinese international student. Therefore, it may be somewhat limited in its scope. While Chinese international students may struggle with engagement in a writing class, other groups of ELL students may not struggle at all. Nevertheless, it will be worth noting in the current study if students struggled with these same issues of responsibility and engagement.

Gender Differences

ELLs and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students share many similarities in terms of which factors impede language acquisition (Mohammadi, 2016). Male and female EFLs often attribute their success to distinct factors (Mohammadi, 2016). Mohammadi (2016) conducted a

qualitative study using the Theory for Foreign Language Learners Questionnaire (ATFLL) to identify what foreign language learners of English attribute to their success or failure of learning English. The ATFLL instrument was designed and validated by Pishghadam and Modarresi (2008). Mohammadi (2016) administered this questionnaire to 200 language students who were studying English at private institutions in Iran. These students ranged in age from 17-32. Not surprisingly, these students attributed their successes and failures to both internal and external factors. Interestingly, however, the majority attributed their successes more to external rather than internal factors such as the difficulty of an assignment. Also of note is the differences between male and female attribution. Mohammadi (2016) discovered that males were more likely to attribute their success and failures to internal factors such as ability, while females were more likely to attribute their success and failures to external factors such as luck.

Mohammadi (2016) presents an insightful look into the attributions not only of English language students, but also of variances between males and females. However, because this study takes place in Iran, cultural aspects must be taken into consideration. While there are minority cultures in Iran, it is largely homogonous. Mohammadi (2016) does not address the cultural makeup of the participants in the study nor whether that could affect the discrepancies between males and females. Nevertheless, these differences are worth noting. Furthermore, it will be notable in the current study to identify attribution differences between male and female participants.

Complexity in Writing Assignments and Instructor Feedback

A high level of self-efficacy can be an indicator of increased writing complexity (Rahimi and Zhang, 2019). Similar to Mohammadi (2016), Rahimi and Zhang (2019) also conducted a qualitative study in Iran to determine if increasing the complexity of a writing assignment

affected anxiety and accuracy. The participants were 60 upper-intermediate English students. Unfortunately, they do not say where the participants studied or what their ages were. The study found that as writing tasks increase in complexity, so does the syntactic structure attempted by the participants. Specifically, they found an increase in the use of subordination. Subordination is the use of dependent clauses to form complex or compound/complex sentences. The increase in the complexity of syntactic structure, unfortunately, also led to a decrease in accuracy. Interestingly, there was not a strong correlation between increasing the complexity of a writing assignment and anxiety. However, Rahimi and Zhang (2019) did find a correlation between self-efficacy and accuracy. Those with high self-efficacy were more likely to attempt complex syntactic structures, resulting in a decrease in accuracy.

Unfortunately, the sample size (n=60) seems to be too low to universally apply this study. However, the results offer significant insights into the mindset of some ELL students. The writing tasks in a transfer-level English course are presumably more complex than those of an ESL composition course. Therefore, it will be helpful to know if self-efficacy influenced how ELLs approached the complexity of their own writing, and if, in fact, their accuracy decreased.

Written feedback from instructors on composition assignments can affect ELL writing skills. Chong (2019) completed a qualitative grounded theory study to theorize which factors affect the perceptions and responses of community college ELLs to written feedback from instructors. Chong (2019) used an open-ended questionnaire to survey 93 students, followed by two sets of interviews with 15 students. Chong (2019) discovered that students respond better to written feedback that is specific to their needs and positive in tone. More importantly, however, was the technical aspect of written feedback. If students regard written feedback as helpful to

improve their writing skills, they are likely to overlook the tone in which it is written, even if the tone is perceived to be detached and less positive.

Like Mohammadi (2016) and Rahimi and Zhang (2019), this study takes place in a largely homogonous culture of Hong Kong. Similarly, while there are minority cultures in Hong Kong, Chong (2019) does not mention the cultural makeup of the participants or whether cultural influences could affect the outcome. Nevertheless, as written feedback is a significant external factor that could impact the success or failure of ELLs in transfer-level English, Chong's (2019) study will be a valuable resource. For the current study, it will be useful to identify the impact that written feedback has on the success of ELLs in TLE.

Foreign and Domestic Education

Somewhat surprising is the research that suggests that the less time students spend in American secondary schools, the better they will do in college writing courses (Lane et al., 2019). Lane et al. (2019) found that students who attended foreign secondary schools performed better in community colleges than those who completed high school in the American education system. Similar studies reveal that students educated in foreign secondary schools have a higher degree of "self-efficacy and persistence" than those who attended American high schools (Lane, et al., 2019, p. 678; Mueller, et al., 2013).

Research about how to improve retention among ELLs points to the development of TLE and first-year experience (FYE) courses specifically designed for ELLs. Snyder's (2017) research highlights the success of Arizona State's Stretch program, which boasts a higher success and retention rate than traditional FYE programs. While California community colleges continue to offer disparate programs for ELLs, many have recognized the need for these unique TLE courses and have begun to incorporate them into their programs (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, most ELLs continue to enroll in traditional TLE courses, which makes it important to understand what ELLs attribute to their successful completion of TLE.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a problem that can impede student progress. It is an issue that occurs in all writing courses. Bowen and Nanni (2021) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the attitudes and perspectives about plagiarism from students and professors at a university in Thailand. Bowen and Nanni (2021) surveyed 441 participants using a validated instrument created by other researchers at the university. The study found that an overwhelming majority of teachers and students understood that plagiarism was ethically wrong. Nevertheless, a substantial number of students (32.62%) and teachers (86.96%) knew of at least one student who had broken plagiarism rules. There is no accurate way of knowing, however, if students truthfully responded to the question. If there was any fear of being caught for previous plagiarism, students may have been reluctant to be open about their past indiscretions, as people will tend to lie if there are positive consequences and they know they will get away with it (Vrij et al., 2019). Nevertheless, Bowen and Nanni (2021) attributed part of the problem with plagiarism on a system that insufficiently enforces plagiarism policies. In addition, Bowen and Nanni (2021) discovered that most students were not required to submit assignments using a plagiarism detection program. In fact, many instructors allow their students to submit paper copies. Some even accepted handwritten assignments.

Plagiarism is always an issue in transfer-level writing courses. Some ELL students may come from a system that did not enforce plagiarism policies, and, consequently, are tempted to plagiarize. For this study, it will be valuable to know if plagiarism was ever an issue for these students, and if so, how they were able to overcome the temptation.

Faith and Spirituality

Although Weiner (1985) does not list faith as an attribution to which students might attribute their success, researchers find that faith can help students grow personally and academically (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018; Lynch, 2016; Rechtschaffen, 2014). While the number of people who consider themselves religious, or belonging to a religious organization, has dropped to below half of the US adult population according to a recent Gallup poll (Jones, 2021), Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2018) contend that this does not mean that Americans have lost their spirituality. Instead, Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2018) suggest that faith and spirituality play a significant role in both learning and teaching. Moreover, they assert that it is the responsibility of student life professionals to enable students "to connect their faith with their learning" (pg. 99).

Jacobsen and Jacobsen's (2018) charge may fall on deaf ears at some secular institutions. However, part of the core values of the community college where the participants for this study are students are to help students develop mind, body, and spirit. It will be useful to understand if participants attribute any of their success to their faith and to see if they attribute any of their spiritual growth to the institution. If faith were to be listed on Weiner's (1985) list of attributions, it could be an external, stable, and controllable attribution.

Additional Internal Factors Impeding ELL Success

The research supports the existence of internal barriers facing ELLs such as low-self-esteem and lack of motivation to practice the language. Fong et al. (2017) included other psychosocial factors. In a meta-analytic study, Fong et al. (2017) found that psychosocial factors, or internal obstacles, can interfere with student success at community colleges and may account for the low success rate of community college students in general. These psychosocial factors include self-regulation, self-perceptions, anxiety, attributions, and motivation. Of the five,

motivation and self-perception were the most likely to interfere with student success. Although ELLs are a distinct group within the community college student population, Fong et al. (2016) found that Latino ELL students are more likely to be extrinsically motivated, highlighting the need to understand the intrinsic or psychosocial factors that influence ELL student success.

Additionally, although unwarranted, students often associate intelligence with the ability or inability to learn a language (Kralova et al., 2018). When students are unable to express themselves spontaneously in their target language, their ego and sense of self can be deflated (Kralova et al., 2018). Competitiveness has also been found to be an internal struggle for ELLs. In a classroom setting, the need to save face and not embarrass oneself may result in a psychological inability to practice the target language in front of peers (Chuang & Fujian Medical University, 2019).

Additional External Factors Impeding ELL Success

Previous negative educational experiences can affect students' ability to learn and apply new knowledge (Weiner,1985; Finn, 2018). These experiences can be with the instructor, other students, or institutional support systems. While some institutions may be aware of the need to change, others, according to Samuelson and Litzler (2016), look to place blame for the lack of achievement on individuals or communities instead of finding areas of improvement within themselves. This lack of change unintentionally can create external barriers for ELLs. Kanno (2018) expanded this concept of external barriers and suggested that many institutions have a lack of awareness of the "community cultural wealth" (Kanno, 2018, p. 339) that both minority and minority-language students bring with them (Yosso, 2005) (Table 1). This community cultural wealth contrasts the cultural capital that Bourdieu (1986) described. Bourdieu (1986) explained that cultural capital includes acquired knowledge and skills, mostly acquired through

educational institutions. Schroedler (2018) explained that cultural capital has an economic transferability, meaning that those who have cultural capital have a better opportunity to prosper economically. However, Yosso (2005) challenged Bourdieu's (1986) suggestions of cultural capital with the concept of community cultural wealth, which includes innate skills and abilities that exist within all human beings. Yosso (2005) argued that cultural capital is prescribed criteria by which all students are expected to be measured. In contrast, Yosso (2005) contended that this is an unfair measuring tool, as it precludes the community cultural wealth that minority students acquire from their families and communities. Yosso (2005) contended that institutions should not overlook community cultural wealth and instead place more value on it and less on cultural capital.

Nevertheless, Schroedler (2018) provided a compelling argument for cultural capital, specifically learned linguistic capital and its economic benefits. Schroedler (2018) offered a number of research studies that show that learning a language that has economic prestige, such as English, can offer a considerable amount of human capital (Grin, 2006; Vaillancourt, 1996; Bloom & Grenier, 1996; Chiswick & Miller, 2007; Dustmann, 1994; Martinovic, 2011; Graddol, 1997; Coulmas, 2005). Specifically, Dustmann (1994) found that writing competency more than any other linguistic feature in a language with economic prestige increases the earning power of those who are not native to that language. Therefore, despite the external factors that may hinder the success of non-native English students (Fatemi & Asghari 2012; Mohammadi, 2016), it benefits these students economically to become proficient writers in English. In fact, proficiency in English offers a tremendous amount of human capital including "cross-cultural participation (literature, arts, media, etc) …opportunities for travelling (for holiday, work or study purposes) and…a general openness towards other cultures" Schroedler, 2018, pg. 17).

Autonomous Learning

Regardless of the potential external and internal barriers that ELLs face, their ability to acquire language skills is inherent in their biological makeup. Adult learners may need more time and effort than young learners, especially in terms of acquiring academic written language (Cummins, 2008). Nevertheless, it is possible for ELLs to acquire the English language sufficiently to succeed in TLE. Lee (2018) claimed that effective study and learning habits lead to ELL success. However, ELLs have a responsibility to develop the habits that will help them become successful students (Lee, 2018). Zaky (2018) argued that instructors can design curriculum to help ELLs become more autonomous learners. In a study about autonomous computer learning, Sugata (2017) discovered that young learners can acquire a sophisticated degree of computer literacy by prioritizing the relevant information to acquire the needed knowledge. This "hierarchical self-organization" (Sugata, 2017, p. 290) is a product of "self-organizing systems" (Sugata, 2017, p. 290), which essentially is a group of autonomous learners discovering new information and selecting the order of acquisition together.

While Sugata's (2017) study focused more on obtaining computer literacy rather than language acquisition, it highlights the effectiveness of autonomous learning. In fact, it underscores language acquisition research that suggests that autonomous language learners do better than those who are in structured classroom settings (Lai, 2017). The reason lies with the research-supported notion that autonomous learning is "associated with greater perceived meaningfulness, personal relevance, emotional investment and a greater likelihood of internalization" (Lai, 2017). Consequently, while institutions and educators should be aware of the external and internal factors that may impede success, there are pedagogical advantages and a dignity that is associated with the personal responsibility of learning.

Despite the advantages of autonomous language learning, research indicates that autonomous writing development is likely to occur less frequently or at a much slower pace than auditory language development (Lai, 2017). As a result, it is probable that a hybrid of instructor-guided writing activities that employ autonomous learning abilities could result in internalized and automatized writing skills. To this end, Zaky (2018) contended that ELL educators can be aware of the internal and external struggles that ELLs face while at the same time designing curriculum that elicits autonomous motivation. While this can occur by recognizing talents, skills, improvements, and other achievements, Lai (2017) indicated that curriculum that used supplemental technology increases learner autonomy.

Institutional and Instructional Responsibility

Despite the need for ELL autonomy, there is also a need for institutions to be more flexible with their approaches to teaching ELLs, especially in terms of writing. Nguyen (2021) argues that many language minority students who have attended high school in the United States are not college-prepared due to inadequate preparation in their high schools. Because of their linguistic deficiencies, they were not allowed to take writing courses that would prepare them for the rigors of college writing. If they do attend college, these students are then placed in remedial or ESL courses. Adams et al. (2017) suggest that these courses lead to a "long pipeline students must pass through to succeed [and] the longer the pipeline, the more likely there will be 'leakage' from it—in other words, the more likely students will drop out before passing composition" (p. 404). Consequently, some institutions are changing their approaches by placing students directly into college-level writing courses, including ELLs who have attended high school in the United States (Parmegiani, 2019). For immigrant and international students, some ESL programs have streamlined their programs, reducing the number semesters students are

required to take and aligning their courses so that they feed directly into college-level writing courses (Parmegiani, 2019). This seems to make sense, as writing does not come naturally to most people, nor is it culturally consistent (Myles, 2001).

Zaky (2018) argued that writing centers and instructors should not assume that students are able to "verbalize what they want to do … use the proper language to express themselves correctly in English … [and] perceive what is beneficial for their linguistic and cognitive progress" (p. 49). For this reason, Bunch & Kibler (2015) asserted that community colleges must find flexible alternatives to offer needed support systems to ELLs, who are generally non-traditional students and have competing outside influences. Therefore, it is essential that institutions help students develop successful habits (Lee, 2018) as well as alternative methods to quickly become successful college writers.

Community college ESL programs can also improve the way they help ELLs succeed in TLE by identifying the academic skills that successful ELLs need (Lambert, 2015). ELL students exhibit error patterns in their writing that is distinct from L1 and language minority students (Doolan, 2017). However, as ELL students improve their writing skills, they also improve the complexity of their writing. Staples et al. (2016) demonstrated how the complexity of a successful ELL student in college-level English will exhibit features of complex grammar associated with L1 writing (e.g., use of dependent phrases). Staples et al. (2016) found that writing complexity increases with writing practice and experience. In addition, Staples et al. (2016) claimed that complexity in grammar varies by discipline, with humanities being the least grammatically demanding of disciplines that require regular writing assignments.

Implications of Obstacles Impeding ELL Success

California has the highest number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the country (Ariel & Ruiz Soto, 2016), yet only a little over half of those complete a high school education (Civil Rights Data Collection). Many of those students who do complete high school go on to college, often starting at a community college. One community college in the Central Valley of California, noted in this study as JC, is among those community colleges with a substantial number of ELLs. JC calls its program English for Multilingual Students (ESL). Its enrollment is comprised of those who are identified as international students, language-minority students, and immigrant English-language learners. The throughput rate from ESL courses to successful completion of transfer-level English (TLE) is very low, not only at JC, but also at other community colleges (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). While ESL students are completing TLE, a disaggregated description of the type of ELL student and their academic and social characteristics is not available.

Understanding the characteristics of each type of ELL in the ESL program is essential to possibly grasping the underlying causes of success in TLE. There are three distinct types of ELLs in the ESL program. International students are one. They are those who live temporarily in the United States for the sole purpose of taking classes at a college or university (Zhao et al, 2015). These students live away from their families usually in dorms or apartments, or with host families. They can experience homesickness, anxiety, and stress (Oberg, 1960); nevertheless, many international students are able to isolate these emotions and focus on their academic success (Zhao et al, 2015). This group comprises the lowest number of enrolled students in the ESL program.

Language-minority students (sometimes referred to as generation 1.5 students) are another type of ELL. They have lived in an English-speaking country for a substantial amount of time. In fact, they have had opportunity to practice and learn English in formal educational settings. However, they still may exhibit language interference as their first language is spoken primarily at home. While Doolan (2017) found that language minority students share many of the same written errors as native English-speaking (L1) students, Rjosk et al. (2015) discovered that many of these students belong to a low socio-economic status and suggested that they often struggle with motivation to succeed in school. Therefore, on the surface, these students do not appear to need ESL instruction, but fundamental factors influence their alignment in the program. While this group is a significant part of the ESL program, the recent ramifications of California Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705) have drastically reduced the number of language-minority students who take ESL classes.

The largest number of students enrolled in the ESL program are adult immigrant ELLs. These students arrive in English-speaking countries as adults and come from a variety of educational backgrounds in their primary language (Bergey et al, 2018). While some come with university degrees and professional experience from their native countries, others come with very little formal education (Bergey et al. 2018). Interestingly, many ESL immigrant students are women. Menard-Warwick, J. (2004) argued that immigrant women do not have as many opportunities to practice English outside their homes and primary language communities. Therefore, many of these adult immigrant women seek out English-language learning opportunities at adult schools or community colleges.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand why and how successful ESL students have completed college-level English at JC while others have struggled to succeed. For this study, central phenomenon is defined as an experience shared by multiple people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the large numbers of ELLs who do not complete TLE, it is vital that instructors and institutions find ways to address and improve the situation. Researchers have identified factors that interfere with academic success. These factors include internal struggles (Finn, 2018), lack of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1993), and institutional failures (Lee, 2018), among others. While these struggles are real and significant, it is also important to identify those qualities and characteristics that ELLs share who have successfully completed TLE. Researchers have identified factors that successful students in general share. These factors include social and academic integration (Tinto, 1993), atomization of skills (DeKeyser, 2007), and the ability to produce complex written products (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Nevertheless, ELL students are a distinct group in higher education who may not share these same traits or have the same needs. Regardless of the external or internal factors, the goal of all language learners should be to ween themselves from the crutch of institutional support systems and become autonomous learners. However, institutions do have an obligation to explicitly teach academic writing, as this skill is not always innately acquired.

While many ELL students succumb to the obstacles that researchers have identified, many others have gone on and succeeded in TLE. Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution as described in this chapter provide substantial theoretical frameworks as foundations to understand what successful ELLs attribute their success in TLE. While there are manifold obstacles that may lead to student attrition, like complexity of writing

assignments, gender differences, misunderstanding of plagiarism, and other internal and external challenges, there are also multifarious factors that contribute to their success. It is unclear, however, exactly what successful ELLs attribute to their success and what distinguishes these successful ELL students from unsuccessful ELL students. Instructors and administrators can benefit from understanding what factors help their ELL students succeed in college-level English. This is possible by better understanding the characteristics and skills behind the achievements of successful college ESL students (de Kleine & Lawton, 2015).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Qualitative research originates from the humanities and social sciences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Today, researchers in a variety of fields apply qualitative methods to their research to gain a rich and textured understanding of problems or issues and the reasons, feelings, and motivations informing them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In qualitative research, researcher-participant relationships are established through data collection activities that may include observations, interviews, and document sharing (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Analysis of the data leads to themes and patterns that can offer insights about solutions as well as areas of further investigation of the problem or issue (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Although Yin (2016) claims that it is not necessary for qualitative researchers to adopt a specific type of qualitative design, this study followed the guidelines of qualitative case study. Case study attempts to "generate knowledge" (Yin, 2016, pg. 68) about a case. A case can be defined as a group, event, or even an individual bounded in time and place (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Knowledge about the case is then generated by identifying and coding distinct themes produced through objective data gathering strategies. With the collection and analysis of various types of data from English language learners (ELLs), this qualitative case study was designed to identify the factors that ELLs attribute to successfully completing transfer-level English (TLE) with a passing grade (A, B, or C) at a community college in California (CC). The throughput rate of ELLs successfully completing TLE at CC is currently 25% (Buitron, 2018). This study addressed the problem of the low throughput rate of ELLs in TLE at CC by identifying what successful ELLs attribute their success in TLE.

Chapter three introduces and describes the methods used for this study beginning with a description of the design and research methods. The design includes the main research question with its sub-questions. This is followed by a description of the site, participants, procedures, and the researcher's role. Subsequently, there are descriptions of data collection and data analysis. Finally, there is a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design

A case study begins with the identification of a unique case that can fit within specified parameters. For this case, the parameters included participants whose first language is not English and who attended a community college in California (CC). Additional parameters for this case required that all participants had previously taken at least one course designated for ELLs. For the purposes of this study, those courses were referred to as English as a Second Language courses, or ESL courses. The parameters also required that the participants had completed an ESL course at CC within the past 5 years followed by enrollment and successful completion of transfer-level English (TLE). TLE courses are the same as freshman English courses at 4-year universities. They are required in both 2-year and 4-year programs to graduate. Successful completion meant earning a passing grade of A, B, or C.

Given the disproportionate throughput (or successful completion) of ELLs in TLE (Rodriguez, et al. 2019), a close examination of factors which ELLs attribute to their success in TLE is a valid qualitative case study. The design is applicable to this study as the case consisted of clear and identifiable boundaries, which include ELLs who had succeeded in TLE at CC within the past five years. A group of successful ELLs can offer unique perspectives about their internal motivation and external supports that facilitated their persistence and successful completion of TLE. A qualitative case study allowed for detailed analyses and descriptions of the

settings, participants, themes, and other factors that community college ELLs attribute to success in TLE. As this study gathered data from various participants within a bounded system, it can also be described as a comparative qualitative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This collective or comparative qualitative case study allowed for a deep and wide analysis (Milacci, 2018) of the success of community college ELLs in TLE.

A case study allows for a thorough and complete analysis of a phenomena based on multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hoon, 2013). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that a central characteristic of a case study is defining and being able to "fence in" (p. 38) what will be studied. This is the "what" of what will be studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 38). This bounded case of ELLs had clear and identifiable boundaries. Those boundaries included ELLs who had succeeded in TLE within-site, or at a particular community college (CC) in California's central valley within the past five years. From a visual standpoint, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) described the bounded case study as a heart with a circle around it, with everything within the heart as the central focus of the study and everything outside of the heart as what will not be studied. Therefore, for this case study, the heart consisted of ELLs who had successfully completed TLE at CC. Within the circle is what these students attributed to their success in TLE, including both internal and external attributions. The outside of the circle consisted of non-ELLs and ELLs who have not successfully completed TLE.

To avoid overgeneralizations, rigorous data collection occurred. While Yin (2014) advocated for both a qualitative and quantitative approach to case study, Stake (1995) described a systematic and step-by-step approach to case study. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended analyzing several information sources. Following these recommendations, this study used a systematic approach to collect various forms of information. I first used a questionnaire (see

Appendix F) to elicit demographic information about age, gender, ethnicity, primary languages, and educational backgrounds. I also used the questionnaire to gauge general attitudes about writing, learning English, internal motivating factors, and external motivating factors. I also engaged students in individual interviews (see Appendix H). I asked questions about the challenges they faced in TLE and what internal and external factors helped them to overcome these challenges. Finally, I used a focus group to engage participants collectively (see Appendix G). I asked questions about experiences in TLE. I asked about their interactions with the instructor, other students, and course materials. I also asked questions about their feelings about the oral and written feedback they received from their instructors and asked participants to share artifacts in the form of samples of written feedback they received on their writing assignments. Unfortunately, no participants except one had received or saved papers with written feedback from their instructors.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What do English language learners (ELLs) attribute their successful completion of transfer-level English?

Sub-Question One

What are the academic skills acquired in community college English as a second language (ESL) courses that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most useful in college-level English?

Sub-Question Two

What are the institutional support systems that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in transfer-level English (TLE?

Sub-Question Three

What are the social support systems that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in transfer-level English (TLE)?

Setting and Participants

The site for this case study was a community college (CC) in California's Central Valley. It is part of the 116 community colleges in California that support non-native English-speaking students. The largest ethnicity matriculated at CC is Hispanic at 69.6% (California Community Colleges, 2020), making CC a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI (White House Hispanic Prosperity Initiative, 2021). Other ethnic groups at CC include white (15.9%), Asian (4.4%), Black/African American (4.4%), American Indian/Native Alaskan (0.3%), Pacific Islander (0.1%), and 2 or more ethnicities (2.4%) (California Community Colleges, 2020). A small number of students, 2.4%, have unknown or unreported ethnicities (California Community Colleges, 2020).

Site

The ESL program at CC is designed to prepare students to enter directly into TLE. CC has a main campus that sits on 153 acres (California Community Colleges, 2020). It also has four satellite campuses, several other off-site campuses that it shares with high schools or community programs, and a prison education system (California Community Colleges, 2020). Many of the off-site locations are in rural areas surrounding the city where the main campus is located. The ESL program at CC begins three levels below TLE and includes three types of courses: reading, listening/speaking, and writing. The program is overseen by a department chair and a dean of instruction, who is the administer directly responsible for the program. The program is also supported by the office of adult education, which provides liaisons who work with the

community to recruit and matriculate ELLs into the program. These ELLs whom the liaisons recruit often are Latin American immigrants who have worked or are currently working in the agricultural industry. The student population in the ESL program at CC reflects other ELL student populations at community colleges throughout California. Therefore, the setting for this study was appropriate as the results can be applied as the basis for further investigations at other community colleges throughout California programs.

The demographic of the study was any non-native English-speaking student who has taken one or more ESL class, or classes designated for ELLs, at CC and subsequently passed TLE (see Appendix E). As an HSI, CC is committed to supporting ELL development. Despite the support of community colleges in California for ELLS, only 34% of those students complete TLE (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). At this community college, the throughput in TLE for ELLs is 25%, nearly 10% lower than the state average (Buitron, 2018). Curiously, those ELLs who do attempt TLE have a 5% higher success rate than non-ELLs (Buitron, 2018). Nevertheless, the overall throughput is low, and faculty, staff, and administration want to increase it. While there are only 3 full-time faculty who teach ELLs at CC, there are multiple adjunct faculty, staff, and administrators who provide support for the program and continually look for ways to increase the throughput rate.

Participants

This study derived its conclusions from data gathered from fourteen participants. Participants needed to have a primary language that is something other than English. They needed to have taken an ESL class at CC within the last 5 years and subsequently taken and passed TLE. Participants who matched these characteristics were identified using purposeful sampling methods to ensure they met the case parameters (see Appendix E). Purposeful sampling

is the process of identifying participants who have knowledge of or experience with the phenomenon being explored (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, participants were selected based on their experience in ESL and successfully completing TLE. Purposeful sampling included asking site leaders to identify participants. It also included snowballing, or asking participants to identify others who shared similar characteristics identified in the case parameters (Palinkas et al., 2015). After participants were identified, they were asked to volunteer in the study with a clear explanation of the expectations and compensation (see Appendix C and Appendix D). Expectations included participation in interviews and group discussions as well as artifact sharing.

Procedures

Careful consideration about procedures were followed throughout the study. Adherence to both Liberty University institutional review board standards as well as institutional review board standards at the study research site were strictly followed. Participants were made aware of their rights before and during the study. Data collection was secure and confidential. All analyzed data was used to achieve triangulation.

Permissions

Institutional Review Board approval was secured from Liberty University as well as CC (see Appendix A and Appendix B). I requested the services of the Institutional Effectiveness Office of the institution. This office is responsible for data collection, research, and analysis about issues pertaining to the institution. I requested that I be provided with a list of ELLs who had successfully completed TLE. I then used this list to elicit the help of 15 participants.

Recruitment Plan

I sent an email (see Appendix C) to potential participants explaining the study and

requesting that they answer a questionnaire (see Appendix F), participate in one focus group (see Appendix G) and one face-to-face interview (see Appendix H), and share at least one document from their TLE course that was graded essay with comments from the instructor. I had hoped that participants would be able to reflect on the document and comments from the instructor and explain how the comments affected their success in TLE. Unfortunately, only one participant had a document with comments from the instructor. The questionnaire (see Appendix F) consisted of questions to elicit demographic information about age, gender, ethnicity, primary languages, and educational backgrounds as well as gauge general attitudes about writing, learning English, internal motivating factors, and external motivating factors. The focus group (see Appendix G) elicited information about experiences in TLE, including their interactions with the instructor, other students, and course materials. The individual interviews (see Appendix H) elicited information about the challenges they faced in TLE and what internal and external factors helped them to overcome these challenges. Even though no participants except one had a document to share, participants were able to explain how teacher-comments affected their ability to succeed in TLE.

Monetary compensation of $50 was offered to participants (see Appendix C). The results of the study were shared with each participant. The focus group and the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The focus groups were scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes at a time that was most convenient for the participants. The focus groups and face-to-face interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom. I used the YouTube transcription tool to aid in the transcription process, and I thoroughly reviewed the recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. I also shared the final version of the transcriptions with each participant to check for accuracy.

The Researcher's Role

I do have a personal and vested interest in the site and the students. I am currently a tenured professor in the ESL Department at this institution. All the participants were previous students. However, none of the participants were current students, therefore, nullifying a possible conflict of interest. There were no worldviews that I have that interfered with collecting or analyzing data. However, I do believe that students with exposure to higher education in their country of origin are more likely to succeed in TLE than students who do not have exposure to higher education from their country of origin. This view, however, was not the focus of this study.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection commenced after I gained approval from the institutional review boards of both CC and Liberty University (see Appendix A and Appendix B). After IRB approval from both institutions was obtained, I used the institutional research department at CC to help identify ESL students who have completed TLE. I sought out 15 participants. I understood that attrition is a factor in qualitative research. Fortunately, the goal of 15 participants yielded quality data from 14 participants. I emailed the participants information about the study (see Appendix C), explained what the expectations were for the study, and sent them a consent form (see Appendix D).

After participants were screened to determine if they met the parameters of the study (see Appendix E), data collection began with the questionnaire (See Appendix F). While I used a questionnaire as part of my data collection process, it was not used to generate any statistical conclusions as the sample size was too small. The questionnaire was emailed to the participants with a link to Google Forms. The questionnaire has highly structured questions that produced

information about the participants primary language, gender, age, family circumstances, and educational background. These questions were important not only for identifying eligibility characteristics to participate in the study, but also for identifying factors that may have hindered or facilitated English language acquisition. The questionnaire also had four open-ended questions that related directly to the research questions and gave participants the opportunity to explain what they attributed to their success in TLE. The responses from this questionnaire were collected using Google forms collection feature.

In the initial email (see Appendix C), participants were asked to provide a time that they were available for a 1-on-1 interview lasting from 60 to 90 minutes each. These interviews were conducted on the Zoom video conference platform for two reasons: Zoom is convenient for the participants because 1) they did not need to travel, and 2) I was able to record each interview, making it easier to transcribe them later. At this time during the 1-on-1 interview, participants were asked to share at least one document. Unfortunately, only one participant had a document with an instructor comment. However, the participants were asked how comments from their instructor affected their success in TLE.

After the 1-on-1 interviews were conducted, I conducted 4 focus groups with at least 3-4 participants in each group. Again, the participants were asked in an email a time to meet that was most convenient for them. Scheduling the focus groups proved to be more challenging than scheduling the one-on-one interviews as participants' schedules often did not align. The focus groups lasted from 60-90 minutes each. They were held on Zoom for the same reasons that the 1-on-1 interviews were held on Zoom: convenience for both the participants and me.

The questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, document analysis, and focus groups are essential parts of most qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, it is not enough

to simply collect the data. I was mindful about ethical issues, security concerns, as well as collection strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants are anonymous, and their responses are kept on a secure computer. All data will be destroyed within three years of the data being collected, which will be fall, 2024.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix F) was composed of nine multiple choice questions that were used to gather demographic information. There were also four open-ended questions that were used to determine what participants attributed their success in TLE. Because this is a qualitative analysis, the questionnaire was not used to generate any statistical conclusions. However, the open-ended questions were useful in answering the research questions. The questionnaire was administered using Google forms, as online questionnaires make it easy for students to access on their time (Dewaele & Botes, 2020). The link to the questionnaire was emailed to participants.

Questionnaire

1. What is your primary language?
2. What is your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
3. What is your age?
    a. 18-25
    b. 26-30
    c. 30-40
    d. Over 40

4. Are you married?
    a. Yes
    b. No
5. How many children do you have living at home?
    a. 5 or more
    b. 2-4
    c. 1
    d. 0
6. How much schooling did you complete in your country of origin?
    a. I have a university degree
    b. I attended and completed some college.
    c. I finished the equivalent to high school.
    d. I did not finish high school.
7. How long have you spoken and written English?
    a. Less than 1 year
    b. Less than 3 years
    c. Less than 5 years
    d. Other (please specify how long)
8. When did you take your last ELL course?
    a. Less than 1 year ago
    b. Less than 3 years ago
    c. Less than 5 years ago
    d. Other (please specify how long ago)

9. When did you take TLE?
    a. Less than 1 year ago
    b. Less than 3 years ago
    c. Less than 5 years ago
    d. Other (please specify how long ago)
10. What skills did you learn in your ESL courses that you believe helped you the most to succeed in TLE and why did they help you?
11. Which institutional support systems (e.g. the Writing Lab, Tutoring Center, NetTutor, other) do you believe helped you the most to succeed in TLE and why?
12. What social support systems (e.g. friends, family, God, other) do you believe helped you the most to succeed in TLE and why?
13. How were you able to overcome any negative attitudes you had about TLE?

Rationale for Questionnaire

Primary language tendendancies and gender play roles in language acquisition. First, a language tendency that some ELLs have is to "transfer" (Foley & Flynn, pg. 102) grammatical structures that exist in their primary language to English. For example, many Asian languages (such as Chinese and Vietnamese) do not have articles. Therefore, ELLs from Asian countries often omit articles in their English writing to transfer their first-language grammatical structures. Hence, question 1 identifies the types of first languages of each participant as this could affect the challenges faced in TLE. In addition, gender plays an important role in the acquisition of language (Shakouri & Saligheh, 2012). Research indicates that males and females learn through different motivational factors (Shakouri & Saligheh, 2012), and females often outperform males in language acquisition Zoghi, et al., 2013). Question 2 identifies the participants gender, as

different genders could have distinct challenges in TLE and unique ways to overcome those challenges.

Additionally, social relationships and formal language training affect language acquisition (Véronique, 2013). First, it is often more difficult for older learners with children to acquire the same language skills as younger learners without children (Véronique, 2013; Herschensohn, 2013). Nevertheless, family support does have a positive correlation with language acquisition (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvin, 2007; Suarez-Orzco, et al., 2008; Caster, 2018). Questions 3-5 and 12 identify age and how the participants view their family in terms of supporting or hindering success in TLE. Furthermore, research indicates that formal education in a first language helps in the acquisition of a second language, while the lack of a formal education in a first language can hinder second language acquisition (Earl-Castillo, 1990; Ramírez-Esparza, et al., 2012; Thigpen, 2020). Questions 6-9 identify the educational background of each participant in both their first language and English in an effort to identify the extent of formal education of each participant. Although there is a lack of literature about the specific effects that faith has on student development (Lynch, 2016), many researchers agree that faith can help students grow personally and academically (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018; Lynch, 2016; Rechtschaffen, 2014). Question 12 allows students the opportunity to attribute faith to their success in TLE.

There are various factors, both internal and external, that may impede ELL success. While it is almost impossible to pinpoint one specific internal obstacle that impedes ELL success, identifying both internal and external factors that impede success can provide a broader understanding of the language struggles that ELLs face (Dewaele, 2013). These challenges could be the result of past experiences that affect the ELL's attitude (Dewaele, 2013; Weiner, 1985). A

negative past experience could cause issues of low self-esteem, resulting in a lack of effort in the future. On the other hand, a positive past experience could increase confidence and result in continued efforts to succeed. Therefore, question 13 allows participants to identify internal negative attitudes and explain how they were able to overcome them.

Interview Questions

To gain a subjective understanding of each ELL's perspective in succeeding in TLE, interviews play a significant role in data collection (McGrath, 2019). A semi-structured interview (see Appendix H) was conducted using open-ended questions, followed by prompts from the researcher to ensure that the answers align with the theories that frame the method (Laksov, et al. 2017). The interviews were 1-on-1 and lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. They were conducted through Zoom. Zoom allowed for the interview to be recorded and transcribed, and it was safe in a Covid-19 environment. After participants volunteered to participate in the study, I sent them a list of dates and times that they could select from. If these dates and times did not work for them, I asked the participants to offer a date and time that best suited their schedules.

Personal Interview Questions

1. Describe how you felt about your writing abilities upon entering TLE.
2. What was the greatest challenge that you faced in TLE?
    a. How did you overcome this challenge?
3. What did you do to overcome any negative thoughts you may have had about TLE?
4. Describe the effort you put into each writing assignment.
5. What strategies or processes did you use to make sure you submitted a passing paper?
6. How interested were you in the topics that you wrote about?
7. How difficult did you find the writing assignments?

8. Describe your relationship with your TLE instructor.
    a. How much time would you spend with your instructor outside of class (office hours)?
    b. How did your relationship with your instructor affect your work?
    c. What kind of feedback on writing assignments was most helpful (e.g., written comments, oral feedback, corrections, etc.)
9. Describe your relationship with other staff or faculty members on campus.
    a. How much time would you spend with them?
    b. How did these relationships affect your schoolwork?
10. Describe your relationship with other students on campus.
    a. How much time would you spend with other students?
    b. How did these relationships affect your schoolwork?
11. Describe any extra-curricular activities you were involved in on campus.
    a. How much time would spend in these activities?
    b. How did these activities affect your schoolwork?
12. Describe your relationship with your family.
    a. Did your relationship with your family help or hinder your success in TLE?
13. Do you feel that luck had anything to do with your success? Why or why not?
14. Describe your spirituality.
    a. Do you believe your spirituality or lack of spirituality affected your success in TLE?

15. Choose what you believe to be the most important external factor that helped you pass TLE (instructor, friends, family, Writing Center, etc.). Why do you believe this factor was so helpful?
16. Choose what you believe to be the most important internal factor that helped you pass TLE (intelligence, perseverance, positive attitude, faith, etc.). Why do you believe this factor was so helpful?

Rationale for Interview Questions

Weiner's theory of attribution claims that learners perceive their success or failure because of three elements, or dimensions, of causality (Soriano-Ferrer & Alonso-Blanco, 2019). They include factors that are internal (traits, talents, etc.) and external (situations). They also include factors that are stable (unchanging) and unstable (temporary). Finally, they include factors that are controllable (something the individual can control or alter) and uncontrollable (something the individual cannot control or alter). Questions 1-9, 12, and 13 focus on attributions associated with locus, stability, and controllability (See Table 1; Soriano-Ferrer & Alonso-Blanco, 2019).

Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence indicates that involvement with faculty and other students increases student persistence (Mutter, 1992). Additionally, external relationships with other students and involvement in extracurricular activities, according to Tinto (1993), can contribute to student persistence (Mutter, 1992). Moreover, Weiner (1985) identified 8 attributions that individuals often ascribe to their success or failure in an activity (see Table 1). Therefore, Questions 8-11 identify external factors identified by Weiner (1985) and Tinto (1993) that successful ELLs might attribute to their success in TLE.

Finally, Waggoner (2016) revealed a growing interest in spirituality and spiritual development in college students. Additionally, Waggoner (2016) found that students who are more spiritually minded have a "compassionate self-concept" (p. 153). This indicates higher level of self-esteem and confidence. It is important, therefore, to identify if and how ELLs attribute their own spirituality to their success in TLE. Question 14 addresses this matter. Questions 15 and 16 are used as summary questions. Their intention is to prompt participants to pinpoint at least 1 external and 1 internal attribution to their success in TLE. These questions algin with both Tinto's (1993) Theory of Persistence and Weiner's (1985) Attribution Theory.

Table 3

Dimensional Classification Scheme for Causal Attributions

Attributions	Dimensions		
	Locus	Stability	Controllability
Ability	Internal	Stable	Uncontrollable
Effort	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Strategy	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Interest	Internal	Unstable	Controllable
Task difficulty	External	Stable	Uncontrollable
Luck	External	Unstable	Uncontrollable
Family influence	External	Stable	Uncontrollable
Teacher influence	External	Stable	Uncontrollable

Note. Derived from Soriano-Ferrer & Alonso-Blanco, 2019

Focus Group Questions

While personal interviews tend to illicit more unique responses from individuals than focus groups, Guest et al. (2017) found that participants in focus groups often are willing to disclose more personal and sensitive information. Therefore, 2 to 3 focus groups with 3-4

participants in each group were conducted to allow participants an opportunity to describe common experiences in TLE and identify similar external and internal attributions. While the goal of the research was not to reveal information that was personal and sensitive to the participants, the focus group helped prompt memories of shared experiences that occurred while enrolled in TLE (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). These focus groups were conducted on Zoom and were recorded for transcription purposes. Participants were grouped by convenience based on availability.

Focus Group Questions

1. What skills from your ESL courses helped you the most to succeed in TLE?
2. When you thought about taking TLE when you were in ELL courses, what did you anticipate the instructor and the assignments to be like?
    a. Describe your interaction and relationship with the TLE instructor. What was it like?
    b. How did the instructor give you feedback? Oral? Written? Both? How did the feedback affect your writing?
3. What kind of relationships did you have while taking TLE, and how did they affect your writing?
    a. Other students?
    b. Your family?
    c. Your friends?
    d. Your spirituality or relationship with God?
4. What external services did you use that helped you in TLE?
5. Choose three factors that you believe helped you the most to pass TLE.

Rationale for Focus Group Questions

There are certain skills and competencies that college professors expect to see demonstrated in their students' college-level writing. Fernandez et al. (2017) found that many college ESL programs have started to revise their writing courses to better address these skills. They include the following:

1. Credit sources appropriately
2. Organize ideas and information coherently
3. Use grammar and syntax that follow the rules of standard written English, avoiding errors that distract the reader or disrupt meaning
4. Avoid errors in mechanics (e.g., spelling and punctuation)
5. Abstract or summarize essential information (e.g., from speeches, observations, or texts)
6. Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources
7. Integrate quoted and referenced material appropriately
8. Develop a well-focused, well-supported discussion, using relevant reasons and examples
9. Write clearly, with smooth transitions from one thought to the next
10. Write precisely and concisely, avoiding vague or empty phrases
11. Revise and edit text to improve its clarity, coherence, and correctness
12. Work independently to plan and compose text

Question 1 allows participants to identify any skill they learned in their ESL writing courses that helped them succeed in TLE. It will be valuable to see if these skills align with the skills that Fernandez et al. (2017) listed.

A considerable amount of research indicates that teacher/student relationships, which include content delivery methods, affect ELL student learning (Grubb & Gabriner, 2013; Callahan & Chumney, 2009; Hern & Snell, 2013; Raufman, Brathwaite, & Kalamkarian, 2019). It is important, therefore, to understand to what extent ELLs attribute their success in TLE to the relationship with and content delivery methods of their TLE instructors. In addition, feedback on writing assignments is a significant part of second language development, yet it is not fully understood how feedback encourages successful second language acquisition (Kim & Kim, 2017). Most feedback that writing instructors give is corrective, which is what most ELLs prefer (Kim & Kim, 2017). Therefore, question 2 is used to describe the participants' perceptions of their instructors, their feedback, and their delivery methods.

Questions 3 and 4 reflect Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence, which suggests that student involvement with faculty, campus services, and friends on campus supports student persistence (Mutter, 1992). Additionally, research indicates that there is a positive correlation between family support, specifically from mothers and older siblings, and ELL persistence (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvin, 2007; Suarez-Orzco, et al., 2008; Caster, 2018). Question 3 allows participants to identify the influence that their family relationships had on their success in TLE. Question 3 also elicits insights into the participants' attitudes about spirituality that Waggoner (2016) suggests is a significant part of many students' lives today. Question 5 gives students the opportunity to summarize their thoughts and pinpoint their most significant attributions to success in TLE.

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, they were analyzed using coding that offered a complete picture of the whole case (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 151). I was able to identify shared themes

and common issues among the participants. The array of data sources allowed for triangulation. The triangulation of data developed deep insight and understanding of the issue. Analyzing the collected data from each participant and creating a complete picture of the issue led to identifying common themes that ELLs identified as contributing to their success in TLE.

Triangulation

The data gathered from the questionnaire generated a general picture of the participants' demographics and attributions. It also provided insights into participants' attitudes towards learning English. Shared themes and common issues began to evolve from the results of the questionnaire. The responses to the questions were multiple choice. The last four questions were open-ended.

The focus group was used to gather information from participants about their attitudes and experiences in TLE. Being open to any information that the participants wanted to share, I used horizontalization to analyze data, placing the same importance on each statement and all collected data, but I also eliminated redundancies and identified statements that were significant to the study (Given, 2008; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). I also used In Vivo coding, or authentic language from the interviews to code sections, to bring an authentic voice to the participants (Saldaña, 2015). Theoretical coding, however, was the most significant. Statements were organized based on how they related to Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution and Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence. I looked for answers in their responses that aligned with attributions like "Task Difficulty" and "Effort" as well as answers that aligned with persistence like "social integration" and "academic integration" and categorized their responses accordingly.

The interview questions were designed to gather data about the research questions. I used the same type of coding as I used for the focus groups, specifically In Vivo and theoretical, and

for the same purposes. I read the transcripts of each interview and focus group line by line to create hierarchical frames to organize codes, establish relationships among codes, and identify themes. I regularly checked for researcher bias by including reflexivity statements (see Appendix G and Appendix H) throughout (Dowling, 2008). This rigorous, systematic, and step-by-step collection and analysis of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation and saturation to avoid overgeneralizations.

Because this study was designed to understand the phenomenon of ELL success in TLE, the data used to identify the factors associated with this phenomenon was analyzed using the technique of explanation building (Yin, 2018). As the data was collected in narrative form, it was challenging to derive results that offered definitive conclusions about causal relationships (Yin, 2018). Nevertheless, step by step methods for coding and analysis were employed. I also employed computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to aid in this process. I used both Dedoose and QDA Miner Lite to help code data. I found that Dedoose was more user-friendly. Nevertheless, in the end it was my own effort that was used to identify themes and issues.

First, I built a data repository, or database, by collecting, recording, and transcribing (in the case of the focus groups and interviews) the data from the questionnaire, focus groups, interviews. The CAQDAS aided in developing the schema, or the visual design and representation of the database (Atkinson, 2002). The initial schema was used to represent the research questions (see Figure 1). Next, a set of forms were created that were used to categorize the data. This was a “front-end” approach (Atkinson, 2002) that increased the likelihood that the data were grouped appropriately (see Figure 2 for example form). Once forms were created, the data were then entered according to which form they best fit. After the data was entered, 15-30

initial codes were created that reflected the research questions (Atkinson, 2002) (see Figure 3 for example form). These codes were then revised and expanded based on In Vivo responses from the participants (see Figure 4 for example form). Finally, a set of rationalized codes were generated. These were the final set of codes used after eliminating duplicate codes and revising others that best reflected the experiences of the participants. The data collected within these codes were used to generate conclusions and answer the question of how ELLs succeed in TLE.

Figure 1

Initial Schema for Data Collection

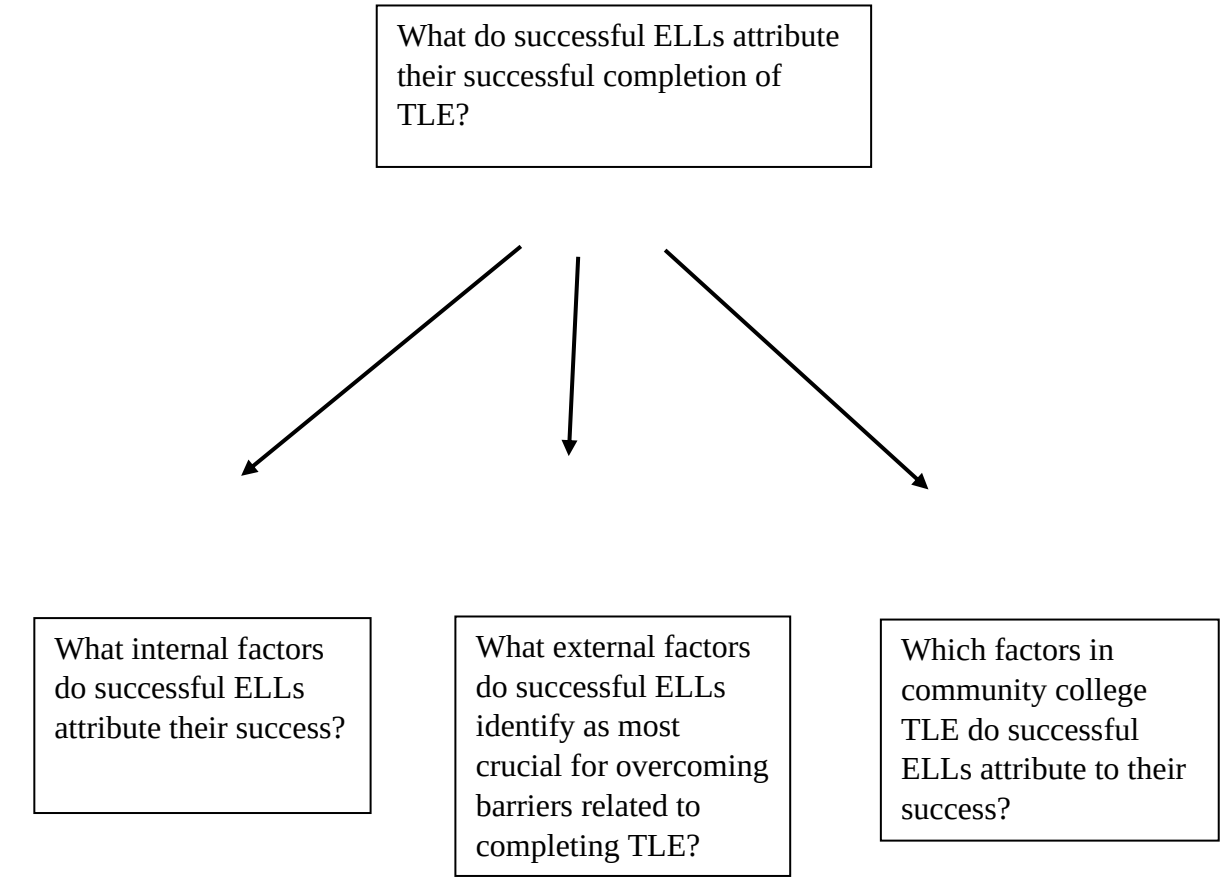


Figure 2

Example of Form of Student Responses to Questionnaire

	Date Collected	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
Participant 1	06/03/2021	A	B	B	A	A	B	B	A
Participant 2	06/05/2021	B	C	D	B	B	C	D	B
Participant 3	06/07/2021	A	A	B	D	A	A	B	D
Participant 4	06/04/2021	C	D	D	C	C	D	D	C
Participant 5	06/06/2021	D	A	A	A	C	A	A	A

Figure 3

Example of Form of Initial Codes That Represent Research Questions

	Date Collected	Perception of writing abilities before entering TLE	Greatest Challenge faced in TLE	Negative thoughts about TLE
Participant 1	06/03/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 2	06/05/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 3	06/07/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 4	06/04/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 5	06/06/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response

Figure 4

Example of Form with Codes Representing In Vivo Responses

	Date Collected	I felt confident before TLE.	Grammar was my biggest challenge in TLE.	I'm not going to pass TLE.
Participant 1	06/03/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 2	06/05/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 3	06/07/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 4	06/04/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response
Participant 5	06/06/2021	Student response	Student response	Student response

Trustworthiness

To establish the value of this study, certain steps were taken to establish trustworthiness (Given & Saumure, 2008). I established member checks and allowed participants the opportunity to review their own transcripts and respond to interpretations I made. This process increased the reliability of the study because it allowed participants the opportunity to confirm their participation and increase the degree of neutrality of the researcher. It also allowed for transferability of the study to other situations. In addition, I used multiple participants and multiple methods of data collection to establish triangulation (Rothbauer, 2008). This increased the credibility, transferability, and reliability of the study. Finally, I engaged in reflexive practices to examine my own assumptions and beliefs that may influence the study. It is important to distinguish between the voices of the participants and that of the researcher to establish a neutral setting and increase the credibility, transferability, and reliability of the study.

Credibility

In addition to discovering what participants attribute to their success in TLE, the questionnaire ensured the participants represented the demographic that the study intended to describe. In addition, other data collecting methods (focus groups, interviews, and document sharing) were used to achieve triangulation and achieve an accurate description of the participants' perspectives (Jensen, 2008). Finally, I utilized member checks to verify with the participants that their experiences were accurately portrayed in the study (Sandelowski, 2008).

Dependability and Confirmability

Thorough and complete descriptions of the methodology confirm that this study is able to be replicated. Any changes to the methodology were tracked and recorded, although none were made. Additionally, there is "research infrastructure" (Jenson 2008, p. 2) for this study well into the future, as there will likely be ELLs who need to succeed in TLE. Dependable descriptions, recorded changes, and research infrastructure allow for replication. In addition, I acknowledge the fact that I carry certain biases. However, I was transparent about the data collection process and used reflexivity statements throughout.

Transferability

Due to the nature of a qualitative case study, its limited locations and small number of participants, it is difficult to transfer the findings and conclusions to other environments and cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Nevertheless, the use of purposeful sampling as well as thick, rich descriptions will increase the ability of other researchers to decide if this case will transfer to their areas of research (Jensen, 2008). Furthermore, researchers can use this case study as a foundation to launch similar research studies at other locations. Participants were selected based on meeting the criteria for the study, which is an ELL who had taken a class specifically

designed for ELLs and then gone on to successfully complete TLE. There are ELLs in community colleges throughout the United States, and many complete TLE.

Ethical Considerations

This study contributes to the body of knowledge that seeks a better understanding of language acquisition. To maintain respect of the participants and their privacy, ethical standards and principles were adopted based on the Belmont Report (Preissle, 2008). Although interviews were confidential, there is the potential that information from the focus groups could be leaked. Participants were encouraged to keep the information private. All names were changed to pseudonyms. All data is held on a password-protected computer that only I am able to access. Data will be destroyed after three years' time, which will be fall 2024. In the participant waiver (see Appendix D), they are promised that the information they provided will not negatively affect their relationship with the institution.

Summary

This collective qualitative case study was designed in a way to offer a broad and deep investigation into what successful ELLs attribute to their success in TLE. The boundaries were clearly defined, and steps were taken to avoid overgeneralizations. The location of the study was a singular bound site, and purposeful sampling methods were used to reach saturation and ensure the participants at this site truly represented the identified population of the study. I used multiple analysis techniques including inductive and deductive coding of multiple data sources to increase triangulation. I took steps to ensure trustworthiness and transferability. Most importantly, I have taken ethical precautions to ensure that the participants' privacy is protected. The methods of this study have produced a worthwhile report that can benefit instructors and administrators in their efforts to promote the successful completion of TLE for ELLs at CC.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to identify what ELLs attribute their success in TLE. This chapter will present a description of the participants who participated in this study. Their demographic information is presented in Tables 3 and 4. This is followed by a description of the findings from the focus group and personal interviews. The findings are presented according to themes generated from the interview questions. The significant attributions as they pertain to the research questions are discussed and presented. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

Participants

Fourteen participants took part in this research study. However, not all were able to participate in each aspect of the study. Thirteen participated in the face-to-face interviews, while twelve participated in the focus groups. They came from a variety of backgrounds with varying experiences in TLE. Names of all participants have been changed to pseudonyms. Their demographic information is listed in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 4

Personal Demographic Information of Participants

Name	Gender	Primary Language	Age Range	Marital Status	Children living at Home
Advik	Male	Punjabi	18-25	Single	0
Min	Female	Chinese	30-40	Single	0
Samuel	Male	Spanish	26-30	Married	0
Amalia	Female	Spanish	18-25	Single	0
Daniel	Male	Spanish	18-25	Single	0
Gabriela	Female	Spanish	30-40	Single	0
Aaliyah	Female	Arabic	26-30	Married	1
Isabella	Female	Spanish	26-30	Single	0

Mariana	Female	Spanish	26-30	Single	0
Eliana	Female	Spanish	18-25	Single	0
Sara	Female	Spanish	18-25	Married	1
Lien	Female	Vietnamese	30-40	Married	1
Diya	Female	Punjabi	30-40	Single	0
Diego	Male	Spanish	Over 40	Married	0

Table 5

Educational Demographic Information of Participants

Name	Time Speaking and Writing in English	Passed TLE Class	Schooling in Country of Origin	When Last ELL Class was Taken
Advik	More than 5 years	Less than 3 years ago	Finished HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Min	3-4 years	Less than 3 years ago	Attended University in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Samuel	3-4 years	Less than 3 years ago	University Degree	Less than 3 years ago
Amalia	More than 5 years	Less than 3 years ago	Did Not Finish HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Daniel	3-4 years	Less than 3 years ago	Did Not Finish HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Gabriela	1-2 years	Less than 3 years ago	University Degree	Less than 3 years ago
Aaliyah	3-4 years	Less than 3 years ago	Finished HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Isabella	More than 5 years	Less than 3 years ago	Finished HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Mariana	3-4 years	Less than 3 years ago	Did Not Finish HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Eliana	3-4 years	Less than 3 years ago	Did Not Finish HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Sara	More than 5 years	Less than 3 years ago	Did Not Finish HS in Country	Less than 3 years ago
Lien	3-4 Years	Less than 1 year ago	Finished HS in Country	Less than 1 year ago
Diya	1-2 years	Less than 1 year ago	University Degree	Less than 1 year ago
Diego	1-2 years	More than 5 years ago	University Degree	Less than 1 year ago

Results

The results of this study are presented according to themes generated through focus groups and personal interviews. The interview and focus group questions that were developed using Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) attribution theory. The themes were identified through data analysis, which involved creating hierarchical frames to organize codes and establish relationships among codes. Themes developed from Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence include how participants integrated socially and academically into the institution. Themes developed from Weiner's (1985) attribution theory include what participants attribute to their success. The themes in the results reflect these theories as well as the responses from the participants.

Social Integration

How participants perceived their social interaction in relation to their success in TLE is significant. Participants were asked about their relationships with their peers, their families, and the faculty and staff at the institution. This line of questioning and responses is reflected in Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence, which identifies the need for inclusion to increase persistence. It responds to research sub-question 3. This question looks for the social support systems that ELLs attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in TLE.

Anticipating the Instructor and Assignments

There were a range of responses about what the participants anticipated their TLE instructor and assignments to be like. Aaliyah anticipated that the assignments would be easy because when she took her last ELL writing course, "It was easy. I got A's and Bs with my essays." However, most participants anticipated a challenge. Gabriela thought that TLE "might be super, super hard." Amalia anticipated the essays to be long "because everybody was thinking

like 10-page essays." She also feared having her writing compared to native English speakers. "I'm going to be at a level of native English speakers," she said. "The instructors are going to expect that level for me." Min had a similar thought, that "the instructor is going to be strict and going to be a tough grader." Nevertheless, participants did not allow their anticipation of perceived challenges interfere with their success in TLE.

For most participants, their anticipation did match their reality. The TLE courses did prove to be challenging, yet many, like Gabriela, found that they were more prepared than they anticipated due to their time in ESL writing courses. "This might be hard," said Gabriela, "but really, taking [ESL] class gave me…. It makes me feel relief because [TLE] was mostly similar to [ESL] class." The only difference between the two courses, according to Gabriela, was that the essays she wrote would require "more pages, more words, [and] a little more time. Interestingly, some participants who anticipated a challenging TLE course were surprised. For instance, Min found that her instructor was "not tough on the grades, not at all." However, for Aaliyah, who anticipated an easy class, she found that "it was not that easy…. It just was hard because of the professor." Whether participants had challenging writing assignments, an easy instructor, or a difficult instructor, each participant successfully persevered.

Negative Thoughts

Participants had a variety of negative thoughts during their time in TLE. Sara felt very "disappointed" when she would receive negative comments on her paper. Sometimes she felt like quitting. Like Sara, Mariana's negative thoughts affected her drive and enthusiasm. She did not feel "committed with the course" and, consequently "started to feel unmotivated." Similarly, Diego always had "doubts" about the accuracy of his English. Lien did not feel "prepared" to take a writing class with native English speakers. "It felt overwhelming at first," she said,

“because I didn’t know what to expect.” And while Gabriela was taking the class, there were times when she felt that she “wasn’t good at all.” Nevertheless, while participants each experienced a variety of negative thoughts, those thoughts did not keep them from successfully completing TLE.

In fact, each participant discovered ways to overcome those negative thoughts. To do this, many participants relied on their friends for support. Diya, for example, explained how her friends were “very nice and very good. They teach me,” she said, “and they give me positive thoughts and positivity to overcome my negative thoughts.” Similarly, Daniel would talk to his friends. “We were supporting each other,” he explained. They would boost each other with encouraging words like, “Don't think you're going to do bad. Just think you're going to do good.” Friendship and peer relationships did much to bolster the confidence of these participants.

While almost all participants relied on friends or peer relationships on some level to get through difficult times, others leaned more heavily on themselves and their own resiliency. Diego, for example, credits his “positive attitude and [his] decision to keep going even though there's a lot of problems,” he said. Mariana talked to herself and told herself, “It's okay if I fail sometimes. And if I feel frustrated, I will not fix anything just by feeling frustrated.” Samuel encouraged himself “because it kind of was my only option to go ahead, you know. So that was basically it. I just kind of thought about the benefits of doing the class and moving forward in college.” Aaliyah did not allow negative thoughts to enter her mind. “I just always say, ‘It's easy. I can do it. It's easy. I can't do it.’” Lien summed up the sentiments of most participants by describing a poster that she has on her wall in front of her desk that says, "Think like a proton," which reminds her to think positive thoughts. She went on to explain, “If you always doubt yourself, then you're going to fail. Like you fail even before you start.” Like friendship and peer

relationships, personal resiliency and self-confidence did much to help these students be successful in TLE.

Challenges in TLE

While some participants cited the difficulties of mastering English grammar as their greatest challenge in TLE, not all participants felt that way. Those who did, like Sara, stated that "pronouns and the verbs and punctuation, the commas" were the most challenging grammatical aspects. Sara stated that she struggled with the semicolon and run-on sentences. "I still cannot figure out how it works," she said. Many of these participants would seek help from the institution's Writing Center to mitigate the challenges they faced with grammar. Others would use editing software like Grammarly.

Like the grammar challenge, some participants described writing in another language as challenging. Diego, for instance, had trouble "because in my native language," he explained, "sometimes you write down the sentence in different order." Isabella felt the same, stating, "In Spanish, the sentence goes backward." In a similar vein, Min struggled with choosing the right vocabulary. She often doubted herself, asking herself, "Do you guys really use that kind of words?" A common solution to the language challenge was the use of translation applications like Google Translate. Nevertheless, participants were mostly aware of, or made aware of, the semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic differences between English and their native languages through their own investigation efforts or with the help of the Writing Center.

Still others had slightly different challenges. Amalia, who enjoyed reading, struggled with the type of reader that she was required to do. "The book that we read," she said, "it was mainly in old English." Her situation is understandable. It is difficult for native English speakers to read and understand old English. It is easy to imagine, therefore, the challenges that Amalia,

and others like her, faced in that class. Advik had a similar problem, not because of the old English, but simply because he did not enjoy doing research. “I am not very fond of reading,” he said. Again, this is a task that many young college students face with either dread or indifference. Adding in the challenges of reading or researching in a second language creates another level of difficulties.

Other participants cited problems with essay development. Daniel’s challenge was writing long essays. He stated that the essays he wrote in TLE were long and difficult. “I never done something so hard, not even in Spanish,” he confessed. “So it was tiring.” Gabriela had a difficult time paraphrasing and summarizing her research, which is a common practice for TLE students “I have an idea,” she explained, “but it's hard for me not to copy it, but create it differently than what I already read.” Many participants had similar feelings. When they read text that would be useful in their own research papers, the language of the original text was clearly stated. Many felt their language skills in English were not good enough to paraphrase a text and stay true to its original intent.

Another challenge that many participants struggled with was taking their TLE course online. Many of these participants took TLE during the pandemic and were forced to take it online, something they otherwise would have chosen not to do. Lien, for example, struggled taking a purely online course. “I don't see the professor face to face. We don't have Zoom either, so it's just like a hundred percent online. She just send out a lecture and I watch it and learn it on my own.” For those who took their TLE course oline, the inability to easily communicate with their online TLE instructor seemed to affect their ability to fully integrate.

Finally, Diya, who spoke English in India, stated that the greatest challenge for her and others like her is “to follow your accent. For international students, it's the greatest challenge we

people face. Totally your accent as well as the way of your English." It is important to note that both Diya and Advik learned and spoke English in India. However, it is a very different English dialect that they learned. TLE instructors may not know that Indian students like Diya and Advik perceive the way instructors speak as a foreign accent, very different from what they are used to.

Overcoming Challenges

While Min did not seem to face many challenges in TLE because "I didn't really have anything to overcome. I just did it," most other participants used a variety of strategies and services to help them overcome the challenges they faced in TLE. Many mentioned taking full advantage of the institution's Writing Center and Tutoring Center. Others relied on friends to help proofread their essays. Other services that participants mentioned were online programs like NetTutor and Grammarly or information repositories like YouTube and QuillBot. Participants also talked about doing extra activities to improve their English skills like reading more and watching television and listening to music in English. Amalia talked about using reading strategies that she learned in her ELL reading class. She took her time reading, looking up each word she was unsure of. "As I was reading more chapters," she said, "I had more vocabulary from the old English, and I was able to read it and understand it." She also took a tremendous amount of notes about what she was reading. While all participants many not have made the same efforts as Amalia, each participant used either a strategy or a service to overcome the challenges they faced in TLE.

Relationship with Other Students

Due to the interference of COVID-19, the interaction that participants had with other students varied depending on their effort to engage with others. Some participants who took their TLE course online, like Aaliyah, claimed not to have any friends on campus. "Maybe," she said,

"that would have helped me do better." Many students interacted with friends whom they already had and who had previously taken TLE. For instance, Min's boyfriend helped proofread her essays. Similarly, Dia relied on the help of friends who had taken TLE and who were from the same region in her country. Samuel also took the class online, so he "didn't have much interaction with other students." However, he and Gabriela were friends before taking TLE and supported each other during the class. Although Lien took the class online, she made an effort to form a study group. This group helped to boost her confidence. After getting their first graded paper back, she discovered that she got the highest grade in the group. "I am the only non-native speaker in the group," she said, "and I feel like, 'Oh, if I can get higher score, then why do I have to overwhelm myself?'" The help and support that the participants received from friends and peers was a main theme throughout this study.

Participants who were able to take the class face-to-face all seemed to have some level of interaction with other students. Advik attributes his study group that he formed in class to much of his success. "I would say," he reflected, "the only help that I had was my group members. Our group was really good. I really appreciate all of that because usually we do not have groups that helpful." Similarly, Daniel was able to form supportive relationships with other ELL students in his TLE class. "For me," he said, "it was helpful to have so many [ELL] students in the class because I feel better that I wasn't alone in the class." Diego, who was the only participant to take TLE outside the location of this study, also had a strong connection to other students in his class. "For me," he said, "the most important relationship was with my classmates." Again, the support and relationships with peers and friends proved essential to the success in TLE for almost all participants.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Most of the participants did not participate in extra-curricular activities, usually due to time restraints or a lack of opportunity. Sara, for example, stated that she is a full-time worker and did not have time for extra-curricular activities on top of work and school. Aaliyah had a similar response. “I think it would hurt me,” she said, “because I would spend more time on the clubs and the other stuff.” However, others expressed interest in extra-curricular activities but did not have the opportunity to participate. Samuel, for instance, said, “I was very interested in that kind of activities, but then Covid hit, and that went away.” Gabriela had limited exposer to extra-curricular activities on campus and wished there were more opportunities, especially for international students. Reflecting on one activity in which she participated, she described how much she enjoyed the activity and wished there were more. “It made me feel like international students matter,” she said. “They make a little space for a little event for us saying, ‘Hey we're here.’" Advik had a similar sentiment about the value of interacting with other international students. He described how he and other international students would congregate for lunch at the international student office. They would sit and eat and talk. For Advik, “It is just a little bit different to fit in, and there, we just felt home.” The best part about it was the food and the conversation. This sentiment about it being “just a little bit different to fit in” is a feeling that many of the participants had, yet despite the lack of opportunities to interact with other international students outside of TLE, these participants still found a way to integrate and succeed in TLE.

Some participants did have the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular clubs and enjoyed the experience. For instance, Daniel and Amalia both were members of the Spanish Club. Daniel credits his association with the club for building his confidence in English. “I was

kind of afraid of speaking English in front of other people," he said, "so getting to socialize with more people was… was good for me." The opportunity to interact and socialize with other students, especially with others with similar backgrounds, seemed to be a tremendous advantage for those who had the opportunity.

Academic Integration

How participants perceived their academic integration in relation to their success in TLE is significant. This line of questioning and responses is reflected in Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence, which identifies the need for students to interact with faculty and use institutional support systems to meet academic standards. It responds to research sub-question 2, which looks for the institutional support systems that ELLs attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in TLE. The institutional support systems that participants used varied. Their use depended on how much time was available to the participants and how comfortable the participants were using the resource.

External Services

All participants mentioned using some kind of external service or program outside of class. Some mentioned using NetTutor, which is an outsourced tutoring service that the institution provides for students. Diego, who took his TLE class in Mexico as a PhD candidate, paid for English lessons at a private English school because his university did not offer a Writing Center for English composition. Nevertheless, most participants mentioned the institution's Writing Center as the external service that they used most. Aaliyah stated that she visited the Writing Center at least once a day. Participants who utilized the services of the Writing Center expressed appreciation for the support.

Relationship with Other Staff and Faculty Members

Most participants mentioned having a relationship with at least one staff or faculty member that was beneficial while taking TLE. Many commented on the relationship they had with their Writing Center tutor and the importance of familiarity with that tutor. Gabriela explained that she would always go to the same girl in the Writing Center "because," she explained, "she already knows my errors or what I needed to improve." Isabella was relieved to find that her TLE instructor was her tutor that she had used previously in the Writing Center. "It was funny," Isabella remembered, "because my professor for [TLE] was one of my helpers in the Writing Center, so I knew him well" Isabella was grateful to have "familiar face" as her instructor, someone who was already familiar with her "struggles" and someone to whom she felt comfortable asking questions. Unlike the other participants, that type of relationship with the TLE instructor was unique to Isabella.

While not all participants had a close relationship with their TLE instructor, many established or maintained relationships with other staff or faculty. Amalia, for example, maintained her relationships with her ELL instructors as well as staff from the Writing Center. "It helped me because I felt comfortable with sharing any questions that I had," she explained, "and it just helped me to grow and to learn more because I was comfortable to ask anything that I wasn't secure about." Other participants mentioned having positive relationships with counselors or library staff. While a couple participants reported having very limited contact with faculty or staff outside of TLE, the overall sentiment was positive, summed up by Isabela.

> The relationship with the staff at [CC] has been really caring since the beginning that I started pursuing my path, my associates. They were there when I needed them. I spend

> time with them if I have any questions so they can guide me through something that I need in the facility, and they were there when I needed help.

This sentiment reflects well on the institutions support services and the accessibility that students feel that have to these services and to the faculty and staff who run these services.

Attributions

What participants attribute to their success in TLE is significant. This line of questioning and responses is reflected in Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution, which identifies factors that students attribute to their academic success and/or failure. It responds to the main research question and sub-question 1, which look for what skills and other factors ELLs attribute to their success in TLE. These attributions range in type from external, uncontrollable attributions like luck and family, to internal, controllable attributions like effort and stratagem. Responses from participants vary.

Difficulty of Writing Assignments

Attitudes about the difficulty of writing assignments were fairly evenly split, with about half of the participants feeling as though the writing assignments were very difficult and the other half feeling as though the writing assignments were somewhat difficult to not difficult. Some participants, like Isabella, for example, stated that the assignments were difficult at the beginning of the course, but as the course progressed and they became accustomed to the expectations of the instructor, the degree of difficulty decreased. Many participants felt somewhat prepared for the challenges of the writing assignments in TLE due to the guidance they received in ELL. For example, Lien described the writing assignments in TLE to be somewhat challenging due to the autonomy that the TLE instructor expected from the students. "I would say," she explained, "it's a little bit harder than if I compare it to [ELL] class because

for [ELL] class, the professor usually give us the guidance." While some participants complained about the difficulty of the assignments, the assignments were not perceived as interfering with the participants' success, as all participants succeeded in TLE.

Luck

Participants varied in how they attributed their success to luck. When asked if luck had anything to do with their success, 5 respondents stated that luck had very little, if anything, to do with their success. Diego explained that it is effort, not luck that makes people successful. Lien actually takes offense when someone calls her lucky. She described how much time and effort she put into each writing assignment, sometimes 20 hours a day, she said. Therefore, anyone who says she is lucky is actually insulting her.

Four respondents attributed part of their success to luck. Amalia said that luck affects her success. However, it was not the type of luck that one might attribute to scratching a lucky lottery ticket. Instead, for Amalia, she felt lucky to have the right friends, professors, and family in her life who support her. It was these "lucky" relationships with people coupled with her effort and hard work that she attributes to her success in TLE.

Three others attributed much of their success to luck. Daniel talked about forgetting to do some of his assignments and completing them at the last minute. He felt that he was lucky to remember at the last minute, turn something in, and still get a passing grade. Min talked about being lucky to have a teacher that "didn't care because he told us, 'The grade I gave you guys is higher than the grade you guys deserve.'" Min said that she got an A in the class, but her actual grade was most likely lower. Perhaps this type of luck is more akin to scratching a winning lottery ticket.

Relationship with Family

Participants had a variety of responses about the influence of their families on their success in TLE ranging from high attribution to low attribution. Diya, for example, credits a significant portion of her success to her Family. “It's a huge role,” she said, “and I think…I'm sure I am here today with the support of my family because without support of my family, I am not here.” Amalia had a similar feeling. She described how, although there was not a lot of room in her home, her family made sure that she had the space that she needed to study. Other participants, like Gabriela, relied less on family support. “Of course, I want them to be proud,” she said. However, Gabriela, like many other participants, credits her own persistence more than her family’s influence. “I think it was probably just my commitment to myself to do better and learn and do things right.” This seemed to be the prevailing attitude among the participants.

Overall, participants had supportive family that either encouraged or at least did not dissuade them from attending and succeeding in college, including TLE. Lien, for example, was very appreciative to her supportive husband who cooked meals, cleaned the house, and took care of their baby while she attended school. At times, Lien would feel bad, but he would remind her of her academic and professional goals. “You don’t get paid now,” he would remind her, “because you are studying right now. But later on, you can make a living out of it, so don’t worry. Don’t feel bad.” Lien felt encouraged and supported by her husband. Other participants relied less on their families. Some participants explained that because they were studying English, and because their families did not speak English, the participants would not share with their families information about their failures and successes in school. While some families may not have given direct educational support, all families encouraged the participants to attend school.

Relationship with TLE Instructor

Some participants reported having a strong relationship with their TLE instructor, while others reported not having much of a relationship at all. Isabella had a strong relationship with her TLE instructor that stemmed from her association with him in the Writing Center. She appreciated the fact that he was already familiar with her writing and the challenges she faced. “I got comfortable asking questions,” she said, “because I knew him at the beginning, so it was really nice seeing someone that knows me and my struggles. It helped me.” Most participants did not have the same kind of relationship with their TLE instructor as Isabella had. In fact, it took time and initiative from the participants to establish a relationship with their TLE instructor. Some would visit their TLE instructor during office hours, like Aaliyah, who said she would spend 15 minutes to an hour a week in her instructor’s office asking her questions. Others, like Daniel and Amalia, would stay after each class and ask the instructor questions. Lien described how she would help the instructor clean up after class in order to ask questions and build a relationship. Diego explained how valuable it was to him to have a relationship with his instructor. “The professor was a very good guy,” he said, “and he talked to us like we were partners. So in that way, it was very useful because I felt more comfortable.”

Unfortunately, some participants reported not having much of a relationship at all with their TLE instructor. Mariana remembered, “I did not have a close relationship, just during class, and the rest of the time just if I had a question, I just sent him an email, but not too close with him.” Min completed her TLE course with a negative feeling about her TLE instructor. She recalled her instructor telling the class that he gave the class higher grades than they deserved. “I feel like my professor didn't care. I felt like he's not that responsible. I felt like it's not like very

good.” While Min’s experience was unfortunate, it did not appear to be typical among the other participants.

Feedback on Writing Assignments

The type of feedback that participants received varied. Much of the feedback from their TLE instructors centered on grammar and mechanical issues. Mariana, for instance, appreciated this kind of feedback from her instructor. "Every time I started to have less mistakes on the papers,” she said, “and at the end of the semester, it wasn’t the same amount of mistakes than in the beginning. So I improved on that aspect.” Other participants received feedback that was positive in nature and reinforced their determination to succeed. Amalia remembered the “positive feedback” she received from her TLE instructor. Her instructor was impressed with her work and asked her and a friend “if we wanted to be tutors because he knew that we were [ELL] students, and he was like, ‘Some native English speakers don't even write like you guys.’” Other participants, like Lien, were disappointed with the lack of feedback they received from their TLE instructor. “I basically receive one comment from her for the whole semester.” Gabriela had a similar experience. “He really didn't give me any feedback on my writings,” she said, “and I didn't know what I was doing right or wrong.” Feedback, whether positive or negative, appeared to have some effect on students and their ability to socially integrate with their instructor, but it did not affect their ability to succeed in TLE.

Writing Abilities

Each participant had taken and passed a preparatory ESL writing course before taking TLE. Nevertheless, participants had a variety of feelings about their writing abilities before beginning their TLE course. Some, like Sara, felt “very confident” about their writing abilities

before entering the class. Others, like Daniel, felt “nervous [but] confident.” However, many felt like Lien, who did not feel “really prepared.”

Effort in Writing Assignments

Most participants claimed to have put a great deal of effort into their writing assignments. Min stated that she spent an average of twelve hours on each writing assignment. Lien described how she would start working on assignments before everyone else in her class. “Even before the assignment was announced, if it's open, if the professor not lock it and I can see it, I start working right away.” Diego measured his effort in terms of percentages. “Between zero and one hundred percent, I try to do like a ninety percent.” Samuel measured his effort on how interested he was in the assignment. “Maybe I put more effort into some assignments more than others based on the subject,” he said. “Maybe there were some subjects I was more passionate about than others.”

Strategies for Submitting a Passing Paper in TLE

Participants had a variety of strategies that they used to ensure they submitted passing papers, from reading their papers aloud to themselves to visiting with a tutor at the Writing Center. Those who did not visit the Writing Center usually had someone proofread their paper before they submitted it, either a friend, family member, or someone from their study group. Participants also reported using online programs and services to help them write passing papers including NetTutor, Grammarly, and QuillBot.

However, most participants, like Daniel, preferred using other people to help, not only with grammar corrections, but also with idea development. “I'll review it, then read it, then start looking for any mistakes that I had in my essays” Daniel recalled. After his initial review, he would ask friends to read his paper. After that, Daniel claimed that he visited the Writing Center

at least three or four times for each paper that he wrote to get help with developing ideas, grammar, and organization.

Interest in the TLE Writing Topics

There were a variety of responses about how interested the participants were in the writing topics. Some were very interested in the topics that were based on their assigned readings. For example, Diya enjoyed reading and writing about *A Place to Stand* by Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Daniel enjoyed reading and writing about *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Other participants enjoyed certain topics that were not necessarily related to the books they were reading. Diego was studying psychology, so he enjoyed writing about topics in psychology. Mariana enjoyed writing about current events. Samuel enjoyed writing about topics that were relevant to him and his community. He wrote a paper on diabetes and why it affects minority communities in the United States more than White communities. Some participants, like Min, reported not enjoying the topics at all. Similarly, Isabella said, “It was not interesting.” Lien and Advik both stated that they did not like reading, which made the writing process more arduous.

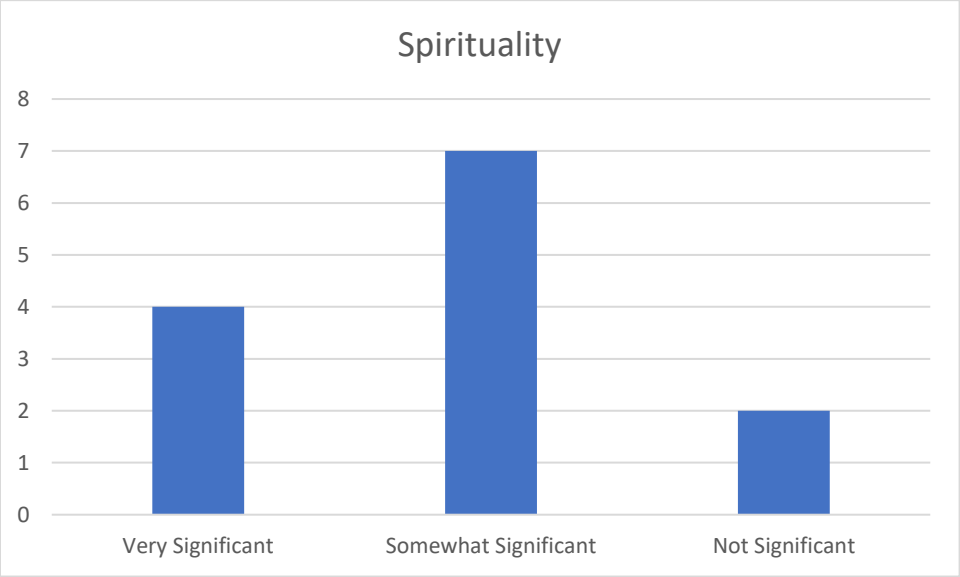
Spirituality

Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2018) suggest that faith and spirituality play a significant role in learning. When asked about how their spirituality influenced their success in TLE, most (11 out of 13) responded that their spirituality or belief in God affected their success in some way (see Figure 5). Their levels of attribution varied from significant to minor. Diya, for example, stated, “Without spirituality, for me, it’s nothing in life,” while Sara said, “I believe in God, but I'm not very religious. I do feel like God has given me the opportunity to go to school and be a better educated person.” Most participants who responded favorably about spirituality noted the effort that they need to make for God to help them. Diego, for instance, stated, “I did not ask God, for

example, ‘Oh God, please help me to pass this test.’ I better ask God, ‘Please help me with giving me health.’ In that way, I can do the rest.” Aaliyah admitted that when she prays, “I tell God to help me to pass the essay. But,” she acknowledged, “how can I pass the class without doing anything?” In contrast, Advik admitted that he was “not very spiritual,” and Daniel stated, “I don't really rely on God. I’m not so religious, like a religious person. I’m just on my own.”

Figure 5

Spiritual Attribution



Note: Significance of how participants attributed their spiritual to their success in TLE.

Research Question Responses

The data that was collected were able to effectively answer the research questions. The data also provided support for the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. While participants did not all have the same experiences in TLE, their experiences were able to generate important collective data that identified internal and external factors to success in TLE as well as attributions. These results benefit CC as it determines which services to provide students. These results also benefit ELL students as they prepare to take TLE.

Central Research Question

What do English language learners (ELLs) attribute their successful completion of transfer-level English (TLE)? After evaluating the data, there is no single answer that was true for all participants. While this question is best answered by looking at it through the sub questions and the lens of Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) attribution theory, there were three major factors that stood out among the various attributions. The first was the utilization of external support services, specifically the Writing Center. Participants who utilized the institution's writing center felt it was a significant support to their success in TLE. The second was being socially integrated with friends and classmates. The support and insight from friends and classmates into writing assignments enhanced the participants confidence and ability to produce well-written assignments. Finally, the most significant attribution was the confidence that each participant had in themselves. While participants exhibited a healthy amount of trepidation about TLE, all expressed confidence in their own abilities to complete assignments and succeed in the course.

Sub-Question One

What are the institutional support systems that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in transfer-level English (TLE)? All the participants proved to be somewhat academically integrated into the institution, as Tinto (1993) claims is necessary for students to persist. While not all participants used the same institutional support system, they all used some sort of external resource. The institution's writing center was the most cited academic resource that participants used. Other participants used the peer tutoring center, and some used NetTutor, an online service that the institution provides. Nevertheless, participants who used the Writing Center had high praise for its services. When asked in the

focus group to identify an external service that helped the participants be successful in TLE, Amalia responded without hesitation, “Hands down, the Writing Center,” which seemed to sum it up for most of the participants.

Sub-Question Two

What are the social support systems that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in transfer-level English (TLE)? When asked to identify the most significant social support systems, almost all participants listed a friend or peer group, which indicates a certain level of social integration at the institution, to which Tinto (1993) described as important for academic persistence. While family was also mentioned, it was the friends and peer groups on whom the participants tended to rely most. These friends and peers were also students at the same institution and had either already taken TLE or were in the process of taking it at the same time as the participants. The participants trusted these friends and peers to give honest feedback about the papers they had written for their TLE course. Mariana described the symbiotic academic relationship she has with a friend. “With [her friend], if I have a question, I can ask her, or if I took that class first, she asks me, and we’re helping each other. For [TLE], I sent to her my paper, and she told me what she thought I could change, and she said she will be picky because it counts to my grade.”

Sub-Question Three

What are the academic skills acquired in community college English as a second language (ESL) courses that English language learners (ELLs) attribute as the most useful in transfer-level English (TLE)? Most participants cited basic writing skills and grammar as the most useful skills they acquired in their ELL courses. Samuel summarized this sentiment that most participants had. He explained how learning the basic structure of an essay along with

grammar skills helped prepare him for TLE. Advik added the skill of formatting an essay, and Isabella described learning how to outline an essay as useful skills. Amalia mentioned skills that she learned in a TLE reading class as beneficial in TLE. Other Factors

There were other factors to which participants attributed their success. When asked in their face-to-face interview to describe the most significant external factors that contributed to their success in TLE (see Figure 6), participants focused on 4 distinct categories: their instructor, their family, their friends or peers, and external resources. Friends, peers, and external resources were the most significant factors to which participants attributed their success.

When asked in their face-to-face interview to describe the most significant internal factors that contributed to their success in TLE (see Figure 6), self-confidence ranked higher than any other factor. Faith, intelligence, and persistence were other factors that participants mentioned.

When asked in the focus group interview to name the three factors that contributed most to their success in TLE, participants had a variety of answers (see Table 6). Some participants mentioned factors that they had previously mentioned as important internal and external factors such as self-confidence, friends, family, and the Writing Center. However, participants also mentioned various strategies they used including reading books, watching movies with sub-titles, and getting organized.

Figure 6

Most Important External Factors for Participants

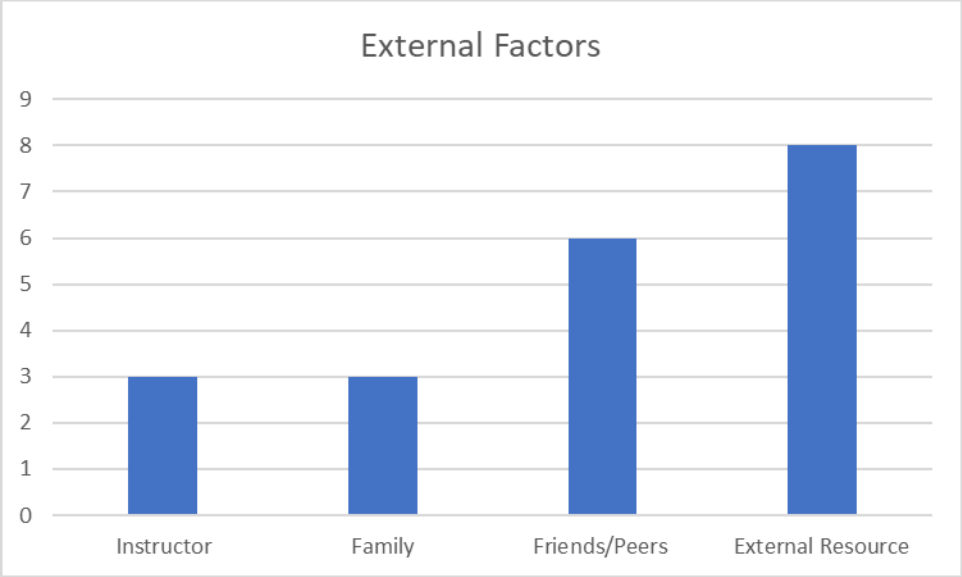


Figure 7

Most important Internal Factors for Participants

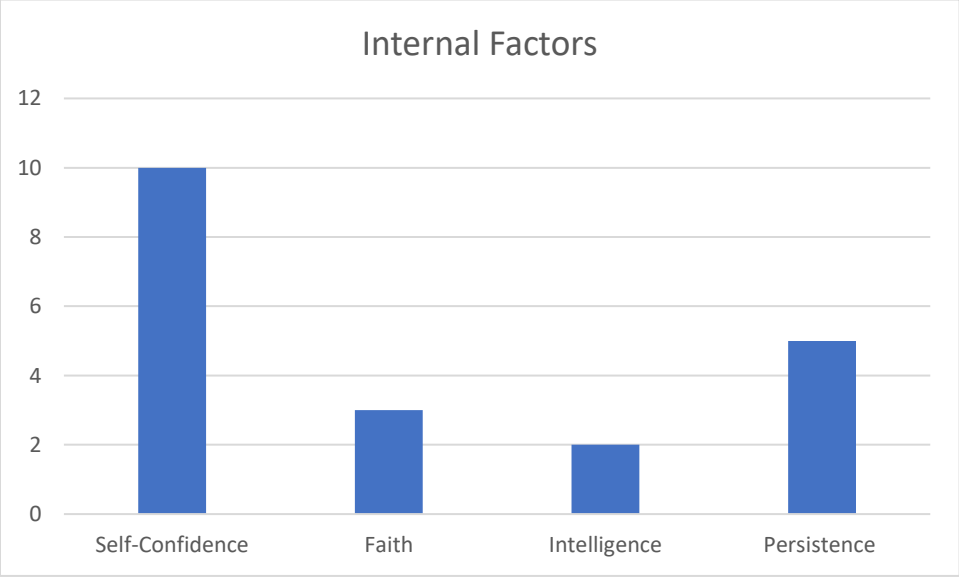


Table 6

Three Factors that Participants Believed Helped Them the Most to Pass TLE

Daniel	The Writing Center	The library	The library Workshops
Lien	Asking Questions	Getting Organized	Getting a Study Group
Amalia	ELL Classes	Support Systems: Friends, Family, Instructors, The Writing Center	Personal perseverance, effort
Min	Personal attitude, treating every class like a job	Passion: desire to get an A.	Making sure I'm really studying, learning stuff from class, like writing skills and gaining vocabulary.
Diego	Dedication	Using English every day in common activities	Watching movies and TV with subtitles
Samuel	Dedication	ELL Teachers	
Eliana	Reading	TLE and ELL Professors	Tutoring
Mariana	TLE Professor and feedback	Support from Friends and family	External resources provided by the school (Writing Center, library)
Isabella	Writing Center	Purdue OWL	Translation programs
Aaliyah	Herself	Family (taking care of daughter)	
Sara	Determination	Teacher support	Confidence gained from ELL classes
Advik	Study Group	Choosing "easy" topics	
Gabriela	Close Friend	Books	Tutors

Summary

The fourteen participants that took part in this research study provided insight into the question of what ELLs attribute their success in TLE. These participants came from a range of national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, yet their responses generated many of the same important themes, namely that academic and social integration are important factors for ELLs to

succeed in TLE. While there are other important academic resources, the institution's writing center was the academic resource most cited has helpful to succeeding in TLE. In addition, friend and peer relationships that are academically mutually beneficial are significant for TLEs to succeed in TLE. While almost all the participants attributed self-confidence as a factor they attribute to their success in TLE, it is not clear from where their self-confidence originated. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between being socially and academically integrated into the institution and having self-confidence.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to understand what English language learners (ELLs) attribute to their successful completion of transfer-level English (TLE) at a California community college (CC). This chapter includes a summary of the findings. It also includes a discussion of the findings as related to Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) attribution theory. This is followed by a section about the methodological and practical implications of the study as well as an outline of the delimitations and limitations of the study. It concludes with recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This study is based on two theoretical concepts: Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution. Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence attributes student success to their ability to make social and academic connections at their academic institution. Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution identifies internal and external factors that students recognize as either helping or hindering their academic success.

Interpretation of Findings

Several thematic findings were identified during the data analysis. These findings were based on Tinto (1993) and Weiner's (1985) theoretical frameworks. Specifically, it was found that participants felt academically integrated through their use of the institution's writing center. Moreover, they felt socially integrated through their connection with friends and peers who had taken or were concurrently taking TLE. Finally, participants attributed much of their success to their own self-confidence. This self-confidence is most likely partially due to their academic and social integration in the institution.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Three sub-questions guided this study. Sub-question 1 asked participants to identify the academic skills acquired in their ESL courses that they attribute to their success in TLE. Sub-question 2 asked participants to identify the institutional support systems that they attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in TLE. Finally, sub-question 3 asked participants to identify the social support systems that they attribute as the most crucial for achieving success in TLE. These questions were the basis for identifying how these participants were able to achieve academic and social integration and how they attributed their success. Many participants were able to develop relationships with their tutors in the institution's Writing Center. These relationships appeared to be more significant than the relationships – or lack of relationships – the participants formed with their TLE instructors. Additionally, peer relationships were a very significant factor in what the participants attributed to their success in TLE. It was also found that, while helpful, extracurricular activities are not essential for helping ELLs integrate socially. These themes are essential factors in the success these participants had in TLE.

Institutional Integration. The first main construct of Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence posits that students are more likely to persist if they are socially integrated with faculty, staff, and peers. This study confirms this aspect of Tinto's theory. The participants attributed much of their success to the institution's Writing Center. Some participants expressed deep appreciation for the relationships they developed with their Writing Center tutors. Participants that visited the same tutors each week were able to kindle significant academic relationships with their tutors. Participants appreciated the fact that these tutors understood the obstacles facing the participants in their TLE courses. In fact, Isabella expressed great delight when she discovered that her TLE instructor was the Writing Center tutor that she had seen many

times before for previous classes. She was pleased that she was beginning the course with an instructor that already understood her strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, this study extends Tinto's (1993) theory by positing the benefits for ELLs of creating social connections with writing center staff. These relationships increased student persistence among ELLs at CC.

Instructor Integration. Most Participants expressed a less significant social connection with their TLE instructor. While some participants were able to form a social connection with their TLE instructor, others were not, mostly due to the online format of the class. However, exchanges with the instructor – or the lack thereof – impacted participants. Some participants who never heard from their online instructor wondered if their instructor even cared about them. Min seemed to be insulted and hurt by her instructor who told the class that he was giving them higher grades than they deserved. Nevertheless, all the participants in this study were able to succeed in TLE despite the kind of relationship they had with their instructor. Therefore, this study diverges slightly from Tinto's (1993) theory in that, while helpful, students can persist without positive social integration with their instructor.

Peer Integration. More significant than social integration with the instructor, and slightly more significant than the social integration with staff in a writing center, is social integration with peers. Participants relied heavily on either friends whom they already had or study groups which they had formed during class. Not only does this confirm Tinto's (1993) theory of social integration, but it also confirms Deil-Amen's (2011) suggestion that the use of learning communities, which is a type of social integration, among ELLs increases persistence among these students. While there was one outlier in this claim in Aaliyah – who claimed the support of the instructor, the Writing Center, her peers, and her family were not helpful – all other participants had at least one peer or more whom they claimed were very helpful in their

efforts to succeed in TLE.

Academic Integration. The second construct of Tinto's theory is that of academic integration, or the ability to meet academic standards and use institutional support systems to meet these standards. This study confirms this aspect of Tinto's (1993) theory. All participants used external support system to meet the academic standards of the course. Most used the Writing Center. However, others used the peer Tutoring Center, while others used an online service called NetTutor, which is provided by the school. Diego is the only one who did not take TLE at the same institution where he took ESL. Nonetheless, he still found an external support system in the form of a private English school to help him meet the standards of his TLE course. Again, as all students utilized at least one type of external support system to succeed in TLE, it confirms Tinto's (1993) theory that the use of external support can increase student persistence.

Extracurricular Integration. Tinto (1993) claims that students who are engaged in extracurricular activities at their institution are more likely to persist. This study found that most of these ELLs did not participate in traditional extracurricular activities. Two participants did, in fact, participate in the Spanish Club on campus, and one belonged to the International Club, but the rest did not belong to or participate in extracurricular activities. Many expressed interests in participating in clubs, organizations, or activities. However, due to work responsibilities, family responsibilities, and Covid restrictions, most did not take part. Again, just like ELLs do not need to have a relationship with their instructor to succeed in TLE, while helpful, this study shows that they also do not need to take part in extra-curricular activities to succeed in TLE.

Tinto (1993) acknowledged the lack of data informing the theory as it relates to immigrant and international students. Therefore, this study contributes to this theory by providing needed data. It provides useful data concerning the value of staff and peer

relationships for ELLs, the value of external resources provided by the institution for ELLs, the useful but unnecessary social interaction between TLE instructors and ELLS, and the useful but unnecessary participation in extra-curricular activities by ELLs.

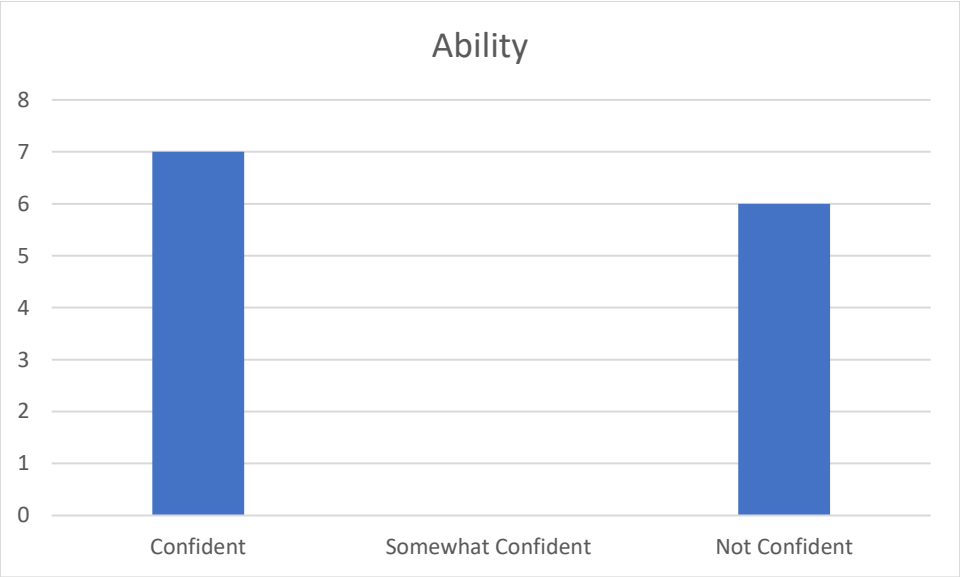
Strategic Attributions. The first four factors to which students attribute their success or failure, according to Weiner (1985), are ability, effort, strategy, and interest (see Figures 5 and 6). These are all internal factors, with ability defined as an uncontrollable factor, and effort, strategy, and interest defined as controllable factors. For the first uncontrollable factor of ability, participants were almost evenly split between having confidence in their writing abilities or not feeling confident in their writing abilities before entering TLE. There was no in-between. All participants but 2 indicated rendering a significant amount of effort in each writing assignment. The 2 participants that did not render a significant amount of effort indicated that they gave some effort to their writing assignments. All participants indicated using strategies before submitting a paper to their TLE instructor. These included the use of the Writing Center, online grammar-check programs, peer reviews, and other pre-writing and revising techniques. Participants were somewhat split between their level of interest in their writing assignments. Most were either very interested in the topic they were assigned or somewhat interested in the topic they were assigned. Three participants indicated that they were not interested at all in the writing assignments.

Internal Attributions. These findings support Weiner's (1985) theory of uncontrollable and controllable attributions. Even though all participants had taken preparatory writing courses before entering TLE, half of the participants did not feel that their abilities were at a level to succeed in TLE at the beginning of the course, indicating an uncontrollable factor (in their minds) of their capacity to succeed in TLE (see Figure 8). Nevertheless, all participants utilized the controllable factors of effort and strategy to ultimately succeed (see Figure 9). This study

diverges slightly from Weiner's (1985) in that the level of interest in each writing assignment was more of an uncontrollable factor. Most instructors assigned writing topics over which students had little choice.

Figure 8

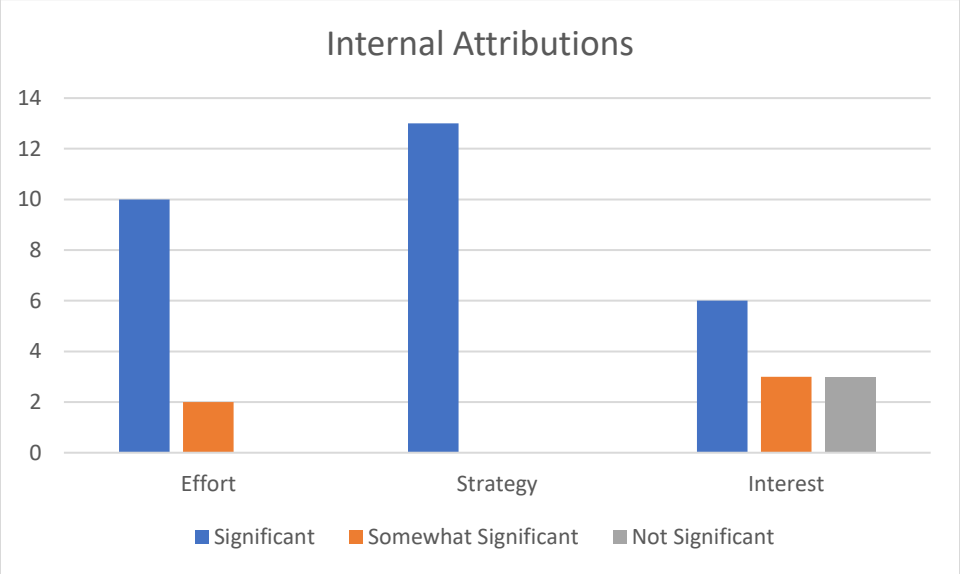
Internal Attribution of Ability – Uncontrollable Factor



Note: Level of confidence upon entering TLE.

Figure 9

Other Internal Attributions – Controllable Factors

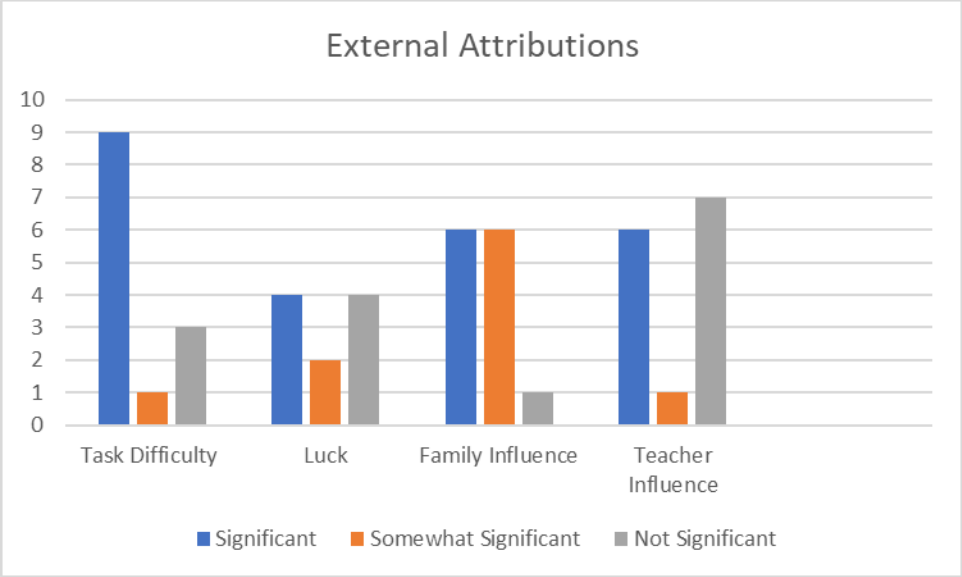


Note: Significance of other internal attributions.

External Attributions. The second four factors to which students attribute their success or failure, according to Weiner (1985), are task difficulty, luck, family influence, and teacher influence (See Figure 10). Because these are each external factors, they are each also characterized as uncontrollable factors. Most participants identified the writing tasks as difficult or somewhat difficult, with only 2 participants identifying the writing assignments as not difficult. Most participants (6 in total) felt that luck played a part in success, with 4 participants not attributing any part of their success to luck. All participants but 1 attributed much or some of their success to their family. Participants were evenly split between attributing their success to their instructor. Half attributed some or much of their success to their instructor, while half did not attribute any of their success to their instructor.

Figure 10

External Attributions



Note: External attributions according to the level of significance applied by participants.

These data support Weiner's (1985) theory of uncontrollable attributions to success. Participants clearly did not control the level of difficulty in each writing assignment, the actions or influence of their families, or the actions or influence of their instructors. In addition, for half of the participants, luck was not a factor. However, to be fair to the instructors, many of the participants completed their TLE course during the COVID pandemic and were forced to take the course online. The participants and the instructors were forced to adjust to the new (for most) environment of online teaching and learning. Again, this aligns with Weiner's (1985) theory of an uncontrollable factor of teacher influence.

ESL Course Attributions. Not surprisingly, participants cited grammar and writing skills as the most useful. Specifically mentioned as part of the grammar skills were sentence-level mechanics. They mentioned learning how to correctly use commas, semi-colons, and periods, although some admitted to still struggling with these mechanical issues while taking and

after completing TLE. Participants also mentioned the usefulness of learning basic essay development. Those who had earned university degrees from other countries explained how the writing style in the United States is much different than the writing style in their respective countries. They stated that it was helpful to learn how to organize an essay with an introductory paragraph that includes a thesis statement, develop strong body paragraphs with detailed support, and a concluding paragraph. In addition, participants mentioned reading strategies and vocabulary development as useful in TLE. Participants used reading strategies that were learned in ESL courses and applied them to difficult reading assignments in TLE. Similarly, participants mentioned the ongoing development of academic vocabulary that began in their ESL courses and continued into their TLE course.

Beyond the skills that were acquired in ESL courses, participants mentioned the value of having ongoing relationships with their ESL instructors. Many of them had taken multiple ESL classes. Therefore, they formed a connection with their instructors. They expressed appreciation for the support of their ESL instructors through TLE and beyond. Overall, although some participants felt overwhelmed at the start of their TLE course, most felt a sense of confidence that is attributable to their experiences in their ESL courses.

Social Support Attributions. Participants emphasized the importance of their social support systems. While some participants were initially reluctant to give credit for their success to anyone else, all eventually acknowledged the value of some type of social support. They can be analyzed in three separate categories: family, friends, and spirituality. It was surprising to find that many participants did not attribute much of their success in TLE to their families. Most participants perceived support from family as the family member's ability to edit and revise a TLE paper, which most family members were not able to do. However, when pressed, most

participants acknowledged that their families supported their overall educational goals with verbal support as well as physical support in terms of providing a place to study, babysitting children, making meals, and altogether being concerned for the general welfare of the participant. Support from friends and classmates was the most significant social interaction to which participants attributed their success. Unlike family members, participants sought out help and advice from friends and classmates for their TLE writing assignments. Participants appreciated the honest feedback they would get about their papers. There also seemed to be a sense of competition among participants who were part of study groups. They would read other students' papers and feel driven to do better than their classmates. Similarly, there was a sense of pride when a friend would read a paper and give positive feedback on that paper. Overall, most participants held friends and classmates in high regard in terms of attributing their successful completion of TLE to them.

Faith Attributions. Finally, although spirituality may not traditionally be thought of as social interaction, it did rate high among many participants. While two participants did not attribute any of their success to their spirituality, most revealed that they would regularly ask God to help them do their best on their assignments. Lien, especially, felt a special connection to her father who had passed away when she was younger. She felt as though he was always there supporting her. Overall, participants attributed most of their success to their own abilities, their perseverance, their positive attitude, and other personal traits and characteristics. While external and social support systems were valuable, the desire, and ultimately the ability, to succeed came from within. No participant ever mentioned that they were afraid that they would not succeed. Even though there was some fear and trepidation at times, the deep desire to succeed superseded

any thoughts of failure. Once these participants set a goal to take and pass TLE, they looked for external and social means to help them achieve the goal.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The results of this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical significance. Theoretically, it offers support to Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence and Weiner's (1985) attribution theory. Empirically, it provides data about successful ELLs in TLE where there was previously a lack of data. It can also aid in future research and offer support for ELL programs that feed in to or terminate in a transfer-level English course. Finally, it benefits ELLs, faculty, and administrators who work at CC by providing specific information that ELLs attributed to their success in TLE at CC.

Implications for Policy

The practical significance of this study is, perhaps, the most important. It offers important justification for the continuation of the external services that CC provides, as each of the participants utilized at least one of these services. The service that was mentioned most often, however, was the Writing Center. This study validates the existence of this vital service, but it also goes beyond simply providing the service. Multiple participants described the value of having a relationship with a Writing Center tutor, someone who understands the language obstacles that the students face. This also aligns with other research indicating that a positive relationship with faculty or staff on campus increases academic success for ELLs (Huerta et al., 2019). Currently, CC has an embedded-tutor program, which means that a Writing Center tutor is designated to a specific class. However, due to an insufficient number of tutors, not all classes are able to have an embedded tutor. This study can be used to encourage administrators to increase the number of Writing Center tutors to increase the number of embedded tutors.

Additionally, California Assembly Bill 705, a bill that was passed in January of 2018, requires community colleges to increase the likelihood that students will pass transfer-level English and math in one year (AB 705, 2018). This means that almost all students are now placed directly into transfer-level math and English courses, and colleges are no longer allowed to offer below transfer-level courses. This also applies to ELLs who have completed at least two years of high school in the United States. They are now placed directly into TLE whether they feel prepared for the course or not. It is, therefore, essential that TLE instructors understand what these ELL students need to succeed in their course. While the ELLs do not need a close relationship with the instructor, they do need to feel socially integrated with friends and classmates. They also need to feel supported by the institution by means of available resources. Again, the institution must provide enough writing support staff at the Writing Center for these students to succeed in TLE. At the very least, TLE instructors can foster learning communities in their classrooms, which Deil-Amen (2011) found to increase persistence among ELLs.

While international students are still allowed three years to pass transfer-level English, they, too, feel the need to be socially integrated with peers and institutional resources. The institution currently does not have an international student center where international students can congregate and interact with each other. There is one international student counselor at the institution, and that is where international students gather, outside her office. As participants in this study attributed relationships with peers and classmates as a factor in their success in TLE, it would behoove the institution to invest in a facility where international students can meet. This would be a worthwhile investment into the success of these students.

Implications for Practice

Social integration is also a significant practical implication. All participants, except one, described the value of having friends or classmates they could trust to read their papers. Many participants claimed to be shy and stated that they were reluctant to talk to other students in their classes unless the other student talked to them first. This study identified the value of these relationships. Instructors, therefore, should try to help ELL students form relationships in their TLE courses. These relationships will help students feel socially integrated and help them persist in their TLE course.

One way instructors can help ELLs socially integrate in their classes is to form learning community, as Deil-Amen (2011) suggested. Traditionally, a learning community would be composed of a cohort of students who take more than one class together (Garza, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, as AB 705 limits the ability of ELLs who have attended two years of high school and graduated to take additional ESL courses in college, TLE instructors can create learning communities within the classroom. This can be in the form of group projects or group tutoring sessions at the Writing Center.

For international and immigrant students who are still able to take ESL courses in college, learning communities in the form of multiple classes is more feasible. However, international and immigrant students are composed of more than just F1 visa students who are single and without children. They are married, have families, have work responsibilities, and other obligations. Therefore, creating lasting cohorts of learning communities could be more challenging. Nevertheless, Garza, et al. (2021) found that ELLs who do participate in learning communities are more likely to persist in college. This is something that ESL teachers and administrators can promote.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study contributes to Tinto's (1993) and Weiner's (1985) theoretical frameworks by (1) identifying the institutional and social support systems that can aid successful ELLs to persist in TLE, and (2) identifying the factors that ELLs attribute to their success in TLE. Tinto (1993) identified the need for students to be academically and socially integrated into the institution to increase persistence. As Tinto (1993) suggested, to be academically integrated into CC, ELLs need external support to be successful in TLE, as each participant took advantage of either the institution's Writing Center, Tutoring Center, or NetTutor. Additionally, the results of this study indicate a need for ELLs to be socially integrated into the institution. All but one participant had at least 1 friend they were able to use for academic support, and participant responses indicate that the larger the friend or peer group, the more integrated they feel in the institution.

These results correlate with the research of Fong et al. (2017), which concluded that many ELLs are extrinsically motivated. This extrinsic motivation can be in the form of support services provided by the institution, praise from faculty, or positive associations with friends and classmates. This seems to be especially true for female ELLs, as Mohammadi (2016) found, yet there did not appear to be a significant discrepancy in this study of females being more extrinsically motivated than males. What did stand out is each participant's effort to make use of an external resource, whether it was provided by the institution – like the instructor or the Writing Center – or came from the participants' personal life – like family or friends. In this regard, Kanno (2018) is validated in recommending that the institution be aware of these factors that lead to ELL success in college and make efforts to build on them.

As for attributions, the most significant attribution that participants ascribed to their success was the effort that they put into each assignment and the strategy they used to ensure

they submitted a passing paper. This finding correlates with the findings of Soriano-Ferrer and Alonso-Blanco (2020), who observed that students attribute at least part of their success to some internal variable like effort and strategy. Indeed, participants in this study attributed much of their success to their own efforts and strategies they employed while enrolled in TLE. Not coincidentally, the attribution of strategy is inherently linked to being socially and academically integrated into the institution (Tinto, 1993), as the strategies participants used most included friend/peer review, or the external services provided by the institution.

Empirically, this study contributes to the literature concerning ELL success and second language acquisition by filling gaps with data about successful ELLs in TLE. Much of the previous literature focuses on obstacles that ELLs face, especially in writing programs. Finn (2018), for instance, identified internal struggles that ELLs in a college writing program faced. These struggles included nervousness and anxiety about test results, poor study habits, and discouragement. The participants in this study admitted to having feelings of nervousness and anxiety over assignments, but they tended to use those feelings as motivation to complete the assignments. In fact, all the participants mentioned the significant amount of effort and time they devoted to each assignment in order to succeed. This does not mean that participants never had feelings of discouragement stemming from low grades. Some participants did, in fact, receive low grades on some assignments. However, they used these experiences to learn from their mistakes and improve on the next assignment.

Similarly, Lee (2018) identified habits that failing ELLs must develop as well as awareness that ELL instructors and writing centers must have about the challenges facing ELLs. Of note is the fact that these successful ELLs exhibited personal traits that Lee (2018) identified as essential for ELLs to possess in college. While Lee (2018) places much of the onus for

success on the intuition and the instructors, Lee (2018) also contends that ELLs must make an effort to participate in class, be aware of assignment guidelines and dates, and make use of intuitional resources. ELLs can easily be facilitated in these tasks by the intuition. Nevertheless, personal responsibility is a valuable characteristic, which is what the participants in this study had. No one that used the Writing Center stated that they were forced to go. No one that sought out help from friends or classmates said that it was a requirement. Not one participant blamed the instructor if he or she forgot an assignment due date. In fact, Daniel did forget some due dates, yet he was able to remember at the last minute and still submit a passing assignment, which he attributed to luck. Therefore, this study confirms Lee's (2018) research, that institutions need to take some responsibility for the success of ELLs in the form of making them aware of resources, dates, and other important educational factors. However, much of the success of these participants came from their efforts to be responsible for themselves.

Lambert (2015) identified factors such as family and work that can interfere with success. While five of the fourteen participants in this study were married, only three had children. Those who had children had only one child each. Also, each participant who had children stated that they had support from family to help with childcare while attending school. Therefore, because the participants in this study successfully passed TLE, there was no real correlation between Lambert's (2015) study and this one.

The most significant contribution that this study adds to the literature is identifying specific internal and external factors that successful ELLs attributed to their success in TLE (see tables 5, 6, and 7). As Kitcher (1992) observed, nothing is known a priori. Such was the case for this study. It was not known what the participants would attribute to their success in TLE. From a teacher's perspective, it would be assumed that good teaching would be high on the list.

However, good teaching did not make the top three. In fact, the number one attribution for success that participants identified contradicts Lamber's (2015) findings. Lambert (2015) concluded that confidence did not impact student success in writing. However, this study confirms that self-confidence was the main factor that participants attributed to their success in transfer-level English at their institution.

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to identify what ELLs attribute their success in TLE at a community college in California. For that reason, participants were selected based on whether they took an ESL course at the institution and subsequently enrolled in and passed a TLE course. Because this study focused on ELLs, it was required that each participant have a primary language other than English. There were no restrictions or limitations about which country the participants originated from. All participants were over 18 years old.

A weakness of this study is the inclusion of both online and face-to-face TLE courses. This study was first designed with the assumption that most or all participants would have taken their TLE course face-to-face. However, due to COVID restrictions, many of the participants were forced to take their TLE course online. Some participants started the TLE face-to-face and then went online mid-semester. These unforeseen circumstances may have affected their social integration with their instructor and with the institution, which could have altered what the participants attributed their success in TLE.

Recommendations for Future Research

The delimitation of including both face-to-face and online TLE courses occurred due to COVID restrictions. COVID has caused many TLE courses to continue to be offered online. Research indicates that while there are many benefits to online learning, especially in higher

education, it also presents some challenges (Dumford & Miller, 2018). For ELLs, research indicates that online learning presents language acquisition problems in the form of relying on written and verbal input, which leads to a lack of verbal interaction and, therefore, verbal development (Sailsman, 2020). However, online learning takes many forms, which can include face-to-face instruction via video conferencing platforms like Zoom or Skype. Further research in the form of a quantitative correlational study can identify if there are factors that interfere with the success of ELLs enrolled in online TLE courses, whether they are purely online or incorporate forms of face-to-face technology.

Additionally, one of the main factors to which participants attributed their success in TLE was their self-confidence. This could be ascribed to grit, which Duckwork et al. (2007) defined as a factor beyond talent and ability, which causes someone to persevere despite challenges that may occur. While studies have shown that teaching students to have grit can have beneficial results on the academic development of middle school students (Santos, et al., 2021), it is not clear if grit can be taught to community college ELLs who will take TLE. Therefore, research can be conducted in the form of a quantitative experimental method in which a test group of ELL community college TLE students are taught grit-building curriculum. Their results can be compared to a control group ELLs who take TLE but are not exposed to grit-building curriculum.

Many of the participants in this study were young, single, and childless. There was only one participant over 40, but he did not have any children living at home. There is research conducted about non-traditional community college students, or those over 25 years old, yet there is little about non-traditional, or mature ELLs (Almon, 2015). The research that there is mostly qualitative in nature. It indicates that family responsibilities, full-time jobs, lack of

finances, and insufficient language skills deter them from continuing in college beyond the traditional ESL courses. More research can be conducted following quantitative methods to establish a broader perspective nationwide of the obstacles, both perceived and real, that mature ELLs attribute to their resistance to progressing through transfer-level English and beyond.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to identify what ELLs at a community college in California attribute to their success in TLE. Using Tinto's (1993) theory of persistence as one of two theoretical frameworks, this study found that ELLs are more likely to persist in TLE if they are socially integrated with the institution. Due to COVID restrictions, most participants were not able to integrate socially via extracurricular activities on campus. However, all but one participant identified either friends or peers as significant contributions to their success in TLE. Some participants only had 1 friend in whom they could rely, while others had a cohort of friends or peers with whom they shared their writing assignments and from whom they sought academic advice. The significance of this finding underscores the need for ELL as well as TLE instructors to make conscious efforts to encourage social interaction in their classes among their students.

Additionally, this study found that ELLs are more likely to persist if they are academically integrated in the institution. While COVID restrictions made it challenging for some participants to integrate academically with their instructor, all participants noted using one or more external academic service provided by the institution, with the institution's Writing Center being the most valuable resource. Participants who used the Writing Center praised the support they received from the tutors. The academic relationships the participants formed with the tutors helped these ELLs integrate academically in the institution and persist in TLE.

Using Weiner's (1985) attribution theory as the second theoretical framework that guided this study, the research found that these ELLs attributed much of their success to 3 main factors: strategy, effort, and self-confidence. Each participant indicated using some sort of strategy before submitting an assignment to their TLE instructor. Those strategies included individual approaches such as reading a paper aloud and using online grammar tools, to collaborative approaches such as going to the Writing Center or having a friend or peer read the paper. This suggests a need for ELL and TLE instructors to teach and encourage the use of strategies to their ELL students.

Related with strategy and integration is the factor of effort that each participant put into their writing assignments and attributed to their success in TLE. Nine of thirteen participants stated that the writing assignments in their TLE courses were either somewhat challenging or very challenging. This required effort on their part, which they purportedly produced. It required effort to utilize strategies that would yield a passing grade. It required effort to seek help from the Writing Center or some other external service. It required effort to seek help from friends or peers. It is this effort that these participants applied to their writing assignments that lead to their success in TLE, and it is effort that ELL and TLE instructors should encourage their students to practice.

The last factor to which these participants attributed their success in TLE is perhaps the most vital: self-confidence. Each participant expressed a great deal of self-confidence in their ability to succeed in TLE. It is unclear where each individual participant acquired his or her self-confidence. Lien explained part of where her self-confidence comes from, which could apply to the other participants. When asked to describe the internal factor that helped her the most to pass TLE, she said, "A positive attitude." She continued, "You need to think outside of the box. I

have a poster in front of me. It says, ‘Think like a Proton,’ like think positive. If you always doubt yourself, saying, ‘I'm going to fail this class. This class is so hard. There is no way I can get through it. There is no way I'm going to make it,’ then you're going to fail. Like you fail even before you start. I remember there was one TED Talk that we watched in [ESL] class that said, "Fake it until you make it." It always sticks in my head. Fake it until you make it. Like you believe you can do it. Then you can do it.”

The insights provided by the participants in this study are valuable for TLE and college-level ESL programs. Instructors can foster relationships among students to help with their social integration. Social integration, especially peer integration, proved to be a significant factor that led to success in TLE among these participants. In addition, program administrators and instructors can provide the external resources – which include the writing and tutoring centers – and teach the strategies to promote academic integration. Together, these factors that the participants in this study attributed to their success can develop the self-confidence that is necessary for ELLs to persist in TLE.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter from Liberty University

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 7, 2021

John Hart

Floralba Arbelo Marrero

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-146 ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TRANSFER-LEVEL ENGLISH

Dear John Hart, Floralba Arbelo Marrero:

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 following date: October 7, 2021. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications 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(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your

stamped consent form(s) 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(s) 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 Ethics Office

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter from Case Study Location

Institutional Review Board Office of Institutional Effectiveness

September 23, 2021

RE: IRB Application for Project: Attributions of Successful English Language Learners in Transfer-Level English

Dear John Hart,

Your research application for "Attributions of Successful English Language Learners in Transfer-Level English" has been reviewed and approved by the [redacted]IRB.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

[redacted]

C.H., Ph.D.

Chair, IRB

Dean of Institutional Effectiveness

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to identify what former English for Multilingual Students (ESL) attribute their success in English 1A, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, have taken at least 1 ESL course, and have taken and passed English 1A. Participants, if willing, will be asked to respond to a questionnaire (about 10 minutes), participate in 1 group interview (60-90 minutes), 1 personal interview (60-90 minutes), and share an English 1A essay with comments from an instructor (if possible).

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed in order to analyze data. Participants will have the opportunity to review transcriptions to check for accuracy. Names and other information will be requested as part of the study, but all information will remain confidential.

Participants who complete the study will be compensated with $50. Participants who complete only half of the study will be compensated $25 (e.g. questionnaire and interview OR questionnaire and focus group).

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to sign and return the consent document to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

John Hart

Professor of English for Multilingual Students

[redacted]

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: Attributions of Successful English Language Learners in Transfer-Level English

Principal Investigator: John Hart, M.A., Professor of English for Multilingual Students at Bakersfield College; Doctoral Student, Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, have taken at least 1 ESL course at Bakersfield College, and have taken and passed English 1A or the equivalent at another 2-year or 4-year institution.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to discover what English language learners attribute their successful completion of transfer-level English (or freshman English). Attribution is generally defined as the internal and external factors that English language learners identify as aiding in their successful completion of transfer-level English.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Respond to a questionnaire. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
2. Take part in a 1-on-1 interview. This will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. This interview will be recorded and transcribed.
3. Take part in a focus group interview with 4 to 5 other participants. This will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. This interview will be recorded and transcribed.
4. Share an essay from English 1A (or the equivalent) with comments from the instructor. This can be shared during the 1-on-1 interview or the focus group interview.
5. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit form participating in this study. However, by participating in a focus group, some participants may obtain a better understanding of what motivates them to succeed. They will be able to apply those factors to future endeavors.

Benefits to society may include giving other ELLs, faculty, and administrators a better understanding of what helps ELLs succeed in English 1A (or the equivalent).

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and/or codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- 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.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is John Hart. You may ask him any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Floralba Arbelo Marrero at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix E

Participant Screening Questions

Questions to determine eligibility to be part of Study.

1. What is your name?

2. What is your age?

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Under 18
   - ◯ Over 18

3. Is English your first language?

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Yes
   - ◯ No

4. If English is not your first language, what is your first language?

5. Have you taken at least one (1) English for Multilingual Students (ESL) course at Bakersfield College?

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ Yes
   - ◯ No

6. Have you successfully completed TLE at CC or the equivalent at another college?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

7. If you are interested in and eligible for this study, what is the best way to contact you?

Appendix F

Participant Questionnaire

These questions provide demographic information as well as insight into attributions for succeeding in TLE.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your primary language?
3. What is your gender?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

4. What is your age?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 18-25
- ◯ 26-30
- ◯ 30-40
- ◯ Over 40

5. Are you married?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

6. How many children do you have living at home?

Mark only one oval.

- 0
- 1
- 2-4
- 5 or more

7. How much schooling did you complete in your country of origin?

Mark only one oval.

- I have a university degree from my country.
- I attended a university in my country, but I did not earn a degree.
- I finished the equivalent to high school.
- I did not finish high school.

8. How long have you spoken and written English?

Mark only one oval.

- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- More than 5 years

9. When did you take your last ESL course?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 1 year ago
- Less than 3 years ago
- Less than 5 years ago
- More than 5 years ago

10. When did you pass TLE? *Mark only one oval.*

- ◯ Less than 1 year ago
- ◯ Less than 3 years ago
- ◯ Less than 5 years ago
- ◯ More than 5 years ago

11. Which skills did you learn in your ESL course(s) that you believe helped you the most to succeed in TLE and how did they help you?
12. Which institutional support systems (e.g. the Writing Center, the Tutoring Center) if any helped you the most to succeed in TLE and how did they help you?
13. Which social support systems (e.g. friends, family, church) if any helped you the most to succeed in TLE and how did they help you?
14. What did you do to overcome any negative attitudes you may have had about TLE?

Appendix G

Example of Focus Group Transcript

What skills from your ESL courses helped you the most to succeed in TLE?

Sara: Some of the skills that helped me most were when I turned in my essays and my professor would give me feedback on my sentences. He would underline the little errors that I would make in the commas, punctuation, all that.

Also, I think what helped me a lot, too, was because he would ask if anybody wanted to stay after class who has any questions, and I would always go and summarize my essay with them just to make sure that I understand what he wanted to point out.

Advik: In the ESL class, we actually learned more about the format of writing an essay, which actually really helped me a lot in being able to succeed in the TLE class. The format helped us be more concise with our information in the essay. It helped us have good writing skills in general. [Reflexivity: this is something I stress in my own ESL classes]

Gabriela: I feel like it helped me a lot because it refreshed me all the grammar and the punctuation and the structures of sentences and essays. I took English classes a long time ago, so I feel it helped me develop in a quick, clear way the way of thinking in English, writing in English, make complex sentences, and structure them in the correct way, making sure that it flows correctly. So it did help to develop more skills of being more quickly or better thinker, probably. [Reflexivity: I'm glad she remembered sentence types]

When you thought about taking TLE when you were in ESL courses, what did you anticipate the instructor and the assignments to be like?

Gabriela: I thought that it might be super, super hard because I heard comments that that English class was a requirement for the universities, so I thought, "Okay. This might be hard." But really,

taking an ESL class gave me… It makes me feel relief because it was mostly very similar to an ESL class, but longer essays, more pages, more words, a little more time I could say, different topics. But the concept was almost the same: the same structure, the same format, no plagiarism, paraphrase the sentences correctly.

Besides, with the ESL class, I got all the information I needed to go to the Writing Center or any help that I needed, so I knew where to go. I knew how to do it. I knew what to expect. So it was a lot of help. [Reflexivity: I'm glad she felt prepared by ESL classes]

Advik: When I was entering in the TLE, I was expecting everything to be long: long essays, more words, more pages. And I was thinking more research to be done for the topics, and more reading. And I just don't like reading very much, so it's really hard part for me to be researching for any kind of topic. So I was thinking it would be most of my weekend just reading something or trying to research for a topic. And that is just what I was expecting: long essays. I was pretty confident I would be able to be fine with the class.

Sara: What I have learned from the classes that I've taken, usually we assume the worst from the class. We assume that it's going to be really hard and we're going to have trouble. But at the class, you realize that they're not that hard. You just have to really focus and study, and then after you get it, you're like, "Oh. It's really easy." I feel like that's very general with most of the classes we go with that thinking that it's going to be really hard. That's how I feel in general. Not just my English classes.

Gabriela: I really didn't enjoy my instructor because he really didn't give me any feedback on my writings, and I didn't know what I was doing right or wrong, even though I didn't get bad grades. But I wanted to at least to know because I know I don't write perfect, so I know I must make some mistakes. But I didn't get any feedback or anything, not even a comment. And I wasn't sure

how can I get better if I don't know at least, “Hey, you missed a comment here,” or “Hey, that shouldn't be there,” or “That's a too long sentence,” or something. So I really didn't enjoy that part. [Reflexivity: Remember that students appreciate feedback]

It was an advanced composition class, so we didn't have much interaction. But it was basically classes and assignments and not much interaction like with you, for example, that we can have feedback. It was different.

Sara: For me, usually I took my classes in the afternoon. With the professor's comments, that would always be like, “Oh, this is a smaller class,” because I would want it to be like 10 or 15 students. So I believe that because they did not have many students, I feel they helped us the most because even the professors would mention that they had less students. So I guess they had more focus on each of the students, how they're doing, and I feel that in my experience, I feel that they did help me a lot. Anything from my assignments, they would give me feedback during class. Even during class, we had time to discuss each other's assignments. So that was pretty cool. I feel like in the morning there's much more students, so I think that's why the professors don't do the same work in the afternoon than in the morning.

Advik: My interaction with my professor, my instructor, was he did give feedback to all of us about all of our essays or work, but we personally, our group, we had a group in the class. She would always let us work in groups for all the in-class activities or any in-class work that we had. So with our group, she was…because we were always asking questions or just making comments. So we were very interactive and always working on each other's projects and each other's work and essays. That is why I think our interaction with the professor was really good. In other classes, basically I did not have very much of the English classes, but with other field of

classes, I felt like she was really interactive with the students all the time. [Reflexivity: Students appreciate interacting with the instructor]

What kind of relationships did you have while taking TLE, and how did they affect your writing?

Advik: Actually, I told you about the group that we had for all the study and all the work. It was not all the students particularly in the class, but most of us we were all interacting with each other and helping each other with our work. So we were all showing each other's essay to one another in the group. And that is why I believe it was really supportive and helpful because it would give us a better feedback and better advice for working on the essays and all. I felt it was a very good experience for me.

Gabriela: I took the class with a friend, and we supported each other by just keeping up with what was in the schedule, making comments on, "What topic are you going to take," or making suggestions: maybe you can have more information about this topic, or maybe you should choose this other topic, and be dependent on each other, like "Are you done? Have you at least started your introduction or something?"

With other students besides my friend, I could say in the Writing Center, I had this, you could say instructor/teacher, a tutor, but I have her always because I like the way she explains to me. She knew me, so I kind of feel like I built a relationship, not a big relationship, but at least a student-tutor. She knew who I was. I like the way she taught me. We can catch up like, "Okay, we left this, and we will now start with this new topic," like that.

Sara: For me, it was kind of difficult because, like I mentioned before, the classes in the afternoon were with less students, but the majority of those students were on the older side. So it would be like 30, 40 year olds. And they had a lot of questions about the formatting, and a lot of the times the professor had to explain several times.

As for me, I never really look for help with another student because I've had a bad experience with getting to make a friend in class, and then I don't know where…. They just leave the class in the middle of the semester, and they don't go anymore. And since then, I always try to figure out things by myself. The first thing I always do is just look on the internet, or I use the NetTutor on Canvas. But I try not to depend much on other students because, like I said, in the past I haven't really had a good relationship like that to carry out the whole class with another student.

Recently, I had a class in which I met a girl, and we were supposed to study together and help each other. We were going to meet. And then I asked her about the homework the next week, and she said, "Oh, I dropped the class. I'm not going to go anymore." So I feel that it was just a waste of my time, I mean not meeting her. It's nice to meet other people, but sometimes, I don't want to be bad, but sometimes people just slow you down and they just look out for themselves and they don't try to help each other sincerely. You can basically try to help each other out, but a lot of people are not like that. So since that, I just try to maintain everything for myself.

My parents, my family, were…they're immigrants. So my dad, he speaks a little bit of English. He understands it, and my mom, she doesn't speak English. My sister, she speaks English, but she doesn't live with us, so I'm at home. I really didn't have that support to ask them anything.

And for friends, I never really take any classes with my friends. They took classes in the morning, and I took them in the afternoon because I had work. And, like I said, I didn't have the support. So I have to always look out for myself and figure things out for myself. [Reflexivity: Be aware of students with a lack of support]

Advik: Like other groups like family, I don't think it might be very related to the question, but as I was living with my aunt at that time, she was actually taking a history class the next semester. After I completed my transfer-level English class, she was impressed, like, how I did write my

essays and all, and how I got my grade. She is actually…. I just came to the U.S. two years ago. At that time, it was just one year, and she had been here since her childhood. And she had done all her schools all in here. But still she was like, “I am not very confident with my English writing.” And she always used to ask me for help with her essays for history class as I did very good in the history class as well in the previous semester with the essays and all. It felt really good. I was helping her out with her essays and with her studies.

Gabriela: My family lives in Ecuador, and they don't speak English at all, my mom and dad. I think it was probably just my commitment to myself to do better and learn and do things right. But of course, I want them to be proud, you can say. So that could be my motivation to accomplish my dreams and just do what I came to do: study hard and have a good [?].

What external services did you use that helped you in TLE?

Sara: For me, it was the NetTutor on Canvas, and also a vocabulary site that I found on Google. Instead of buying the book, I just found a site on Google. It's a vocabulary sight. It helped me a lot with… Because I wanted to extend my words, I didn't want to have the same basic words, so I always try to figure out a different way to pronounce them, to put them in my essays and my writings. So I think that really helped me a lot. And I also always carry… When I have a class that is to include some essays or research papers, I always carry my APA book. It's APA, MLA. It's a format book, and I it's very little, and I really like it because it goes back to conclusions. and if you need anything, you could just go to the index and it tells you what page. And it's really fast to use it.

Gabriela: I really use, as I said, the Tutoring Center, the Writing Center. And in the Writing Center, my tutor provided me information. She gave me some grammar tips, some papers that I still have it with me. And all the time that I was writing until now, I use my ESL class book, the

red one, because it has the connecting words, the grammar things, and I just I feel like when you start with something, you keep it, and you keep going with that. So that's like my primary book to write because that's how I develop my ideas. And that's my resource book when I go to remember things. So I use that.

Advik: Outside the class, I was not going out for any other help very much. But in my class, as I told you, all the other students and everybody they were always very helpful. But as I would say, whenever I was trying to study and read and anything at home, I was always up late at night, and I would say my family, they did support me very much. They never asked me to turn off the lights or anything, but I was not making any noise at all and not trying to disturb anybody. But they would still let me have my time and let me study in peace, not making any sound or anything by themselves either. I believe it was supportive.

Sara: I found the site. It's called thesaurus.com. And what I really liked about this site is that you put in a word and then it gives you a list of different words that you could say instead of that word, so you keep learning. You can extend your vocabulary. And I really liked it because it's like two in one. It's like two sites in one because it gives you the option if you want to look up a word that you don't know what it means. It's a dictionary. I really liked it. I think that helped me most when I first started with my writing classes because my English was very limited.

yeah that thesaurus is very helpful and you know that word has a thesaurus on it too all I have to do is right click on the word you look up synonyms so like relationship there's a synonyms connection association bond but yeah the thesaurus.com would probably have a lot more to choose from thank you for sharing that Sara all right last question I want you to think about three things the three top things that helped you the most to pass tle that could be yourself some

outside resource maybe something in the class if you had to choose three what would those three things be

Choose three factors that you believe helped you the most to pass TLE.

Sara: For me, it was my determination. When I got back to school, I was, I think I was 20 years old, and I had already determined that I didn't want to drop out of school, that I wanted to finish it. I wanted to do something. And also what helped me a lot was my teacher support because they would always encourage me. They could see it in my essays that I would write the same words, and I was trying to change that. And what really motivated me is that they would always be like, "Oh, that's really good," because I would start using words that were not my usual words, and they wouldn't notice. So I think that was pretty cool.

Advik: The first I would say… I really talked much about the study group that I had in that class. I believe out of all the classes that I ever had, that was the best study group. So it really helped because all of us were helping each other out and working with each other, so it was really helpful in getting a good grade in that class.

And also, I chose a kind of easy topic for me because I knew kind of most of it. I did research a lot of it for my previous semester to pass the class, and that's why it helped me out, not spending too much time on the research, and also I was very prepared for the essays.

The third factor, I would say, I was very confident about my writing skills because I did take the ESL class the previous semester, otherwise I would not be very confident about my writing because the ESL class that I took, it made me believe that I do write good essays, I do have good writing, and because I did get a good grade, it made me feel more confident about all of the stuff that I do.

Gabriela: I believe the first factor was my friend because we were always catching up with the next assignment, and we discussed that a lot all the days previous to the submission of the assignment. So that's how I feel. Also, there was a couple of times that I read his essays, and he read mine so I could have a better clue of his point of view and how I can write a little better. I think that was one factor.

Another factor was the books that I have, the information that I have. I don't think it's a factor. I think it's more like a source, or not a source, but a technique. I believe I developed my vocabulary by always searching for new words, not using the same ones. I wrote an idea, but then I searched for words that will make it more professional, or more formal, words that I know that they have synonymous that I have used before. But I always search and try to find out which one was better, a better word to use. And that's how I started to write differently, by using other words and not get used to the same ones and write the same way and using the same ideas, but try to make it better.

And the third source, I think it would be the tutors because they do help a lot. They give you…. They correct you, and they give you ideas. They tell you what is missing. They correct you when there is two long sentences or one sentence that doesn't make sense. I think those are my factors.

Appendix H

Example of Personal Interview Transcript

Describe how you felt about your writing abilities upon entering TLE.

I honestly feel like I'm not really prepared. That was the first time I have a class with native speakers. My first year in BC, I take all the ESL classes, so that the first time I being mixing with other students. But it went well. It went very well. The first comment I received from my professor for my English class was... I sent her an email before I submit my work, and I say, "I'm sorry if there are any grammar mistake or spelling in there. English is not really my first language." I write her like a whole essay. She said, "No. Your English is very solid. You have a solid grammar, so don't doubt yourself." So that makes me feel more confident. [Reflexivity: Why did she not feel prepared for TLE after taking ESL?]

What was the greatest challenge that you faced in TLE?

I would say, because that class I have to take online, so I don't see the professor face to face. We don't have Zoom either, so it's just like a hundred percent online. She just send out a lecture and I watch it and learn it on my own. But then I just sent her whatever essay I do. I sent her my draft even though she says she's not going to grade it, and she just cannot give me comments on it because she don't have enough time for everyone if everyone's saying. But I just take advantage of it. [Reflexivity: Interaction with the instructor is important]

And I go to Writing Center, send out what I have, and ask them, like, "How do you feel about this? How do you feel about that?" Just asking around.

What did you do to overcome any negative thoughts you may have had about TLE?

It felt overwhelming at first because I don't know what to expect, especially when it's the very first online class that I have to take, but then in my room, I create a story room, and after first

essay, I feel like I am the one that got high score, and I am the only non-native speaker in the group, and I feel like, "Oh, if I can get higher score, then why do I have to overwhelm myself?" I feel like people in my life, they always say, "Is that a stupid question to ask? Why you have to send her just the intro and ask her is it the right intro?" They feel shy. But for me, as long it helps my grade, then I don't feel ashamed to ask. [Reflexivity: I need to encourage participation]

Describe the effort you put into each writing assignment.

From what I heard from my group, they started the assignment like three days before, but for me, even before the assignment was announced, if it's open, if the professor not lock it and I can see it, I start working right away. I try to make an idea of lists. If they say they want argument, who I am I going to pick to argue? What point am I going to pick to put in there? And I start little by little, brainstorming what idea am I going to put in there. And I do some research. I create a file for each of the items, each of the topic that I picked, and then later on, which one I have more sources, and then I pick the one that I am going to work on.

What strategies or processes did you use to make sure you submitted a passing paper?

We have the draft that we can turn in online, or I send it to my tutor. I have a appointment with my tutor every two weeks. I see her and then she read over it, and she gave me an idea, and sometimes she told me, "If you need to talk to me right away, just send me a picture of your work. I can go over it for you." So that was what I did.

And there is some website online like Grammarly. I can post little by little, and they check my grammar. I feel like I have a lot of ideas, but sometimes I don't know how to describe it into words. I'm calling that fancy words, like a more fancy word. Like instead of saying good or great, you say excellent. It feels more fancy in there. So Grammarly and my tutor, and I take advantage of draft day to send my draft to my professor. [Reflexivity: Teach vocabulary]

How interested were you in the topics that you wrote about?

To be honest, I don't like to read books, and two of my essays were about a book, and I don't really like that book. But then there is no other choice, so I have to go with it. Luckily they they make a documentary about the book that my professor book, so I watched the documentary, and then I feel more interesting in it. I feel connect with the characters in it, so therefore, it's like it forced me to read the book more, and then I picked up any idea from the book and from the documentary and then put it in my essay. Luckily, the final paper she left it an open research, so we can talk about anything that we want. So I feel like I enjoy that one the most. I was talking about American Dream, and I received 495 out of 500, and I got the highest score in class for my final paper. [Reflexivity: Students like to choose their own topics?]

How difficult did you find the writing assignments?

I would say it's a little bit harder than if I compare it to ESL class because for ESL class, the professor usually give us the guidance. So what we're going to write about in topic, and what the body needs, to what point we need to include in the body, and okay so the conclusion is going to repeat the intro but in a different word. But in English, they don't give us an idea. You need to create your own. Think about how many paragraphs you need in the body to make up into five pages or seven pages, so I feel like we have to do it on our own. I don't know if it is because I take it online and it's like that or it the way it is. I feel like for most of the class that I take online right now, most of the things we have to work on our own.

Describe your relationship with your TLE instructor.

Not as close. None of my classmates have a relationship with her. She keep distant from us. Like I say, we study on our own. All she did is send us some PowerPoint, not even like recording, just PowerPoint, and we go over the PowerPoint, and we study on our own. And there is no textbook.

We just have the book that we read and then do the essay on it. There is no textbook or anything. We cannot read from the textbook or anything. And only one of my essays that she graded called my name. She don't even fix anything, like no spelling no grammar. And then sometimes I wonder why I got deducted like five points and for what. She always said, "I will get back to you later." I can see that on her comments, but I never heard anything from her until now. So on the day that I see your email that asks me if I can share my essay with you, so I emailed her right away. I said, "Can you go over my final paper because I want to help one of my professor out about his research paper." And until today, I sent it on like Friday night, and Tuesday I haven't heard anything from her.

The very first essay, she said she want us to just to talk about ourselves, like introduce ourselves to her so she can know what level, what skill we have. And then she can work on that. And that the only one that I receive comments from her.

Describe your relationship with other staff or faculty members on campus.

I will say the math center and the tutoring center and then the writing center, I visit them every week if I on campus. Even right now, I have my tutor for my bio class because the thing is it's hard for you to just stop by. If you drop in, you have to wait for an hour, and you only have like 20 minutes with them. But you make an appointment weekly or like every other week, they give you up to one hour, and then they share their information with you like email or phone number so you can reach out to them whenever you need. That's why I always apply for that. I pick the day that the homework is released and I bring it to my tutor and ask about it, like "This is the idea that I have. What do you think about it?" And then she gave me a little bit of her advice about them, and I work on that and then send it to her through email. And she go over it.

I always doubt myself. I feel more confident when I know that my paper was proofed.

[Reflexivity: Encourage students to use the Writing Center]

Describe any extra-curricular activities you were involved in on campus.

I volunteer to stay after class for my bio, but it's not a group. I stay after class to clean up the things, but then, you know, you get a relationship with the professor when you stay after like that. And anything that you want to ask, you can ask during that time. Like helping him set things up, you know, because of Covid. Our class is the last one in the day, so I stay like one hour just to clean up and talk to him. And then I feel more confident in the class whenever I have a connection with the professor or the one that's teaching because it's easier for me to ask them, and I don't feel so dumb when I ask because they know I just want to know.

Describe your relationship with your family.

I would say I'm very grateful that I have my husband help me with all the things so that I can just focus on study only. I feel very lucky because there are students who have to work, and then they have kids, they have to take care of house chores, but for me, all I have to do is just spend a little bit more time with my kid while he's at home. But my husband took care of everything. He cooked, he cleaned, he picked up a kids. And you always feel like, "What you doing right now? You don't get paid because you study right now." But later on you can make a living out of it, so don't worry. Don't feel bad. I really appreciate that.

Do you feel that luck had anything to do with your success? Why or why not?

I would not say that because for me, luck is like people saying, "Oh, you're lucky. You got sick." Or, "Oh my god, you're so smart." No I don't feel like that's a positive comment for me because I feel like I study. I put time on it. I sit on this desk like 20 hours a day, and you cannot tell me that I got the right way of luck. There may be some percentage in there, but no it's like you get what

you work for. You cannot just count on that. Some people say, "Oh you got your math right. It's so high. Oh, you're Asian. You're very good at math." I said, "No I studied for it. Let's say, okay I'm Asian, but then I got the highest score in class for English, and it's not because I'm English, and I'm not even a native speaker. It takes me a week to do this paper, but it takes you like five hours because you don't have to really find a word to describe what you say, but for me, I always Google another way to say "thank you", another way to say "in my opinion", another way to say "I agree with your idea." I try to find another way to say the same thing. I don't like when people describe what I have today is out of luck, out of nowhere.

Describe your spirituality.

Yes, I believe in God, and I do believe there is some.... Okay, my dad passed away, and I always feel like whenever I overcome something, I think, "Oh, okay. My dad have my back. That's why I get through it." I always feel that... I don't know if it's true or not, but it helped me. It helped me go through that, and I feel like I want to make him proud. He's going to be so proud when he sees this.

Choose what you believe to be the most important external factor that helped you pass TLE (instructor, friends, family, Writing Center, etc.). Why do you believe this factor was so helpful?

If I would pick one, then it's going to be someone in my class, like friends, classmates because they are the closest ones. They don't feel shy to give me negative comments, like "Oh my god, you repeat this like three times already. Can you find something else? Why you need to go this way?" I don't know for other people, but for me, for online class, classmates are even more important than professor because they are the ones who are always there, always there and more available. I always pick the right people into my room. I feel like that's why they're very helpful.

My Bio group right now, we have 10 people, and seven of us have A's in the class. And that is an extremely hard class, and I feel so proud that we all can be in this at this level right now.

Choose what you believe to be the most important internal factor that helped you pass TLE (intelligence, perseverance, positive attitude, faith, etc.). Why do you believe this factor was so helpful?

I would say positive attitude. You need to think outside of the box. I have a poster in front of me. It says, "Think like a proton," like think positive. If you always doubt yourself, saying, "Oh my god, I'm going to fail this class. This class is so hard. There is no way I can get through it. There is no way I'm going to make it, then you're going to fail. Like you fail even before you start.

I remember there was one TED Talk that we watched in ESL class that said, "Fake it until you make it." It always sticks on my head. Fake it until you make it. Like you believe you can do it. Then you can do it. [Reflexivity: Can I be that positive all the time?]

I like study groups because we can compare our work together, and we can compete with each other, like in our minds. I say, "Oh my gosh. She got higher grade than me. I want to beat her next time." Even though I don't say it, but it helped me. You need to think positive, and if that day I got a lower grade than my group members, then I'm going to say it's okay. This is a hard class. This is a hard class. And she's so smart, and she's a native speaker. She's faster than me on quizzes because the quiz in our class we have like 12 questions for 10 minutes. For me, it takes me like half of the time to translate from Vietnamese to English, and then from English to science language (because what we learn in bio is not even English. It's like a Latin or something else. I call it science language.) It takes me longer to understand the question than her so that's why she always beats me on quizzes. But on exams when we have more time, then I get her back on the exams. So I'm always like, "I'm going to get you back on this exam." So I feel like a

positive attitude is something I believe is going to help me throughout all the class, not just in English 1A. When I was in 1A, most of the students there were native speakers, and when we compared our work together, some of them do run-ons, and even me, I can see it right away. But I'm asking myself, "Why do they not even notice? You cannot use those words in an essay. Why are you using them? And you are a native speaker. Your English should be better than this." But I see all the run-ons and fragments in their paper, and I feel like, "Oh my god, I'm so lucky that I take a year to take seven ESL classes. I take seven ESL classes, and they weren't on my list either. After I take the placement test at BC, my professors try to send me to pre-calculous, public speaking, and English B1A. That's actually my first semester. That's the first semester. But then I say, "No. Can I just start from basics because I want to see how college works. I've been away from school for like eight years." So that's why I told myself, "It's like overwhelming." So that's why I said, "Can I just take some basic class? Where can I study with people not from here? With people that study English so that I can feel more confident?" So that's why I go back to start from like ESL B71, B72, and B70.