A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY:

THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LOW-SOCIOECONOMIC-STATUS ESL LEARNERS

ENROLLED IN A MID-SIZED URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Anna Marie Buck

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Constance Pearson, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Dr. Karla Swafford, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college located in Pennsylvania. The theory that guided this study is Walberg's theory on educational productivity, as it looks at how learners' psychological characteristics and the psychological environments in which they live influence academic outcomes and their ability to succeed academically. Walberg's theory of educational productivity provided a framework to answer the central research question and three sub-questions: (A) What are the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners? (B) What are the socioeconomic aspects that hinder low socioeconomic status ESL learners' ability to succeed academically inside of school? (C) What are the socioeconomic aspects that hinder low socioeconomic status ESL learners' ability to succeed academically outside of school? (D) What socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor college graduation outcomes among low socioeconomic status ESL learners? Using purposeful and convenience sampling, participants enrolled in an academic English language learning program at a mid-sized community college were selected. Data were collected through individual interviews, focus group sessions, and journal collections, then analyzed using Moustakas's modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for evaluating phenomenological data. Data collection results generated commonalities and themes of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. Empirical, practical, and theoretical implications of the data analysis and recommendations for future research were identified.

Keywords: academic achievement, community college, English language learners, higher education, socioeconomic status, urban, dual language learners

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, who has worked miracles in my life in ways I could never have imagined!

I dedicate this to my husband and best friend, Jack Buck, who has been a source of strength, support, encouragement, and motivation throughout this process. Thank you for supporting my dreams and encouraging me to believe in myself. I love you more than you will ever know, and I thank God for choosing me to be your wife.

To my father-in-law, Charles J. Buck, who reminded me of the importance of faith and believing in our Lord and Savior. Thank you for supporting me and teaching me to read scripture.

To my family, who supported and encouraged me every step of the way. I love you all and appreciate all that you have done for me.

To my supervisor, mentor, and friend, Ms. Irena Mira, who was patient, kind, and an inspiration to me every step of the way as I researched this dissertation.

To my students and all future students who may doubt their ability to overcome adversity, I pray that this inspires them to pursue their dreams and reminds them to always believe in themselves.

To the memory of my great-grandmother Anna, who always believed in my abilities and taught me to believe in myself.

"For with God nothing shall be impossible." -Psalm 125:1

"She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future."

-Proverbs 31:25

Acknowledgments

First, I want to acknowledge God, my Lord and Savior, for blessing me with this opportunity. I will forever live in gratitude, leading others to God and reminding them that anything is possible when we place our faith and love in Him.

I want to honor and express my gratitude to my chair, Dr. Constance Pearson, for her support, mentorship, and guidance throughout this process. During the early stages of the program, I encountered many obstacles and even contemplated giving up, but Dr. Pearson encouraged me to stay the course and do my best. While this journey was difficult, I would not have made it to this point without her patience, support, time, and faithfulness to her students.

Also, I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Karla Swafford, who graciously offered her time and support to guide me through the remainder of this process. In the beginning stages of my dissertation journey, Dr. Karla Swafford shared with me that she was a first-generation graduate, and her story not only inspired me but encouraged me to stay the course because anything is possible with hard work and discipline.

Lastly, thank you to all the online faculty that was also a huge part of my journey. My coursework throughout this program was very challenging, but without the rigorous expectations and coursework, I would not have been able to reach this point. Thank you for setting the bar high.

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List of Abbreviations

Bilingual Education Act (BEA)

Dual Language Learner (DLL)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Emergent Bilingual (EB)

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

English Learner (EL)

English Language Learner (ELL)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Higher Education Act (HEA)

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Luzerne County Community College (LCCC)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Over the past several decades, disparities in academic achievement have been well documented between low- and high-socioeconomic status (SES) students in the United States (Duncan et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKenzie, 2019; Milner, 2013; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Perrigo et al., 2022; Van der Berg, 2008). Likewise, as explained by Adler-Greene (2019), Ladd (2012), Robinson (2018), and Saultz et al. (2019), many legislative reform initiatives have been implemented to help reduce the achievement gap and improve academic achievement, but ultimately disadvantaged populations still encounter barriers that hinder their ability to succeed (Adler-Greene, 2019; Ladd, 2012; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019). Rikichi and Yakubu (2021) found that income level and low socioeconomic status have continued to be a barrier to obtaining one's fundamental right to education and equitable learning opportunities. As a result, low socioeconomic status and poverty continue to affect all countries, races, regions, cultures, and religions. This chapter discusses academic achievement and provides insight into key socioeconomic aspects that remain critical among disadvantaged populations and their ability to academically achieve positive educational outcomes from a historical, social, and theoretical context. Additionally, this chapter provides information on the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-size urban community college and key socioeconomic factors known to influence their ability to succeed through the lens of Walberg's theory of educational productivity (Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). This chapter also ensures that the research problem and the purpose of the study are articulated. In addition, the significance of the research is identified, and the

research questions are introduced. Finally, relevant definitions for the study are provided as a

reference, and the chapter concludes with a summary.

Background

According to Fontenot et al. (2018), recent estimates have shown that approximately

thirteen million children in the United States are of low socioeconomic status and live in poverty.

However, achieving equality in education is one of the most fundamental human rights in every

society (Rikichi & Yakubu, 2021). However, for a majority of the country's population, low

socioeconomic status has continued to be a barrier to obtaining this fundamental right. Ge and

Wang (2019) found that the social and economic progress of the world is seriously affected by

poverty. Likewise, a social issue that affects all countries, races, regions, cultures, and religions

is poverty (Rikichi & Yakubu, 2021). To further explain, low socioeconomic status has been

known to fuel the cycle of injustice and inequality, which deprives children around the world of

reaching their full potential and can have lasting catastrophic effects not only on their childhood

but also later in their adult life. More importantly, family economic circumstances have proven

to impact a student's academic performance (Rikichi & Yakubu, 2021). Research conducted by

Ge and Wang (2019) revealed that children from homes that have never experienced poverty are

more likely to perform well in school when compared with children raised in disadvantaged

families. Therefore, children raised in disadvantaged families are more inclined to struggle in

school, have poorer test scores and educational attainment, and have greater dropout rates.

Research by Dixson et al. (2018) highlighted that understanding the factors that predict

positive student outcomes is crucial, given the importance placed on academic achievement.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is described as an adult's or student's family's combination of

income, education, and professional status. It is one of the most researched and reliable

predictors of academic accomplishment (Dixson et al., 2018). Furthermore, families with low socioeconomic status are more likely to have few resources. They are vulnerable to various environmental issues, including lower-paying occupations, unstable employment, underfunded schools, unsafe neighborhoods, and fewer powerful support networks (Dixson et al., 2018).

Historical Context

Literature published by Cook-Harvey et al. (2016) and Darling-Hammond (2010) acknowledged that promoting equality for underprivileged individuals is a crucial responsibility of the federal government, and the goal of equal educational opportunity has long been at the heart of the most important education laws in the country. However, in the United States, equity is still a long time away from being achieved. Considering the long record throughout the history of unequal educational opportunity in the United States, from the era of slavery, when it was illegal to educate an enslaved person to read, through segregated organizations that offered radically different resources for learning, these concerns are legitimate and justifiable (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The first major education reform initiative that focused on ending the country's war on poverty was established by Lyndon B. Johnson. Smith (2020) reported that Lyndon B. Johnson addressed the Houses of Congress, advocating for better housing, schools, and job opportunities. As per Smith (2020), Congressional hearings were conducted to discuss the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or the ESEA of 1965 (Smith, 2020). Subsequently, the bill was signed by Johnson with the goal of "strengthening and enhancing educational opportunities and educational quality in the Nation's elementary and secondary schools" (p. 168). The new law provided local education organizations with Title I funds to support the education of children from low-income families. The Title II clause also supported the procurement of textbooks,

library resources, and other instructional materials for both public and private schools, which was especially appealing to private schools. However, Smith (2020) concluded that the ESEA was opposed by many, and 80% of House Republicans rejected it because it imposed minimal academic accountability from the states.

Subsequently, Smith (2020) reported that in 1972, under President Nixon's administration, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) was proposed to ensure that all individuals would not be subject to prejudice, discrimination, or unfair treatment (Smith, 2020). The Equal Educational Opportunities Act proposed by Nixon allocated almost $2.5 billion to support urban schools and expand aid to Latinos, American Indians, and English language learners. The act was implemented to reaffirm a commitment to establishing equal and equitable educational opportunities for all. Consequently, Nixon's approach received much criticism because he also believed that busing and student transportation contributed to racial tension and school violence (Smith, 2020).

Later, Smith (2020) conveyed that during the presidency of George H.W. Bush, Bush aimed to raise academic attainment in the nation's high-poverty schools. He later adopted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which held schools responsible for student achievements, to reform the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The purpose of Title I funds continued to be applied toward raising the academic performance of underprivileged kids. Education requirements were raised under Title II, and special language instruction for English language learners became mandated under Title III (Smith, 2020).

The Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced NCLB, was enacted by the Obama administration in December 2015 (Suitts, 2015). The ESSA was designed to ensure that all students had access to high-quality education and gave states additional power to hold districts

and schools accountable (Smith, 2020). Research conducted by Cook-Harvey et al. (2016) asserted that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provided the federal government, states, districts, and schools with the opportunity to equitably design educational systems so that the students whom these systems have historically underserved would receive an education that would better prepare them for the demands of the 21st century (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016).

Social Context

According to a report by the OECD (2016), countries with low enrollment rates and a high number of primary and secondary school-aged students, due to the increasing population should implement policies that promote inclusivity in education systems and improve access to education. By implementing policies that promote inclusivity in education systems, countries can increase the supply of skills that fuel economic growth and promote social cohesion. This can lead to greater strength and unity within society (OECD, 2016). There is ample evidence that socioeconomic status has an impact on academic performance, and research has uncovered key variables that connect financial, social, and environmental factors pertaining to family structure and students' educational outcomes (Economic Research Service, 2017; OECD, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Owens & Candipan, 2019).

Reardon et al. (2022) acknowledged that, despite attempts to achieve equitable learning opportunities, many schools across the United States remain highly segregated by race and class (Reardon et al., 2022). In addition, over the last 30 years, the racial and economic segregation of schools has increased (Reardon et al., 2022). According to Rendón's (2020) findings, higher education has become increasingly divided by socioeconomic status and race. Consequently, children raised in affluent households are almost guaranteed educational opportunities at prestigious, well-known colleges and universities. Furthermore, Rendón reported that most

people of low socioeconomic status are comprised of people of color. To further explain, low-income groups that consist of Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans tend to have fewer assets of value when compared to White populations (Rendón, 2020). As a result, their families have reduced incomes and are in low social positions to help their children (Bruenig, 2019). According to a study conducted by Taylor and Barch (2022), significantly increased rates of poverty in children are alarming because they are linked to several adverse short and long-term effects, including poorer educational and vocational attainment and a higher risk of developmental delays, substance abuse, behavior problems, and depression (Taylor & Barch, 2022). Research shows a child's well-being is influenced by their school and neighborhood (Economic Research Service, 2017; Egalite, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Owens & Candipan, 2019). In addition, Owens and Candipan (2019) revealed that educational institutions in affluent neighborhoods tend to receive more societal, financial, and instructional resources when compared with schools that serve low-income, disadvantaged communities.

Theoretical Context

In the last 50 years, academic achievement among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds has been lower than that of students from higher SES backgrounds (Duncan et al., 2017; Henry et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2019; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Rosen et al., 2021). Multiple theoretical frameworks have been used to explore academic achievement or academic outcomes in education. Ryan and Deci (2020) utilized self-determination theory to explore factors that enable or challenge intrinsic motivation, independent extrinsic motivations, and psychological well-being and acknowledged that all issues are directly relevant to academic environments (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Likewise, the researchers highlighted the importance of autonomy support in fostering inclusive environments and supporting the diversity of learners

(Ryan & Deci, 2020). Not only can fundamental psychological needs influence academic results, but educational environments that support them enhance students' growth across a range of cognitive, emotional, and social standards (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In contrast, other theories explored how academic self-efficacy affects overall academic achievement and outcomes. Additionally, Lihong Shi (2016) identified that self-efficacy plays a big part in learning a second or foreign language. High self-efficacy learners may perform better academically, employ more learning techniques, have reduced anxiety levels about language, and sustain healthy determinations (L. Shi, 2016). Furthermore, Gaxiola Romero et al. (2022) examined the structural relations between positive family environment, subjective well-being, general distress, and academic engagement among Mexican high school students before and during the COVID-19 outbreak. They found that a positive family environment can play an important role in promoting academic engagement. Furthermore, research by Yi Shi and Chun Ko (2023) discovered a positive connection between the familial and educational psychological environments and the academic self-efficacy and self-identity of university students majoring in English education. Research by Yi Shi and Chun Ko (2023) confirmed that the school's psychological environment has a greater impact on students' academic self-efficacy than the psychological environment of their families (Y. Shi & Chun Ko, 2023).

However, few studies have examined academic achievement outcomes and education achievement data through the lens of one's socioeconomic background characteristics (Sacklin & Daniels, 2022). Njuguna (2021) applied Walberg's (1980) theory of educational productivity to their research and found that many factors in achieving success go beyond the curriculum, instructional techniques, and procedures, emphasizing that socioeconomic factors such as a parent's level of education, household income, financial support, ability to access resources,

language, and parental involvement all influence academic outcomes. Walberg's (1980) theory

of educational productivity identified key categories that highlighted fundamental factors that

influence learning outcomes and achievements (Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981).

Walberg's theory assumes that a student's academic success can be easily impacted by socio-

emotional elements, such as support from parents, and is often defined by one's socioeconomic

status, student-teacher engagement, social groups, and the school and

classroom environment (Greenberg et al., 2003). Njuguna (2021) confirmed that although

educational institutions cannot alter the external aspects, such as parental education and income

that exist outside of the classroom, they can work toward establishing a positive effect on the

home environment by attempting to educate and collaborate with families to close the

achievement gap that exists among low-socioeconomic students (Njuguna, 2021).

Problem Statement

The problem was that the low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized

urban community college in Pennsylvania have been known to perform worse than their peers

(Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Luo, 2021; Marquis, 2022; Rahimi & Samadi, 2022; Reardon et al.,

2022; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Soland & Sandilos, 2021). Low socioeconomic status has been

linked to poverty for decades and has been known to impact educational outcomes among

underprivileged students (Reardon et al., 2022). According to Soland and Sandilos (2021),

English language learners (ELLs) often start school with lower levels of achievement compared

to their non-ELL peers, and those achievement gaps rarely improve (Soland & Sandilos, 2021).

Additionally, Marquis (2022) revealed that in numerous language evaluations and composites,

children with low socioeconomic status performed worse than children of greater socioeconomic

status (Marquis, 2022). According to Koball et al. (2021), 38 percent of children under eighteen

in the US reside in low-income homes, and 17 percent, or almost one in five, are considered poor. This indicates that children are disproportionately represented among people experiencing poverty in our nation. In contrast, they make up 23 percent of the population and account for 32 percent of all those living in poverty. As a result, the experiences of economic instability that younger children and adolescents are exposed to are often associated with factors surrounding parental education, occupation, race, ethnicity, and other characteristics (Koball et al., 2021).

Research conducted by Kanno and Cromley (2015) identified that when it comes to four-year college access, the difference between ELLs and non-ELLs is especially pronounced. Consequently, a common factor among students raised in low socioeconomic status households contributing to limited four-year college access stems from the inability to access resources, and their ability to acquire resources is heavily impacted. Resources can consist of financial, psychological, and physical support, often unattainable to underprivileged populations (N.A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). As a result, the lack of resources for disadvantaged learners is often directly impacted by poverty, thus hindering one's overall ability to succeed academically. Paschall et al. (2018) found that poverty cannot be measured and emphasized the need for future policies to consider financial support initiatives for underprivileged students and low-income families to close the existing gaps (Paschall et al., 2018). Unlike past research that has explored test-based outcomes to address the achievement gap among low socioeconomic status learners, this research addressed the gap and sought to contribute to the current literature by addressing the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners and exploring socioeconomic factors known to hinder one's ability to succeed academically both inside of school and outside of school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and understand the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college in Pennsylvania during the 2023-2024 academic school year. At this stage in the research, socioeconomic status is generally defined as an individual or group's position on the socioeconomic scale. Various social and economic factors, including income, the level and type of education, the type and prestige of occupation, the place of residence, and in certain cultures or areas of the world, ethnic origin or religious background ultimately determine one's overall status on the socioeconomic scale (American Psychological Association, 2023). The theory that guided this study was Walberg's (1980) educational productivity theory (Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Walberg's (1980) theory on educational productivity was significant in decreasing the number of disparities among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners that continue to contribute to the academic achievement gap because it assumes that a learner's overall psychological attributes and environment could directly influence educational outcomes (Galizty & Sutarni, 2021; Walberg, 1980). In addition, Walberg's theory of educational production was one of the few academic productivity models that had been experimentally evaluated and contains student variables (DiPerna et al., 2002).

Significance of Study

Although there was a great deal of research that links low socioeconomic status to lower academic achievement and educational outcomes when compared to affluent high socioeconomic communities, much of the reviewed literature focused on test-based outcomes and the school and classroom environment but failed to address how key variables surrounding an ESL learner's low socioeconomic status and their environment can influence academic achievement among

underrepresented ESL students. The participants for this study described their academic experiences and the barriers that low-socioeconomic status ESL learners face in higher education compared to peers from higher affluent SES households. The findings from this study are significant because they will help alleviate the disparities that exist in education among diverse populations and reduce the educational achievement gap (Hanushek et al., 2019). A better understanding of support strategies and methods to promote awareness among academic institutions on the importance of incorporating culturally relevant instruction to reduce the achievement gap exists (A. Hernandez, 2022; McKenzie, 2019). More importantly, findings were useful to educational administrators and government legislators in developing social policies to help reduce disparities in learning opportunities and academic outcomes for high and low socioeconomic students from both high and low socioeconomic backgrounds (Chmielewski, 2019).

Theoretical Significance

The theory that guided this study was Walberg's theory of educational productivity and academic achievement (Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). According to Walberg's theory of academic achievement, an individual learner's psychological traits and direct environments can greatly influence academic achievement and outcomes (cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal) (Reynolds & Walberg, 1992; Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Likewise, lower socioeconomic status communities continue to be associated with lower academic achievement and reduced rates of academic outcomes when compared to communities of high socioeconomic status (American Psychological Association, 2017). Examining the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status students and academic success (Duncan et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Ladd, 2012; McKenzie, 2019; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018) and socioeconomic barriers

known to increase the achievement gap among low socioeconomic status ESL learners (Akram et al., 2021; Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Koban Koç, 2016; Lecheile et al., 2020; Luo, 2021; Marquis, 2022; Perez & Morrison, 2016) provided relevant details to widen the scope of the existing theory. More importantly, the results of this study resulted in a better understanding of the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners.

Empirical Significance

This research study aimed to fill a gap in the literature that sought to address the problem that low socioeconomic status learners contribute to poor academic outcomes and the increasing number of disparities in the academic achievement gap, and little is known about the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a post-secondary education environment. A gap in the literature exists on the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic ESL learners enrolled in a post-secondary education environment (Almon, 2015; Perez & Morrison, 2016; Y. Shi & Chun Ko, 2023; Villarreal & García, 2016). The study's themes, subthemes, and phenomenological descriptions will have empirical significance because they will contribute new information and support the existing literature. The findings from interviewing low-socioeconomic status ESL learners attending a mid-sized urban community college about socioeconomic variables that may have hindered their ability to succeed academically may provide significant empirical results to education leaders and government legislators that can develop future educational policy reform initiatives to reduce the gap in educational disparities among disadvantaged student populations.

The current literature on low socioeconomic status students and academic achievement primarily focused on younger adolescents in pre-k-12 schools and placed a strong emphasis on standardized testing. However, the literature lacked a study that could confirm or dispute the

need for future educational policy reform initiatives centered around disadvantaged multicultural English language community college learners and programs to achieve equitable post-secondary outcomes among diversified students enrolled in higher education environments. This study's findings offered insight into how educational leaders and government legislators can work toward developing new educational reforms and strive to provide better language learning programs at all education levels centered around equitable learning opportunities in higher education among disadvantaged populations to improve post-secondary outcomes among diversified populations. Moreover, the results added to the growing body of literature regarding the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners enrolled in a higher education environment (Almon, 2015; Perez & Morrison, 2016; Y. Shi & Chun Ko, 2023; Villarreal & García, 2016).

Practical Significance

According to research, students are more likely to drop out of school when they experience household stressors and come from a low socioeconomic background (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Henry et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2019). As a result, student achievement and socioeconomic background (family income, occupation, race, and parental educational level) were instrumental factors that must be considered to establish equal opportunities for all (Owens, 2018; Paschall et al., 2018). Also, new legislative local, state, and federal efforts for diversified disadvantaged populations, support programs, and services that have not been considered must be developed to improve academic achievement and post-secondary outcomes among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners to decrease the disparities in the academic achievement gap (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Long, 2022; Paschall et al., 2018).

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

Central Research Question

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college?

Sub-Question One

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners inside of school?

Sub-Question Two

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners outside of school?

Sub-Question Three

What socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor college graduation outcomes among low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners?

Definitions

The following terms have been defined to understand the significance of the subject matter in this paper.

1. *Absolute Poverty* – The lack of money necessary to maintain a particular minimum quality of living (Van der Berg, 2008).

2. *Academic Achievement* – The acquired competence in fundamental abilities and subject-matter knowledge (McCoy et al., 2005).

3. *English Learners (ELs)* – The term used to describe students who are learning the English language (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020).

4. *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* – An act that permitted the government to authorize federal spending to deliver aid to schools across the United States. A national commitment to providing equal educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of ethnicity, race, disability, language, or income (Darrow, 2016).

5. *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* – Legislative action taken to ensure that all schools, regardless of whether they were in a high-poverty region or not, met the same academic standards and attainment levels (Johnson, 2019, p. 94).

6. *Poverty* – A state or circumstance in which one has little or no money, possessions, or means of survival. Lack of essential or desirable components, characteristics, or resources. Inadequacy or insufficiency (Jensen, 2009).

7. *Relative Poverty* – Poverty that is influenced by a person's social setting and where they live (Van der Berg, 2008).

8. *Socioeconomic Status (SES)* – The status of an individual or group, which is influenced by a mix of social and economic criteria such as income, educational background, level of education, occupation, place of residence, and, in some countries or sectors of society, ethnic origin or religious background (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Summary

Examining the problem of low socioeconomic status and academic achievement among disadvantaged populations supports the purpose of this study, which sought to describe the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. As low socioeconomic status ESL learners continue to contribute to the rise in the academic achievement gap among disadvantaged minority populations, it is relevant to assess the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-

sized secondary education environment in Pennsylvania. Examining the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners who attended a mid-sized secondary education environment enables post-secondary education organizations and local, state, and federal legislators to implement equitable pathways and support initiatives for low socioeconomic status ESL learners to improve academic outcomes and post-secondary enrollments for minority urban community college students. In this chapter, an overview of the research topic and research questions were introduced. The researcher provided the background of the study by highlighting the history of barriers surrounding equitable learning opportunities among low-socioeconomic-status disadvantaged populations, past educational reform initiatives that sought to improve equality for all, and the theoretical framework underpinning the research. Moreover, the researcher discussed the research problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, and the definitions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to better understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college in Pennsylvania during the 2023-2024 academic school year. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. First, the theories pertaining to the influence academic achievement and socioeconomic status are discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature highlighting the significance of the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners and their ability to succeed academically. Then, an overview of past and present legislation applicable to academic achievement and socioeconomic status in the educational school systems, including factors associated with educational outcomes among low-income students, that are revealed in the literature. A thorough review of socioeconomic factors was also conducted to show the overall correlation between student achievement and students of low socioeconomic status. Finally, a gap in the literature related to the need for more research about how socioeconomic status can influence academic achievement among urban community college English language learners (ELLs) is identified.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study utilized Walberg's (1980) theoretical framework to guide the research process. The theoretical framework served as a blueprint from which all knowledge is constructed and is one of the most important components of the research process (Osanloo & Grant, 2016). This literature review explored Walberg's theory of educational productivity and academic achievement, which posits that a student's psychological traits and their immediate environment influence the learner's academic outcomes, including their cognitive abilities,

behavior, and attitudes (Reynolds & Walberg, 1992; Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). This theory offers a perspective into the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners and the socioeconomic barriers disadvantaged minority populations encounter that influence academic outcomes. This theoretical framework prompted the research question and sub-questions to explore the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an English language learning program at a mid-sized urban community college. Data collection and analysis procedures were also influenced by this theoretical framework, emphasizing the academic experiences and socioeconomic barriers of ESL learners. The results of this study provided academic institutions, educators, and local, state, and federal legislators with information pertaining to the academic achievement gap that exists among low socioeconomic status ESL learners and the need for additional support programs to improve the psychological traits and immediate environment of low socioeconomic status ESL learners to increase a learner's academic outcomes.

Theory of Educational Productivity

This research explored the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners and their ability to achieve academic success. This exploration began with Walberg's (1980) work on educational productivity (Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). The educational productivity model proposed by Walberg (1980) was centered around the cognitive learning theory, which views learning as a process (DiPerna et al., 2002; Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Additionally, Walberg's theory on educational productivity posits that a learner's overall psychological attributes and environment could directly influence educational outcomes (Galizty & Sutarni, 2021; Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Moreover, Walberg's (1980) theory of educational production is one of the few academic productivity models that has been

experimentally evaluated and contains student variables (DiPerna et al., 2002; Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). According to Fraser et al. (1987), Walberg's theory of educational productivity focused on nine key variables: three student aptitude variables, two instructional variables, and four environmental variables. The first three student aptitude variables consist of ability or prior achievement, developmental level, age, and motivation. On the other hand, the two instructional variables consist of the quantity and quality of instruction. However, the final four variables focus on a student's environment, such as their home environment, school environment, friend group environment outside of school, and media exposure outside of school (Fraser et al., 1987). Walberg believed that the home environment is the most influential factor of academic success for learners growing up in low-income households (Njuguna, 2021).

Educational Productivity Theory in This Research Study

Walberg's (1980) theory of educational productivity was essential in understanding the relationship between academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and the socioeconomic factors that influence academic success among urban community college English language learners (Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Walberg's educational productivity theory aimed to explain academic success. However, it was instrumental in understanding the conditions and variables that affected success among learners because such factors provided insight as to why a learner is not performing to their highest potential (Walberg et al., 1981). The research questions that guided this study were directly generated from the premises of Walberg's educational productivity theory. Interview questions were derived from the central and sub-research questions. Additionally, each question drew upon key elements of Walberg's educational productivity theoretical framework. This study contributed to educational productivity theory by providing valuable information about low socioeconomic ESL learners and socioeconomic

barriers ESL students encounter in a post-secondary education environment and how a learner's overall psychological attributes and environment could be improved to increase educational outcomes among disadvantaged minority populations to decrease the disparities that exist within the academic achievement gap.

Related Literature

This literature review presented an analysis and synthesis of research related to the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college in Pennsylvania during the 2023-2024 academic school year. Previous studies that aimed to explore the relationship between low socioeconomic status and academic achievement placed a strong emphasis on the connection between poverty and a lack of resources (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; LaFortune et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018), and neglected to consider the effects that a lack of resources had on students, schools, and how socioeconomic factors can impact academic achievement among underprivileged children. Research by Johnson (2019), Luo (2021), Milner (2013), and Sugarman and Lazarín (2020) on the impact of poverty and academic achievement and the relation to socioeconomic factors on one's ability to succeed academically is scarce. This literature review includes background information on academic achievement, socioeconomic status, educational reform initiatives, and the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status on academic achievement and to identified critical initiatives to help close the achievement gap in education.

Academic Achievement and Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic position has been found to be a predictor of academic achievement in studies conducted by Cedeño et al. (2016), McKenzie (2019), and Reardon and Portilla (2016).

Moreover, socioeconomic status (SES), as identified by Altschul (2012), American

Psychological Association (2018), Lacour and Tissington (2011), and McKenzie (2019), has

been widely recognized as a contributing factor often associated with one's income, level of

education, occupational status, and individualized perceptions surrounding one's social status

and class. Socioeconomic status can contribute to many facets of a person's life and the

opportunities and advantages available in society (Altschul, 2012; American Psychological

Association, 2018; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKenzie, 2019).

Additionally, several studies (Duncan et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Ladd, 2012;

McKenzie, 2019; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018) have demonstrated that socioeconomic

factors and chronic poverty are often intertwined. As a result, issues surrounding chronic poverty

and low socioeconomic status remain a global epidemic. Communities must engage proactively

to help disadvantaged populations by providing them with the assistance that helps them get

ahead rather than holding them back studies (Duncan et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Ladd, 2012;

McKenzie, 2019; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Likewise, studies have shown that

family income has an impact on where families can reside, the safety of their neighborhoods, and

their access to social and educational services that promote healthy development (Engle & Black,

2008; Milner, 2013; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015).

Therefore, low-income, disadvantaged families are more likely to live in areas with high

rates of violence and rising crime. Consequently, most of these environmental circumstances,

unfortunately, are out of the students' and their families' control. Likewise, Johnson (2019) and

Milner (2013) found that underprivileged students growing up in poverty face many issues both

outside of school and inside of school and are more likely to experience health and nutrition

problems, attend fewer school days, arrive late, experience abuse, lack support, are more likely

to experience bullying, and quit school (Johnson, 2019; Milner, 2013).

Furthermore, a strong association exists between academic achievement and low

socioeconomic status (SES). This strong correlation indicates that students raised in poverty

from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have low academic outcomes compared to

peers from affluent backgrounds (Duncan et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; McKenzie, 2019; Milner,

2013; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Van der Berg, 2008). In today's classrooms, poverty

is one of the most common determinants known to influence academic achievement. As poverty

continues to cause disparities in education, educators need to be aware of how poverty affects

academic achievement among underprivileged students to help achieve equitable learning

opportunities for all. According to Olszewski-Kubilius and Corwith (2018), sixteen million

American children, or about 21 percent, live in low-income households that meet the federal

poverty threshold of $23,550 for a family of four (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018).

Research by Ratcliffe (2015) suggests that adult achievement is greatly impacted by childhood

poverty and the duration of poverty experienced. Furthermore, children from disadvantaged

backgrounds are less likely to achieve important milestones in adulthood, such as graduating

from high school and successfully completing college, compared to those who never experienced

poverty (Ratcliffe, 2015).

Moreover, situational poverty, as defined by Richmond Vale Academy (2022), is

characterized as a shortage of resources at a particular time brought on by an unanticipated

circumstance, such as a severe illness or medical condition, a loss of employment, an unforeseen

environmental disaster, or having to live in an underprivileged neighborhood. As a result,

situational poverty has been known to cause several disparities in the U.S. and can influence a

child's access to educational opportunities (Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). Despite

continuing efforts to eliminate barriers surrounding academic achievement among disadvantaged

students (Duncan et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Milner, 2013; Van der Berg, 2008), research

published by Milner (2013) recognized that many educational reform initiatives efforts have

failed because such efforts solely focus on test-based outcomes rather than internal and external

factors that influence academic outcomes among underprivileged children (Milner, 2013).

Nonetheless, many scholars agree that poverty creates inequities in education (Duncan et al.,

2017; Johnson, 2019; Milner, 2013; Van der Berg, 2008). As a result, findings identified by

Duncan et al. (2017), Johnson (2019), McKenzie (2019), Milner (2013), Olszewski-Kubilius and

Corwith (2018), and Van der Berg (2008) confirmed that disadvantaged populations from low-

socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods, attend low-

quality schools, suffer from physical, psychological, and/or emotional abuse, have poor

academic outcomes, and are more likely to attend fewer school days when compared to their

non-disadvantaged peers

Current Educational Trends Among Low-Socioeconomic ESL Learners

According to studies by Aikens and Barbarin (2008), Bhat et al. (2016), Destin et al.

(2019), and Reardon and Portilla (2016), students from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds

consistently outperform students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Aikens & Barbarin,

2008; Bhat et al., 2016; Destin et al., 2019; Reardon & Portilla, 2016). Likewise, research

indicates that disparities in higher education opportunities reliant on household income, race,

background, parental education level, place of residency, and dependent status continue to grow

(Cahalan et al., 2022; Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2022). One current trend in education is the

growing number of English learners (ELs) in U.S. public school classrooms. ELs make up 9% of

children served in the classroom (Lavery et al., 2019). According to data from the National

Center for Education Statistics (2022), more than three-quarters, roughly 76.8 percent of all EL

students enrolled in public schools in the fall of 2019, were Hispanic, reaching nearly 3.9

million. A total of 523,400 Asian students accounted for the second largest racial/ethnic group

amongst ELs, accounting for 10.2 percent of EL students. Likewise, 332,400 White students

accounted for 6.5 percent of all EL students, and 221,000 Black students represented 4.3 percent

of EL students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Sugarman (2019) acknowledged

that underserved populations have historically had reduced graduation rates, asserting that this is

true in almost every state and throughout the country (Sugarman, 2019).

Similarly, research indicates that income is a strong indicator of disparities in educational

attainment (N.A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018). According to

Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2022), socioeconomic status is often linked to poverty and family

income (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2022). Likewise, much of the reviewed literature has revealed

that poverty remains to be recognized as a growing trend that has continued to increase over the

past several decades (Jones et al., 2020; Schweiger, 2019; Suitts, 2015). According to Suitts

(2015), the National Center for Education Statistics reported that poverty has continued to be

recognized as an increasing pattern that has significantly continued to grow and quickly advance

(Suitts, 2015). Research by De Brey et al. (2019) reported that in 2016, roughly 19 percent of

children under the age of 18 lived in poverty. Findings revealed that Black and American

Indian/Alaska Native children had the highest percentages of children living in poverty, both at

34 percent, followed by Hispanic children, which accounted for 28 percent. Likewise, children

from the Pacific Islands accounted for 23 percent, and children from two or more races

accounted for 19 percent. In comparison, White and Asian children had the lowest percentages of children living in poverty at 11 percent (De Brey et al., 2019).

Despite the rise in the number of students living in poverty and low-socioeconomic-status households nationwide, Paschall et al. (2018) stressed the need for reform initiatives to address the problem. Many past reform efforts have failed to consider financial support for underprivileged children and families to close the existing gaps (Adler-Greene, 2019; Ladd, 2012; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019). Furthermore, low-income geographical areas should receive equal resources for instruction, supplies, and students regardless of locality. Nonetheless, future stakeholders and policymakers must focus on equity when implementing new policies to help bridge the educational gap among underprivileged students (Paschall et al., 2018).

Community College Enrollment Trends Among ESL Learners

E. Hernandez et al. (2019) reported that nearly one-third of community college students are of immigrant origin, the fastest-growing new population in community colleges. According to research (David & Kanno, 2021; Janis, 2013), community colleges have been a popular choice for adult learners with an immigrant or English language learning (ELL) background. However, Janis (2013) revealed that these students often face challenges in preparing for and succeeding academically at the college level. In fact, older adult ESL students have the lowest first-semester grade-point averages (GPAs) and are four times less likely to graduate than their non-ESL counterparts (Janis, 2013). Additionally, Kanno (2018) conducted a study that revealed several institutional and individual factors that make it difficult for English language learners to enroll in four-year institutions. These factors include a lack of access to college preparation or advanced classes, as well as a lack of understanding of college admissions procedures. As a result, it is

crucial to address these challenges to ensure that students with inadequate preparation can succeed in higher education (Kanno, 2018).

Assessment and Placement

According to Bostian's (2017) report, universities and colleges have implemented significant modifications to their student placement systems. However, the placement processes for English language learners have remained mostly unchanged. Bostian (2017) revealed that one reason for this is that ESL placement tests and conventional placement exams rely merely on evaluating language proficiency without considering the context, which may not provide an accurate prediction of college readiness. As a result, English language learners are usually assessed through tests like TOEFL, IELTS, or ACCUPLACER ESL, which may require alternative work, particularly for international students (Bostian, 2017). A study by Hughes and Li (2019) found that the current version of ACCUPLACER unfairly categorizes students from historically marginalized backgrounds into developmental writing classes (Hughes & Li, 2019). Additionally, Hughes and Li (2019) reported that this often results in students underestimating their potential for success in college-level coursework, as they are penalized for not adhering to the main expectations of grammar, category, and structure. However, computer-scored assessments offer an increased likelihood of eliminating linguistic, racial, and gender biases among human graders because a computer can only make judgments in ways that it has been designed to (Hughes & Li, 2019).

In a study by Bahr et al. (2019), placement tests tend to underestimate students' ability to succeed in college-level courses. This often results in students being placed in developmental coursework, which can hinder their academic progress and increase the risk of dropping out of college. Additionally, Bahr et al. (2019) concluded that the cumulative high school grade point

average (GPA) is an exceptionally reliable indicator of performance across levels of math and

English coursework, and a higher GPA must be achieved to indicate academic preparedness for

collegiate-level English and math coursework (Bahr et al., 2019). A recent study conducted by

Park (2019) evaluated the progress of community college students who were taking English as a

second language and found that a significant number of students who were classified as children

of immigrants and had been identified as having completed most of their schooling in the US,

started at three levels below college-level English. Furthermore, compared to international

students, this group had a lower rate of attempting and completing the academic college-level

writing English 101 course (Park, 2019). Studies conducted by Raab and Adam (2005) and

Stewart et al. (2015) have stressed the importance of social and economic factors in determining

students' successful transition from secondary to postsecondary institutions. Findings shared by

Raab and Adam (2005) and Stewart et al. (2015) revealed that it is crucial to address the

transition challenges during a student's first year, particularly in the first semester. Failure to do

so reduces their chances of continuing at the same institution, which can decrease their future

enrollment and graduation rates.

Education Reform Initiatives

Over the past several decades, many educational reform initiatives, such as the Every

Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), have been established

to provide equal learning opportunities for all regardless of one's income or family background

(Adler-Greene, 2019; Ladd, 2012; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019). Studies by M. Alexander

(2017), Ladd (2012), and Menken (2010) noted that the NCLB program failed to address severe

educational disparities. On the other hand, studies on language education under the ESSA

conducted by Leider et al. (2021) and López and Santibanez (2018) discovered that allowing the

state to make legislative decisions led to inconsistent policy implementation. Nevertheless, the majority of the literature (Adler-Greene, 2019; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019) claimed that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed to give states the option to develop accountability measures that would accurately reflect English language learners' outcomes within each jurisdiction. But, according to research by Quintero and Hansen (2017), no recent federal policies have given special attention to pre-service or in-service teacher training for English language learners (Quintero & Hansen, 2017).

Much of the literature has revealed that segregated schools have increased, and unequal access to resources and learning opportunities has continued unabated (Kucsera et al., 2015; Orfield et al., 2012; Owens, 2018; Reardon et al., 2022). As a result, the gap between high and low-income young adults' educational attainment and college enrollment has also grown (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Duncan et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2019; Owens, 2018). Over the past several decades, many educational reform initiatives, such as the Higher Education Act (HEA), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have all been established to promote equitable opportunities through educational reform. Ultimately, the legislative effort of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sought to establish equal learning opportunities for all, regardless of income or family background (Adler-Greene, 2019; Fountain, 2021; Ladd, 2012; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019). However, Ladd (2012) revealed that the NCLB initiative failed because it did not recognize the educational disparities that exist among students who reside in low-income households. Regardless of reform efforts, policymakers failed to address significant educational inequalities that stem from external socioeconomic barriers (Ladd, 2012).

Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA)

Data shared by Dhanapala (2021) reported that the Higher Education Act (HEA), initially

passed in 1965 and most recently reauthorized in 2008, outlines American schools' and

universities' requirements to be eligible for federal student grants and loans (Dhanapala, 2021).

Fountain (2021) explained that programs permitted by the HEA promote higher education in a

number of ways. To further explain, the program permitted by the HEA helps students pay for

their postsecondary education. It provides additional aid and services to disadvantaged students,

supports students seeking foreign education and particular graduate and professional degrees,

and supports institutions of higher education (IHEs) in increasing their capacity and capability to

provide postsecondary education (Fountain, 2021).

Consequently, a study by Garcia (2018) that recognized the changing face of

postsecondary students called for revisions to the HEA to address the needs of students of color.

Furthermore, Garcia (2018) reported that reauthorizing the HEA could provide opportunities to

improve educational attainment levels, tackle disparities that contribute to the

increasing achievement gap, and ensure that the federal government, states, and institutions adapt

their policies and practices in response to changing demographics. Garcia (2018) also

recognized how inadequate investment at the state level in higher education contributed to rising

tuition fees and poorer outcomes in education altogether. Additionally, these issues

have discouraged economically disadvantaged and racially diverse students from diverse

backgrounds from enrolling in college.

No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented in 2001 (Robinson, 2018).

According to research (Adler-Greene, 2019; Ladd, 2012; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019),

the purpose of the NCLB was to reduce the linguistic, racial, and ethnic achievement gaps in

math and reading in public schools. In addition, research conducted by Adler-Greene (2019), Ladd (2012), and Saultz et al. (2019) indicated that within the NCLB, all states were held to meet specific state standards established by the federal government. The NCLB aimed to provide performance-based incentives to high-performing school districts with positive student outcomes and highly qualified educators (Adler-Greene, 2019; Saultz et al., 2019). However, Ladd (2012) revealed that state and federal legislators used test-based strategies and support for educational efforts like the NCLB but noted that previous findings surrounding prior reform initiatives had been misinterpreted. Ladd (2012) stated that the NCLB initiative failed because it did not recognize the educational disparities that exist among students who reside in low-income households.

Similarly, research conducted by Menken (2010) identified significant problems with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) assessment and accountability requirements. Menken (2010) emphasized that high-stakes examinations for English language learners in English, a language that non-native English speakers understand, continue to remain problematic. Menken (2010) found that even academic content examinations are linguistically difficult, applying terminology presumably unfamiliar to an English language learner. As a result, this explains why test-based strategies established by the NCLB created challenges for this group of students (Menken, 2010). In a separate study, M. Alexander (2017) investigated how late-entering international English language learners overcome the linguistic and intellectual barriers encountered during high school exit tests. Findings revealed by M. Alexander (2017) indicated that English language learners purposefully failed a No Child Left Behind-mandated statewide English proficiency test while maintaining their ELL status to continue receiving ELL support, without which they would have little chance of passing the exit exams. In addition, M. Alexander

(2017) emphasized the importance of understanding that late-arriving international English language learners have different curricular backgrounds, which can lead to greater academic disadvantages that may affect students' educational experiences and futures even though these individuals consistently encounter linguistic disadvantages.

Despite reform efforts, policymakers failed to address significant educational inequalities that stem from external socioeconomic barriers (Ladd, 2012). Nonetheless, the NCLB encountered many criticisms and eventually was revised into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

According to research (Leider et al., 2021; López & Santibanez, 2018), state policies on language education under ESSA have consistently placed a strong focus on English learning. However, to a certain extent, delegating legislative decisions to the state level has caused inconsistent policy execution (Leider et al., 2021; López & Santibanez, 2018). Despite the growing demand for specialists and skilled educators trained in EL instruction, Quintero and Hansen (2017) found that many teacher preparation programs did not prioritize training EL-ready teachers. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and other recent federal policies are becoming more prominent among ELs. However, no pre-service nor in-service teacher training for ELs has been prioritized under any recent federal policies (Quintero & Hansen, 2017). According to research conducted by Adler-Greene (2019), Robinson (2018), and Saultz et al. (2019), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was enacted to provide states with the choice to create accountability measures that would accurately reflect English language learners' outcomes within each jurisdiction. To further explain, accountability for student performance under ESSA was no longer determined by student-based proficiency levels in subjects such as reading and

math. Instead, under ESSA, schools would be evaluated on areas such as student attendance, school culture, and availability of advanced placement courses. In addition, the Department of Education required all states to submit accountability plans with goals centered around testing outcomes, English language proficiency for English language learners, and graduation rates (Adler-Greene, 2019; Robinson, 2018; Saultz et al., 2019).

Educational Aspects and Low-Socioeconomic Status ESL Learners

A majority of the research conducted by Kanno and Cromley (2015), Rodriguez et al. (2022), Soland and Sandilos (2021), and Sugarman (2019) has identified that English language learners had greater dropout rates and poorer college attendance. Research also revealed that socioeconomic status significantly influences education and language learning among English language learners (Akram et al., 2021; Dixson et al., 2018; Luo, 2021; Luo et al., 2021; Pace et al., 2017; Perrigo et al., 2022). Furthermore, teacher quality and skillset, school location, and learning environments, as mentioned by Gándara et al. (2005), Senjahari et al. (2021), and Taufiqulloh et al. (2018), have all been known to influence academic performance among English language learners. Moreover, according to Reardon et al. (2022), high-poverty schools are less effective since they tend to possess limited resources such as experienced and qualified educators, which are essential to an educational institution's success. As a result, Reardon et al. (2022) acknowledged that schools with a significant number of low-income minority students frequently encounter elevated incidences of principal, staff, and educator turnover, higher rates of inadequately trained and uncertified instructors, and a greater likelihood of educator absences. Thus, such issues increase the number of disparities in academic achievement among low-income black and Hispanic students (Reardon et al., 2022).

Sugarman and Lazarín (2020) discovered that English learners and immigrant children regularly experience challenges in achieving academic success. These constraints include, among other things, the effects of economic hardship, the stress associated with rising anti-immigrant viewpoints, and attending under-resourced schools. As a result, Rodriguez et al. (2022) revealed that graduation rates for states with a high proportion of English language learners in 2014-2016 showed an increased dropout rate among English language learners, which has become a major national issue among teachers and educational organizations (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

The Coleman Report, as published by Coleman et al. (1966), also acknowledged that educational institutions have little bearing on a student's educational achievement. Inequalities imposed on learners by their home, neighborhood, and interpersonal surroundings are carried forward and, unfortunately, later evolve into greater inequalities that they encounter later in their adult lives following the completion of school (Coleman et al., 1966).

Second Language Learning Environments and Academic Achievement

Much of the research conducted by Dhanapala (2021), Jalalzai et al. (2023), Kiatkheeree (2018), and Tu (2021) has established that second language learning environments immensely influence the academic performance of ESL learners. According to Kiatkheeree (2018), three variables known to affect the learning environment consist of the physical environment (supplies, building, and classroom), the academic environment (learning approach or academic outcomes), and the psychological environment (attitude or value), can all influence academic success among English language learners (Kiatkheeree, 2018). Likewise, disparities in a learner's home learning environment, which include the standard of parent-child language interactions, the accessibility of literacy materials, and the occurrence of activities involving language acquisition, can assist in explaining several socioeconomic status-related gaps in

language outcomes (Akram et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Luo, 2021; Luo et al., 2021; Pace et al., 2017). According to studies by Akram et al. (2021), Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018), Luo et al. (2021), and Pace et al. (2017) learning English along with any other language is difficult for students. Thus, learners often face many challenges when learning English at home and school, which are both important social factors and are conducive to learning (Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018).

Similar research by Ferreira et al. (2018) recognized that the two important social environments that influence an individual's development are a person's home and school environment. However, research has shown that a family's income and educational background have a beneficial and crucial role in learning (Akram et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019; Morales & Maravilla, 2019). Consequently, students from higher-income families, when compared to their non-affluent peers, are more likely to pursue higher education. As a result, higher education levels frequently imply a brighter future, better-paying jobs, and more opportunities (Akram et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019; Morales & Maravilla, 2019). Subsequently, findings established by Akram et al. (2021) align with prior studies (Cheng et al., 2019; Morales & Maravilla, 2019) that have identified the academic challenges of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners and have confirmed the implications that financially poor low-socioeconomic status can have on ESL learning (Akram et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019; Morales & Maravilla, 2019).

Teacher Quality, Preparation, and Skillset

According to Reardon et al. (2022), the unequal distribution of qualified educators among schools accounts for one-fifth of the effect of segregation on achievement differences (Reardon et al., 2022). In addition, a study conducted by Leider et al. (2021) sought to examine the professional teaching standards involving culturally and linguistically diverse students from

50 states and the District of Columbia as well as the criteria for certification of educators to instruct assigned English learners in bilingual education, English language development, and secure English immersion environments research identified disparities in teacher qualifications for educating English learners and discrepancies in the education of classified English learners across the United States (Leider et al., 2021). Dörnyei and Muir (2019) emphasized that the student-teacher relationship in the classroom is considered one of the most noticeable aspects of the learning environment. The quality of teaching and learning differs dramatically depending on whether the classroom environment is one of trust and support or one of competition and cutthroat competition (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019). In a study conducted by Shim and Shur (2018), researchers found that both English language learners and teachers had different perspectives on what they believed to be a controlling factor for their learning. The study highlighted that the perspectives and attitudes among English language learners heavily relied on what the educators did and did not do. Essentially, the structure of a curriculum has a critical role in academic success among English language learners, and educators must work to ensure that a student-centered curriculum is established that engages and motivates all learners (Shim & Shur, 2018). Studies have found that a teacher's skill set, knowledge, personality, and classroom learning environment have all been instrumental in achieving positive learning outcomes among ESL learners (Senjahari et al., 2021; Taufiqulloh et al., 2018). However, studies have recognized the need for adequate ESL teacher preparation and training programs (Correll, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2022; Samson & Collins, 2012).

A research study by Neumeister et al. (2007) surveyed fourth-grade teachers of talented learners enrolled in a large urban school district with a substantial number of low-income and minority learners. The results explained that a majority of the surveyed teachers were not aware

of how culture and socioeconomic status can influence student talent. Teachers were unable to recognize culturally specific talent expressions, such as strong oral storytelling skills. They also did not comprehend how having few opportunities could result in low performance and motivation, even in the presence of exceptional talent.

In a separate study by Correll (2016), 79 elementary school teachers were surveyed to assess their perceptions of teaching English language learners (ELLs). The results showed that many surveyed teachers revealed that they felt that their teacher education programs did not prepare them well enough for teaching ELLs. Specifically, many reported that they did not receive adequate coursework that covered strategies for teaching ELLs, had limited opportunities to observe classrooms with ELL students, and lacked experience working with ELLs during field placements and student teaching. On the other hand, research on second and foreign-language learning teachers' expectations of their students significantly impacts their behavior and achievement. Studies have found that ESL educators frequently set different expectations for their students, which seems to have an interpersonal expectation effect on students (De Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas et al., 2015; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). Gándara et al. (2005) conducted one of the largest studies on teacher effectiveness and satisfaction among English language learners, surveying 5,300 educators in 22 California school districts (Gándara et al., 2005). The study discovered four significant challenges, which include communication with learners and their families, a lack of time to teach ELLs the necessary language skills and subject matter, a broad range of English and academic skill sets between many ELLs in every class, and a lack of resources (e.g., textbooks, assessments, other materials) (Gándara et al., 2005). These issues were also raised in prior research conducted by Anyiendah (2017), Behroozi and Amoozegar (2014), and Rahimi and Samadi (2022).

The Effects of Socioeconomic Status on Academic Achievement

Some studies revealed that socioeconomic factors such as family education, family income, parents' criminal history, and family structure have been known to impact student achievement (Duncan et al., 2017; Egalite, 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Rothstein, 2008). Some emphasize that household stressors and low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to produce negative academic outcomes, causing students to become more inclined to drop out of school (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Henry et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2019). In addition, a significant portion of the literature that had been published on the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement acknowledged that children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, experience unstable upbringings, and are less likely to attend high-quality schools, have access to necessary resources, and achieve academic success (Duncan et al., 2017; Egalite, 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Rothstein, 2008).To further explain, studies conducted by N. A. Alexander and Jang (2020), Duncan et al. (2017), Lacour and Tissington (2011), and McKenzie (2019) found that the lack of resources and accessibility to resources are greatly impacted by poverty. As a result, the lack of resources among underprivileged students tends to create a barrier for students growing up in low-income households. Additionally, much of the reviewed literature confirmed that it can be more challenging for students of low socioeconomic status to equally perform academically when compared to more affluent peers who do not live in low socioeconomic households (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Duncan et al., 2017; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKenzie, 2019).

Understanding how socioeconomic status and academic achievement are related to improving student learning opportunities and outcomes is crucial. For decades, researchers have explored the aspects of socioeconomic status on academic achievement and determined that

socioeconomic status heavily influences one's ability to succeed academically. Much of the reviewed literature on academic achievement and low socioeconomic status has revealed that income, family background, lack of resources, low-quality schools, and low-income neighborhoods have been known to impact student achievement (Destin et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2017; Egalite, 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Rothstein, 2008). Similarly, research established by N. A. Alexander and Jang (2020), Henry et al. (2017), and McKenzie (2019) found that household stressors and low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to produce adverse academic outcomes, causing students to become more inclined to drop out of school.

Likewise, much of the existing literature that pertains to the effects of socioeconomic status on academic achievement acknowledged that students raised in underprivileged homes, live in underprivileged areas, or grow up in unstable environments are less likely to attend good schools, have access to appropriate resources, and are less likely to achieve the American dream (Duncan et al., 2017; Egalite, 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Rothstein, 2008). Some studies found that the lack of resources and accessibility to resources are significantly impacted by poverty (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Duncan et al., 2017; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKenzie, 2019). As a result, the lack of resources among underprivileged students tends to create a barrier for students growing up in low-income households. Additionally, much of the reviewed literature has confirmed that it can be more challenging for students from low-income homes to perform equally academically when compared to peers who do not live in poverty (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; Duncan et al., 2017; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKenzie, 2019).

Family Background

Family background is often associated with student achievement and academic outcomes. Egalite (2016) and Rothstein (2008) revealed that an individual's family background could often

impact one's ability to succeed academically. Research conducted by Egalite (2016) found four significant variables that affect students' academic performance: family income, family education, parental criminal histories, and family structure. According to the findings established by Egalite (2016), children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, reside in low-income neighborhoods, or are raised in unstable situations are less likely to attend good schools, have access to necessary resources, and achieve the American dream. On the other hand, children from wealthy households with a stable living environment are more likely to succeed academically since they have access to better resources and schools.

Akram et al. (2021) found that ESL learners who are financially poor cannot focus on their learning because they are required to work outside of school in addition to being a student (Akram et al., 2021). Much of the research (Darko-Asumadu & Sika-Bright, 2021; Rothstein, 2008) revealed a lack of understanding of socioeconomic circumstances that can hinder one's ability to succeed academically. In addition, Darko-Asumadu and Sika-Bright (2021) and Rothstein (2008) found that underprivileged children raised in low-income households are more likely to have a higher absenteeism rate due to lack of insurance. Rothstein (2008) discovered that families from poorer backgrounds and children who grow up in poverty are more likely to move because they cannot afford housing and other expenses. As a result, relocating can cause students to fall behind in their schooling, creating more significant barriers to academic achievement. Also, students raised in low-income households are more likely to experience abuse, receive less individualized attention, witness crimes, come from a single-parent family, and be less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities inside and outside school (Rothstein, 2008).

Family Resources

Family resources have direct and long-lasting positive or negative effects on a child's academic performance. The ability to access resources and the availability to obtain resources can be quickly impacted by income. As a result, the absence of accessible resources among students creates a barrier for those living in poverty and low-income households (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Van der Berg, 2008). According to research (Child Trends, 2019; Koball & Jiang, 2018), an estimated 28 percent of dual language learners from Spanish-speaking households live below the federal poverty line, particularly in comparison to a 19 percent overall childhood poverty rate among Americans (Child Trends, 2019; Koball & Jiang, 2018).

Additional studies conducted by Akram et al. (2021) and Cheng et al. (2019) revealed that individuals of lower socioeconomic status often try to meet their family's basic needs and cannot save money and resources for subsequent generations. In comparison, high socioeconomic status families can preserve their wealth and resources while providing for their children's and other family members' basic and everyday needs. Ultimately, a family's educational background and income level positively and significantly impact a student's ability to learn a second language (Akram et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019). This data aligns with findings shared by Sugarman and Lazarín (2020), who reported that older youth English language learners might have jobs outside of school or supervise younger children, creating obstacles for them to concentrate on completing their own coursework. In addition, basic school supplies, such as paper and pencil and enrichment tools, are often absent from homes that middle- and upper-class families might have access to (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020).

Research conducted by Amato and Ochiltree (1986) identified two classes of family resources, which include family structural resources and family process resources. First, family

structural resources involve parental income, education, and occupation. Second, the family processes resources, which include parental expectations, help, and attention (Amato & Ochiltree, 1986). In a study conducted by Kim (2004) that aimed to assess family resources and children's academic performance, the research found that household income, level of parents' education, and occupation all proved to influence academic performance among low-income children. Kim (2004) found that financial aspects such as a parent's income and other financial resources can often influence factors such as the quality of the school, the neighborhood, and outside influences their child may be exposed to.

Additionally, Kim (2004) acknowledged that a parent's education level often influences a child's academic performance because well-educated parents are more likely to support their child, help with homework, and interact with the school. Kim (2004) established that approximately 50 percent of underprivileged children in low-income households lack parental support, supervision, and involvement. As a result, family structural and process resources can significantly influence a child's academic performance. More importantly, access to resources depends on one's income, employment, and education level, which can heavily impact academic success for underserved children raised in low-income households (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

Home and School Environmental Characteristics and Low-SES

Home and school environments are two predictors known to influence academic achievement among underprivileged children (Johnson, 2019; Milner, 2013). In a study that explored low-socioeconomic status and the language learning processes and the extent to which home literacy environment and existing language knowledge mediated the connection, Luo (2021) discovered that children from higher-SES households (as demonstrated by primary

caregivers' educational background) outperformed those from lower-SES households when learning new language items. More importantly, Luo (2021) acknowledged that one's home learning environment (access and exposure to books, frequency of literacy activities) and current knowledge (vocabulary and linguistic understanding) negated the influence of socioeconomic status (Luo, 2021). These findings identified by Luo (2021) highlight the importance of better-preparing DLLs from low-SES households to learn in a dual-language environment. Improving the SES gap in learning processes requires providing dual language learners with support in a language environment and knowledge through educational materials and language and literacy activities in both languages (Luo, 2021).

Additionally, research conducted by Johnson (2019) and Milner (2013) examined the effects of low socioeconomic status on academic achievement both outside and inside of school and found that inside-of-school underprivileged students growing up in low-socioeconomic households are more likely to experience health and nutrition problems, attend fewer school days, arrive late, experience abuse, lack support, are more likely to experience bullying and quit school (Johnson, 2019; Milner, 2013). Njuguna (2021) confirmed that one's home environment tends to be more significant than other elements that influence academic success, like parental education and income. Several studies (McKenzie, 2019; Milner, 2013; Njuguna, 2021) found that problems that often arise outside of school have been known to impact one's overall academic outcomes inside of school negatively. Similarly, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more prone to exhibit social, psychological, and emotional impairments. These impairments are commonly associated with external influences, such as a child's family environment (McKenzie, 2019; Milner, 2013).

Milner (2013) revealed that students are more inclined to experience abuse outside of school, encounter health and nutrition problems, attend fewer school days, arrive late, and are more susceptible to homelessness (Milner, 2013). In addition, McKenzie (2019) identified that disadvantaged students are often more vulnerable and lack the proper support system that others may have. Such determinants often contribute to poor behavior in one's school environment, disruptive behaviors, low-performance outcomes, lack of concentration, and the lack of the ability to work with others for fear of rejection (McKenzie, 2019).

College Advancement and Access Among Low-Socioeconomic English Language Learners

According to a study conducted by Kanno and Cromley (2015) that examined the gap between English language learners and non-English language learners pertaining to college advancement and access among English language learners, findings revealed that college planning is a challenge for ELLs and, subsequently, most ELLs never reach the point to which they can apply to a 4-year college. As a result, Kanno and Cromley (2015) emphasized the need for educational organizations to target the vulnerable ELL population to ensure the aspirations and goals of each learner are better supported during the college planning process. Another barrier that has proven to hinder academic achievement among low-socioeconomic ELLs, as identified by Kanno (2018) and Núñez et al. (2016), is that many ELLs come from low-income families and lack the finances to pursue a college education.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Despite past reform initiatives, gaps in education remain problematic and unresolved. According to research conducted by Long (2022), Owens (2018), and Paschall et al. (2018), the achievement gap within the educational system results from the many economic inequalities in school districts around the world. Owens (2018) and Paschall et al. (2018) confirmed that in

highly unequal areas, student achievement and financial background are instrumental factors that need to be considered to establish equal opportunities for all (Owens, 2018; Paschall et al., 2018). On the other hand, many studies assessing racial disparities and academic outcomes (Long, 2022; Owens, 2018; Paschall et al., 2018) reported that racial differences had created unequal learning opportunities. As a result, inequitable opportunities often lead to poor academic outcomes in racially segregated school districts (Long, 2022; Owens, 2018; Paschall et al., 2018). Due to this, racial segregation results in fewer academic opportunities (Long, 2022; Owens, 2018; Paschall et al., 2018). Alongside the challenging quest to establish equal educational opportunities for all and to improve student outcomes, some authors (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Long, 2022; Paschall et al., 2018) have highlighted the importance of both long-term interventions and community interventions. McGee (2021) confirmed that without coordinated efforts from state and local leadership, substantial changes in public policy, and public finance, efforts to bridge the achievement gap would not be successful (McGee, 2021). To address the achievement gap within the educational system, (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Long, 2022; Paschall et al., 2018) confirmed that school funding needs to be increased, additional school programs need to be integrated, and community interventions must be established. Jones et al. (2020) added that school and community-based interventions are crucial to low-income students residing in underserved communities and are necessary for reducing the risk factors often associated with low socioeconomic status, adolescents, and youth (Jones et al., 2020).

Leadership and Professional Development

Closing the achievement gap is a difficult task that requires multiple efforts from all stakeholders. According to Martin et al. (2019), school reform initiatives on federal, state, and

local levels are critical to improving academic outcomes and solving fundamental problems known to influence one's ability to succeed academically. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) established four strategies educational leaders and academic institutions could implement to support student performance, academic attainment, and behavior. The four strategies include: (1) promoting a positive learning environment throughout the academic institution, including in classrooms; (2) encouraging positive behavior among students through social and emotional learning; (3) utilizing innovative teaching techniques that foster student engagement, motivation, capability, and a self-reliant learning environment; and (4) creating a support system that satisfies the needs of the students. Yulianti et al. (2022) emphasized the need for professional development opportunities pertaining to parental involvement for school officials and educators in developing home-school relationships and working with parents (Yulianti et al., 2022).

Overall, the need for professional development opportunities is critical because many schools lack professional development opportunities for parental education. However, such opportunities are necessary to improve parent-teacher communication and involvement (Yulianti et al., 2022). More significantly, López and Santibanez (2018) emphasized that inadequate teacher preparation for emergent bilingual (EB) students can have significant implications on student progress, emergent bilingual reclassification, and ultimately, high school and college successful completion (López & Santibanez, 2018)

Parental and Community Involvement

Research conducted by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) highlighted the need for schools to establish relationships that consist of parental and community involvement is critical to strengthen, encourage, and improve educational outcomes among underprivileged students. Likewise, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) stressed the significance of establishing strong

connections between schools, families, and the community to facilitate the success of immigrant students. Collaboration among these stakeholders can also benefit the families of these students. For instance, community organizations can offer newcomer family education sessions to engage in discussions related to education, provide guidance on navigating the educational process, and maintain positive relationships with teachers and school personnel. These sessions can also provide information on local resources such as after-school programs, support groups, religious institutions, and health clinics to help immigrant families build social networks and access community resources (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Much of the literature found that educational leadership can affect student achievement (Jeynes, 2018; Ntekane, 2018; Yulianti et al., 2022). Yulianti et al. (2022) confirmed that school leaders need to create an environment that supports teachers and parent-teacher relationships to improve student success. To promote positive parent-teacher relationships and improve school-based involvement, studies conducted by Jeynes (2018) and Yulianti et al. (2022) revealed that educators need to encourage and invite parents to volunteer in the classroom. Likewise, educators should urge parents and families to attend school events and meetings and work with parents in assisting their children with homework (Jeynes, 2018; Yulianti et al., 2022). However, Ntekane (2018) noted that establishing positive parent-teacher relationships among low-income families could be difficult. Many low-income households have parents who work multiple jobs and long hours, fear rejection, and cannot understand, read, or write, which hinders their ability to help their children at home (Ntekane, 2018). As a result, research by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2010) and Yulianti et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of community involvement. They confirmed that such partnerships are strengthened when school administrators work with the community. Moreover, Yulianti et al. (2022) found that when school administrators work

together with the community, funding becomes achievable, schools become safer and can provide additional resources to low-income students, and neighborhood violence decreases.

Summary

A review of the literature revealed that low socioeconomic status has been known to influence academic achievement among urban community English language learners (Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Luo, 2021; Marquis, 2022; Rahimi & Samadi, 2022; Reardon et al., 2022; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Soland & Sandilos, 2021). Unfortunately, academic achievement among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds has been reportedly lower than that of students from higher SES backgrounds (Duncan et al., 2017; Henry et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2019; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Rosen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, studies indicate that there is a correlation between low socioeconomic status ESL learners and academic achievement (Akram et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Kiatkheeree, 2018; Luo, 2021; Luo et al., 2021; Pace et al., 2017). However, it was difficult to determine the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college and their ability to succeed academically without exploring the barriers surrounding academic achievement and socioeconomic status that contribute to poor academic outcomes and the relationship of socioeconomic factors pertaining to poverty and academic achievement.

Researchers have examined the validity and practical applicability of Walberg's educational productivity theory and the vital role it plays in factors surrounding academic achievement that go beyond the curriculum, instructional techniques, and procedures, emphasizing that socioeconomic factors such as a parent's level of education, household income, financial support, ability to access resources, language, and parental involvement all influence academic outcomes (Njuguna, 2021). Likewise, previous studies that aimed to explore the

relationship between academic achievement and socioeconomic status placed a strong emphasis on the connection between poverty and a lack of resources, but they neglected to consider the effects that a lack of resources had on students and schools (N. A. Alexander & Jang, 2020; LaFortune et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019; Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018; Owens, 2018). Additionally, research by Johnson (2019), Luo (2021), Milner (2013), and Sugarman and Lazarín (2020) on academic achievement and socioeconomic status pertaining to both in-school and outside-of-school variables and the relation to socioeconomic factors on one's ability to academically succeed is scarce. Moreover, much of the existing literature (Correll, 2016; Deocampo, 2020; Gándara et al., 2005; Neumeister et al., 2007; Shim & Shur, 2018) captures the voice of the teacher and educational leaders, and very little research captures the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status from the perspective of the student.

As a result, there was a gap in the literature pertaining to examining the academic experiences of low socioeconomic ESL learners enrolled in a post-secondary education environment (Almon, 2015; Perez & Morrison, 2016; Y. Shi & Chun Ko, 2023; Villarreal & García, 2016). Future recommendations by Sacklin and Daniels (2022) suggest that in order to improve academic outcomes for ESL learners, future research is needed to examine in detail variables pertaining to participants' background characteristics, such as academic ability, motivation, socioeconomic status, prior education, and external responsibilities. This transcendental phenomenological study explored the academic experiences of low socioeconomic ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. By sharing data on student experiences, educational institutions and government officials at all levels will gain a better understanding of the support programs and reform initiatives that are necessary to alleviate the increasing number of minority students that contribute to the achievement gap and can

ultimately lead to the future implementation of more effective solutions for ESL learners'

students in post-secondary education environments and beyond.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and understand the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized secondary education environment in Pennsylvania during the 2023-2024 academic school year. A qualitative phenomenological research design was selected to understand the low-socioeconomic status ESL learners lived and shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach to qualitative research, aimed to address the interpretation of individuals or groups attached to a human or social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018), was applied to this study to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners and socioeconomic aspects known to hinder one's ability to academically succeed. The phenomenological approach utilized for this study was transcendental. Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018) found that this approach enables researchers to set aside their own experiences to gain a new perspective on the phenomenon studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the research methodology applied. In addition, the setting and participant details are provided. This chapter also includes the researcher's positionality, focusing on the interpretative framework, philosophical assumptions, and the researcher's role. Moreover, the methods and plan for data collection were addressed along with the detailed measures and analyses for collecting data from individual interviews, writing prompts, and focus groups. Lastly, the data synthesis plan provides a rationale for the research's reliability and ethical considerations, and a summary are addressed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Research Design

This section includes the research methodology, design, and approach applied to this study. The method applied was qualitative, and a phenomenological design was selected to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners. A qualitative phenomenological research design was selected to understand the lived and shared experiences among a disadvantaged population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach utilized for this study was transcendental. Moustakas (1994) recognized that this approach enabled researchers to set aside their own experiences to gain a new perspective in relation to the phenomenon studied (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological research design was most appropriate for this study because the objective of this research is to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community college. Likewise, a transcendental phenomenological research design addresses the interpretation of individuals or groups attached to a human or social phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additional designs taken into consideration for this study included narrative and grounded theory; however, neither was chosen because the methodologies did not align with the research objective. A narrative approach to this study was not appropriate because narrative research involves the interpretation of stories to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences and perceptions. In contrast, this study sought to investigate phenomena through people's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). On the other hand, the grounded theory approach was also not appropriate, as this study does not go beyond description to produce or establish a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The transcendental phenomenological approach allowed me to describe the academic lived experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community college.

By describing the academic lived experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community college, the researcher contributed to existing literature that pertained to the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a community college setting and better identified socioeconomic aspects known to influence one's ability to academically succeed. This qualitative study narrows a gap in the literature and provided a deeper understanding and insight into the increasing number of disparities among ESL learners that continues to contribute to the achievement gap.

The study applied Moustakas's (1994) four core processes to help facilitate knowledge derivation: epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences. First, in the epoché phase, the researcher put aside understanding, judgments, and prior knowledge, and refrained from using their everyday perceptions to gain a new perspective on the phenomenon. Likewise, Moustakas (1994) identified *epoché* as a process to set aside presuppositions about the phenomenon and considered *bracketing* as a process to isolate (or bracket) the phenomenon being studied. However, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that during the *epoché* phase researchers must remove any preconceptions that could bias the study to better evaluate the phenomena from the participants' perspective to ensure a rich, thorough description based on this understanding. Second, phenomenological reduction uses a composite description to obtain a textural narrative description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon. Third, imaginative variation aims to understand the fundamental nature of the phenomenon explored and allowed the researcher to uncover the pure essence of data that pertained to experience, perception, and memory to correctly connect the difference between what is sought after and what is known. Lastly, phenomenological research was concluded by establishing a synthesis of meanings and essences, permitting the researcher to

consider the possible relevance of the essence of the experiences acquired and provide a depiction of the circumstances that lead to and were connected to the phenomena explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Moreover, in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument (Patton, 2015). Additionally, qualitative research examines, documents, analyzes various means of data collection (interviews, journaling, and focus group sessions) to capture the voice of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the use of various means of data collection consisting of interviews, journaling, and focus group sessions, the research was triangulated to ensure that the academic lived experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners are described and a detailed understanding of the issue is provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I chose to conduct a transcendental phenomenological qualitative study because English learners and immigrant students often face difficulties in achieving academic success (Sugarman & Lazarín, 2020). This research sought to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the academic lived experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners and the socioeconomic aspects known to hinder one's ability to attend and graduate from a post-secondary education environment.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was to describe the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. One central research question and three sub-questions were created to understand this phenomenon better.

Central Research Question

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college?

Sub-Question One

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners inside of school?

Sub-Question Two

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners outside of school?

Sub-Question Three

What socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor college graduation outcomes among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners?

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Setting and Participants

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This section contains the site and participants selected for the study. The study aimed to answer the question, "What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college?" The site and setting were meticulously selected to ensure that the required specifications of the study were met and that the research question and purpose were thoroughly explored to provide and contribute a new outlook and fresh data to the existing body of literature surrounding the area of study.

Setting

Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) was a pseudonym that was used throughout this study to reference the site in which this study will take place. LCCC is a two-year community college campus located in Pennsylvania and ranks among the top 20% of public

schools in the state for the largest student body and the least debt for graduating students (Luzerne County Community College, 2023b). The college was founded in 1966 under the sponsorship of the Luzerne County Board of Commissioners and guided by a fifteen-member Board of Trustees (Luzerne County Community College, 2023b). This school was chosen for the study because it is the largest college in northeastern Pennsylvania with 13 satellite campuses, and 60 percent of the student body enrolled are classified as low-income students who received an income-based federal Pell grant (College Scorecard, n.d.; Luzerne County Community College, 2022a).

In the Fall of 2022, 4,220 students were enrolled in credit classes, with 32% attending full-time and 68% enrolled part-time (Luzerne County Community College, 2022a). Additionally, the college's student-to-teacher ratio is 11:1, which is equivalent to the state community college average (College Scorecard, n.d.). LCCC depends on shared governance among the Board of Trustees, the President's Cabinet, the Faculty, and the Administration to ensure that the operations within the school, each satellite campus, and department function efficiently.

This study took place at an LCCC satellite campus in Pennsylvania. The selection of a mid-sized college campus served as an ideal setting to further explore the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status English language learners. The English language learning program is offered to diverse learners trying to improve their English proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking. Moustakas (1994) identified that qualitative researchers examine phenomena in their natural environments. Likewise, the phenomenon's significance was investigated in these natural environments from the perspective of the population studied. The transcendental methodology enabled the researcher to investigate phenomena naturally, and participant engagement through

face-to-face interactions (Moustakas, 1994). Data for this study was obtained from adult student participants at the school site, the natural site for this study.

Participants

This study utilized both purposeful sampling and convenience sampling. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select study subjects and study sites that will assist them in better understanding the phenomenon studied and the issue at hand (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, this study will utilize convenience sampling, which Dörnyei (2007) identified as a sample that is conveniently accessible to the researcher (Dörnyei, 2007). Likewise, convenience sampling includes subjects that represent the population studied and are selected by the researcher if they fulfill practical criteria, such as ease of accessibility, geographic location, availability at a specific time, or the desire to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants for this study included English language learners who have previously participated in the ESL program within the last year and existing participants enrolled in the English language learning program. The English language program runs annually, and students can enroll during the fall, spring, and summer semesters. Courses usually run for approximately 15 weeks. Approximately 18 students are permitted to enroll in ESL courses at the start of each semester. For this study, 12-15 English language learners were asked to participate. Participants were comprised of female and male Hispanic and Latino ELLs ranging from 18 to 40 years of age. The sample included English language learners enrolled in an academic English language learning program who desired to improve their English language proficiency skills. Similarly, students were asked to participate in the study voluntarily and were contacted through email, which the college provided upon request.

Researcher Positionality

Social constructivism is the interpretive framework that best fits my position as a researcher. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivism refers to "individuals who seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). In addition, Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that researchers are encouraged to keep questions broad and general to ensure that participants can construct the meaning of a situation. More importantly, by executing a social constructivism framework, the researcher is encouraged to ask several open-ended questions while listening and observing what the participants say and do in their life settings. Creswell and Poth (2018) described that researchers must focus on the "processes" of how study participants interact. For example, for researchers to fully comprehend the historical and cultural background of study participants, they must concentrate on the specific areas where the study population lives and works. Then, based on the researcher's findings, an interpretation can be made of what they found, and an understanding based on their personal history and experiences can be made (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research topic that I have selected to study for my dissertation explored the the academic experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized college campus environment in Pennsylvania during the 2023-2024 academic school year. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory the interaction of social, cultural, and individual factors are vital components of human development. A critical precept of Vygotsky's theory is the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986, as cited in Schunk, 2020). According to this precept, reasoning is first social before an individual can absorb new knowledge. Likewise, there is a gap between what students can accomplish alone and what they can accomplish with the help of others. (Walberg, 1980, 1992, 2003) believed that the influence of the cultural-historical

setting was prevalent in students schooling not because it was where students were scaffolded but, rather, because it allowed them to develop a greater awareness of themselves, their language, and their role in the world (Schunk, 2020).

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that guided my study was social constructivism. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivism refers to how individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that researchers are encouraged to keep questions broad and general to ensure that participants can construct the meaning of a situation. More importantly, by executing a social constructivism framework, it is recommended that the researcher ask several open-ended questions while listening and observing what the participants say and do in their life settings. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified that researchers must focus on the "processes" of how study participants interact. For example, for researchers to fully comprehend the historical and cultural background of study participants, they must concentrate on the specific areas where the study population lives and works. Then, based on the researcher's findings, an interpretation can be made of what they found, and an understanding based on their personal history and experiences can be made (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My constructivist paradigm impacted this study by establishing key themes known to hinder academic achievement across disadvantaged populations. Through individual interviews, journal collection responses, and focus group session, data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted to provide insight relevant to the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are the foundation of any research study because they give the researcher a sense of direction in effectively approaching and understanding the research process. Three philosophical assumptions utilized for this qualitative study include ontological, epistemological, and axiological. To further explain, ontological assumption focuses on embracing and reporting multiple realities. On the other hand, epistemological assumption stresses the importance of establishing a close relationship between the researcher and the studied participants. Lastly, axiological assumption allows the researcher to bring their values to the study and make them known (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ontological Assumption

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ontological assumption pertains to the nature of reality and its characteristics. Additionally, ontological assumption stresses the need for the researcher to understand and interpret the multiple realities of the individuals being studied. Nonetheless, it is equally important to identify different themes and perspectives when conducting the study to ensure that different viewpoints are presented as themes develop in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, it is essential to properly study and listen to the multiple viewpoints of all study participants while remaining neutral. Essentially, each study participant will provide their perspectives surrounding the research topic. However, as an educator and instructor of post-secondary ESL learners, I recognize my own biases toward low-socioeconomic status ESL learners and their ability to succeed academically. Therefore, as the researcher, I will utilize bracketing during data collection and analysis to ensure that new perspectives on the phenomenon under examination are discovered (Moustakas, 1994). Likewise, if my beliefs and ideologies which assume that socioeconomic status can hinder one's

ability to succeed academically are challenged, it will be imperative to properly report and identify the different perspectives and themes that emerged in the findings.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumption emphasizes the need for the researcher to establish a close relationship with the participants being studied. More importantly, evidence is collected by the researcher without bias and assembled according to the participants' personal views. Similarly, a deeper understanding is then established through the individual experiences of the study participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that researchers who apply the epistemological assumption should remain in their field of study to get to know and understand the study participants, thus making it easier for the researcher to decipher firsthand information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, a close relationship will be established with students that participate in the study. In addition, interviews and data analysis will be completed to establish key themes based on firsthand information and through the subjective experiences identified by the study participants.

Axiological Assumption

In qualitative research, researchers can incorporate their values into their study. Creswell and Poth (2018) revealed that axiological assumption primarily refers to the researcher's values, beliefs, and biases and how they impact the researcher's overall interpretation of the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an educator and as someone who experienced childhood poverty and who grew up in a low-socioeconomic household, I understand the impact that low-socioeconomic status may have on academic achievement among learners. However, I also understand that my own biases must be restricted when analyzing the data to ensure that the findings are accurately reported. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 states, "Therefore we do not lose

heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by

day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far

outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is

seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Overall, 2

Corinthians 4:16-18 reminds us that our perspective changes according to how close or far we

are to the situation. If we are too close, the situation can look larger than life. If we are too far

away, we can overlook details. This scripture prompts us to look at situations differently to

improve our individualized perspectives. As the researcher, I will use bracketing to ensure that

my experiences as an ESL instructor who teaches low-socioeconomic ESL students at a mid-

sized urban community college do not have an impact on the data collection, interpretation, or

analysis phases of the study process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher is the human instrument (Patton,

2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) and Moustakas (1994) highlighted the importance of epoché or

bracketing, which enables the researcher to remove any preconceptions that could bias the study

to better evaluate the phenomena from the participants' perspective to ensure a rich, thorough

description based on this understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Assessing

the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners was a topic of interest that I

have always wanted to explore. It is a topic that requires attention and support from educational

leaders, local and federal governments, teachers, staff, and organizations within the community.

During most of my childhood and adolescence, I struggled to achieve positive academic

outcomes, had little to no support with schoolwork, and lacked the necessary resources to

succeed in a way that would allow me to demonstrate my full potential. Likewise, growing up in

a low-income, low-socioeconomic family of six presented many challenges. My family and I were forced to relocate several times due to my family's unstable financial condition and poor socioeconomic status. We went without heat, water, or food and sometimes had no electricity. I was forced to attend six different schools within six districts. My personal academic experiences and past history of being raised in a low-socioeconomic environment created a potential bias in my study. Although my own experience presented many challenges and difficulties, I acknowledged that each situation was unique and must be considered in its originality, purely for itself (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the researcher could fully concentrate on the experiences of the study participants by bracketing and putting aside personal experiences relating to the phenomena. During my research, I made sure to bracket and set aside my personal opinions and beliefs. Similarly, through Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological reduction, I made sure that textural descriptions of the meanings and essences were developed during data collection and analysis to effectively summarize what the participants experienced and how they experienced it through a researcher's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Procedures

Preliminary site approval was obtained from LCCC. Then, an application for approval was made to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval before conducting this study. Once IRB approval was obtained, ESL learners ages 18+ who were enrolled in the academic English language learning program at a mid-sized urban community college were recruited. Approximately 12-15 students were asked to participate upon IRB approval from Luzerne County Community College and Liberty University. Students were deemed appropriate for this study if they were between the ages ranging from 18 to 40 years of

age and enrolled as an existing academic student identified as an English language learner who had previously participated in the ESL academic program within the last year and/or an existing academic ESL student enrolled in the academic English language learning program. Students appropriate for this study were identified by the ESL program director. Participants were asked to complete an interview, four journal prompts, and participate in a focus group session. Once I determined that students met the criteria to participate in the study, I reached out to students directly to schedule an interview, which took place online via Microsoft Teams video teleconferencing software. During this time, all potential study participants were provided with consent forms prior to any data collection and were asked to electronically sign and email me their signed consent forms prior to their scheduled interview. Focus groups also took place online via Microsoft Teams video teleconferencing software. Focus groups consisted of approximately 5-6 student participants enrolled in English classes at a mid-sized urban community mid-sized college in Pennsylvania. Additionally, students that participated in the focus group sessions selected between two dates and times to ensure availability. Lastly, participants were asked to complete four journal prompts online through Google Classroom. The data was used to capture the students' academic experiences on how or if one's socioeconomic status influences one's ability to succeed academically.

All recruited participants were presented with informed consent information prior to participating and were notified that participation was completely voluntary, and all participants were allowed to discontinue participation at any time. Likewise, student participants were given information about the study upon being recruited and were permitted to opt out of the study at any time. The following sections thoroughly analyze the three data collection methods used:

interviews, focus group sessions, and journal collection. A detailed data synthesis was provided to accomplish triangulation and improve the rigor of the research study.

To establish credibility between myself as the researcher and the study participants, triangulation of data sources and methods was employed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lather (1991) explained that triangulation includes using multiple data sources, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, and that construct validation entails rearranging already-existing constructs instead of imposing theories or constructs on the participants or setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lather, 1991). Thus, all data were meticulously examined and reexamined to ensure that the conclusions are accurate and reliable (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Permissions

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), prior to conducting a study, permission should be obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To comply with the applicable regulations and ethical standards, prior to beginning the research process, it was necessary to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University (see Appendix A) as well as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the community college selected as the chosen site for this study (see Appendix C). Site consent, participant consent, recruitment emails, and study instruments consisting of interview questions, journal prompts, and focus group questions were included with my application to the IRB at Liberty University. Upon receiving full consent from the IRB, informed consent forms and recruitment from the site and study participants were acquired, and the purpose of the study was disclosed to all participants. All participants received consent forms electronically via email and had the opportunity to participate in a follow-up video conferencing session through Microsoft Teams to address any issues or concerns. To ensure the integrity of the study, consent forms affirmed that participation

was optional and that there was no undue risk to participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was not conducted until IRB approval was obtained. Similarly, data was not collected until site, and participant consent was acquired.

Recruitment Plan

According to Kristensen and Ravn (2015), the recruiting phase of a research study can be particularly complex because it depends on other people's responses and is, thus, in part, unpredictable. As a result, researchers must be persistent, follow up with potential participants, send follow-up communications, and continuously try to convince participants to participate in their research (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). For this study, 10-15 participants were emailed a recruitment letter (Appendix D). The recruitment letter helped to identify and recruit participants between the ages ranging from 18 to 40 years of age that were enrolled as a college ESL language learner who identified themselves as having previously participated in the ESL academic program within the last year and/or identified themselves as an existing ESL student enrolled in the English language learning program at Luzerne County Community College. The ESL language learning program was an academic program offered through a mid-size urban community 2-year college that offers classes annually. Classes were held in the spring, fall, and summer semesters. For this phenomenological study, in-depth interviews with no fewer than ten individuals were conducted, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), to fully capture the meaning of the phenomenon among a limited number of people who experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Patton (2015), it is not required to recruit more than 15 participants since no fresh data will be retrieved, and saturation will be attained with a smaller number of study participants (Patton, 2015). Likewise, Mason (2010), revealed that if the sample is too big, the data starts to repeat itself and eventually becomes unnecessary. Participants who expressed

interest in the study were provided with an electronic copy of a participant consent sheet upon receiving approval from Liberty University's IRB (Appendix E).

This study utilized both purposeful sampling and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to choose participants and study locations using purposeful sampling since these choices helped the researcher better comprehend the phenomenon under investigation and the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that convenience sampling saves time, money, and effort. Through convenience sampling, the researcher announced the study to participants allowing them to self-select if they wish to participate through convenience sampling (Stratton, 2021). Recruited participants were asked to complete an interview, respond to a maximum of four journal prompts throughout the study, and attend a focus group session.

Data Collection Plan

This research study utilized a transcendental qualitative phenomenological design in conjunction with Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method to explore and interpret the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners attending an urban community college at a mid-size university in Pennsylvania. Obtained consent from each study participant was completed upon approval of the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. To gain support from participants, students were informed about the study, their participation in the study, and had the opportunity to withdraw themselves from the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Data was analyzed in accordance with Moustakas's (1994) modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method which has been identified as the most practical and useful method of analysis in qualitative phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, data obtained was

examined using triangulation techniques to enhance the rigor of the research study and

to produce a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon explored (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

To explore the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an

urban community college and to ensure that new forms of qualitative data continually emerge in

the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018), this study drew upon new data collected through

interviews, journaling, and focus group interviews.

Individual Interviews

First, data was collected through in-depth interviews. One-on-one interviews were

conducted among 10-15 study participants enrolled in English language courses at a mid-sized

university in Pennsylvania. Dates and times to conduct the one-on-one interviews were based

on the participants' availability within the first week of classes. Individual interviews were

conducted online through the electronic video conferencing software program Microsoft

Teams. This allowed participants to select a date and time that was convenient for them.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Likewise, all interviews were recorded and

transcribed via Microsoft Teams. Creswell and Poth (2018) acknowledged that the primary data

collection method for a phenomenological investigation entails in-depth interviews (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) highlighted the importance of establishing

rapport and recognized that rapport implies trust in and respect for the interviewee and the details

he or she reveals. Additionally, by conducting individual interviews, the researcher established a

secure and welcoming environment in which the interviewee could freely express his or her

viewpoints and experiences. As a result, interview research adds to our understanding of the

significance of human experience by connecting a variety of truths (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree,

2006).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background. CRQ

2. Please share if you are a first-generation college student. CRQ

3. What comes to mind when you hear the term "low-socioeconomic status?" Do you believe that low-socioeconomic status creates generational poverty? Why or why not? CRQ

4. Describe what academic challenges ESL learners experience in college. SQ1

5. In your experience, do you believe that ESL learners have enough support in the classroom? SQ1

6. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your academic experiences inside of school that we haven't discussed? SQ1

7. Describe what academic challenges ESL learners experience at home. SQ2

8. Describe how low-socioeconomic status and familial background can create barriers in education and one's ability to find employment? Please explain. SQ2

9. Describe the challenges ESL learners experience when completing academic coursework outside of school. SQ2

10. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your academic experiences outside of school that we haven't discussed? SQ2

11. Describe what socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor academic outcomes among ESL learners. SQ3

12. In your perspective, what challenges or barriers do English language learners face in school and outside of school when compared to high socioeconomic status native English-speaking peers? SQ3

13. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your academic experiences that may

   pertain to socioeconomic barriers and poor academic outcomes that we haven't

   discussed? SQ3

Questions 1-3 were centered on establishing a positive relationship between the interviewee and the participant. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) highlighted the importance of establishing rapport and recognized that rapport implies trust in and respect for the interviewee and the details he or she reveals. Additionally, it helps to establish a secure and welcoming environment in which the interviewee can freely express his or her viewpoints and experiences. As a result, interview research adds to our understanding of the significance of human experience by connecting a variety of truths (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Questions 4-10 focused on understanding the participants' academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners and the effects that one's environment can have on academic achievement. Questions 11-13 focused on the participants' academic experiences and socioeconomic barriers that contribute to poor academic outcomes among ESL learners.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis of individual interviews concentrated on the use of the fundamental processes that. First, interviews were transcribed; then submitted to participants for their approval through the member checking process. Afterwards, I began my analysis of the data. Data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. This method has been recognized as the most practical and valuable analysis technique for qualitative phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research permits the emergence of knowledge through the following processes: (1) epoché; (2) transcendental phenomenological reduction; and (3) imaginative

variation (p. 33). To ensure that fresh viewpoints on the phenomena under study were found, thoughts, judgments, and ideas were bracketed and set aside (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, my viewpoints and any prejudices were set aside and bracketed to ensure that all interviews were conducted attentively, objectively, and impartially. The next step in data analysis after bracketing was to identify significant statements, followed by horizontalization. Moustakas (1994) explained that phenomenological reduction includes a pre-reflective description of things precisely as they are and a reduction to what is horizonal and thematic. Then, the goal of imaginative variation as mentioned by Moustakas (1994) was to comprehend the structural basis of experience. Like phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation enabled me as the researcher to extract structural themes from textual descriptions.

During this process, all statements were considered equally important, and significant statements were identified to better understand how participants experienced the phenomenon, as outlined by Moustakas (1994). In order to achieve this, every interview was recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams, printed, and read and reread multiple times to ensure that specific terms or statements were highlighted through the process called coding. Furthermore, all interviews were coded, organized, and grouped into themes, which were made up of multiple codes that were combined to form a central idea that represented the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Likewise, an ontological approach was utilized that took into account the participant's perceived realities and lived experiences, as outlined by Moustakas (1994).

Journal Prompts

The second method of data collection consisted of journaling. Approximately 10-15 study participants enrolled in an English language learning program at a mid-sized university in Pennsylvania were asked to journal their experiences by completing a few journal entries.

Hayman et al. (2012) noted that journaling could benefit qualitative research. Likewise, Hayman et al. (2012) recognized that journaling helps capture study participants' experiences in their natural settings. Thus, many phenomenological research studies often use journaling (Hayman et al., 2012). Students participating in this study were asked to complete a journal to record their experiences on socioeconomic factors that have hindered their ability to succeed academically. Participants were given access to an online learning platform through Google to complete the assigned journal prompts. Journals were recorded and stored in Google drive. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the collection of qualitative data using web-based platforms has cost and time efficiency advantages. There are fewer expenses associated with travel and data transcription. Additionally, it gave participants' time and space flexibility, granting them more time to reflect on and reply to information requests (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Journal Prompts

1. In 500 words, please describe your experience on whether one's socioeconomic status such as level of education, occupation, household income, and parental background can influence academic outcomes among ESL learners? CRQ

2. In 500 words, please explain what you think schools can do to help ESL learners achieve positive academic outcomes and academic success. Please feel free to share any recommendations or strategies that you think of. CRQ

3. In 500 words, please describe how an ESL learner's classroom environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. SQ1

4. In 500 words, please describe how an ESL learner's home environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. SQ2

5. In 500 words, please share your perspective on the following prompt: Do you believe that school administrators and policymakers can do more to alleviate socioeconomic barriers and to help students succeed academically both inside and outside of the classroom? Why or why not? SQ3

Journal prompts 1- 2 focused on understanding the participants' academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners and the socioeconomic factors that could hinder one's ability to succeed academically. Additionally, journal prompt 3 focused on understanding how an ESL learner's classroom environment could influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. Journal prompt 4 focused on understanding how an ESL learners home environment could influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. Lastly, journal prompt 5 focused on understanding the perspective of ESL learners and program and reform efforts to alleviate socioeconomic barriers that contribute to poor academic outcomes among ESL learners.

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was applied to explore and interpret each journal entry. First, all journal assignments were completed on the online learning platform known as Google Classroom. Upon review of all transcribed documents, epoché, took place to ensure that any prejudgments and biases were removed. Then, horizontalization of data was conducted to ensure that significant statements were thoroughly reviewed, reexamined, and highlighted to accurately provide an understanding of how the participants experienced and perceived the phenomenon. Throughout this process, each journal response was given equal consideration, with a focus on identifying significant statements that could provide deeper insight into participants' experiences of the phenomenon, as described by Moustakas (1994). Afterwards, clusters of meaning from the significant statements were

developed into themes. A composite description was utilized to report the phenomenon's essence

and the essence of the phenomenon was presented in written form (Moustakas, 1994).

Throughout this process, all statements were considered equally important, and

significant statements were recognized to better understand how participants experienced the

phenomenon, as outlined by Moustakas (1994). In order to achieve this, every journal prompt

was recorded and stored via Google Classroom. Additionally, journal responses were printed,

and read and reexamined multiple times to ensure that specific terms or statements are

highlighted through the process called coding. Moreover, all journal responses were coded

utilizing an ontological approach that took into account the participant's perceived realities and

lived experiences, as outlined by Moustakas (1994).

Focus Groups

Once interviews and journals were conducted, two focus group sessions were organized

to produce reliable data among the interviewees while cultivating more open exchanges among

participants. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985), emphasized that focus groups can be

advantageous when corroborating and elaborating on patterns and themes found in the analysis

of preliminary data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Focus groups consisted of approximately 5-6

student participants enrolled in English classes at a mid-sized university in Pennsylvania.

Likewise, the focus group sessions were conducted online through the electronic video

conferencing software program Microsoft Teams. Moreover, both focus group sessions were

recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams. Students wishing to participate in the focus group

sessions had the opportunity to select between two dates and times to ensure availability. Focus

groups lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. Focus groups can be beneficial, according to

Creswell and Poth (2018), when interviewee interaction is likely to produce the best data, when

interviewees are like one another and cooperative with one another, when there is not much time to gather information, and when people may be reluctant to share information when speaking one-on-one (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus Group Questions

1. In your academic experience, does socioeconomic status contribute to your ability to academically succeed? CRQ

2. How would you define success? Do you feel that success is easily attainable for those from disadvantaged populations when compared to non-disadvantaged populations? CRQ

3. Based on your experience, how would you describe the ease of accessibility to obtaining educational resources both outside of the classroom and inside of the classroom? Please provide examples. SQ1

4. Based on your experience, what can educational leaders and governmental legislators do to improve academic achievement among low-socioeconomic students in and outside of school? SQ1

5. In your experience, does the lack of educational resources in one's household influence academic success among disadvantaged students when compared to non-disadvantaged peers? SQ2

6. Based on your academic experience, do you believe that your home environment or one's environment influences one's ability to succeed academically? SQ2

7. In your experience, does a family's household income or background impact academic achievement? SQ2

8. In your academic experience, do you believe that low-socioeconomic status such as level of education, income, and occupation create barriers that cause poor academic outcomes in academic settings? Why or why not? SQ3

9. In your academic experience, do you feel that the ability to access the required resources for school is easily attainable or a barrier for unprivileged students in comparison to non-disadvantaged peers? Why or why not? Please give examples. SQ3

10. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your academic experience on low-socioeconomic status learners and academic achievement? CRQ

11. Based on your experience, what can educational leaders and governmental legislators do to improve academic achievement among low-socioeconomic students in school? CRQ

Questions 1-10 were introduced to understand the academic experiences among low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners and to understand better the influence low-socioeconomic status can have on academic achievement. Question 11 enabled participants to add any additional information that may not have been brought up regarding the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status on academic achievement.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

During this process, all statements were considered equally important, and significant statements were identified to better understand how participants experience the phenomenon, as outlined by Moustakas (1994). In order to achieve this, every focus group interview was recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams, printed, and read and reread multiple times to ensure that specific terms or statements are highlighted through the process called coding.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) participants play an important role in the validation of data. As a result, to maintain the credibility of this qualitative study and to ensure

that data accurately represented the participant voices, the member-checking process was implemented. This process allowed participants to confirm or deny the accuracy and interpretation of data, providing valuable feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Afterwards, Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was applied to explore and interpret each statement. Data analysis of the focus group data followed the three processes as identified by Moustakas (1994), which include (1) epoché, also known as bracketing; (2) transcendental phenomenological reduction; and (3) imaginative variation (p. 33). First, as the researcher, I employed epoché and set aside any preconceived notions to guarantee that all interviews were conducted with objectivity and attentiveness, ensuring unbiased outcomes. Additionally, by using phenomenological reduction, I ensured that every experience was considered in and of itself. Likewise, textural descriptions of the phenomenon's meanings and essences, the elements that make up the experience in consciousness were obtained from the perspective of an open self. Moreover, imaginative variation sought to understand the structural basis of experience. The purpose of imaginative variation sought to achieve structural differentiation among countless numbers of existing and potential thought patterns related to the subject in question. This method resulted in a structural description of the experience's core, painting a picture of the conditions that lead up to and connect with it. Lastly, the meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience were then developed through the intuitive integration of a synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Synthesis

Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for reflexive analysis was applied to synthesize the data gathered from interviews, journal collections, and

focus group meetings. By utilizing Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the verbatim transcripts from the individual interviews, journal collections, and focus group sessions were reviewed. Each statement was considered with respect to the significance of the description of the experience. Additionally, all relevant statements were recorded, and annotations were made. To ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements were listed and identified to determine the significant, relevant, and invariant meanings that highlight the phenomenon explored. Next, I clustered themes derived from the invariant constituents to create thematic representations of the experience. Afterward, textural descriptions were constructed from the themes and delimited horizons of each research participant's experience. Moreover, individual structural descriptions were created to give a clear understanding of the underlying dynamics of the experience. These descriptions highlighted the themes and qualities that contributed to the feelings and thoughts associated with the explored phenomenon.

A composite textural description was created by combining all individual textural descriptions. During this process, the invariant meanings and themes were studied to depict the group's experiences as a whole. The next step in the process of phenomenological analysis involved utilizing imaginative variation. By compiling a textural description of each research participant and employing imaginative variation, a composite structural description that represented the group as a whole was created. Next, I established the final themes, and their meanings, and ensured that they aligned with the initial themes.

Lastly, Chapter Four presents a complete chart of themes, their meanings, and corresponding initial themes. Chapter Four includes the final step of Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, which encompasses the integration of the

composite textural and composite structural descriptions, synthesizing the meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Furthermore, the use of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) was applied to this analysis to ensure that all data was properly organized, coded, sorted, and represents the interpretation of all data. The use of a qualitative computer software program provided a method for storing and quickly accessing the coded segments of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

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Trustworthiness

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To ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study, the foundational concepts and terms established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were applied. The concepts identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to assess and increase the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted that these evaluation strategies are crucial for improving the rigor of the qualitative study and for readers to evaluate the value of the qualitative research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

According to Cope (2014), the validity of the information or the participants' perspectives, as well as the researcher's interpretation and depiction of them, are referred to as credibility (Cope, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged that credibility requires substantial immersion in the research setting for repeated patterns to be recognized and verified. Thus, spending adequate time with study participants was crucial. This study utilized data sources consisting of interviews, journal collection, and focus group discussions to address credibility. Likewise, to ensure the internal validity and credibility of the study, Merriam and Grenier (2019) emphasized the need for researchers to employ the following three strategies: triangulation, member checks, and peer review (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Triangulation

To establish credibility, Creswell and Poth (2018) identified strategies involving extended fieldwork and the triangulation of data sources, procedures, and investigators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Cope (2014), triangulation techniques enable the researcher to use various data-gathering techniques to develop a clear, comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Cope, 2014). Data collection methods for this study included interviews, journal collection, and focus group sessions throughout the research process.

Member Checking

Member checking is a second popular method for establishing validity in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). During member checks, participants were presented with data, analyses, interpretations, and findings to ensure that they provided feedback and input on how they construed the data. This process enabled participants to evaluate the account's accuracy and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Study participants had the opportunity to identify their experience through the researcher's interpretation or offer adjustments to capture their opinions better (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). For this validation strategy, member checking was conducted following the analysis of the interviews and focus group sessions.

Transferability

External validity or transferability in qualitative research is a fundamental strategy to ensure that a rich, detailed, comprehensive description of the procedures applied throughout the study is provided. Additionally, quotes from the participant interviews, focus groups, and journal responses were provided to ensure transferability. This process enabled readers to evaluate how closely their circumstances reflected the researcher's and determine whether the findings

transferred due to shared traits (Cope, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Erlandson et al., 1993; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Dependability

Dependability in a qualitative study, as reported by Kemparaj and Chavan (2013), was described as data stability over a period of time (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), both dependability and confirmability are established through auditing the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At Liberty University, inquiry audits took place to assess the study's dependability and the dissertation committee, and the qualitative research director thoroughly assessed the methodology and the research findings.

Confirmability

According to Kemparaj and Chavan (2013), confirmability relates to the data's objectivity or impartiality or the potential for agreement between two or more independent individuals about the data's accuracy, relevance, or significance (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). The phenomenological procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994) were applied to assess and evaluate the data to ensure accuracy and confirmability. Confirmability and dependability of this research were demonstrated by providing an audit trail, a systematic collection of information that enabled an impartial auditor to draw conclusions about the data (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that while organizing and developing a qualitative study, researchers must consider the potential ethical dilemmas that could arise and determine how to handle and address each issue appropriately. Before accessing the site, participants, and collecting data, approval was obtained from the Internal Review Board (IRB). Informed consent

was obtained from study participants to disclose the purpose of the study. The form identified that study participation was voluntary and affirmed that participants could revoke participation at any time.

Throughout the study, confidentiality was upheld. To prevent a harmful portrayal of the participants or the site, procedures to ensure privacy protection among study participants were initiated by masking names to avoid including identifiable information in the analysis files. Additionally, composite profiles or cases were developed to avoid instances where participants' identities might be revealed in reporting documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All recordings and transcripts were stored electronically, backed onto a secured drive, and destroyed after three years to maintain the security and confidentiality of all study participants. Likewise, to enhance confidence in the data interpretations, member-checking strategies were embedded during the disclosure of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This chapter discussed the design choice, data collection, and data analysis strategies for conducting this research study. A transcendental phenomenological research design was selected to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. By conducting a transcendental phenomenological research study, the participants lived and shared experiences attached to a human or social phenomenon can be captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection procedures identified to explore the phenomenon included interviews, journal collection, and focus group sessions. Then, data collected through interviews, journal collection, and focus group sessions were analyzed in accordance with Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for evaluating phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, to capture the essence of the

phenomena as a whole, a synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions were produced (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness of the findings were established through triangulation of all three data collection methods and member checking. Ethical considerations were considered to ensure confidentiality among all participants. Permission from the IRB at Liberty University and Luzerne County Community College was obtained, names of participants were concealed to maintain confidentiality, and all data collected was stored in a safe place to uphold the integrity of the research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college located in Pennsylvania. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings obtained through careful data collection and analysis, along with the study results. This chapter provides a descriptive overview of each participant and highlights the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. Based on the data collected, themes have been identified that address the main research question of this study. The data analysis yielded the following themes: *socioeconomic factors, school and classroom environment, home environment, cultural and linguistic challenges, and psychosocial factors.* Through the participants' descriptions of their academic experiences while enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college as ESL learners, themes emerged, and their responses answered the research questions of this study. Finally, this chapter concludes with the answers derived from the research questions and a summation of the chapter.

Participants

This study utilized both purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select 10 ESL language learners (Patton, 2015). I selected students who identified themselves as English language learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college who had previously participated in the ESL program within the last year and identified themselves as existing current academic students enrolled in the English language learning program. The participants' demographic data included gender, age, level of education, and experience. To guarantee the retrieval of fresh data and attainment of saturation with fewer participants, I selected ten participants (Patton, 2015). The participants in the study consisted of

nine female students and one male student. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of

participants and the study site locations. Below is the participant table:

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Major	Semester
Adelina	20	Female	Latino	Business	3rd
Allison	27	Female	Latino	Human Resources	3rd
Amber	24	Female	Latino	Medical Management	4th
Bella	31	Female	Latino	Behavioral Analysis	2nd
Jesus	22	Male	Latino	Criminal Justice	3rd
Josefina	32	Female	Latino	Nurse Practitioner	2nd
Kathy	33	Female	Latino	Business	6th
Mary	26	Female	Latino	Business	1st
Pam	22	Female	Latino	Nursing	3rd
Roldania	20	Female	Latino	Criminal Justice	6th

Adelina

Adelina was 20 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student

who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Additionally, Adelina

completed 12th grade at a public high school in the United States before enrolling in a two-year

community college. She is a first-generation college student. Adelina described low

socioeconomic status as "not having enough money." Adelina says, "Low socioeconomic status

does not create generational poverty because even though life is difficult, it does not mean we cannot have a better life." In addition to her views on socio-economic status, she expressed that ESL learners experience many financial challenges in college. She expressed:

Money is a huge barrier for many English language learners in college. Attending college is very expensive, and many ESL students are still forced to work to help their families and do not have the same financial or family support that native English speakers have.

Allison

Allison was 27 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student who migrated from Ecuador to the United States. Allison, a first-generation college student, was the first in her family to complete high school and pursue higher education. Allison defined low socioeconomic status as "a specific group of individuals who generally do not have a high education." According to Allison:

Low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty because if a student's parents are of low socioeconomic status, it is difficult for them to become more financially established.

Furthermore, she expressed her views about low socioeconomic status and the financial challenges that many college students learning English as a second language (ESL) often experience. Allison conveyed:

College is easy for native English speakers who have financial support and already know and speak the English language. In my experience, I did not grow up with technology. We did not have a computer in our home. Honestly, I came from a very poor background when I lived in my country, so my family and I never owned or used a computer and had no access to technology.

Amber

Amber was 24 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Amber completed her final four years of high school in the United States before attending a two-year community college. Additionally, Amber is a single mother and a first-generation college student. She plans to become the first person in her family to graduate from a college in the United States. Amber defined low socioeconomic status as "a group of people who are poor or do not have the same income." According to Amber:

> Low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty because sometimes people do not want to improve themselves. So, they remain in poverty because they decide to stay in their current position without taking action to improve their situation or circumstances.

Amber also acknowledged that many ESL low-socioeconomic status students experience financial difficulties that often create barriers and make it difficult to succeed. Amber conveyed:

> Students must work to pay their bills and pay for gas to return to work and school. However, without a job, it is difficult to pay for school, bills, and transportation, and that creates barriers.

Bella

Bella was 31 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Bella completed two years of high school in the United States before attending a two-year community college. Additionally, Bella is a wife and a mother of three. She is a first-generation college student. Bella defined low socioeconomic status as "poverty." When asked about whether low socioeconomic status creates poverty, Bella explained:

I do not believe that low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty because, for me, I am changing my story and working towards a better future, and that is what I am doing right now as a student, trying to do something different from what my past generation did.

Bella also conveyed that many low-income ESL students face financial challenges. Bella described:

The lack of financial resources and the lack of financial support could be very challenging for adult ESL learners because some students do not know if their financial aid is going to cover everything, and they need financial help to pay for their classes, books, and other school-related costs.

Jesus

Jesus was 22 years old at the time of the research study. He is a male Latino student who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Jesus attended middle and high school in the United States before enrolling in a two-year community college. Additionally, he is a first-generation college student. Jesus defined low socioeconomic status as "a particular group of people who do not have much money." According to Jesus:

Low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty because people need an education for better opportunities. However, education is costly, and people need more financial support to attend college and universities. If people had more financial support, they would have better job opportunities and higher pay because they would have a chance to earn a degree in their field.

Jesus also expressed that low-socioeconomic ESL learners experience many financial challenges. Jesus expressed:

Many students like me are required to work full-time to pay for school and other

expenses. Not having money to pay for books, a computer, a laptop, or a printer is

challenging. Also, the cost of transportation is very challenging because if we cannot

afford to own a car, we must pay for a taxi service, which can be very expensive.

Josefina

Josefina was 32 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student

who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Josefina studied medicine and

graduated as a doctor in medicine in the Dominican Republic. In 2021, Josefina moved to the

United States and started a two-year program at a community college. Additionally, Josefina is a

wife and a new mom to a baby boy. She is a first-generation college student and the oldest of her

siblings to pursue a degree in higher education. Josefina defined low socioeconomic status as

"people who do not have the money for necessities." Josefina explained, "People of low

socioeconomic status do not have the money for food, resources, or the finances to pursue their

studies." When asked about whether low socioeconomic status creates poverty, Josefina

remarked:

I do not believe that low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty because

everyone has the power to improve their own life. Therefore, I do not believe low

socioeconomic status creates generational poverty.

Kathy

Kathy was 33 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student

who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Kathy earned her bachelor's

degree in accounting while living in the Dominican Republic and is now pursuing an associate

degree in business. In addition to being a student, Kathy is a wife and mother of two. She is a

first-generation college student. She defined low socioeconomic status as "a group of people who are low-income and who did not go to school." According to Kathy:

> Low socioeconomic status does not create generational poverty because anyone can break the cycle for future generations; if they want to, they can. This is my belief because I am from a low-income family, and I was the first to attend college here in the United States. It was not easy, but I still did it.

On the other hand, when asked about whether low-socioeconomic students experience financial challenges, Kathy conveyed:

> If your family is low-income, you must work full-time, and you cannot work part-time because you need money, especially if you want to go to college. You still need money to pay bills, so you may have to decide to work an overnight job in addition to attending school just to pay for everything.

Mary

Mary was 26 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student who migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States. In addition to being a student, Mary is a mother of two. She is a first-generation college student. She defined low socioeconomic status as "poverty." In addition, Mary explained, "When people are of low socioeconomic status, it makes it impossible to get ahead." According to Mary:

> Low socioeconomic status leads to generational poverty because people who come from a low-socioeconomic family usually do not graduate and cannot afford to pay for school. Also, people who come from low-socioeconomic families are required to put in so much extra effort to try to live a good life because they are not privileged enough.

Pam

Pam was 22 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Pam is not a first-generation college student. She explained, "My cousins have completed their college education in the United States." She defined low socioeconomic status as "not having enough money." When asked about whether low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty, Pam conveyed:

I believe that low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty because if you do not have the money or resources to attend college, then it is difficult to get ahead, support others, and pay bills.

Nonetheless, when asked about financial challenges faced by low-socioeconomic ESL students, Pam conveyed, "The lack of finances to pay for classes and to purchase educational resources like books, Wi-Fi, technology, and gas can be very challenging."

Roldania

Roldania was 31 years old at the time of the research study. She is a female Latino student who migrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Roldania attended middle and high school in the United States before enrolling in a two-year community college. Additionally, she did not identify herself as being a first-generation college student. Roldania defined low socioeconomic status as "poverty." Roldania explained:

My native country has many low-income people, and the people are very poor. However, since I am in the United States and have enrolled in college, I am trying to establish a better future.

When asked about whether low socioeconomic status creates generational poverty, Roldania conveyed:

I do not think low socioeconomic status creates poverty because it is up to the individual and what they want for their future and where they want to go. So, people decide what they want for their future. In my opinion, despite being from a low-income country, I decided I wanted a better life for myself, and I did not want to remain in a low-socioeconomic position. I am determined to improve myself and strive every day to have a brighter future.

Results

This section presents five main themes and thirteen subthemes that emerged from this study. The data gathered from individual interviews, focus group sessions, and journal prompts yielded ample information, revealing several themes and subthemes. The themes of *socioeconomic barriers, school and classroom environment, home environment, cultural and linguistic challenges, and policy and advocacy* were established after careful transcription, evaluation, and analysis of the study data. Participant interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed using Microsoft Teams. Additionally, study participants responded to their reflective journal prompts in writing online through Google Classroom. The transcriptions from the semi-structured individual interviews, focus group sessions, and written journal responses were transcribed and entered into the Delve qualitative coding software program. Through Delve, the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and journal transcriptions were analyzed and coded into themes. Moustakas's (1994) modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was applied to ensure fresh viewpoints were found. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research permits the emergence of knowledge through the following processes: (1) epoché, (2) transcendental phenomenological reduction, and (3) imaginative variation (p. 33). This chapter methodically categorizes the key themes and subthemes based on

the interview questions, focus group sessions, and participant journal responses highlighting the

academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community

college. Table 2 contains the codes, themes, and subthemes identified during data analysis.

Table 2

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
Socioeconomic Barriers		*Generational Poverty* *Education Level* *Occupation* *Income Level* *Geographical Area*
	Family Income	*Neighborhood* *Occupation* *Employment* *Resources in Home* *Household size*
	Parental Education Level	*Mothers Highest Level of Education* *Fathers' Highest Level of Education* *Parental Education Beliefs* *The Influence of Parental Education on Academic Achievement*
	Transportation	*Transportation Costs* *Transportation Barriers* *Student Parking*
School and Classroom Environment		*Teacher Expectations* *Teacher Quality* *Support* *Inclusive Teaching Practices* *Educational Resources* *Support*

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
	Teacher Expectations and Support	*Language Support* *Strategies that Support the Needs of ESL Students*
	Classroom Environment	*Culturally Relevant Instruction* *Teacher Attitude* *Student Engagement*
	School Programs and Resources	*Academic Support Programs* *Community Support* *Student/Parental Involvement* *Ability to Access School Resources*
Home Environment		*Student Household Responsibilities* *Student Household Stressors* *Home Environment Barriers* *Student Expectations Outside the Classroom*
	Family Support and Involvement	*Parental Views on Education* *Parental Language Proficiency Level* *Single Parent/Two Parent Household* *Parental Access*
	Family Responsibilities	*Daily Tasks* *Family Expectations* *Work and School Balance* *Family Needs and Expectations*
Cultural and Linguistic Challenges		*Language Barriers* *Communication Challenges* *Listening and Understanding* *Student Stressors*
	Language Proficiency	*Academic Performance* *Understanding* *Participation* *Engagement* *Parental Language Barriers*

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
	Confidence and Self-Esteem	*Self-esteem in Language Learning* *Confidence in Language Learning* *Confidence in Skillset*
	Perceived Discrimination	*Student Prejudices* *Teacher Biases*
Policy and Advocacy		*Educational Policies* *School Initiatives* *Financial Support* *Communication Challenges*
	Financial Aid and Equitable Learning Opportunities	*Government Funding* *Scholarship Opportunities*
	Strategies and Recommendations	*Assessing ESL Program Practices* *Community ESL Programs* *School ESL Support Programs*

Socioeconomic Barriers

Socioeconomic barriers were a common theme found throughout the individual participant interviews, journal responses, and focus group data. As a result, the first theme to emerge in this study through data triangulation was socioeconomic barriers. Participants frequently mentioned how family household income, family support and involvement, and one's ability to access technology and other learning resources influenced their academic success. As a

result, three subthemes under this theme emerged from the participants' data. The first subtheme, family income, identified that their family income hindered the academic performance of all ten participants. The second subtheme, parental education level, revealed that a parent's education level and background and their involvement in their child's education among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners can influence their academic performance. The third subtheme, transportation, revealed that transportation barriers among low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners can influence their academic performance and outcomes and their overall ability to enroll in a post-secondary educational setting and attend classes. The essence of the socioeconomic barriers theme can be found in the following quote shared by Josefina, which defines and explains low socioeconomic status. Josefina explained:

> When I hear the term low socioeconomic status, I often think about individuals who lack the financial resources to afford necessities. For example, people of low socioeconomic status do not have the money for food, resources, or the finances to pursue their studies.

Income

Participants discussed that income often influenced their ability to succeed academically. As a result, the first subtheme of income emerged when the participants were asked about their socioeconomic barriers and academic challenges during the interviews, journal prompts, and focus group sessions. Codes that uncovered this subtheme were the participant-identified experiences on the influence of socioeconomic status on academic challenges and barriers surrounding income, transportation, occupation, and parental level of education. Kathy is an example of a participant who experienced many drawbacks related to income and socioeconomic status. During our interview, Kathy explained:

ESL students require more time and financial support to excel academically. Many work full-time to pay for their basic needs and academic expenses to support their families. Pursuing a degree comes with additional expenses like technology, textbooks, and transportation. These financial barriers make it challenging for full-time workers to complete their assignments and perform well in school.

Several participants also disclosed that they experienced barriers surrounding income that influenced their ability to succeed academically. For example, when interviewed about her experiences with income as a barrier, Josefina stated:

Socioeconomic barriers such as transportation, financial support, and resources can contribute to poor academic outcomes. For example, when preparing to buy books to study, I had to make sure I had enough money to pay for them. My husband and I purchased used books in good condition because they were more affordable.

Similarly, Allision stated, "I believe that the lack of support and financial support are socioeconomic barriers that contribute to poor academic outcomes. For example, when I started college, I needed to pay for classes, books, and Wi-Fi, which were expensive."

Parental Education Level and Background

The second subtheme of parental educational level and background emerged when participants were asked to respond to a journal prompt on their experience on whether one's socioeconomic status, such as level of education, occupation, household income, and parental background, can influence academic outcomes among ESL learners. The essence of this subtheme on identifying the influence of parental educational level and background and the impact it can have on ESL learners' academic performance and outcomes was derived from the

thematic category of socioeconomic barriers. More than half of the participants expressed that parental education and background proved to be a barrier to attaining academic success. When reflecting on her experiences with the parental level of education as a barrier in response to a journal prompt, Bella explained:

> One area that can impact student success is a person's parental education. For example, neither of my parents speaks English and does not possess the educational background necessary to advise or support their children in their academic endeavors. As a result, a parent's limited knowledge and level of education can often leave ESL students stuck trying to figure things out on their own.

In a separate response on parental educational level and background, Kathy stated, "A parents' education level and background also play a crucial role in ESL learners because when we get home, we do not have any academic support with assignments, school tasks, or practice when we are outside the classroom." More than half of the participants stated that their academic performance was often influenced by the educational level and background of their parents. Many participants also felt that ESL students had a more significant disadvantage as most of them and their families migrated from low-socioeconomic, underdeveloped countries. For example, Allison stated:

> Socioeconomic status and one's education level greatly influence the grades and learning of all ESL students. People with a high socioeconomic status tend to have access to higher forms of education and opportunities. This puts ESL students and their families at a greater disadvantage because we do not have the same educational opportunities as a high socioeconomic status student.

Transportation

The third subtheme of transportation emerged when participants were asked during our focus group sessions to describe whether socioeconomic status contributes to one's ability to succeed academically. During the discussion, the participants reached a consensus that both transportation and transportation costs were a barrier for students. The essence of this subtheme was captured in a quote shared by Kathy. Kathy stated:

It can be difficult for some students to attend classes if they cannot afford public transportation and do not have access to transportation to and from campus. The university should provide transportation to ease this burden. The cost of parking is high, and not paying results in a fine of $10-20. ESL students may have classes several times a week, having to pay for parking each time, adding to their financial strain.

A majority of the participants agreed with Kathy's response and also expressed that both transportation and the costs associated with transportation were barriers for students. For example, Mary explained:

Not everyone has the luxury of having a car or the luxury of having someone to take them to college. I must pay every day for parking, gas, insurance, and sometimes a taxi, and all these things are expensive. But I do not have anyone to take me to college for free.

Additionally, Roldania, Pam, and Jesus expressed similar views regarding transportation. Roldania explained, "I think that transportation barriers make students not want to study because they cannot afford to pay for a car, gas, or parking to attend school. Even though many students want to buy a vehicle to get back and forth to school, they cannot afford it, or they cannot handle working a full-time job in addition to being an ESL student." Similarly, Pam noted,

"Transportation can be challenging for ESL students, especially when they have classes at other campuses. This is because most students do not have the money to pay for a taxi, gas, or parking." Also, Jesus expressed similar concerns and stated, "The costs related to transportation and parking for students can be costly, and students should not have to worry about paying for parking or receiving a ticket if they cannot afford to pay for parking."

School and Classroom Environment

The school and classroom environment became the second common theme found throughout the individual participant interviews, journal responses, and focus group data. Codes that led to this theme included teacher expectations, teacher quality, support, inclusive teaching practices, educational resources, and programs. When asked to describe how an ESL learner's classroom environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes during the individual interviews, journal responses, and focus group sessions, participants expressed the importance of the school and classroom environment. Furthermore, many participants who shared their experience expressed that teachers' expectations, support, classroom environment, and resources all influence an ESL learner's academic experiences and outcomes. Amber described her experience about the school and classroom environment, asserting:

> The school and classroom environment for an ESL student influences their ability to learn and understand the material because if an ESL student feels comfortable and has support from their teacher, then they will try their best to do everything right because they do not feel judged.

Josefina also shared similar views and explained:

> I believe that the classroom environment plays a significant role in the learning process of a student. For example, ESL learners need an organized classroom, good instructors, up-

to-date learning materials, and good relationships with the instructor and peers to do well.

All these factors, including a student's desire to learn, in my opinion, will determine

whether an ESL learner succeeds.

Teacher Expectations and Support

The first subtheme emerged when the participants were asked during the interviews,

reflective journals, and focus group sessions about support in the classroom and academic

challenges. The essence of this subtheme, teacher expectations and support, was derived from the

thematic category of school and classroom environment. Nearly all participants agreed that

instructors' expectations, attitudes, and support for ESL learners from low socioeconomic

backgrounds often influenced their academic performance and motivation. In her reflective

journal response on supporting ESL learners in achieving academic success, Mary explained:

> Teachers expect students to understand the language and course materials immediately.
>
> Not all teachers understand that we come from different countries, and not all countries
>
> speak English as a first language. ESL students require more time to focus and
>
> comprehend the lessons taught in class.

Roldania expressed a similar thought and stated. "In my experience, I do not think ESL learners

get the support we need when entering our major. Initially, I felt I had much support in my ESL

classes, but when I entered my major, the professors were different, and they expected me to

start doing everything on my own." Adelina agreed, "I think teachers could do more to help and

support ESL students." Bella described her academic experiences inside the school and

expressed the need for additional support. Bella explained:

> I believe there could be more availability and support from the teachers. In my opinion,
>
> teachers should be required to help and support students regardless of whether they are

enrolled in online or in-person classes. I am not computer savvy, so I like to attend

classes face-to-face, but if I had to take a course online, I would want to have the

teacher's full support.

Nevertheless, all participants agreed that the instructors' expectations, attitudes, and support

influenced their academic performance.

Classroom Environment

Most participants agreed that the classroom environment often impacts an ESL learner's

academic performance. Jesus asserted, "It is important to create a positive classroom

environment that allows ESL students, like me, to express themselves and learn at our own

pace." Bella stated, "An encouraging classroom environment empowers students to succeed in

any subject." Additionally, in a reflective journal response on how an ESL learner's classroom

environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes, Kathy explained:

> The classroom environment should be centered around respect for others to produce good
>
> academic and emotional results. If the classroom environment is positive, students are
>
> more likely to remain motivated and will not look for a reason to miss class and,
>
> consequently, will learn the material faster. However, if there is a lack of respect and
>
> empathy, the outcome will be unfavorable.

Amber commented, "The classroom environment greatly influences an ESL student's ability to

learn the language. If students feel comfortable and supported, they will be likelier to try their

best without fear of judgment." Josefina agreed and stated:

> The classroom environment plays a crucial role in the learning process of an ESL student.
>
> ESL learners need to have a combination of an organized classroom, good instructors,
>
> up-to-date learning materials, and good relationships with peers to do well.

Furthermore, in a separate reflective journal response on how an ESL learner's classroom environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes, Adelina touched on the need for teacher training and development to improve the classroom environment. Adelina explained, "It is important to train teachers on using audio-visual media. This is especially necessary for ESL students as it helps us to understand the lesson better."

School Programs and Resources

The third subtheme was school programs and resources, as participants in this study unanimously conveyed the need to evaluate the accessibility of school programs and resources to support low-socioeconomic status ESL students. The essence of this subtheme was captured in Allision's reflective journal response. Allison explained:

> Schools should do more to support ESL students' academic success. When I began ESL classes, I enrolled in three levels. However, I struggled with tutoring because it was only offered online, and I lacked computer skills. Also, I think it is essential for the school to try and provide free additional English language courses to ESL students, which would allow us to learn and practice communicating in a non-judgmental environment.

When asked about the accessibility of resources, Bella explained, "As an ESL student, we do not receive everything that we need to be prepared, and this has been very frustrating for me." In a separate response, Mary revealed, "In the United States, the textbooks that we are required to purchase are different because they are in English, but in our native country, they would be in our native language, so it can be hard to succeed." During the discussions, the participants also expressed their concerns about the expenses associated with educational resources. For example, Jesus explained:

It is very challenging to purchase books. Sometimes, students can receive support from

the government, but it is not enough because it only covers classes. Last semester, I had

to pay $300.00 for books for my criminal justice course and had no financial support.

Mary and Kathy also expressed similar difficulties in their reflective journal responses. For

example, Mary stated, "Most ESL learners have a difficult time paying for school supplies,

books, classes, etc., and as ESL learners, we are required to pay higher tuition fees than native

English speakers." Similarly, Kathy noted, "The high costs of textbooks often create economic

problems for students because we are expected to buy them to complete and pass our courses. I

think the university should provide free books to students because, for most, buying books can

be an academic burden."

Home Environment

The home environment became the third common theme found throughout the individual

participant interviews, journal responses, and focus group data. Participants expressed that many

challenges exist within an ESL learners' home environment, which can influence their ability to

succeed academically. When completing her reflective journal response on how an ESL learner's

home environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes, Kathy explained:

If a student lacks emotional support within the household and consistently faces family

issues, their academic performance will be negatively impacted. Apart from dealing with

learning a new language, issues at home can burden students and make them want to give

up. So, for me, the home environment is fundamental to a student's academic results.

Pam also touched on the importance of an ESL learners' home environment. She stated, "When I

stayed with my aunt, it was quite challenging because I did not have my own space. It was

frustrating, tedious, and even a bit exhausting at times. I barely had time to complete my assignments or study."

All other participants agreed that an ESL learner's home environment can influence their academic experiences and outcomes. The essence of this theme was captured in Josefina's reflective journal response. Josefina asserted:

> I believe that the home environment significantly influences the academic outcomes and performance of an ESL learner. An ESL learners' home environment is often influenced by family expenses, support, involvement, and responsibilities. Therefore, it is crucial to address issues related to a learner's home environment.

Family Support and Involvement

The first subtheme of family support and involvement emerged when participants were asked during the interviews and focus group sessions to describe their academic experiences outside school. Based on the participants' responses, the essence of this subtheme derived from the thematic category of the home environment. Participants discussed the importance of family support and involvement in their academic pursuits to attain an advanced degree from a college or university in the United States. For example, Mary conveyed that she encounters many struggles at home and does not feel supported by her family. Mary commented, "As an ESL student, I face many struggles at home because of the lack of support from my family because they do not speak English." Similarly, Adelina added, "If parents have to work long hours because of their job, that can impact the amount of time they have to spend with their children and their ability to help and support them." Mary commented, "We cannot rely on anyone because our families must work." Kathy described, "Sometimes our families do not understand

how important it is for us to have a space at home where we can work and study." Additionally, Pam expressed:

> In my opinion, some parents cannot provide adequate support in their children's academic lives because they do not know the country's native language. However, this can influence a student's ability to complete their work. For example, some parents have no idea what an ESL class is like simply due to ignorance. They assume that our assignments and tasks are easy and only require 5 minutes, but that is untrue.

During our interviews, participants agreed that family support and involvement are crucial for ESL learners' success. For example, Jesus emphasized the importance of family support. According to Jesus:

> When someone takes the time to check on you and ask about your day, it can make a significant difference. In my opinion, the type of day a student has in school plays a big part in their academic performance, and I thank God because I have a family that has always supported me, has always been there with me, and always told me never to give up even when I wanted to.

Likewise, Allison expressed her views on familial support and involvement. Allison said, "If students had a stronger support system at home, they would be more likely to succeed academically."

Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities became the second subtheme to emerge when the participants were asked during the interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions to describe the academic challenges ESL learners experience at home. During the interviews, many participants expressed that they have various challenges that they experience at home, which often influence

their ability to complete school assignments and study. When Mary was asked to describe the challenges that ESL learners face at home, she explained, "As an ESL student and mother, I barely have time to study or complete homework, and when I finally do have time, I am usually drained from everything else that I had to do throughout the day."

In a separate interview, Roldania disclosed, "There are times when I must miss classes because I have to assist my mother with grocery shopping, appointments, or other errands because she does not understand or speak the English language." Similarly, Bella explained:

When you are a student, mother, and wife, you have many responsibilities on your plate. It can be challenging to study while having to take care of everyone and do chores around the house. It is even more challenging for me to concentrate on my schoolwork because I do not have anyone to look after my children while I study. My family responsibilities and the lack of support create significant obstacles when I am trying to do well in school.

In addition, Adelina explained that she has many family responsibilities outside of school. Adelina conveyed:

As a student, I must work full-time, from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM. After work, I must take care of the house, help with my siblings, make their school lunches, prepare dinner, and then find some time to work on my homework and study. As the oldest female and oldest among my siblings, I have to take care of all the household responsibilities, since my mother hasn't arrived yet.

Some participants also provided their experiences through their reflective journal responses. For example, Pam asserted:

It can be challenging for students to balance their academic responsibilities with helping their families. For instance, my mother frequently requires my assistance in scheduling

doctor appointments, paying bills, and other daily tasks. However, these responsibilities can be time-consuming and can interfere with my ability to complete assignments or study for exams.

Cultural and Linguistic Challenges

Cultural and linguistic challenges were identified as the fourth prevalent theme across participant interviews, journals, and focus groups. Participants with limited language proficiency expressed that they experienced many cultural and linguistic challenges that impacted their academic outcomes, classroom participation, and overall curriculum comprehension. Bella said, "When you are an ESL learner from another country, it is very challenging for you to succeed because of the language barrier." During her interview, Roldania discussed the cultural and linguistic obstacles she encountered. Roldania conveyed:

I believe that ESL learners experience a lot. For example, all ESL learners are required to start learning everything right away. It is challenging for ESL learners, including myself, to have a better vocabulary and learn how to read, write, and speak in the English language. Our accents make speaking a challenge and we struggle with homework and assignments due to language barriers.

Many participants discussed how the language spoken at home can hinder academic success. In her interview, Josefina revealed:

When your family does not speak English at home it is difficult. Also, ESL learners face challenges with language barriers that can make it difficult to do well in school, find employment, and make a living. Diplomas and degrees earned in other countries may not be recognized, requiring students to start from scratch.

Mary stated, "My family speaks Spanish at home. This can be challenging because, as a student, I want to learn the language and practice, but it makes it difficult. For example, completing schoolwork can be challenging when your family is unfamiliar with the language." Similarly, Amber agreed and explained, "One of the major challenges that I have faced as an ESL student was completing and understanding the homework and studying for the exams because when you are raised in a Spanish-speaking household, they do not like it when you speak English in your house."

Language Proficiency

The first subtheme of language proficiency emerged when the participants were asked during the interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions about their experiences as ESL learners and the academic challenges they experience due to their limited language proficiency. Kathy noted, "Sometimes, pronunciation can be a challenge. For example, students tend to be mocked for poor pronunciation or because they do not know how to formulate a sentence or question correctly." Jesus quipped, "Pronunciation is often a challenge for ESL students when speaking English compared to native speakers." Amber explained, "Learning the language and the words and practicing the pronunciation are all challenging." Bella stated:

> In my experience, compared to high socioeconomic native English-speaking peers, a barrier English language learners encounter is the language. Sometimes, we do not communicate or understand things effectively, and it is a barrier when we are trying to learn.

All participants agreed that speaking and comprehending the English language was extremely difficult. For example, Adelina remarked, "Speaking and understanding the English language is very challenging for me." Pam also conveyed:

In my opinion, I believe that the language is a challenge for English language learners in

school and outside of school when compared to English-speaking peers because Spanish

speakers usually speak Spanish at home, and their families cannot practice with them or

help them with schoolwork which can be a considerable challenge.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

The second subtheme of confidence and self-esteem emerged when the participants were

asked during the interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions about how an ESL

learner's classroom environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. Bella

asserted, "In my opinion, it is important to implement a positive and supporting environment so

the ESL students feel empowered and confident enough to tackle the most challenging of

scenarios. Students should not be afraid of making mistakes or receiving corrections." In a

reflective journal response, Pam wrote about her experiences. Pam explained:

When a teacher explains well and checks in often, it motivates me and helps other ESL

students speak confidently in front of peers. On the other hand, lack of interaction with

students can harm their confidence in public speaking. If teachers discourage questions,

students may hesitate to ask for help and lose confidence.

Many participants expressed that their confidence and self-esteem often influenced their

academic performance. For instance, Kathy shared:

I had a professor I could not understand, and they did not care. The professor continued

teaching the class, and I struggled. I noticed that I occasionally fell behind other students

because I could not understand what they were saying. Then, if I had questions about the

lesson, I did not want to ask because I do not speak English well, which affected my

confidence when speaking to others.

On the other hand, other participants agreed that the ESL program helped improve their confidence and self-esteem. For example, Jesus explained:

> The ESL program allows students to be themselves. In my opinion, the program gives students the comfort and confidence of a teacher who understands them, teaches them, wants to help them, and seeks to help them improve their future. This ESL program is essential to us within the Latin community.

Perceived Discrimination

The third subtheme of perceived discrimination emerged when the participants were asked during the interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions about academic barriers ESL learners encounter and whether the classroom environment influenced their academic experiences and outcomes. During an interview, Amber recounted an experience in one of her classes and discussed the impact of the classroom environment on success. Amber revealed:

> Some teachers are not as supportive. I believe it is because they do not trust that you will learn the language because you come from a different country. For example, I had a speech teacher who was not supportive and who made comments about my accent in front of the class. The situation made me uncomfortable, and I told the instructor they were very unprofessional but ultimately dropped the class.

Most participants expressed that their experiences of discrimination or prejudice often influenced their willingness to participate in class and their academic performance. In an additional journal response, Bella stated, "Students should feel comfortable asking questions without fear of judgment or ridicule." Similarly, in a separate interview, Adelina remarked:

There is a difference between ESL teachers and teachers on the main campus. I

understand what the teachers say, but speaking is more complicated. Some teachers

become upset because I need time to think in Spanish before I answer in English. Some

instructors become impatient and act crazy and continue asking you the same question

repeatedly, which causes me to panic and lose concentration.

In a reflective journal response, Kathy wrote about her experiences. Kathy explained:

Prioritizing mutual respect between students and teachers leads to better outcomes. For

example, if students in the class are respectful, they will not mock classmates for

mispronouncing words. Collaboration and active participation of students promote a safe

and inclusive learning environment, improve attendance, and accelerate ESL learning.

Policy and Advocacy

Future policy and advocacy efforts to improve educational outcomes and opportunities

among low-socioeconomic ESL learners emerged as the fifth common theme in the individual

participant interviews, journal responses, and focus group data. Participants unanimously agreed

that there is a need for school administrators and legislators to do more to improve the academic

outcomes of ESL learners. In a reflective journal response, Jesus expressed the need for reform.

For example, Jesus conveyed:

ESL learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, earning adequate grades, need more

support from school administrators and legislators who currently prioritize academically

successful students. Young people are the future, and it is crucial to provide opportunities

for those who strive to better their lives.

Similarly, other participants agreed with the need for additional support from school

administrators and government legislators. Mary stated, "Educational leaders and government

legislators can do more to help and support ESL students who want a better life." Roldania commented, "School administrators and policymakers can alleviate socioeconomic barriers. Sometimes, these barriers make students not want to study." During an interview, Josefina explained the need to have extra support. Josefina stated:

> In my opinion, academic success primarily depends on the student. However, administrators and policymakers must also ensure ESL students receive appropriate support. They can help improve academic performance by addressing the socioeconomic barriers that can delay a learner's progress.

Financial Aid and Equitable Learning Opportunities

The subtheme of financial aid and equitable learning opportunities emerged when participants were asked whether school administrators and policymakers could do more to alleviate socioeconomic barriers to help students succeed academically both inside and outside of the classroom. Most participants agreed that additional financial aid and equitable learning opportunities are needed to improve academic outcomes among ESL learners. For example, Jesus stated, "If the government provided students with more funding and financial support for education, more individuals would have the opportunity to attend college and earn a degree." In a separate response, Pam asserted:

> As a student, I believe school administrators and government legislators should do more to support students. Education can be costly, and financial support would be immensely helpful in relieving the constant worry about money. Regardless of their circumstances, whether they live alone, come from low-income families, or live far from campus, they must have the resources to improve their lives.

A majority of participants discussed the importance of financial aid. For example, Allison said, "If students had more financial support, they would be more likely to succeed academically." Similarly, Mary conveyed, "ESL students who lack the necessary financial resources need additional financial support from the government to do better in school and to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed academically."

Strategies and Recommendations

During the study, participants were asked to share their perspectives in a reflective journal response on how school administrators and policymakers could help ESL students overcome socioeconomic barriers and achieve academic success in and out of the classroom. This led to the emergence of the second subtheme of strategies and recommendations. In a reflective journal response, Josefina offered her perspective on what school administrators and policymakers could do to support students better. In her reflective journal, Josefina explained:

> School administrators and policymakers must distribute resources equitably, create laws for equal opportunities, and support communities with social programs to motivate learning. Teachers, who play a crucial role, should be compensated fairly.

In a similar response, Amber stated, "There needs to be more support for students, and teachers should have better training when working with students who are not native speakers." Additionally, several participants emphasized the need to offer supplementary programs supporting individuals learning English as a second language. Allison stated:

> School administrators and policymakers can assist ESL students by offering free additional English classes, allowing students to practice English more frequently if needed.

Adelina commented, "Having an ESL program to communicate with others in English outside of school could help us improve our vocabulary."

In a separate reflective journal response that suggested a possible solution to students' financial hardships, Kathy suggested:

> To alleviate the financial burden on students, school administrators, and policymakers can eliminate financial barriers. For example, providing free college materials for students with good academic performance can help. Many students must take out loans to pay for education, leading to years of debt without any guarantee of employment.

Kathy also recommended, "Legislators and school administrators should try to collaborate with businesses to help students find jobs and apply their skills in the workforce."

Outlier Data and Findings

During this data collection and analysis, two unexpected themes emerged in the participant interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions. The outlier theme of psychosocial challenges emerged when participants described the various socioeconomic barriers ESL learners experience that influence their ability to succeed academically. For example, participants described feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress as a barrier. The second outlier theme was the need for additional ESL support programs in post-secondary education settings to assist first-generation college students.

Psychosocial Challenges

Adelina explained, "Whenever a teacher asks me something, I panic." Pam also mentioned, "When trying to learn the language and attend classes, ESL students might feel stressed or tired. Our brains get overloaded with information, and we cannot process it all." In a reflective journal response, Bella stated, "There is a need for psychological help for ESL

language learners who may experience issues outside the classroom. For example, students should feel that their well-being is as important as their academics." In a separate response, Kathy conveyed, "There is no emotional support for students, and if the student's family environment is a constant source of concern, it will be reflected in our academic performance."

College Support ESL Programs for First-Generation College Students

Participants who identified as being in their second year of college shared that they received ESL support from their instructors during their first year before entering their major. However, most participants expressed that when they entered their major, they no longer felt support from traditional non-ESL instructors. During one of the focus group sessions, Amber conveyed:

> Not all teachers are supportive or understand that ESL students need more time to understand things. This can make ESL students feel judged, as they are often held to the same standards as native speakers despite the lack of support and the additional language barriers we experience.

Kathy shared in her interview:

> As an ESL student, I have noticed that some of my ESL professors show great care and concern for my second language while others are not as concerned. In my major, I am the only Spanish speaker in my class, and I do not have enough support.

> In conclusion, participants emphasized the need for additional ESL support beyond their first year. Despite limited support outside the classroom, ESL learners remain persistent in their studies and focused on creating a brighter future.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status English as a Second Language (ESL) learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. Individual interviews, reflective journal responses, and focus group sessions were used to understand the academic experiences of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Data from all three sources has been used to answer the research questions below.

Central Research Question

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college? The participants described their academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college, highlighting the first theme of Socioeconomic Barriers. Most frequent descriptions emerged from the subtheme of family income. Participants described their experiences as low-socioeconomic status ESL learners as financially challenging. These challenges often influenced their academic performance and outcomes. For example, Mary stated, "ESL students from low-socioeconomic families who cannot afford books or computers may have difficulty completing their schoolwork. In addition, they may not have the financial resources to own a car or pay for taxi services and cannot attend their classes." In the focus group, Josefina commented:

> The lack of educational resources can influence an ESL learner's success because if you cannot afford books or other required materials, it is difficult.

Amber also agreed and stated:

> It becomes difficult for students to perform well in school when they lack the necessary resources. For instance, sometimes, I am forced to choose between purchasing clothes for

myself and my children, paying the water bill, or paying for my education, which can be very challenging.

Sub-Question One

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners inside of school? Participants unanimously identified similar academic experiences as low-socioeconomic status ESL learners inside the school. Participants expressed that teachers' expectations, support, classroom environment, and resources all influence an ESL learner's academic experiences and outcomes. The theme used to answer this question was School and Classroom Environment. Amber commented on her academic experiences inside the classroom as an ESL student and the challenges students face:

In my experience, when you come from a different country and do not know the language, in this case, English, ESL learners need to improve their writing, speech, reading, and everything. So, as a Spanish speaker, trying to learn English is very hard, and it is almost like teaching your child to speak for the first time because you are learning a different language you did not know.

Additionally, Allison described her academic experiences inside the classroom as an ESL student. Allison revealed, "In my experience when I started college classes, I encountered academic challenges with understanding the language, online assignments, and using a computer."

Many ESL learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds face academic challenges within the school setting. For example, Bella stated:

Learning English as a second language can be tough and academically challenging. ESL students may have difficulty understanding school procedures due to language barriers, making it even more challenging.

Sub-Question Two

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners outside of school? During our interviews, all participants agreed that low-socioeconomic status English as a Second Language (ESL) learners face similar academic challenges outside of the school environment. Participants expressed that many challenges exist within an ESL learners' home environment, which can influence their ability to succeed academically. The theme used to answer this question was Home Environment. Kathy commented on her academic experiences outside the classroom as an ESL student and the challenges students face:

ESL learners experience many academic challenges at home, especially when balancing family, school, and work. Another challenge ESL learners experience is the lack of technology in our homes because we do not have a computer, which makes it difficult to complete work at home.

Pam described her academic experiences outside the classroom as an ESL student. Pam revealed:

As a student, I experience many academic challenges at home, such as balancing working full time to help support my family, paying bills, and assisting my mother with translating paperwork or with appointments. These challenges often prevent me from completing homework or finding time to study.

Low-socioeconomic ESL learners experience many academic challenges outside of the school environment. Amber shared in her interview, "Learning a language, new vocabulary, and practicing correct pronunciation can be extremely difficult when living in a Spanish-speaking

household. However, as an ESL learner, I am determined to continue learning daily to improve my language and overall communication abilities."

Sub-Question Three

What socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor college graduation outcomes among low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners? ESL learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds face socioeconomic barriers that impact their academic performance. Participants expressed that income, parental education level, background, and involvement in their child's education among low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners can influence their academic performance. Three themes were used to answer the question: Socioeconomic Barriers, Home Environment, and Cultural and Linguistic Challenges. In the focus group, Adelina commented, "As adult ESL learners, we must work and attend classes. If we do not do well in class, we still have to pay for that class, which makes it challenging to get ahead." Allison agreed and stated:

> One barrier I encountered was with my health insurance. For example, because my income was just above the cutoff, I lost my son's Medicaid coverage and was told to take a semester off to ensure he had health insurance. This was a barrier because it could delay my ability to graduate on time.

Similarly, Bella revealed:

> The cost of health insurance and educational materials is a significant socioeconomic barrier for low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners. For instance, it is challenging for me to pay $500.00 monthly for health insurance besides what I already have to pay for books and classes.

Additionally, participants discussed that not having access to educational resources at home was a socioeconomic barrier. Mary shared, "I recall when I had to go to the nearby UPS store to print

a paper for school. I had no access to a computer, printer, or WIFI at home and had to pay $0.50 per page to get it printed." Pam also conveyed, "When you do not have a computer, printer, or technology in your home, it is difficult to complete assignments."

Summary

Through individual interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions, ten participants described the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. The themes from this data were a) Socioeconomic Barriers, b) School and Classroom Environment, c) Home Environment, d) Cultural and Linguistic Challenges, and e). Policy and Advocacy. There were two outlier themes in which participants unanimously expressed psychosocial challenges that influenced their ability to succeed academically and the need for college support ESL programs for first-generation college students.

The central research question and sub-questions were answered, emphasizing that Low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners in a mid-sized urban community college face many barriers to academic success. The data confirmed the need for school administrators and government legislators to examine the current education system to identify programs that could improve the academic outcomes among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners. Furthermore, there is a greater need to implement educational policies that ensure equitable learning opportunities and access for low-socioeconomic ESL learners from disadvantaged populations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community college. The problem addressed in this study was that the low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college in Pennsylvania have been known to perform worse than their peers (Kanno & Cromley, 2015; Luo, 2021; Marquis, 2022; Rahimi & Samadi, 2022; Reardon et al., 2022; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Soland & Sandilos, 2021). For many years, low socioeconomic status has been associated with poverty and has been shown to affect the academic performance of disadvantaged students (Reardon et al., 2022). Data were collected from ten student participants who identified as ESL learners enrolled or completed at least one academic semester in the English language learning program at a mid-sized urban community college. Additionally, the data were collected through individual interviews, reflective journals, and focus group sessions. The collected data underwent analysis using Moustakas's (1994) modified Van Kaam method for analyzing phenomenological study data through four steps of epoché, horizontalization, reduction, and imaginative variation.

Discussion

After conducting data analysis, the findings revealed that all ten participants indicated that socioeconomic barriers, school and classroom environment, home environment, cultural and linguistic challenges, and policy and advocacy all influenced a low socioeconomic ESL learner's ability to do well academically. This chapter outlines my interpretations of the study by summarizing each thematic finding. In addition, this chapter will expand on implications for

policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and lastly, recommendations for future research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Five themes were identified in this study. The themes include socioeconomic barriers, school and classroom environment, home environment, cultural and linguistic challenges, and policy and advocacy. Ultimately, these themes are essential when discussing the socioeconomic barriers that low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners face in their academic pursuit of achieving an advanced degree in a post-secondary education environment. Additionally, each of these themes highlighted the need to achieve equitable access to resources and learning opportunities among ESL learners to improve their academic experiences and outcomes.

Critical Discussion

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community and how socioeconomic status can influence academic achievement. The results provided valuable insights for creating equitable learning opportunities for ESL students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The findings of notable discovery include: socioeconomic barriers influence academic performance, inclusive learning environments are effective, environmental factors influence educational progress, cultural and linguistic challenges influence academic achievement, and policy reform and education equality. These five points may contribute to improving the academic achievement gap among disadvantaged minority populations and can help to improve the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized secondary education environment in Pennsylvania.

Socioeconomic Barriers Influence Academic Performance

Adapting to a new country and way of life can be challenging for ESL learners with low

socioeconomic status. They face numerous socioeconomic barriers that directly impact their

academic performance. Apart from learning English, they also must navigate different social

structures and educational systems. As a result, ESL learners frequently

experience socioeconomic challenges associated with income, parental educational level,

occupation, access to resources, and transportation, directly impacting their academic

performance. In educational productivity theory, Walberg (1992) acknowledged that learning is

influenced by various economic, sociological, and political factors at different levels. However,

specific characteristics and forces, such as the gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of the

student, the size and expenditure of schools, and the political and social structures, pose less

flexibility in a democratic and pluralistic society even though these factors are consistently and

strongly associated with student learning (Walberg, 1992). Consequently, the study conducted

among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized secondary education

environment revealed a strong correlation between socioeconomic barriers and academic

performance. The research indicates that underprivileged minority students face more obstacles

in obtaining a college degree than their affluent native English-speaking counterparts. Research

shows that scholars agree that academic success among students from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds is lower than that of students from higher SES families (Duncan et al., 2017; Henry

et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2019; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Rosen et al., 2021). In this study, many

participants attributed socioeconomic status to the many barriers ESL learners experience in and

outside of school, which were evident when speaking to participants about the costs associated

with college. Moreover, all participants reported financial challenges, including expenses for

transportation, tuition, technology, household bills, and required textbooks. Although some participants' families could provide financial assistance, it was not entirely adequate, and the participants were still expected to work in addition to attending school. Furthermore, participants struggled with balancing school, work, and family responsibilities, and they frequently lacked time to study and complete homework, which limited their performance in school.

Inclusive Learning Environments are Effective

According to Suntsova (2021), creating inclusive learning environments requires establishing a culture that values and respects individual differences. Additionally, the environment incorporates numerous resources that provide different types and levels of support to students, parents, teachers, and specialists, depending on the challenges faced. The goal of this support is to help individuals unlock their potential, initiate self-improvement, and solve any problems that may arise (Suntsova, 2021, p. 133). In this study, emphasis on Walberg's (1980) theory on educational productivity and a learner's overall environment proved to influence the educational outcomes directly among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners (Walberg, 1980). In my research, all three data sources confirmed that participants who felt supported and accepted academically and intellectually were more likely to ask for help and, as a result, often achieved better academic outcomes. However, research also concluded that when support and inclusivity are lacking, students often feel invalidated and unmotivated and become silent. Therefore, effective interpersonal communication, as demonstrated by teacher immediacy, is crucial in promoting student achievement and inclusive practices. It is imperative for teachers to establish strong connections with their students to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Faulkner et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2023). Furthermore, I found that participants associated inclusive learning environments with better academic outcomes and a desire to

succeed academically. To further explain, during this study, participants noted the impact of the classroom and school environment on their academic performance. They also acknowledged differences between ESL instructors and those in their major. After completing their prerequisite ESL courses and entering their major, many participants found that their instructors had different expectations. Participants felt that traditional courses lacked cultural sensitivity and awareness, unlike the ESL courses. However, despite these issues, participants agreed that feeling supported by instructors increased their success and motivation to continue their studies.

Environmental Factors Influence Educational Progress

I found that student participants acknowledged that environmental factors often influence educational outcomes. Walberg's (1980) theory of education productivity and academic achievement presupposes that individual psychological characteristics of students and their environment directly affect outcomes of education, including cognitive, affective, and attitudinal components (Galizty & Sutarni, 2021; Reynolds & Walberg, 1992; Walberg, 1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Participants expressed how they experienced numerous challenges in the school and classroom environment and within their home environment. All ten study participants expressed that in the school and classroom environment, the language proved to be a barrier. In addition, pronunciation and speaking in the English language to native speakers proved to be a significant obstacle. Participants also expressed difficulties understanding the homework, assignments, and their teachers compared to native English students. Despite the difficulties faced in the school and classroom setting, all participants expressed that when they had the opportunity to establish a positive teacher-student relationship and felt welcomed in the classroom, they were more inclined to share their ideas and ask questions. For example, participants who received additional support from the instructor in completing assignments or understanding the material were more

likely to perform well and achieve positive academic results. All ten participants reported challenges with studying and completing schoolwork due to home responsibilities. Additionally, participants agreed that when they received support from their families, they were more inclined to study and had the time to complete their work. However, without support from their family, students were more likely to perform poorly in school. Three of the ten study participants were also young mothers who expressed the need for childcare assistance because they had to prioritize the needs and care of their children, which often influenced their ability to study and work in their home environment. Regardless of the challenges participants experienced within their home environment, they all agreed that it was more accessible and more efficient to try and complete any schoolwork or homework on campus whenever possible. Therefore, these findings demonstrate that environmental factors often influence the educational progress and performance of students.

Cultural and Linguistic Challenges Influence Academic Performance

The academic experiences of ESL learners are directly related to cultural and linguistic challenges that often influence their academic performance. Participants in this study unanimously discussed how communicating and understanding course material in the English language proved to be a barrier. In addition, participants shared that when placed in classes with native English-speaking peers, they were less likely to engage in classroom discussions, read, or ask questions for fear of being mocked or laughed at by other students in the class. Additionally, all participants indicated that they speak their native language at home and that their families insist on speaking Spanish, which presents difficulties mainly because they cannot practice speaking English at home. Walberg's (1980) theory of educational productivity acknowledged that language proficiency stems from experience, not test-based measures of intelligence, which

is essential for academic success (Walberg, 1980, 1992, 2003). I found that ESL students often struggled academically upon entering their majors and lacked the ability to practice socializing with other native English-speaking peers, which often influenced their academic performance. Many participants disclosed experiencing prejudice in certain classes and feeling misunderstood and unaccepted. For instance, some participants reported that their teachers rushed them or repeated questions when they needed extra time to process the language while asking for help. As a result, participants said they often became embarrassed and afraid to speak during class. I found that these scenarios often caused students to become silent in the classroom, which resulted in poor academic performance and, in certain situations, caused students to drop classes. Thus, cultural and linguistic challenges can influence the academic experiences of ESL learners and directly influence their academic performance.

Policy Reform and Education Equality

Throughout this study, participants highlighted policy reform and education equality to address systemic inequities ESL learners face. Many participants faced financial barriers while pursuing an advanced degree. Participants expressed that the costs of transportation, costs associated with transportation, books, technological resources such as a computer, laptop, or printer, and tuition often created financial barriers that hindered their ability to do well academically. Additionally, many participants disclosed that they had to work full-time jobs to help cover the costs associated with their education. However, regardless of these issues, participants unanimously agreed that policy reform is needed to alleviate financial constraints faced by students.

Moreover, participants expressed their desire for additional language support programs. During the study, participants mentioned they lacked opportunities to practice English outside

the classroom. They conveyed that additional support would have been beneficial for their academic performance, especially in courses that were subject to financial aid guidelines. Nonetheless, participants alleged that this support would have improved their grades and academic performance. Therefore, to help participants avoid adverse academic outcomes that could result in the loss of financial aid, it would be advantageous for school administrators and policymakers to implement non-academic language support programs for language learners. By addressing the needs of English language learners and creating initiatives that enable students to enhance their language proficiency and knowledge of the English language, non-native English speakers would have equitable opportunities to do well both in school and outside of school environments.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study suggests policy and practice implications for addressing systemic inequities among ESL learners, leading to recommendations for educational leaders and government legislators to implement additional reform initiatives. This section emphasizes how educational leaders and government legislators can integrate and implement reform policies to support low-socioeconomic English language learners enrolled in a post-secondary education learning environment. Additionally, this section provides recommendations for policymakers, leaders, and educational stakeholders in higher education on policies and practices to tackle the systemic inequalities among diverse language learners and narrow the academic achievement gap.

Implications for Policy

This study's findings have policy implications. In exploring the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college, the research findings suggest that education policies currently in place may lead to unequal access

and outcomes for English learners (Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2016). The quality of an English learner's home learning environment is crucial in determining their language outcomes. This includes factors such as the level of parent-child language interactions, the availability of literacy materials, and the frequency of language acquisition activities. Disparities in these factors can explain the gaps in language outcomes related to socioeconomic status (Akram et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Luo, 2021; Luo et al., 2021; Pace et al., 2017). Additionally, research confirmed that a family's income and education play a crucial role in learning (Akram et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019; Morales & Maravilla, 2019). As a result, when compared to their less affluent peers, students from higher-income families are more likely to pursue higher education, leading to increased opportunities for higher-paying jobs and a brighter future. (Akram et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2019; Morales & Maravilla, 2019). Participants confirmed that the home environment, access to resources, and income are essential to improving academic achievement among students.

In this study, participants found it challenging to practice English at home because their families discouraged it and preferred to speak Spanish, their native language. Additionally, all participants lacked support and resources when attempting to study and complete schoolwork. Therefore, a policy suggested for low-socioeconomic status ESL learners would be to implement and require after-school English language support programs for students who need additional support. This policy would improve academic performance and outcomes for ESL learners. It would also provide access to educational resources not available at home. This policy would help students prevent the loss of financial aid by offering necessary support and resources, eliminating the need to drop challenging courses.

Another area of concern among participants is transportation. Students should have easy access to postsecondary education without transportation concerns. Any issues with accessing transportation should not be a barrier to their education. An alternative policy to address the barriers students encounter with transportation is to establish community partnerships that would assist with student public transportation. Educational organizations that collaborate with the community to establish partnerships could come together to implement a free public transit program that would eliminate the transportation barrier. This policy would ensure that all students would receive equal opportunities to continue their education in a post-secondary education environment.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, this study also has practical implications. Throughout the study, it was evident that many socioeconomic barriers influence academic outcomes among low-socioeconomic ESL learners. Although many participants expressed similar barriers to pursuing academic success, one participant highlighted the need for additional support from educational leaders, government legislators, and the community. He explained that policy changes are needed to help and support all ESL learners and make education equal for all. Recommendations include establishing multicultural reform initiatives, support programs, and partnerships with community organizations that support low-socioeconomic ESL learners. Establishing multicultural reform initiatives that acknowledge and value differences in ethnicity, culture, and language can result in equitable access and opportunities for all students, leading to better academic achievement outcomes. Similarly, establishing educational support programs that specifically target helping English language learners improve their reading, writing, and speaking abilities would foster a secure and nurturing learning atmosphere. Such programs

would enable students to practice their language skills, enhance their self-assurance, and forge valuable connections with their classmates and educators. Lastly, establishing partnerships with community organizations that support low-socioeconomic ESL learners would provide additional resources and support outside of the classroom environment for students to continue to develop their skills and build social connections that cultivate growth and development.

While it is clear that additional new reform initiatives, support programs, and community partnerships need to be established, providing support for ESL learners to eliminate the socioeconomic barriers they often encounter in their pursuit of academic success is an important finding. It may also be effective for all school leaders to establish additional on-campus supports demonstrating cultural awareness and sensitivity to the many challenges that low socioeconomic status ESL learners' encounter.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The essence of the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in an urban community college prompted themes to emerge from this research study to corroborate Walberg's (1980) theory on educational and empirical works that were essential to the framework of this study. Theoretical implications include the validation that an ESL learner's overall psychological attributes and environment could directly influence educational outcomes. Empirical implications include a student's environment, such as their home environment, school environment, and support exposure outside of school can all influence academic success among students. This study also contributed to the literature by providing valuable information about low-socioeconomic ESL learners and socioeconomic barriers ESL students encounter in a post-secondary education environment and how a learner's overall psychological attributes and

environment could be improved to increase educational outcomes among disadvantaged minority populations to decrease the disparities that exist within the academic achievement gap.

Empirical Implications

Throughout this study, participants emphasized the need for new reform initiatives, support programs, and community partnerships to alleviate the academic achievement gap that exists among disadvantaged minority populations, more specifically ESL learners. The findings of this study further support and add to the existing empirical literature. For example, studies examining the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic ESL learners enrolled in a post-secondary education environment revealed several key findings (Almon, 2015; Perez & Morrison, 2016; Y. Shi & Chun Ko, 2023; Villarreal & García, 2016). Almon (2015) discovered that working with college staff and faculty to create an inclusive environment for English language learners, providing them with the necessary support and knowledge about curriculum and college procedures, improves academic outcomes. Additionally, studies have identified that English language learners face numerous obstacles that significantly decrease their chances of pursuing higher education. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of implementing effective strategies to support English language learners and help them achieve their educational goals (Almon, 2015; Perez & Morrison, 2016). Furthermore, academic confidence and self-identity among English language learners enrolled in college are related to the psychological environments of the home and school (Y. Shi & Chun Ko, 2023).

Participants emphasized that socioeconomic barriers such as income, occupation, educational level, and transportation often influenced their ability to succeed. Thus, research has shown that equal opportunities for students can only be established by considering both their academic performance and their socioeconomic background, including family income,

occupation, race, and parental educational level (Owens, 2018; Paschall et al., 2018).

Additionally, nearly all participants expressed that their inability to practice English with peers

or family hindered their academic success. Institutions that foster a positive school environment

promote collaborative relationships among peers, mutual acceptance, and teacher support have

been recognized to improve student motivation and academic performance (Y. Shi & Chun Ko,

2023; Zhou et al., 2016).

The results of the current study align with these findings. The empirical implications of

this study are that low-socioeconomic-status English language learners contribute to poor

academic outcomes and the increasing number of disparities in the academic achievement gap.

Therefore, the need for future educational policy reform initiatives centered around

disadvantaged multicultural English language community college learners and programs to

achieve equitable outcomes in higher education environments is necessary. This study confirms

the findings of previous research that suggests the need for new legislation at the local, state, and

federal levels to address the academic achievement gap among low-socioeconomic-status ESL

learners. To decrease disparities, it is crucial to develop support programs and services that have

not been considered before. These efforts could improve academic achievement and post-

secondary outcomes for disadvantaged populations (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018;

Long, 2022; Paschall et al., 2018).

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that led this study was Walberg's (1980) theory of educational

productivity. The researchers theorized that a learner's overall psychological attributes and

environment could directly influence educational outcomes (Galizty & Sutarni, 2021; Walberg,

1980; Walberg et al., 1981). Additionally, this theory focused on nine key variables: three

student aptitude variables, two instructional variables, and four environmental variables. The first three student aptitude variables are ability or prior achievement, developmental level, age, and motivation. The variables that affect a student's academic performance can be categorized into six main categories. The first two variables are related to instruction, which includes the amount and quality of instruction. The remaining four variables are related to a student's environment, including their home environment, school environment, social group outside of school, and exposure to mass media outside of school (Fraser et al., 1987).

In addition to literature underlining the importance of a learner's overall psychological attributes and environment, many participants spoke about the various socioeconomic barriers ESL students encounter in a post-secondary education environment and how a learner's overall psychological attributes and environment. Aspects of Walberg's (1980) theory of educational productivity confirmed the participants reported experiences that socioeconomic factors such as a parent's level of education, household income, financial support, ability to access resources, language, and parental involvement all influence academic outcomes. Moreover, participants reported a strong emphasis on the connection between a lack of financial support and a lack of resources. This confirmation may incite government legislators and educational institutions at all levels to work toward implementing new reform policies that cultivate equitable learning and access for all, regardless of culture or background, and to provide additional English language support programs to alleviate the increasing number of minority students that contribute to the achievement gap.

The findings of this study consistently showed alignment with other existing theories. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes how social, cultural, and individual factors influence human development (Schunk, 2020). The sociocultural theory assumes that reasoning is first

social before an individual can absorb new knowledge. Likewise, according to this theory, there is a gap between what learners can accomplish alone and what they can accomplish with the help of others. Vygotsky's theory posits that the cultural and historical context in which students learn is crucial for their development. This is not just because it provides learning support but also because it helps students gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their language, and their place in the world (Schunk, 2020).

In this study, participants demonstrated sociocultural theory by sharing their experiences pertaining to linguistic, socio-emotional, and cultural differences as English language learners compared to their native English-speaking peers. Participants identified that they often experienced challenges surrounding discrimination, isolation, lack of support from family members or friends, financial hardships, anxiety, and excessive stress related to education. As a result, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory identifies that English language learners come from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, have their own unique language, and experience their own emotions. As such, these differences must be considered.

Another theory that was proposed is the social cognitive theory. This theory posits that an individual's learning is influenced by their environment, behavior, and personal factors (Schunk, 2020). Literature also confirmed that second language learning environments immensely influence the academic performance of ESL learners (Dhanapala, 2021; Jalalzai et al., 2023; Kiatkheeree, 2018; Tu, 2021). Participants stated that their academic success was directly influenced by the home and school environment and depended on the support they received from their families and teachers. Similarly, participants reported that receiving support from their families and feeling supported in the classroom improved their academic performance, and they were more inclined to attend classes, participate, and answer questions during class.

Limitations and Delimitations

Many limitations and delimitations of this research study were identified. This study conveyed three potential limitations: sample size, time constraints from participants, and a limited target population. Additionally, three main delimitations to this study were that participants needed to be over 18, were required to be currently enrolled or previously participated in the ESL academic language program, and had to identify as English language learners. A detailed explanation of the limitations and delimitations of this research study is provided in the following subsections below.

Limitations

Three limitations of this study were the sample size, time constraints from participants, and a limited target population. A small sample size of ten participants was used to gather relevant data for analysis. The participants consisted of nine females and one male. Using a sample size of 10 participants to represent the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status English as a Second Language (ESL) learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college may present a challenge in generalizing the findings because it is not an accurate representation of all English as a Second Language (ESL) learners who are enrolled in a post-secondary education environment in the United States. Therefore, representing a partial or subjective interpretation of the findings. This study had a second limitation caused by the participants' time constraints because of their work, school, and family responsibilities. Some ESL learners who were contacted delayed scheduling the individual interview, while others scheduled their interview but needed flexibility within their schedules to complete the other forms of data collection. This led to difficulties for the researcher in gathering data. Lastly, a limited target population was the third limitation of this study. The researcher used only English

as a Second Language (ESL) learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college rather than including other 4-year colleges to compare their academic experiences. Therefore, the use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability and transferability of findings, as the experiences and situations of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in a mid-sized urban community college can vary greatly and may not be fully captured within the scope of this study.

Delimitations

There were three main delimitations to this study. Additionally, three specific requirements bound participants. First, participants needed to be over the age of 18. The age range of participants was between 18-40, with most participants in their 30s. Second, participants were required to be currently enrolled or previously participated in the ESL academic language program. Lastly, all participants had to identify as English language learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several research studies have been conducted on socioeconomic status and academic achievement. However, few studies have been conducted on low-socioeconomic status ESL learners and academic achievement. The results from this qualitative study suggested the need to explore the academic experiences of English language learners enrolled in a four-year college and whether the reported experiences are the same or similar. A second recommendation for further study would be to explore collaborating and implementing additional English language support programs that would address the specific learning needs of each student. As a result, researchers can conduct a longitudinal study to determine if an English language support program improves academic performance and outcomes over time for participating learners. Additionally, further research would enable researchers to determine if the academic achievement gap among disadvantaged minority populations decreased. Two outliers identified

in this study were psychosocial challenges and college English language support programs for first-generation college ESL students need to be addressed. Therefore, a final recommendation is to conduct a study to determine if ESL learners who identify as first-generation college ESL learners enrolled in an English language support program face the same psychosocial challenges and, if so, to what extent.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand and describe the academic experiences of ESL learners of low socioeconomic status enrolled in a mid-sized secondary education environment. A transcendental phenomenological research design was used to capture the lived experiences of low socioeconomic status ESL learners. Walberg's (1980) theory of educational productivity served as the theoretical framework for this study. Data were collected from 10 ESL language learners through individual interviews, reflective journal responses, and focus group sessions. Data collected from individual interviews, reflective journal responses, and focus group sessions were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) four core processes of epoché, reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation. Upon analyzing the participants' experiences, many significant implications for future policies, practices, and empirical works were revealed. Furthermore, the theoretical framework was validated by the data. The findings revealed that there is a need for language support programs to improve academic outcomes among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners. Additionally, there is also a need for government legislators to implement educational reform policies to achieve equitable learning opportunities for low-socioeconomic status ESL learners.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 8, 2023
Anna Buck
Constance Pearson

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1666 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: THE
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF LOW-SOCIOECONOMIC-STATUS ESL LEARNERS
ENROLLED IN A MID-SIZED URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Dear Anna Buck, Constance Pearson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in
accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug
Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.
This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your
approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific
situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in
45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive,
diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of
public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria
is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of
the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the
subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by
§46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on
your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the
Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab
toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions
of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for
verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a
modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Site Permission Request

April 26, 2023

███████████
Luzerne County Community College
███████████

Dear ███████████████████████ IRB Board,

As a doctoral student in the School of Education, Curriculum, and Instruction program, at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is A Phenomenological Study: The Academic Experiences of Low-Socioeconomic-Status ESL Learners Enrolled in a Mid-sized Urban Community College. My research aims to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status English language learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at the Luzerne County Community College Hazleton campus. I am also requesting approval to contact Luzerne County Community College students to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached interview, participate in a focus group session, and complete four journal prompts. Additionally, students will be asked to contact me to schedule the interview, which will take place online via Microsoft Teams video teleconferencing software. Focus groups will also take place online via Microsoft Teams video teleconferencing software. In addition, participants will be asked to complete Journals online through Google Classroom. The data will be used to capture the students' academic experiences on how or if one's socioeconomic status influences one's ability to succeed academically. Participants will be presented with an information sheet prior to participating. Participating in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you grant permission, please provide a signed statement on the official letterhead indicating your approval or email ███████████████. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.
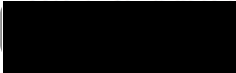
Sincerely,

Ms. Anna Marie Buck
███████████████████
███████████████

Appendix C: Site Permission Approval

LUZERNE
County Community College

June 2, 2023

Ms. Anna Marie Buck
Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University

Dear Ms. Buck:

After reviewing your research proposal entitled "A Phenomenological Study: The Academic Experiences of Low-Socioeconomic-Status ESL Learners Enrolled in a Mid-sized Urban Community College", the Luzerne County Community College Institutional Review Board grants you permission to contact our students and invite them to participate in your study and conduct your study at Luzerne County Community College and to receive and utilize collected student data for the purpose of your research study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☒ I will provide our ESL student list to Anna Buck, and Anna Buck may use the list to contact our students to invite them to participate in her research study.

☐ I grant permission for Anna Buck to contact previous and current English language learners enrolled in the ESL program at Luzerne County Community College to invite them to participate in her research study.

☐ I will not provide potential participant information to Anna Buck, but we agree to [[send/provide] [his/her] study information to English language learners enrolled in the ESL program on [his/her] behalf.]

☒ I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Gary C. Mrozinski, Ed.D.
Co-chair, Luzerne County Community College
    Institutional Review Board

Appendix D: Recruitment Email

Dear Student,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Education: Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to better understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status English as a Second Language (ESL) learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college ESL academic language learning program, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

For this study, participants must be between 18 and 40 years of age and a college ESL learner who is currently enrolled or previously participated in the ESL academic language program at Luzerne County Community College. If willing, participants will be asked to complete a 30–40-minute individual semi-structured interview, 4-5 preselected writing prompts of 500 words or less with a forecasted time of 20-30 minutes and may be selected to participate in one focus-group session for approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews and focus groups will be audio- and video-recorded and transcribed via the electronic video conferencing software program Microsoft Teams, and journals will be recorded and stored in Google Drive on a locked computer in a private office and completed via Google Classroom. After data collection, I will transcribe all data as the researcher and will send you a copy of the transcriptions to review and validate the information. This process is known as "member checking." During member checks, participants will be presented with data, analyses, interpretations, and findings to ensure that they can provide feedback and input on how they construed the data. Participants will have 24-48 hrs. to review their interview transcripts and the developed themes to check for accuracy and confirm agreement. In addition, names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at ███████████ or ███████████ for more information and 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 need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email before completing any of the research procedures or at the time of the interview.

Participants will receive a virtual $20.00 e-gift card to either Walmart or Amazon (participant's choice) upon completion of all study procedures.

Sincerely,

Ms. Anna Marie Buck
Graduate Student
████████████████████

Appendix E: Participant Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study: The Academic Experiences of Low-Socioeconomic-Status ESL Learners Enrolled in a Mid-sized Urban Community College
Principal Investigator: Anna Marie Buck, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. For this study, participants must be between the ages of 18 and 40 years of age and a college ESL learner who is currently enrolled or previously participated in the ESL academic language program at Luzerne County Community College. 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 study is to describe the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college. The study seeks to understand the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners (aged 18+) and whether socioeconomic status plays a role in a learner's ability to succeed academically by exploring the lived academic experiences of ESL students who have enrolled or completed at least one academic semester enrolled in the English language learning program at Luzerne County Community College.

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:

1. Complete a one-on-one interview, via electronic video conferencing software program Microsoft Teams, which will take approximately 30-40 minutes. Interviews will be audio and video recorded and transcribed. The interview will consist of questions about academic success and socioeconomic status. All participants will have the opportunity to freely express his or her viewpoints and experiences.
2. Complete preselected writing prompts sent through Google Classroom (consisting of 4-5 journal prompts). Writing prompt completion time will vary with a forecasted time of 20-30 minutes. Participants are asked to write 500 words or less. Journals will be recorded and stored in Google Drive on a secure computer.
3. Five to six participants will be asked to participate in one focus-group session, approximately 30-45 minute-long online through the electronic video conferencing software program Microsoft Teams. Focus group sessions will be audio and video recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams.
4. Review the interview and focus group transcripts for accuracy. The estimated time of completion for the transcript review will necessitate approximately 24 – 48 hours.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include sharing your experiences and story to potentially improve academic outcomes and experiences of other ESL low-socioeconomic status learners enrolled in an urban community college education environment as well as bringing about awareness of accommodating supports for ESL learners pursuing a post-secondary education.

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. However, the sharing of memories pertaining to your academic experience as a low-socioeconomic-status ESL learner may be triggering to some participants.

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 subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted and recorded through an online platform, such as Microsoft Teams, with the researcher in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with people outside the group.
- Participant data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all physical records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then erased. Only the researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Upon completion of all the procedures listed above, participants will receive a virtual $20 gift card to either Walmart or Amazon (participant's choice).

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Luzerne County Community College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions 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 Anna Marie Buck. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Constance Pearson, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

<table>
<tr><td>**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**</td></tr>
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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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is 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.

<table>
<tr><td>**Your Consent**</td></tr>
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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 F: Research Questions

Phenomenological Research Questions:

Central Research Question

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic status ESL learners enrolled in a mid-sized urban community college?

Sub-Question One

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners inside of school?

Sub-Question Two

What are the academic experiences of low-socioeconomic-status ESL learners outside of school?

Sub-Question Three

What socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor college graduation outcomes among low-socioeconomic status ESL learners?

Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background. (CRQ)

2. Please share if you are a first-generation college student. (CRQ)

3. What comes to mind when you hear the term "low-socioeconomic status?" Do you believe that low-socioeconomic status creates generational poverty? Why or why not? (CRQ)

4. Describe what academic challenges ESL learners experience in college. (SQ1)

5. In your experience, do you believe that ESL learners have enough support in the classroom? (SQ1)

6. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your academic experiences inside of school that we haven't discussed? (SQ1)

7. Describe what academic challenges ESL learners experience at home. (SQ2)

8. Describe how low-socioeconomic status and familial background can create barriers in education and one's ability to find employment? Please explain. (SQ2)

9. Describe the challenges ESL learners experience when completing academic coursework outside of school. (SQ2)

10. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your academic experiences outside of school that we haven't discussed? (SQ2)

11. Describe what socioeconomic barriers contribute to poor academic outcomes among ESL learners. (SQ3)

12. In your perspective, what challenges or socioeconomic barriers do English language learners face in school and outside of school when compared to high socioeconomic status native English-speaking peers? (SQ3)

13. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your academic experiences that may pertain to socioeconomic barriers and poor academic outcomes that we haven't discussed? (SQ3)

Appendix H: Writing Prompt Questions

Sent via Google Form

1. In 500 words, please describe your experience on whether one's socioeconomic status such as level of education, occupation, household income, and parental background can influence academic outcomes among ESL learners? CRQ

2. In 500 words, please explain what you think schools can do to help ESL learners achieve positive academic outcomes and academic success. Please feel free to share any recommendations or strategies that you think of. CRQ

3. In 500 words, please describe how an ESL learner's classroom environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. SQ1

4. In 500 words, please describe how an ESL learner's home environment can influence one's academic experiences and outcomes. SQ2

5. In 500 words, please share your perspective on the following prompt: Do you believe that school administrators and policymakers can do more to alleviate socioeconomic barriers and to help students succeed academically both inside and outside of the classroom? Why or why not? SQ3

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions

1. In your academic experience, does socioeconomic status contribute to your ability to academically succeed? (CRQ)

2. How would you define success? Do you feel that success is easily attainable for those from disadvantaged populations when compared to non-disadvantaged populations? (CRQ)

3. Based on your experience, how would you describe the ease of accessibility to obtaining educational resources both outside of the classroom and inside of the classroom? Please provide examples. (SQ1)

4. Based on your experience, what can educational leaders and governmental legislators do to improve academic achievement among low-socioeconomic students in and outside of school? (SQ1)

5. In your experience, does the lack of educational resources in one's household influence academic success among disadvantaged students when compared to non-disadvantaged peers? (SQ2)

6. Based on your academic experience, do you believe that your home environment or one's environment influences one's ability to succeed academically? (SQ2)

7. In your experience, does a family's household income or background impact academic achievement? (SQ2)

8. In your academic experience, do you believe that low-socioeconomic status such as level of education, income, and occupation create barriers that cause poor academic outcomes in academic settings? Why or why not? (SQ3)

9. In your academic experience, do you feel that the ability to access the required resources for school is easily attainable or a barrier for unprivileged students in comparison to non-disadvantaged peers? Why or why not? Please give examples. (SQ3)

10. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your academic experience on low-socioeconomic status learners and academic achievement? (CRQ)

11. Based on your experience, what can educational leaders and governmental legislators do to improve academic achievement among low-socioeconomic students in school? (CRQ)