AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-YEAR, INTERNATIONAL SPANISH-SPEAKING DUAL LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

Lindsay Merritt

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Approved By:

_____
Dr. Walter Hart

_____
Dr. Joan Lachance

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Dr. Jimmy Watson

_____
Dr. Adriana Medina

ABSTRACT

LINDSAY M. MERRITT. An Exploratory Study of The Lived Experiences of First-year, International Spanish-speaking Dual Language Teachers in North Carolina (Under the direction of DR. WALTER HART AND DR. JOAN LACHANCE.)

As interest in Dual Language Immersion programs continues to grow in North Carolina, the hiring of international teachers has increased tremendously. These international teachers often have not had the experience or training to address the needs of the students they are serving. In addition, pedagogical challenges such as working with diverse learners' abilities, social constraints, educational practices, and emotional needs are often associated with international teachers' different experiences. Many states, including North Carolina, seek to expand dual language programs but have difficulty hiring sufficient dual language teachers, highlighting the need to hire internationally (Lachance, 2017).

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of first-year international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina, focusing on the supports and barriers these teachers face relative to cultural differences. The results of this study from semi-structured one-on-one interviews indicated that international teachers sometimes feel unsupported as they face barriers in housing, transportation, and healthcare. Emotional isolation was common as they dealt with loneliness and homesickness. Cultural barriers, such as spoken and body language nuances and differences in educational systems, emphasized the multifaceted impact of cultural differences on their teaching experience. Implications reflect the urgent need for comprehensive training for DL/I teachers, focusing on locality. Additionally, there is a call for better pre-arrival support, considering the challenges international teachers face in adjusting to the nuances of North Carolina's educational system as compared to their experiences in their home countries.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, and coworkers who have believed in me and celebrated with me on each step of this journey. Your love and confidence in my ability are my driving force.

To my husband Andrew Merritt, thank you for pushing me each and every day. You would move mountains to see me reach my goals, and sometimes it felt like that is exactly what we did. Thank you for your prayers, sacrifices, and steadfastness through this process. I love you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DL/I	dual language immersion
DPI	Department of Public Instruction
EL	English learner
EPI	Educational Partners International
MTSS	multi-tiered systems of support
NC	North Carolina
PLC	professional learning communities
RQ1	Research Question 1
RQ2	Research Question 2
RQ3	Research Question 3
RQ4	Research Question 4

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Interest in Dual Language Immersion (DL/I) programs has been growing rapidly. North Carolina has been recognized as a leader in DL/I programs for over 30 years, starting with the first Spanish DL/I program in 1990. North Carolina currently has over 244 DL/I programs in operation in eight languages: Cherokee, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Spanish, and Urdu. Of these programs, 157 are one-way immersion programs, 84 are two-way immersion, and one is not categorized (Dual Language Immersion, NC Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Interest in DL/I programs continues to grow within the state of North Carolina, appealing to varying demographics and communities. In fact, North Carolina is currently ranked in the top five states in the nation in the number of DL/I programs, and it leads the Southeast with the same distinction (American Councils for International Education, 2021).

Simultaneously, the United States is facing a steady teacher shortage in all areas. Teacher demand is projected to increase over the next decade based on expectations that the school-aged population will increase by roughly three million students (Wiggan et al., 2020). Teacher supply has been declining, and with a national pandemic exasperating the already challenging issue, will there be enough teachers to teach the growing population? Enrollment in colleges of education is down by 50% over the last decade, while many teachers are leaving the classroom at alarming rates. Between 2009 and 2014, enrollment in teacher preparation programs declined by 35%, and 23% fewer preparation candidates completed these teacher training programs (Sutcher et al., 2019). Furthermore, seasoned teachers are retiring earlier than in the past.

This teacher shortage dilemma has impacted North Carolina. Specifically, the total number of teachers employed in North Carolina has declined from a historic high of 113,670 in 2009 to 108,470 in 2018, a 5% drop over that period. During that same period, enrollment in the

state's traditional public schools and charter schools increased by 2% (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2019). North Carolina reported 1,621 unfilled teacher vacancies for the 2017-2018 school year, with the largest number of vacancies among teachers of exceptional children at all levels, elementary teachers, math teachers, career /technical educators, those who teach English as a Second Language students, and dual language teachers. The latest data from the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association show that school districts across the state had 3,618 vacant teacher positions at the start of the 2022-2023 school year, which is up from 1,942 in the 2021-2022 school year.

According to Guerroro and Lachance (2018), the shortage of well-prepared teachers creates challenges for dual language programs. As these programs expand, so does the need for qualified teachers. Yet, school districts across the United States are facing barriers due to the shortage of qualified DL/I educators. For example, the number of teachers receiving an initial teaching credential in any licensure category, from either in-state or out-of-state programs, has also seen a steady decrease in North Carolina. The total number of teaching credentials issued in North Carolina decreased by 30% (from 6,881 credentials to 4,820 credentials) within the five-year timespan from 2010-2011 to 2015-2016 (WestEd, 2019).

North Carolina is no exception to the national shortage of qualified teachers to meet the needs of expanding DL/I programs. As a result, North Carolina insources international teachers for these programs largely through private recruiting companies such as Participate Learning (Participate, 2024) or Educational Partners International (EPI, 2024). These companies recruit international teachers from over 48 countries who are then hosted by North Carolina school systems implementing DL/I programs (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Huneycutt, 2021). In 2023 there were 2,536 teachers on international exchange visas in North Carolina public schools, which is a

23% increase over the 2022 school year, these international teachers are recruited through these companies (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2013) These placement services, which provide trained and experienced international teachers on a five-year contract to their schools. By understanding the experiences of these international teachers as they serve in North Carolina classrooms, it may be possible to inform the policies and practices that will foster their success and retention.

Statement of the Problem

An overreliance on hiring from private placement companies has brought many international teachers to DL/I programs who may not understand or identify with the current Latinx population and other minority groups in North Carolina (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). International teachers often have not had the experiences or training to address the diversity needs of students in general (i.e. abilities, emotional, social) or within the US context specifically (i.e. race). Nonetheless, one of the main reasons DL/I programs hire international faculty is the lack of bilingual educators and the inability of institutions of higher education to prepare teachers for the DL/I classroom (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). In addition, given the teacher shortage from within educator preparation system, DL/I programs heavily rely on hiring international teachers via private placement companies. Cervantes-Soon (2014) calls attention to the point that said teachers may be disconnected from current Latinx and other minority groups in the US and North Carolina. Furthermore, there are pedagogical challenges associated with international teachers' who may have different experiences working from a student-centered space with diverse learners' abilities, social constraints, and emotional needs. As stated in the U.S. Department of Education policies, North Carolina implements in-service professional development for both domestic and international teachers to equip them with the specialized

skills needed for instruction in DL/I classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, is this training enough?

Many states, including North Carolina, seek to expand dual language programs but have difficulty hiring sufficient dual language teachers (Lachance, 2017). Lachance (2017) stated that dual language teacher shortages often result in states continuously being forced to look to other countries to fill positions as best they can. Based on this shortage of DL/I in North Carolina and the state's increased dependency on private companies to provide these teachers, as well as the linguistic and cultural benefits they provide, it is imperative that North Carolina retains international teachers who are placed in districts across the state for the duration of their contracts.

Through this study, perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers about the challenges they faced in their first year of teaching in North Carolina were investigated. Additionally, I sought to examine the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the support they received during their first year of teaching in North Carolina. Finally, in this study I describe how cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceived during their first year of teaching in North Carolina.

There is limited research illuminating the voices of and challenges faced by these international teachers. However, some research has shown that international teachers face socio-cultural challenges within their placements in the United States. Lee (2015) found that these challenges were primarily related to cultural differences in classroom discipline, parent conflicts based on mainstream cultural differences, and language barriers. Although there has been some research concerning ~~these~~ international teachers, there is a need to further highlight their

experiences, particularly in a state like North Carolina where DL/I is growing so rapidly. Therefore, this study seeks to give voice to international teachers, understand the challenges they face in North Carolina classrooms, and identify the supports they have found to be helpful.

This topic has practical importance because it may inform current practices and policies affecting international teachers teaching in DL/I programs, the programs where they work, and the students they serve. In addition, the goal of the study was to inform the field of education and educational leadership regarding the DL/I teacher shortage. The study has potential empirical importance because it can add to a limited body of knowledge. While numerous studies focus on students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, there is a limited body of research specifically addressing international teachers teaching in DL/I programs. This has an implication for teacher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1) What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the challenges they face in their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

2) What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the supports they receive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

3) To what extent do cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that shapes the study is the LatCrit theory. LatCrit is a recent genre of critical outsider jurisprudence, with jurisprudence meaning the theory or philosophy of

law, including critical legal studies, feminist legal theory, critical race theory, critical race feminism, Asian American legal scholarship, and queer theory (Latina and Latino Critical Legal Theory (n.d.), 2022; Huber, 2010).

LatCit theory was developed by a small group of committed scholars who agreed to invest their time and research in a new project to produce critical socio-legal knowledge that would initially center on the multiple and diverse conditions and experiences of Latinas and Latinos in the United States. The theoretical branch, extending from Critical Race Theory (CRT), examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Gonzalez et al., 2021: Huber, 2010; Delgado Bernal & Solorzano, 2001) and allows researchers to better share the experiences of Latinas/os specifically through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

During the mid- to late 1980s, the United States saw various new strands of jurisprudence come from within the legal community which were considered critical or realist jurisprudential traditions with the purpose of interjecting those missing voices into socio-legal discourse and contemporary policy-making (Valdes, 2005). This movement focused on identity critiques of established law and theory, looking at the ways gender and race or ethnicity are embedded in the legal doctrines and regimes that govern society (Valdes, 2005).

Despite the expansion of critical jurisprudence during the period from the 1980s to the early 1990s, Latinas/os were a group that did not predominate in the activities and discourses. This discursive absence can be reflective of the demographics of the legal professionals in 1994-1995, which showed only 94 of 5064 law professors identified as Latina/o. LatCrit theory

emerged at that moment, partly in reaction to this continuing marginality and invisibility of Latinas/os in law, theory, policy, and society (Valdes, 2005).

Guided by prior advances of critical outsider jurisprudence, the early LatCrit conferences and published symposia generated seven guideposts for the development of LatCrit theory to inform and guide ongoing work. The seven guideposts for LatCrit theorists/scholars are to (a) Recognize and accept the political nature of legal scholarship despite claims or denials to the contrary, (b) Conceive themselves as activist scholars committed to praxis to maximize the social relevance of LatCrit theorizing, (c) Build intra-Latina/o communities and inter-groups coalitions to promote social justice struggles, (d) Embrace commonalities while respecting differences to chart the design of social transformation, (e) Learn from outsider jurisprudence to orient and develop LatCrit theory and praxis in all settings and efforts, (f) Ensure a continual engagement of self-critique to stay principled and grounded, (g) Balance specificity and generality in LatCrit analysis to ensure contextualized multi-dimensionality as the standard in LatCrit discourse (Valdes,2005). Based on these guideposts and the current work being done around LatCrit theory, four functions are used with the praxis of the LatCrit theory: (a) the production of knowledge; (b) the advancement of social transformation; (c) the expansion and connection of anti-subordination struggles; and (d) the cultivation of community and coalition, both within and beyond the confines of legal academia in the United States (Valdes, 2005).

The LatCrit theoretical framework constitutes some specifics for this study's design, such as the choice of participants, the research questions, and the participant interview questions. ~~Respectively,~~ the framework aims to create the desire to examine cultural issues that may shape participants' experiences. Throughout this study, I considered the intersectionality of race and other issues such as culture and language that Spanish-speaking international DL/I teachers

negotiate in their educational careers in North Carolina. The LatCrit framework used for or in this study informed the decision to use semi-structured one-on-one interviews with first-year DL/I teachers whose primary language is Spanish. Chapter 2 contains a nuanced description of LatCrit Theory.

Overview of Research Methodology

This qualitative, exploratory study examines perceptions of first-year, international, Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina. This study sought to examine the perceptions and experiences of first-year international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina, focusing on the supports and barriers these teachers face relative to cultural differences.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is considered multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative researchers study things in a natural setting as they seek to make sense of and interpret phenomena. Common empirical methods used within qualitative research consist of case studies, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, observations, and historical, interactional, and visual texts that focus on moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin, N & Lincoln, Y; 2005; Creswell, 2009).

Data sources for this study included semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Participants were six Spanish-speaking international teachers in their first year of teaching in elementary school DL/I programs in North Carolina. The researcher analyzed qualitative interview feedback from participants based on the work of Saldaña (2013) by coding a second or third time for the researcher to more clearly define and find patterns within the lived experiences.

This research design aligned well with the LatCrit theory due to the use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews that focused on individuals' own accounts of their attitudes, motivations, behavior, events, and situations. Specifically, the research design sought to

understand the lived experiences of an often-marginalized group and how cultural differences impact the experiences of these DL/I teachers.

Significance of the Study

Specific research focused on first-year international Spanish speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina is scarce. Those focusing specifically on cultural barriers are even fewer. Therefore, this study intends to add-to the research literature. It is also intended that this research would help shape educational policy and provide guidance to district and school leaders about processes to promote effective experiences for DL/I teachers. Ultimately, this guidance would help facilitate the success of DL/I teachers in North Carolina and inform practices in other states.

Delimitations

There are four delimitations within this study. The first was the focus only on international, Spanish-speaking DLI teachers. Data show that the largest population of immigrant teachers within the United States come from Mexico (18%). This coincides with the largest number of DL/I programs in the United States. which are Spanish (Startz, D.,2017; IPUMS., 2022). As of October 2021, 44 states within the United States reported having DL/I programs, and over 2,936 were Spanish-speaking programs. Spanish programs account for about 80% of DLI programs in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2022)

The second delimitation of this study was to narrow DL/I teachers to their first year of teaching. This boundary was implemented due to the varied experiences of international teachers during each subsequent year of their time within the United States. The research conducted with teachers who are in their first year of teaching in the U.S. offers the space for participants to express their viewpoints based on the newness of their positions in the setting.

The third delimitation of the study was to pull a sample of participants from North Carolina DL/I programs. California, Texas, New York, Utah, and North Carolina account for almost 60% of all DL/I programs within the United States. North Carolina has a total of 188 Spanish DL/I programs (Roberts, G., 2021). Therefore, North Carolina contracts with Participate Learning to help staff a large number of DL/I classrooms. The teachers were international teachers who had fulfilled logistical requirements so that they could teach in U.S. classrooms. According to Participate's website, international teachers wishing to teach in the United States must meet the following criteria:(a) proof of successfully completing a tertiary education degree in teaching or a related education degree, (b) have at least two years of full-time teaching experience post-grad with students between the ages of 5-18 in public primary, private primary, or secondary schools, (c) have taught within the last year in a classroom setting, (d) be fluent in English, or have sufficient English proficiency to communicate effectively (oral and written), (e) have a current driver's license and at least one year of experience driving a car, (f) be a non-U.S. citizen or permanent resident, and (g) commit to teach with Participate Learning for at least two years (Huneycutt, C., 2021; Huston, A., 2020). Based on the number of DL/I programs throughout the state, the sampling of participants from North Carolina was strategically beneficial.

The fourth delimitation was the use of participants who teach in elementary school DL/I programs. This decision was made because DL/I programs are more frequently found in elementary schools. Additionally, my experience as an elementary school teacher and administrator suggests that elementary school parents frequently engage with their children's teachers. Thus, it is likely that participants would be able to share experiences related not only to dealing with students but also with their parents.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that all participants were passionate about working in a DL/I environment. It was assumed that participants had a strong understanding of the educational approach of the DL/I classroom and pushed for results in academic, linguistic, and sociocultural learning. The second assumption was that a sample size of six teachers would yield sufficient and rich data to further the research in this area. While the generalizability of findings would be limited, this would be offset by using an approach that would provide rich descriptions that allowed the addition of details so that the reader understood both the significant and complex cultural meanings. A third assumption of the study was that all participants would be Spanish-speaking, international, dual language teachers. No attempt would be made to formally verify the participants' racial and ethnic identities or place of birth. The researcher would be relying on self-reporting from the participants. In order to make the study realistic and feasible, the researcher would utilize contacts within varied districts across the state of North Carolina and Participate Learning.

The fourth assumption was that all participants would answer the interview questions honestly and openly. To encourage participants to be forthright in their responses, they were informed that participation was voluntary and that all data gathered would be de-identified to maintain confidentiality. In addition, it was also assumed that the interview protocol used for this research would elicit the desired perspectives from all participants.

Definition of Terms

Bilingual education. Based on the Center for Applied Linguistics' definition (2022), bilingual education is used both as an umbrella term for dual language and transitional bilingual programs, and synonymously with transitional bilingual programs.

Dual language. The Center for Applied Linguistics (2022) states dual language, used synonymously with dual language immersion, is a program in which the language goals are full bilingualism and biliteracy in English and a partner language, students study language arts and other academic content (math, science, social studies, arts) in both languages over the course of the program, the partner language is used for at least 50% of instruction at all grades, and the program lasts at least five years (preferably K-12). CAL and other institutions use this term as an umbrella term that includes two-way immersion, foreign language immersion, heritage language immersion, and developmental bilingual programs. Throughout the U.S., it is frequently used synonymously with two-way immersion.

Partner language. Defined by the Center for Applied Linguistics website (2022), partner language[1] is an alternative term for the language other than English that is used for instruction in programs in the United States. Preferred term in dual language, in which both English and language other than English are both targets for multiliteracy development.

One-Way Immersion. The NC Department of Public Instruction (2022) has defined one-way immersion as a DL/I program where students are mostly speakers of one language group, either of English or the DL/I partner language. The challenge is that the students in one-way immersion programs do not stay monolingual for very long.

Two-Way Immersion. The NC Department of Public Instruction defines two-way immersion classrooms as those where students enrolled in the DL/I program are a combination of native speakers of English and native speakers of the DL/I program language. The Center

[1] For the purposes of this study it is inferred that the DL/I program partner languages are Spanish and English.

for Applied Linguistics website (2022) further explains it as a dual language program in which both native English speakers and native speakers of the partner language are enrolled, with neither group making up more than two-thirds of the student population.

Full Immersion. NC Department of Public Education (n.d.), states that full immersion classrooms are structured for the DL/I program language to be used exclusively or for the majority of the day. Content is delivered in the DL/I program language. English language arts are typically introduced around grade two.

Partial Immersion. The NC Department of Public Education uses the term partial immersion to describe structured environments where the DL/I program language is used for some portion of instructional time that is less than half of the day. Content is delivered in English and in the DL/I program language.

50/50. The Center for Applied Linguistics website (2022) has defined the 50/50 program as an immersion program model in which both English and the partner language are each used for 50% of instructional time across all grade levels.

90/10. Also defined by the Center for Applied Linguistics website (2022), the 90/10 model is an immersion program model in which students are instructed 90% of the time in the partner language and 10% in English in the first year or two, with the amount of English instruction gradually increasing each year until English and the partner language are each used for 50% of instruction.[2]

Summary and Organization of the Study

The steady increase in the number of DL/I programs combined with a scarcity of teachers has resulted in a shortage of teachers with the necessary language skills needed to teach in these

[2] There are 80/20 and 70/30 program structures at the broader level.

programs. Based on this shortage of bilingual educators in North Carolina and the state's increased dependency on organizations such as *Participate*, it is imperative to retain the international teachers placed in school districts across the state. With the research showing the struggles international teachers face with sociocultural challenges in their placements in the United States, it was important to explore the experiences of these international, Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers. This research was intended to fill a gap in scholarly knowledge and offer professional practice recommendations regarding DL/I teachers.

The remainder of this study is organized into four subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 reviews scholarly literature regarding DL/I programs within the United States and North Carolina, beginning teachers overall and those within DL/I programs, international teachers, and the growing teacher shortage. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methods utilized within this study. Major discoveries drawn from the analysis of the collected data and thematic interpretations of the research findings are presented within Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research collected, discussion of significant outcomes and contributions to the scholarly body of knowledge, implications for professional practice, and recommendations for future research. The culmination of the study included a bibliography of referenced literature and appendices.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

DL/I is one of the fastest growing programs throughout schools in the United States and specifically in North Carolina. (Baldwin, 2021; NC Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.). This education model provides academic instruction using two languages, with the most common language approach involving instruction in English and instruction in a language other than English (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Esposito, 2020; Valentino & Reardon, 2015). Using this approach, DL/I proponents suggest that three major goals/pillars can be achieved through the DL/I model. First, there must be a focus on bilingualism and biliteracy. Since content is being learned in two languages, students must be able to not only speak both languages, but also write, read, listen, and use each of the two program languages as a support for the other (Medina, 2017). Next, DL/I programs can build high student proficiency levels in language and literacy in both program languages while attaining high levels of overall academic achievement. Third, DL/I programs also seek to build knowledge and understanding of the culture of the language (Center for Applied Linguistics, C. A. L. (n.d.), 2022; Gómez, 2013; Howard et al., 2018; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Valentino & Reardon, 2015;).

DL/I programs have been associated with positive student achievement. In their three-year study of DL/I programs in North Carolina, Thomas and Collier (2012) found that reading and math scores of students in two-way dual language education are higher than students not in these programs, regardless of students' ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency status, or special education status. The broader scope of the Thomas and Collier research indicates that in most cases, by the middle school years, two-way dual language students, across all subgroups, are scoring higher in reading and math than non-DL/I students (Cohn, 2015; Page, 2019; Roberts, 2021;Thomas & Collier, 2012). In addition, Thomas and Collier found that

disparities in academic achievement between lower socioeconomic students and their peers from higher income households were smaller when both of these groups participated in DL/I programs than when the same groups were in traditional education settings. Therefore, Thomas and Collier report that in addition to myriad benefits across multiple subgroups, DL/I programs significantly address gaps in achievement for lower socioeconomic students.

The larger body of research conducted to look at many aspects of DL/I programs includes academic advancement among students in DL/I programs (Esposito, 2020; Hindin, 2021; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Steele, 2017), sustaining dual language programs (Ayscue, & Uzzell, 2022; Valentino, & Reardon, 2015), and equity among dual language participants (Dorner & Cervantes Soon, 2020; Lindholm-Leary, 2012), However, little research has been conducted on the perceptions and experiences of first-year, international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers who often help lead these programs.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of first-year international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina, focusing on the supports and barriers these teachers face relative to cultural differences. It was intended that this research would inform educational policy and provide guidance to district and school leaders about processes to promote effective experiences for DL/I teachers. Ultimately, this guidance may help to facilitate the success of DL/I teachers.

This chapter presents a review of literature related to DL/I programs and was divided into five sections as outlined in Table 1. Sections were chosen due to their significance in DL/I programming in North Carolina compared to the United States. Each was chosen with a cultural lens to meet the needs of the research goal. Additional selection was due to the researcher's

focus on the cultural aspects of the DL/I teachers in their first year combined with the needs of states, including NC, for qualified teachers in these positions.

These sections examine the following: (a) an overview of DL/I programs throughout the country and in North Carolina, (b) the shortage of teachers in North Carolina, (c) the role of international teachers and their placements in DL/I programs, (d) challenges facing all beginning teachers generally and international teachers specifically, and the (e) LatCrit theory that would inform analysis of data and implications of the research findings.

Table 1
Sections of Identified Literature

Category	Sources
Dual Language/Immersion Programs	What is Dual Language (Burkhauser, Steele, Li, Slater, Bacon, & Miller, 2016; Center for Applied Linguistics, C. A. L. (n.d.),2022; Dual Language Immersion | NC DPI. (n.d.); Huston,2020; U.S. Department of Education., 2015; Gómez, 2013 Management Association, 2021; Howard, Lindholm-Leary, Rogers, Olague, Medina, Kennedy, Sugarman, & Christian, 2018; Medina, 2017)
	History of the Dual Language Program (Christian, Donna, 2016; Dorner & Cervantes-Soon, 2020; Genesee, Fred, and Lindholm-Leary, 2008; Lindholm-Leary, and Borsato, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2012; Management Association, 2021; Steele, 2017; Thomas, & Collier, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014)
	Types of Dual Language Programs (Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Dual Language Immersion | NC DPI. (n.d.); Esposito, 2020; Valentino & Reardon, 2015; Center for Applied Linguistics, C. A. L. (n.d.),2022
	Advantages of Dual Language Programs (Baker, 2001; Center for Applied Linguistics., 2011b; Cohn, 2015; Page, 2019; Roberts, 2021; Steele, Slater, Zamarro, Miller, Li, Burkhauser, & Bacon, 2017; Thomas, & Collier, 2003)
	North Carolina Programs (Baldwin, 2021; Hofstetter & McHugh, 2021; Dual Language Immersion | NC DPI. (n.d.); Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Steele, Slater, Zamarro, Miller, Li, Burkhauser, & Bacon, 2017; U.S. Department of Education., 2015; Thomas, & Collier, 2012 WATZINGER– THARP, THARP, & RUBIO, 2021)

North Carolina Teacher Shortage	General Education Teachers (Barrientos,2022; Berry & Shields, 2017; Blinder, 2015; Goldhaber, Strunk, Brown & Knight, 2016; Leaders Join Forces to Help Solve North Carolina's Teacher Shortage., 2017; Martin & Mulvihill, 2016; US Department of Education., 2022; Wiggan, Smith, & Watson-Vandiver, 2020; Startz, 2017)
	Dual Language Teachers (Amanti, 2019; Granados, 2020; Ayscue & Uzzell, 2022; Baldwin, 2021)
International Teachers	Spanish Dual Language Placements in NC (Huneycutt, 2021; NC Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.), 2022; Roberts, 2021; U.S. CENSUS DATA FOR SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND HEALTH RESEARCH. IPUMS.,2022; Walkenhorst, 2022)
	International Placement Services (Huston, 2020; Warms, 2016; Lee, 2015)
	Dual Language Credentials (NC Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.), 2022; Walkenhorst, 2022)
Challenges for Beginning Teachers	General Education Teachers (Fitchett, McCarthy, Lambert, & Boyle, 2018; Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, & Van Veen, 2018; Gray, & Taie, 2015; Helms-Lorenz, Slof, Vermue, & Canrinus, 2012; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Ingersoll, 2007; Veenman, 1984;
	Dual Language Teachers (Byram et al. 2009; Bodycott, Walker, 2000; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Craig, 2017; Ospina, & Medina, 2020)
LatCrit Theory	(Guajardo, Robles-Schrader, Aponte-Soto, & Neubauer, 2020; Gonzalez, Matambanadzo & Martínez, 2021; Huber, 2010; Latina and Latino Critical Legal Theory: Latcrit theory, praxis and …, 2022; Valdes, 1997)

Dual Language Programs

Dual Language/Immersion Defined

DL/I, as described by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2015), is structured to give students access to key skills including biliteracy, bilingualism, and global education. These are all justification points for schools wanting to adopt this model. The additional benefits of building foundational language acquisition and learning English as a

second language have pushed the adoption of this model for schools across the United States (Gomez, 2013; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; U.S. Department of Education., 2015).

The foundation of DL/I is providing teacher-led instruction of academic content through two languages with the intended outcome that students learn both languages and academic content as they progress through school. A typical example of a DL/I program is one in which teachers provide instruction using both English and Spanish. Within these programs, the partner language (which was Spanish in this study) is used to provide instruction for a large portion of the students' instructional day. In fact, the partner language can be used for up to 50% -90% of the day, depending on the program model (Esposito, 2020; Howard et al., 2018). U.S. trends show that DL/I instruction is provided mostly at the elementary school level, with many schools emphasizing the continuation of DL/I instruction for a minimum of six years. In some cases, districts opt to continue DL/I instruction in middle and high schools, particularly in elective classes (Howard et al., 2018; NC Department of Public Instruction., 2022; U.S. Department of Education., 2015). It should be noted that ideally, DL/I program development goals should be K-12 at a minimum and K-20 at the exemplar level (Guerrero & Lachance, 2018). DL/I programs can be implemented as a whole-school model where all students within the school are taught using the model. Some schools opt for the strand model in which one class per grade level is taught using a DL/I model while the rest of the school receives instruction using only one language (NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d.).; U.S. Department of Education., 2015).

According to Thomas and Collier (2012), the North Carolina studies on DL/I analyzed data from two-way dual language programs. Identified programs have English learners and native English speakers educated in the classroom together in both English and another language (the home language of the English learners). The curriculum (the North Carolina Standard

Course of Study) is presented in English part of the time and in a second language at least half the time (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, French, German, or Japanese). All state-level tests are administered in English within North Carolina regardless of the program (Thomas & Collier, 2012). Language and content are taught in these classrooms, with students and teachers communicating with one another at the discourse level (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

Academic rigor is expected within DL/I programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021), "Dual language programs use the same academic content standards as other instructional programs and must measure student achievement related to those standards on annual content assessments" (p. xiv). As a result, research has demonstrated the positive impact of DL/I on student academic achievement. Research related to the relationship between DL/I and academic achievement will be described in subsequent sections.

Types of Dual Language/Immersion Programs

With the growing number of bilingual programs in the United States, it was important to provide clarity about individual programs within schools. The main grouping of programs could be categorized as:

- Developmental, or maintenance, bilingual programs. These enroll primarily students who are native speakers of the partner language.
- Two-way immersion programs. These enroll a balance of native English speakers and native speakers of the partner language.
- Foreign language immersion, language immersion, or one-way immersion. These enroll primarily native English speakers.

- Heritage language programs. These mainly enroll students who are dominant in English but whose parents, grandparents, or other ancestors spoke the partner language (Center for Applied Linguistics, [CAL] ,2022).

Dual language education refers to both one-way and two-way programs. Two-way dual language programs serve English learners (ELs), also referred to as multilingual learners (MLs), in the same classroom with native English speakers who are developing proficiency in their home language and English. Students are placed into these classrooms with the criteria of having students who all speak a common language other than English (e.g., Spanish, Mandarin, Chinese) blended with students who speak English as their primary language for academic instruction. For example, a first-grade two-way immersion program may have 10 native Spanish-speaking students in a class with 12 native English-speaking students for core academic content. In comparison, two-way programs blend English-dominant students with their peers who speak another language at home, whereas one-way programs serve more linguistically homogeneous groups.

Given their unique nature, key provisions of DL/I programs need to be identified. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (2022), Successful dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs encompass essential elements such as providing literacy instruction in both the partner language and English (once introduced) throughout the program. In addition, delivering content instruction in both languages consistently, dedicating a minimum of 50% of instructional time to the partner language, utilizing linguistically and culturally suitable curriculum and instructional materials in the partner language, offering targeted professional development for administrators, teachers, and family/community members related to dual language education, and conducting assessments in the partner language. All of these provisions must be followed to

ensure the program successfully creates bilingual students who are academically prepared in both their native and partner languages.

Looking at data worldwide, one-way dual language programs tend to be global in impact, with schools worldwide having students from other language backgrounds becoming bilingual through learning and studying instructional content in English (Dorner, & Cervantes-Soon, 2020). In the United States and Canada, one-way programs also include the following: (a) developmental bilingual education for students learning English as an additional language, (b) foreign/world language programs that provide content instruction in another language, and (c) heritage programs designed to sustain and sometimes revitalize languages (Dorner & Cervantes-Soon, 2020, Esposito, 2020; NC Department of Public Instruction; Fortune & Tedick, 2008, Valentino & Reardon, 2015).

History of Dual Language/Immersion

Instruction in languages other than English has a lengthy history in public schools in the United States. The roots of dual language programs in the United States date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, when education in languages such as German and French was permitted in some states, while non-English language instruction was punishable in others (Genesee et al., 2008). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the U.S. embarked on an effort to improve education and to include foreign language competency in educational standards. At the same time, the Cuban revolution saw waves of Cuban refugees migrating to the U.S. These two factors caused the Miami, Florida schools to introduce the first official bilingual program in the U.S. This program allowed the Spanish-speaking children of Cuban refugees to acquire competence in English while retaining their native language (Genesee et al., 2008).

DL/I program began in public schools in the United States during the 1960s. These programs were introduced largely in response to considerable social change in North America and reflected more general worldwide concerns about social inequality and institutional responses to this inequality. One large area of concern was language and culture, and it was believed that DL/I programs would help to address these concerns. The earliest DL/I programs were designed for children who did not speak English as the primary language in the home (Christian, 2016; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2008). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1969 aided local educational authorities with establishing bilingual programs for Spanish-speaking children across the nation as the population continued to grow (Christian, 2016; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2008; Lindholm-Leary and Borsato, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2012).

In 1971, DL/I programs were first introduced for primary English-speaking students in Culver City California. This program was a Spanish-English immersion and the first in the United States. Continuing in the mid-1970s and 1980s, immersion and bilingual education were expanded to include both students in the minority language as well as the majority language within the same classrooms (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2012). This was the beginning of two-way immersion, two-way bilingual, or dual language programs, which are the foundation of DL/I within the United States (Ayscue & Uzzell,2022; Center for Applied Linguistics, C. A. L. (n.d.), 2022; Dual Language Immersion; NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d)., 2022; Esposito, 2020; Valentino & Reardon, 2015).

The history of dual language programs continues to evolve. In the 2000's, globalization became evident in the day-to-day lives of those in the United States. Dual language competence and familiarity with other cultures were increasingly being viewed as assets in the global context. Parents requesting DL/I programs in schools were striving to give their children linguistic and

sociocultural advantages in the educational offerings (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2006). However, what once were considered boutique programs catering to affluent schools and parents are now growing based on several complementary forces: growth in the share of U.S. school children who are English Learners (EL) (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), observational evidence that ELs in dual-language immersion programs outperform ELs in English-only or transitional bilingual programs (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Umansky & Reardon, 2014; Steele, 2017 Valentino & Reardon, 2015), and demand from parents of native English speakers who anticipate benefits of bilingualism within a globally competitive society (Maxwell, 2012; Steele, 2017).

Research shows between 1980 and 2013, the percentage of young adults speaking in a language other than English at home experienced a significant increase, more than doubling from 11% to 25%. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Recent projections by the Pew Research Center suggest that by 2065, first-generation immigrants and their immediate offspring will constitute 36% of the U.S. population versus 26% today (Cohn, 2015). The percentage of public-school students in the United States who were ELs was higher in the fall of 2016 (9.6%, or 4.9 million students) than in the fall of 2000 (8.1%, or 3.8 million students). Of the total students enrolled in U.S. public or charter schools who were considered ELs, 77% were native speakers of Spanish (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). With the increase of EL students and the ever-changing demographics of the United States, DL/I programs have drastically increased in popularity and number (Roberts, 2021).

The Center for Applied Linguistics (citation?) estimates that the number of DL/I immersion schools in the United States grew from 278 to 448 between 1999 and 2011, but 2012 extrapolations place the number between 1,000 and 2,000 (Maxwell, 2012; Steele, 2017;

Watanabe, 2011). More recent data were collected in each of the fifty states in 2021 in order to identify the number of DL/I programs by state, effective with the fall 2021-2022 school year. All DL/I programs were recorded within the database and represented programs such as one-way, two-way, heritage, etc. This was the first comprehensive collection of DL/I programs in more than a decade and is considered an important first step in documenting the growth and prevalence of DL/I programs in the U.S. (Roberts, 2021). The results of this study indicate that there are more than 3,600 DL/I programs across the United States. California, Texas, New York, Utah, and North Carolina account for almost 60% of all programs within the United States. Various program types saw expansion, with data indicating that approximately 80% of all dual language/immersion (DL/I) programs are in Spanish, followed by Chinese (8.6%) and French (5.0%). Researcher Gregg Roberts, noted, DL/I programs provide a cost-efficient method to improve accessibility, and accountability in language education in the United States (Roberts, 2021)

Benefits of Dual Language/Immersion Programs

Current research shows the rapid growth of DL/I programs in many states and the importance of these programs for advancing language education, bilingualism, and access to accountable and quality programs for all populations (Roberts, 2021). Research also shows that DL/I education programs strengthen children's cognitive potential through literacy development in the two languages and exposure to cultural experiences. The brains of bilingual children are shown to be more developed in specific areas than of monolingual children (Hindin, 2021; Purić et al., 2017; Steele et al., 2017).

Children in bilingual education models (including DL/I models described in subsequent sections) have proven to exceed or match the academic performance of their peers in general

education models (Cobb et al., 2006; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2014; Padilla, et al, 2013; Steele et al., 2017). Research has also shown that the amount of daily exposure to the language is a significant factor affecting executive functions in early immersion programs (Chondrogianni et al., 2017). For example, Portland Public Schools conducted a study examining students randomly selected for DL/I programs and those who were placed in a traditional path. The research showed that students randomly assigned to DL/I outperformed their peers on state accountability tests in reading. The estimates of effects on reading performance in fifth and eighth grades ranged from 13% to 22% of a standard deviation, reflecting seven to nine months of learning (Steele et.al, 2017).

In addition, findings from North Carolina's study of DL/I programs strongly suggested that there are qualities to North Carolina's two-way immersion programs that produce greater educational gains in reading and math when compared to non-dual language education (Thomas & Collier, 2012). Looking at the data from three years of studies, Thomas and Collier (2012) concluded that two-way dual language education is an effective way to improve the reading and math scores of all North Carolina students. For example, low socio-economic standing (SES) African American students attending DL/I classes scored at least one grade higher in reading than their low-SES African American peers not in dual language. These students also continued to show gains in math. Low-SES African American dual language students were more than two grades ahead of low-SES African American non-dual language students as early as fifth grade in math (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

The integrated nature of DL/I programs in schools showed more benefits to ELs in these classrooms than those in English-only classes. The opportunity for ELs to speak their dominant language while also acquiring English can boost students' self-esteem and confidence and help

them maintain their sense of identity and heritage, which in turn helps improve students' communication skills in both their new language and their native one. Based on data, parents are more active in signing their children up for these programs (Hindin, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Some of the appeal perhaps comes from studies showing that well-implemented two-way DL/I programs are a more effective way to advance educational equity for students over pull-out or one-way programs that keep students segregated by language ability. In two-way programs, students proficient in English and those learning English collaborate, leveraging their respective strengths and weaknesses. Each student takes turns being the expert and the learner, fostering a dynamic and reciprocal learning environment (Williams & Brown, 2016).

Within DL/I programs, native English speakers who are already on grade level can exceed the achievement of monolingually educated peers at the same grade. In addition, gains in cognitive stimulus from schooling in two languages lead to enhanced creativity and analytical thinking (Baker, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2012). Just as important, nonminority students develop knowledge of and respect for the customs and experiences of others. With an understanding of the cultures included in DL/I programs, native English-speaking children often have travel opportunities or to live in other countries. Upon high school completion, they often actively seek opportunities for international travel and employment that use their second language (Thomas & Collier, 2003).

Additionally, current research shows that the demand for bilingual workers in the job market is increasing dramatically (Page, 2021). While all job market sectors have shown an increased demand for bilingual workers, those considered high prestige, such as financial managers, editors, and industrial engineers, have seen the largest jump (Page, 2021). The five

most in-demand languages in the U.S. job market are Spanish, Chinese, French, Arabic, and Korean. U.S. employers have the highest demand for Spanish-speaking bilingual workers, with more than 450,000 roles listed in 2015 (New American Economy, 2017; Page, 2021).

North Carolina Programs

Like other states, North Carolina has experienced a tremendous increase in the number of immigrants over the past several decades, with most of these immigrants coming from Mexico and Central America. With the migration of these Spanish-speaking families, North Carolina has seen large numbers of EL students. Slightly more than half of North Carolina's immigrant parents of young and elementary-school-age children are EL. There were approximately 68,000 LEP immigrant parents of children ages 0 to 4, and there were 79,000 LEP immigrant parents of children ages 5 to 10 in the state (Hofstetter & McHugh, 2021)

Based on this migration and the initiatives of the North Carolina State Board of Education, North Carolina has been a leader in DL/I for over 30 years. The first Spanish DL/I program in North Carolina began in the fall of 1990 (NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d.). This first one-way Spanish DL/I program began at Jones Elementary School in Guilford County, starting with one classroom which focused on instruction being taught in Spanish to native English speakers. The program grew from one classroom to over 20 classes by 2012. The first two-way DL/I program started in 1997 in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools at Collinswood Language Academy. At Collingswood, classes were structured to include both native Spanish-speaking students and those who were English-speaking at a 50:50 ratio. Each year another grade level was added until it became a schoolwide model. In fact, the Collinswood model was regarded so highly effective that it was used as a model for state and local planners when they implemented DL/I in other schools (Thomas & Collier, 2012).

North Carolina currently has over 225 DL/I programs in eight different languages: Cherokee, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Spanish, and Urdu. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2022), North Carolina is currently fifth in the nation and first in the Southeast in the number of DL/I programs being implemented in schools. Combined, there are over 60 public districts, charter schools, and independent/private schools offering DL/I programs within the state of North Carolina (Baldwin, L., 2021; NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d.). These programs are needed because data reveal that 339 languages other than English are spoken in students' homes (NC Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.). Also, North Carolina is one of five states nationally to establish accountability at the state level for DL/I programs by articulating specific state models and expectations for DL/I programs (Department of Education., 2015).

North Carolina Teacher Shortage

General Education Teachers

Dual language instruction is provided amidst the challenging context of a significant teacher shortage. These teacher shortages have been an ongoing issue for school systems and policymakers in the United States for over 20 years (Barry & Shields, 2017). New light was shed on the shortages many districts were facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge of attracting and retaining teachers had been more difficult than ever before. According to the U.S. Department of Education Fact Sheet (2022), critical areas such as special education, science, technology, engineering, math, career and technical education, and early childhood education have seen a drastic decline in staffing. Of specific importance to this study is that bilingual education was included among the shortage areas (U.S. Department of Education., 2022).

Research shows that educator shortages disproportionately impact students of color, students in low-income neighborhoods and schools, students with disabilities, urban students, and students from rural communities (Barrientos, 2022; Berry & Shields, 2017). Inadequate staffing and rapid turnover rates are prevalent in rural and urban schools, which often have large populations of students identified for special education, students of color, or those who may not speak English as a primary language (Barrientos, 2022).

School climate and instructional quality are areas that show drastic decline as teachers leave the profession. Specifically, inadequate staffing and frequent teacher turnover are more likely to impact schools that serve students in rural and urban areas, linguistically diverse students, students identified for special education, and students of color. For example, during the 2015-2016 school year, 48 states and the District of Columbia reported shortages of teachers in special education, 42 reported shortages of math teachers, 40 reported shortages of science teachers, and 30 reported shortages of bilingual education/ESL teachers (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2017).

DL/I Teachers

It is important to note that the field at large more frequently uses the term Dual Language when describing teachers while the state of North Carolina refers to them as Dual Language/Immersion (DL/I) teachers. As documented by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education (2015),16 states identified significant shortages of bilingual education teachers during the 2015–16 school year (Department of Education, 2015). For the 2021-2022 school year, 31 states within the United States reported teacher shortages in bilingual education or English as a Second Language (Department of Education.,2022). Reports show that the shortage is widespread and impacts both English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

programs as well as Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) programs (Mitchell, 2019). Studies also show the shortage of qualified teachers to teach in DL/I programs, which Collier and Thomas (2017) cite as one of the greatest challenges to their implementation.

States have implemented strategies to fulfill the demand for dual language teachers. Some strategies include creating alternative certification pathways, building up recruitment efforts within the university setting, and providing financial incentives for teachers (Amanti, 2019; Department of Education., 2015). Of particular interest to this study is the use of partnerships with other countries to bring bilingual teachers to U.S. classrooms. Current research shows that about 8% of American teachers are born abroad and now teach in the United States (Aragon, 2016; Startz, 2017).

Recent data show that North Carolina has more than 2000 internationally-born teachers teaching in the state's school systems. The state has spent more than $121 million dollars on the recruitment of teachers from abroad, with some of that being through organizations like Participate Learning, who recruit international teachers to fill the growing number of DL/I placements (Huneycutt, 2021). This number is roughly six times what it was 10 years ago, and growing each year (Walkenhorst, 2022). Undoubtedly, the number of international teachers will continue to grow as the demand for more DL/I programs intersects with the scarcity of teachers with the language skills necessary to support DL/I dual language programs. This is an important process as DL programs continue to be the heart of social transformations (Amanti,2019; Roberts, 2021; Walkenhorst,2022).

Dual Language Credentials

Part of the shortage of dual language teachers directly relates to the credentials required to be certified (Amanti, 2019; Department of Education, 2015; Roberts, 2021). According to the

U.S. Department of Education (2015), teachers in DL/I programs must be certified in the content standards they teach. They are required to have the credentials and competencies that all other certified teachers in their grade level possess. Teachers who are teaching content in the program language in North Carolina need to have high levels of language proficiency, minimally a rating of "Advanced Low" on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency scale. These proficiency guidelines are a description of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context to ensure they can provide effective instruction to students in the program (NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d.). Teachers who come from other countries to teach in North Carolina must also acquire a J-1 visa or already have one to be able to work in the United States (NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d.).

International Teachers

Spanish Speaking Dual Language Placements

Teacher shortages across the United States have forced many districts to look to international teacher placements in an attempt to address this shortage. Data taken from IPUMS USA uses various years of U.S. Census data as well as the American Community Survey by the University of Minnesota show that roughly 8% of teachers in the U.S. are immigrants to the United States. Data reveal that the number of international teachers is growing, with a significant number of Spanish-speaking international teachers (Ruggles et. al, 2023). In 1950, only about 4% of teachers were foreign born. That number dropped to 2% by 1960. More recently, the number of teachers who are immigrants to the U.S. has reached 8% (Startz, 2017). Additional data show that the largest population of immigrant teachers comes from Mexico (18%), followed

by China (13%). Not surprisingly, the largest number of DL/I programs in the U.S. are Spanish, followed by Mandarin-Chinese (Ruggles et al., 2023, Startz, 2017).

As of October 2021, 44 states within the United States reported having DL/I programs, and over 2936 were Spanish-speaking programs. Spanish programs account for about 80% of all programs, followed by Chinese (8.6%) and French (5.0%). California, Texas, New York, Utah, and North Carolina account for almost 60% of all DLI programs within the United States, which makes the need for international Spanish-speaking teachers a high priority (Roberts, 2021). As a result, private organizations such as Participate have partnered with states to help provide language immersion teachers from other countries who are highly qualified and experienced. Companies like Participate Learning recruit international teachers and work to ensure an array of logistical requirements are met so that they can teach in U.S. classrooms. Educators provided by Participate are from 14 different Spanish-speaking countries with diverse backgrounds and rich cultural knowledge to help implement a language rich environment for DL/I classrooms.

International Placement Services

Based on the need for DL/I classrooms, the U.S. Department of State's Exchange Visitor Program encourages international candidates from around the world to come to the United States. The program enables foreign nationals to come to the U.S. to teach, study, conduct research, demonstrate special skills, or receive on-the-job training for a period ranging from a few weeks to several years (Multilingual Visiting International Teacher Program, 2022).

In addition, organizations such as Participate Learning offer programs for visiting teachers if these international teachers meet a series of requirements. According to Participate Learning's website, international teachers wishing to teach in the United States must meet the following criteria: (a) have a university degree in education or teaching (with proof of

graduation), (b) have at least two years of full-time teaching experience post-grad with students between the ages of 5-18 in public primary, private primary, or secondary schools, (c) have taught within the last year in a classroom setting, (d) be fluent in English, or have sufficient English proficiency to communicate effectively (oral and written), (e) have a current driver's license and at least one year of experience driving a car, (f) be a non-U.S. citizen or permanent resident, and (g) commit to teach with Participate Learning for at least two years (Huneycutt, 2021; Huston, 2020). In addition, Participate Learning partners with schools to connect 1,012 teachers from 29 countries to more than 400 schools in three states: North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

Challenges for Beginning Teachers

General Education Teachers

Recent studies in the U.S. show that one-quarter of beginning teachers are at risk for stress in their first year (Harmsen et. al., 2018; Fitchett et. al., 2018). The research reveals an array of factors that contribute to this stress. These stressors include the following: (a) classroom discipline, (b) motivating students, (c) dealing with individual differences, (d) assessing students' work, (e) relationships with parents, (f) organization of class work, (g) insufficient and/or inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and (g) dealing with problems of individual students (Harmsen et. al., 2018, Veenman, S.,1984). Additionally, much research has been done concerning the link between beginning teacher stress and teacher attrition. As noted, teacher attrition during the early years of the teacher's career is a serious problem in many Western societies including the United States (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Harmsen et. al., 2018: Heikkinen, et al. 2012; Ingersoll, 2007). Data indicate that between 20% and 50% of U.S. public school teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career (Gray & Taie, 2015;

Ingersoll, 2007). International teachers in the U.S. often experience stressors that mimic those of teachers generally. They also face a set of stressors that are unique to their experiences, such as a lack of multicultural collaboration focused on cultural differences, and the pedagogical implications.

International Dual Language Teachers

International dual language teachers are impacted by the same stress-inducing circumstances facing beginning teachers generally. However, a variety of cultural and language challenges are uniquely experienced by these international teachers. The availability of appropriate instructional materials, developing new cultural proficiencies, and informal communication norms can all present unique challenges and barriers for international teachers (Amanti, 2019; Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019).

As with any beginning teacher, DL/I teachers reported a lack of sufficient classroom materials. The difference is DL/I teachers are often not given instructional materials in the language in which they teach. Many DL/I teachers were forced to translate English resources into the language in which they were teaching, and they often had to create original instructional materials (Amanti, 2019). DL/I teachers had less ready-made curriculum materials available to them than general education teachers. This extra work directly impacts their working conditions and often leads to DL/I beginning teachers leaving the profession (Amanti, 2019).

In addition to the typical challenges facing beginning teachers, dual language teachers from other countries must also be prepared to meet cultural proficiency challenges. Simply stated, they teach in classrooms with different cultures than their own, meaning that they commonly have to navigate different group norms and belief systems (Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019). For visiting teachers from other countries, these cultural nuances can be

an area of difficulty as they balance their native culture and the various ones in the United States (Quezada & Alexandrowicz, 2019)

Research states that international beginning teachers in the United States have often struggled with issues such as culture shock, logistics, unfamiliar structural and organizational arrangements, differing notions of assessment, communication gaps, and problems with teacher-student relations (Ospina & Medina, 2020). Bodycott and Walker (2000) wrote that these same international teachers face difficulties adapting to the new institution, but more so, adapting to a new country and their cultural differences. The cultural differences among these groups may consist of ethnic heritage, values, traditions, languages, history, sense of self, and racial attitudes (Brownlee, 2023). Moreover, international dual language/immersion (DLI) teachers often grapple with situational factors, including accommodations, financial concerns, emotional demands, loneliness, and homesickness. These issues typically lie outside the realms where they receive adequate support. (Ospina & Medina, 2020).

Additionally, intercultural issues such as both the linguistic and the paralinguistic (i.e., body language, gestures, facial expressions elements of the English language) are noted as very important in the process of communicating with the community in general (Byram et al., 2009). Differences in cultural nuances can lead to misunderstandings in the classroom or during interactions with individuals in the host community. Various elements such as unfamiliar accents, expressions, idioms, silences, spelling, and types of body language may pose challenges to the communication process (Ephratt, 2011; Mancini-Cross et al., 2009).

In additional studies, international teachers stated they had difficulty working with their students' parents. Based on cultural differences, some noted that parents did not respect them as educators and considered them not competent as their children's' teachers (Ephratt, 2011). When

these differing cultural groups misunderstand each other, there can be reactions that make the student to teacher, teacher to parent, and teacher to coworkers' partnerships ineffective (Brownlee, 2023). In order for relationships between international DL/I teachers and the districts they work for or parents they serve to be successful, there must be a multicultural collaboration. With effective multicultural collaboration focused around DL/I, the participants have a sense of common purpose which would be the successful education of students in dual language programs. Within this, they must consider that different cultural groups may have differing ideas and feelings about the structure, practice, and implementation. Using the commonalities from international DL/I teachers and US DL/I teachers can build this multicultural collaboration and help shape practices for DL pedagogies. (Anner, 1995; Brownlee, 2023).

LatCrit Theory

Due to the interpretive nature of this research about the experiences of international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers, participant responses will be examined through the theoretical lenses of the LatCrit theory. A LatCrit theoretical framework in this study considers the intersectionality of race and other issues such as culture and language that Spanish-speaking international DL/I teachers negotiate in their educational careers in North Carolina. The LatCrit framework of this study informed the decision to use semi-structured one-on-one interviews with first-year DL/I teachers whose primary language is Spanish as the primary data source for this study.

As described in Chapter 1, LatCit theory was developed by a small group of committed scholars who agreed to invest their time and research in a new project to produce critical socio-legal knowledge that would initially center on the diverse conditions and experiences of Latinas and Latinos in the United States. Derived from Critical Race Theory, this theoretical framework

explores distinctive aspects of the Latinx community, including immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. These elements form a fundamental basis for the study. (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Huber 2010; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Using the LatCrit Theory allows the researcher to better share the experiences of international Latinx teachers through a focused examination of the unique experiences this group encounters related to cultural differences in the United States (Huber, L.P., 2010; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Four functions were used with the praxis of the LatCrit theory and shaped the research in this dissertation: (a) the production of knowledge; (b) the advancement of social transformation; (c) the expansion and connection of anti-subordination struggles; and (d) the cultivation of community and coalition, both within and beyond the confines of legal academia in the United States also shown in the diagram below (Valdes, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates the four functions of LatCrit Theory.

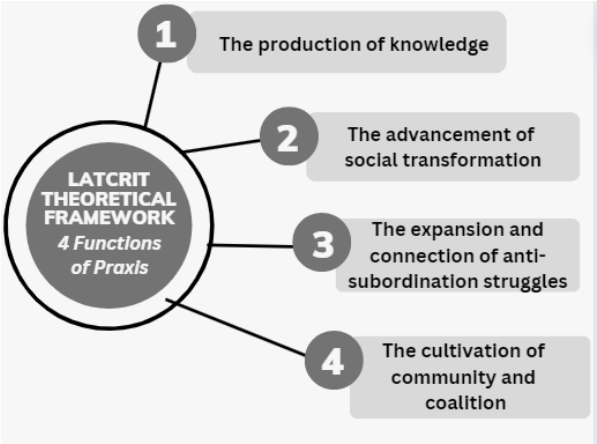

Figure 1

Four Functions of LatCrit Theory

Note: Adapted from Valdes, 2005

Summary

The shortage of bilingual educators in North Carolina, combined with increased interest in dual language programs, has heightened North Carolina's dependency on international teachers. As such, it is imperative that these teachers receive the support needed to be successful in the state's classrooms. The recruitment and retention of these international teachers is integral to being able to offer sufficient DL/I programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

This chapter examined contextual information about dual language programming and the research on sociocultural challenges international teachers experience within their placements in the United States. Generalized literature focus on beginning teachers within the United States is numerous, including challenges these teachers face and recommendations to improve beginning teacher attrition. However, specific research focused on first-year international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina is scarce. Those focusing specifically on cultural implications are even fewer.

While comparative data reveal that native beginning teachers and international beginning teachers often experience similar challenges, international dual language teachers face unique circumstances that make their transition into U.S. classrooms more daunting. Even as they transition to a new country and new socio-political norms, these international teachers often have not had the experiences or training to address the needs of students with diverse abilities, social constraints, and social-emotional needs. Focusing on the barriers first-year international teachers face in North Carolina relative to cultural differences will help district and school leaders implement processes to mediate these differences and retain and empower these teachers in the classroom.

The following chapter outlined the methodology that was employed to examine the lived experiences of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers in North Carolina classrooms.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction with Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of first-year international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina. The research focused on the barriers these teachers face in North Carolina relative to cultural differences. The desired outcome of this study was to expand the body of literature regarding the barriers facing international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers with the hope of helping district and school leaders implement processes to mediate these differences and retain these teachers in the classroom.

Chapter One introduced the scope and purpose of this research, while Chapter 2 summarized significant scholarly literature and contextual theories that would be utilized to interpret the findings of the study. This chapter outlined the methodological practices that were used to address the key research questions that guided the investigation and led to the interpretation of findings.

As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, DL/I programs are the fastest-growing educational programs throughout the United States and specifically in North Carolina (Baldwin, 2021; NC Department of Public Instruction (n.d.). As shown in previous chapters, research has been done on academic advancement among students in DL/I programs (Esposito, 2020; Hindin,2021; Lindholm-Leary, & Block, 2010; Steele, 2017), sustaining dual language programs (Ayscue, & Uzzell, , 2022; Valentino, R. A., & Reardon, S. F., 2015), and equity among dual language participants (Dorner, & Cervantes-Soon, 2020; Lindholm-Leary, 2012), However, little research has been conducted on the perceptions and experiences of first-year, international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers as it relates to cultural differences. As stated in Chapter 2, when differing cultural groups misunderstand each other there can be reactions that make the partnerships ineffective (Brownlee, 2023). In order for relationships between International DL/I teachers and

the districts they work for or parents they serve to be successful, there must be a multicultural collaboration as addressed within the LatCrit theory. This study intended to add to current research and inform future training needs and implications for professional practice.

The following research questions guided this study:

1) What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the challenges they face in their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

2) What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the support they receive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

3) To what extent do cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

Epistemology and Research Methodology

The constructivist paradigm, as the basis for this study, maintains that knowledge is socially constructed through an active research process with a researcher engaging in a personal and interactive mode of data collection (Mertens, 2015). The lived experiences of the participants, captured as data via personal interviews, were analyzed and allowed for an understanding of their distinct points of view within the scope of the research. The study looked to analyze the lived experiences of international, Spanish-speaking, DL/I teachers in their first year of teaching in North Carolina. This study aligned with the social constructivist epistemology based on the researcher's goal to explore complex views and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism also seeks to discover participants' views of their experiences in relation to both historical experiences and social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the approach matched the researcher's focus on cultural experiences as it related to

teaching in the United States. Moreover, social constructivism suggests that individuals strive to achieve a deeper comprehension of their living and working environment. Through this cognitive process, they construct subjective meanings of their experiences, offering researchers the chance to delve into more intricate views and perspectives, in contrast to the limited categorization found in alternative epistemologies.

The methodology employed in this study follows a basic interpretive qualitative approach. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research aims to comprehensively grasp how participants (a) engage with their experiences, (b) shape their perception of the world, and (c) ascribe meaning to those experiences. This type of research is prevalent due to the inherent human inclination to derive meaning from personal experiences and the surrounding world. The chosen basic interpretive qualitative methodology is aligned with the social constructivist epistemology guiding the proposed study. In addition, a basic interpretive qualitative approach allows the researcher a better understanding of the lived experiences of international DL/I teachers and how they construct, interpret, and make meaning from those experiences as it relates to barriers based on cultural differences. To gain rich descriptions of the phenomena under investigation, the researcher follows a highly inductive method of data collection and analysis (Saldaña, 2011). Additional information on coding and the thematic analysis process was discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Positionality Statement

I am the principal of an elementary Title I school (Kindergarten- 5th grade) that is located in a small, rural district in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The school is made up of roughly 23% Latino students and 70% White students. The district currently has one DL/I program with one class in grades K-2 at a neighboring elementary school.

I grew up in a neighboring district and attended school in the district where my children currently attend. I was a teacher for eight years in various districts across the state of North Carolina. I eventually became a curriculum coach after receiving my Master's degree in Reading and Literacy. After two years and completion of my certification in school administration, I became an assistant principal in various settings within two districts. I served at a low-performing urban elementary school, a rural high school, and a rural elementary school in my previous district. I was responsible for assisting in the startup of a new DL/I program while serving as assistant principal at the rural elementary school. Within this capacity I had the opportunity to visit DL/I programs across the state of North Carolina and South Carolina. While doing so I spoke with many international teachers who led these programs. I also assisted in hiring international Spanish-speaking teachers using Participate Learning, and I assisted them in their transition to the United States.

Based on my previous research and experiences with DL/I programs, my family and I made the decision to enroll my son in the new kindergarten DL/I program at the school I served. Since then, my now 4th-grade son has attended three schools that implement DL/I programs, and my 2nd-grade daughter has attended one school that implements a 90/10 DL/I model.

These experiences with DL/I program and hiring teachers through international placement agencies such as Participate Learning have led me to pursue a greater understanding of the lived experiences of these international teachers in Spanish DL/I programs. Specifically, I explored how cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina.

Given my professional experiences as an administrator who has hired and worked with first-year international Spanish-speaking teachers and my personal experiences as a parent of

children in DL/I programs, I chose to examine elementary Spanish DL/I programs and their first-year teachers. This interest was further bolstered by the possibility that my current district may expand the use of Spanish DL/I programs. Through this qualitative research study, I investigated the cultural barriers that impact international first-year DL/I teachers within Spanish programs.

I hope that the findings inform current and future training needs for school districts implementing DL/I programs. Additionally, I hope that the findings help garner support for hiring and retaining Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers.

Professionally, my positionality allowed me the advantage of observing DL/I programs while allowing easy access to first-year international teachers. In addition, having worked with Participate Learning to hire international teachers, I had background knowledge of the processes used by both the hiring agency as well as the international applicants (teachers).

In addition, having my own children in Spanish DL/I programs allowed me to see not only the data collected but also the instruction and interactions with students and families from international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers. With both of my children having international teachers from various Latino countries teaching them culture and customs, as well as my own personal hiring of staff from different countries, I had awareness of differences of culture even among Spanish-speaking countries.

My positionality also had aspects that warranted discussion. Specifically, my previous involvement in the implementation of DL/I programs lent itself to potential bias related to each portion of the study. In addition, seeing the positive effects of the DL/I program my children were enrolled in and the positive relationships they had with their international teachers could sway the results of the study. Additionally, I am a White, American woman who conducted research on the perceptions of Spanish-speaking, international teachers. Therefore, awareness of

potential assumptions based on my current and past experiences needed to be recognized. A continued focus on the social constructivist epistemology and the fact that truth and meaning are constructed in different ways was maintained.

Another layer of my positionality worthy of consideration and mitigation was my current role as a principal conducting a study with teacher participants. Specifically, participants may have been hesitant to share authentic feedback for fear of judgment or confidentiality. Also, not being an international educator myself, participants may have found it challenging to relate to me as the researcher. To mitigate these potential issues, I established an environment of trust before, during, and after each interview by adhering to confidentiality, explaining the process, engaging in open dialogue, seeking clarification from participants, and encouraging them to do the same, defining key terms, and providing time for debriefing.

To minimize and monitor bias, I conducted member checking and provided the interview transcription to each participant to allow for an opportunity to clarify and review the information they shared with me. I addressed my perspective and potential biases in this research by integrating peer debrief sessions with my dissertation chair, an experienced researcher in this specific field. Scheduled sessions occurred consistently throughout the dissertation process to navigate my perspective and potential bias. Additionally, I sought guidance from the qualitative methods specialist on my committee to ensure methodological fidelity and minimize potential biases arising from my perspective or positionality.

Protection of Human Subjects

The consideration of ethics within qualitative research requires a critical level of awareness and attentiveness to procedural, transactional, relational, and sociopolitical elements (Ravitch et al., 2015). Mertens (2015) notes that ethics in research is an integral part of the planning

and implementation process. This consideration of ethics is also just as important in analyzing the results of the research.

Utilization of an institutional review board (IRB) in the approval process assures the protection of participants during each stage of the research study. Using an IRB is a required step in the research approval process through all major institutions within the United States (Mertens, 2015). IRBs are founded on three principles: (a) beneficence, or maximizing benefit and minimizing risk; (b) respect, or treating people with courtesy; and (c) justice, or ensuring fair and reasonable procedures (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978).

Using the three IRB principles was a priority for the researcher in this study. Using feedback from the IRB process and dissertation committee guided the researcher in the safety and protection of all participants. The researcher provided all participants with a Consent to Participate Form (Appendix A) which included the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and an outline of the process for data collection and analysis. In addition, all participants were given a pseudonym, that they chose, throughout the research process to ensure confidentiality. All participant responses were recorded in a manner so as to not give away personally identifiable information. Due to participants working within school systems in North Carolina, the researcher shared no information about the participants with the participants' schools, school districts, or the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). In addition to these measures, participants' visa or work permit information was also kept confidential due to the sensitive nature of the information.

In order to maintain confidentiality and ensure a high level of security through the research, the researcher transcribed each interview and kept these transcripts in a secure location. The researcher and participant were the only individuals with access to the data collected and the subsequent analysis. Transcripts were sent to participants for review and further clarification before

analysis took place. The researcher shared study findings with participants upon conclusion of the study.

To ensure full compliance with the ethical and professional guidelines of UNC Charlotte, this study is in full compliance with the IRB review process. The researcher exercised care and caution with participants by providing written and verbal notification to support understanding of the voluntary nature of the study.

The study presented minimal risk to participants as it neither contained exposure to physical or psychological harm nor any type of experimental treatment. Extreme care was taken to ensure that every participant in the study understood the nature of the study and that participation in the study was completely voluntary. There were no penalties applied if any potential participant declined participation in the study. If any of the selected participants declined participation in the study once the interview session had begun, declined to answer certain questions during the course of the interview, or withdrew from the study completely, no penalties were given. All the conditions above were communicated to the participants at the start of their involvement in this study

To further protect confidentiality and any potential conflicts of interest, no information about any of the participants was communicated to their supervisors, school districts, or the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. All of the previous conditions were also communicated to every participant from the beginning of their involvement in the study.

Participant Sampling

Within qualitative research, it is important to determine which specific persons are appropriate for interviews and choose those most likely to provide substantive answers and responses to your inquiries (Saldaña, 2011). For this study, the researcher recruited participants through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is described as a technique widely used in

qualitative research for identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

In addition to knowledge and experience, participants chosen for the study must be available, willing to participate, and able to communicate experiences and opinions in a reflective manner (Glaser & Straus, 1967). With purposeful sampling, participants are purposefully chosen to participate in a study for specific reasons noted prior to the start of the study. Examples can be representatives of a certain culture or population of people (Mertens, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Following a purposeful sampling method allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants who are international, Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in elementary schools throughout North Carolina. In addition, each of the participants was a first-year teacher in the United States. Although the researcher used purposeful sampling, convenience sampling was also implemented due to the researcher's access to DL/I programs in her current district as well as the districts in which she had previously worked. In addition, since the researcher knew individuals employed by Participate Learning, a list of potential participants was obtained from that organization.

Various strategies were utilized in this study as it related to the purposeful aspect of the sampling involved. Drawing on the work of Patton (2015), homogeneous sampling, group characteristic sampling, and comparison-focused sampling were utilized in this study. Homogeneous sampling involves the use of clearly identifiable characteristics within an outlined sample population that differentiates the sample population from the broader available sample pool. In this study, the selection of DL/I teachers in K-5 elementary schools differentiated the

study group from the larger sample pool of general K–5 teachers. Homogeneous sampling was utilized to select only first-year international teachers because it provided a more balanced foundational base from which further comparisons were made and gave a more recent lived perception. In addition, further involving only Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers narrowed the cultural aspect of the research.

Another important consideration in the participant selection process was the sample size. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize, but rather to rigorously achieve deep and contextualized understandings of participants' perspectives in order to thoroughly answer the research questions. Therefore, the sample size is not as important in qualitative research. Saldaña, (2011) noted that within qualitative research, a small group of three to six people can provide a broad spectrum of data for analysis. Emphasis on the details of the setting and situation is a key descriptor in qualitative research. The goal is to obtain a rich description of the lived experiences as they relate to the focus of the research (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Using a smaller sample allows the researcher sufficient time to obtain more detailed information on participants' lived experiences and allows for additional interviews as needed.

The researcher in this study sought participants representing various cultural backgrounds, gender, race, and educational experiences prior to teaching in the United States. Using these expectations allowed the researcher to acquire a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina. The researcher for this study sought to involve five participants who fit the outlined criteria and represented various districts throughout North Carolina. In utilizing a smaller sample size, the researcher was able to transcribe by hand and identify themes using a personal coding system.

The researcher conducted initial recruitment by utilizing established administrative contacts in various districts throughout the state to see if current DL/I teachers fit the sampling criteria participant. If the response did not fit the researcher's targeted population, the researcher then reached out to an established contact from Participate Learning to help identify participants. After getting a list of possible participants, the researcher contacted the prospective participants via email with a detailed description of the research study. See Appendix B for the initial email contact with participants.

Once five participants were confirmed, the researcher sent a demographic survey (Appendix D) for participants to complete. This survey was designed to collect demographic information pertaining to current International Spanish-speaking beginning teachers who were currently teaching in North Carolina in a Dual Language classroom. Information was shared and completed using *Google Forms.* Data collected from this survey was used for dissertation research purposes only.

Following IRB approval, the researcher began scheduling *Zoom* interviews with each participant at a designated time that was convenient for the participants. Participants received an email to schedule an initial 30-to 60-minute interview based on available times outside of work hours. The option of a virtual interview was offered due to the geographic locations of participants. In addition, the use of *Zoom* allowed the participants to be comfortable and speak freely. Follow-up interviews were scheduled as needed following data analysis. Follow-up interviews were conducted virtually as well.

Data Collection Techniques

The collection of primary data was conducted using five semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the selected participants as noted in the Interview Protocol (Appendix C). These interviews took place in the summer following the participants' initial year of teaching in North Carolina. The initial interviews were done in English however, participants had the option of speaking English or Spanish while being recorded.

Interviews are the centerpiece of any qualitative study. They allow for the collection of contextualized and individualized data central to the pursuit of the research (Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M., 2016). Since the current study is guided by the LatCrit Theory and social constructivist epistemology, the researcher's use of semi-structured interviews aligns best with these constructs. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), the researcher has flexibility with question order, rewording of questions, and probing and follow-up questions. Best practice shows that interview protocol is used to guide semi-structured interviews, however the researcher may use flexibility to allow for a customized conversation that is co-constructed. The goal of these interviews is to help researchers explore how participants' perspectives and experiences may connect to other research on related topics, as well as the experiences of other participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

In addition, the researcher must recognize that interviews, like life, are subjective. Therefore, experiences and context play a role for the interviewer and participant alike. Interviews should not be considered neutral. The researcher must also acknowledge the levels and layers of influence, assumption, and bias that can and will infuse the larger whole (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure that research questions were answered thoughtfully and to allow for follow up questioning, each interview lasted roughly 30-60 minutes. In order to do this, the

researcher-built rapport with the interviewee and built mutual trust. Information concerning the role of the researcher as well as the interviewee was reviewed from the initial agreement document (Appendix A) including the voluntary nature of participation, the purpose of the study, and the opportunity to ask questions or withdraw at any time.

In addition, it was important to also review safety protocols to establish confidentiality of the study and participants responses. The researcher informed all participants that a passcode protected device would be used throughout the process to collect interview responses that would later be transcribed and coded by the researcher. Participants were provided with an opportunity following the interview to reflect on the interview and all subsequent pieces (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The participant would receive a copy of their responses to review for accuracy and to expand on if needed. It was the goal of the researcher that these steps would provide participants with a positive experience throughout the interview process. Interview Protocol document (Appendix C) was used and reviewed throughout the process.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed a general qualitative data analysis approach involving thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves investigating and determining similarities, differences, and relationships in collected data, with an end goal of developing themes to answer research questions.

In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that translates data and interprets meaning to each individual piece of the data. The goal is to look at pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes (Grbich, 2013, Saldaña, 2011, Vogt et. al, 2014,). Initially, precoding of the data is used to effectively organize the interview data. Precoding is a process in which a

researcher engages with collected data such as field notes, reflexive journal entries, and interview transcriptions via multiple readings and critical questioning prior to starting the coding process (Ravitch & Carol, 2021).

Upon completion of precoding, the researcher will begin the formal coding process. The researcher will follow open coding and axial coding procedures described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). In the initial or open coding phase, the researcher will code individual words, phrases, segments, and incidents of text to summarize the transcribed interview data (Mertens, 2020). As the researcher, it is important to keep the research questions, theoretical framework, goals of the study, and other major concerns out and available throughout the process to help keep continued focus and assist with making coding decisions (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, Saldaña, 2011).

Next, in the axial coding phase, the researcher will conduct pattern coding of the established codes from the open coding phase. This process involves moving from coding chunks of data to identifying patterns that can form coding categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Once this is completed, the researcher will complete the iterative coding process by analyzing the categories to develop themes aligned with the research questions. Ravitch and Carl (2021) argue that themes may reflect patterns, commonalities, and relationships found among the developed codes and categories.

Qualitative inquiry demands meticulous attention to language and images along with deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experiences. As a researcher, recoding can often occur with a more attuned perspective using first-cycle methods again, striving for the codes and categories to become more refined. By taking careful time to review each piece of data prior to coding, the researcher is provided with an opportunity to consider the theoretical framework, previous literature, and research questions to support accuracy and

alignment throughout the coding process. By coding a second or third time, the researcher is able to more clearly define and find patterns within the lived experiences (Saldaña, 2011). Ravitch and Carl (2021) argue that unstructured and uninterrupted readings provide researchers with a complete and holistic appreciation for the data. The additional time and focus can also allow the researcher to monitor personal bias as it relates to the collected data.

Analyzed data collected from the initial and second coding is displayed using a *Google Sheet* spreadsheet. Data was divided into color coded headings: a) Raw words/Phrases, b) Codes, c) Categories, and d) Themes. Participants' direct quotations were recorded and collected in a separate document to support accuracy and allow for quick review as needed.

Trustworthiness

As a qualitative study, it is imperative that the researcher conduct the research in a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results. In order to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must show that the data analysis has been completed in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner. This is shown through the recording, systematizing, and sharing of the method analysis to ensure credibility of the study (Nowell et al, 2017).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of (a) credibility, or the assumption of truth in the findings, (b) transferability, or the ability of the findings to apply broadly within the field, (c) dependability, or the consistency of findings whether they can be replicated, and (d) confirmability, or the level of neutrality of findings. Throughout the research collection and analysis, the researcher ensured trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba.

As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) peer debriefing was utilized throughout the process to provide an external check on the research process. Doing so increased credibility

and assisted in examining referential adequacy as a means to check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data (Nowell et al, 2017). The researcher engaged in ongoing debriefing with the dissertation chair and methodologist to consider trustworthiness, minimize researcher bias, and remain close to the data as possible.

Research conducted for this study will be used for the field of study and thus must model transferability. The researcher in this study ensured that descriptions are robust so that those who seek to transfer the findings can judge transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Nowell et al, 2017). The researcher intentionally immersed in the collected data throughout the study for an extended time. In addition to completing transcriptions of each interview, the researcher also conducted multiple readings of each transcript to ensure accuracy and provide additional details as applicable.

To further enhance trustworthiness, the researcher implemented member checking, or sharing interview transcriptions with participants for review. Following each interview, the transcript was sent to each participant. Each participant had the opportunity to check the transcript and offer any additional input. Member checking enhanced study credibility by allowing participants to view, confirm, and provide additional insight into their responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process supports the confirmability and neutrality of the findings by ensuring the accuracy of participant responses and providing feedback to assist the researcher with monitoring for researcher bias (Nowell et al., 2017).

Limitations

The researcher in this study made numerous strategic decisions to narrow the focus of the study, resulting in several limitations. The first limitation involved the strategic involvement of only first-year DL/I teachers within the state of North Carolina. This choice was made because of

the population's unique experiences and needs. The second limitation involved the purposeful study of only international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers. This choice was made due to the accessibility of participants as Spanish DL/I classrooms are the most prevalent within North Carolina, and the researcher had access to participants from this demographic. The third limitation, common to all qualitative studies, involved generalizability. The data gathered in this qualitative study only reflected the perspectives and insights of a limited number of beginning international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers within the state of North Carolina who were given the opportunity and chose to participate in the study. Also to be considered, although the participants in the study were not employed at my school and did not have an existing relationship with me, it was considered that the power dynamic of the supervisor-supervisee relationship influenced participant responses. Alongside this, participants might not have given full answers, especially as it related to race, due to the impression of "outsiderness." I must consider that participants may view themselves as "outsiders" and may not know what's appropriate to share about racism, might not know the racism nuances and how to talk about them in the US context, and that I am an outsider to their group. Finally, another limitation is that I did not examine participants' levels of acculturation to the United States or North Carolina specifically. There is the possibility of different results if the participants are at a different level of acculturation.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has described the research design and data analysis processes used to address the qualitative research questions of this study. These research questions related to the lived experiences of international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in their first year of teaching in North Carolina. The goal of this study was to give voice to DL/I

teachers' perceptions and experiences in North Carolina and recommend shifts in practice as they emerged from the study's findings. The outcome of the study also aimed to expand the body of literature regarding the barriers facing international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers as it relates to culture, with the intention of helping district and school leaders implement processes to mediate these differences. The researcher followed a basic, interpretive qualitative research model while conducting one-on-one semi-structured surveys with participants to assist with effectively answering the research questions through inductive coding and theme development.

Chapter Four provides a thorough description of the findings of the study through the Lat Crit Theoretical Framework lens. The demographics of the sample was described, and responses to each of the interview sessions and related interview questions were documented as transcribed from audio-recorded interview sessions. Chapter Five provides insightful references to each of the research questions as well as conclusions that were determined in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 includes recommendations and implications for professional practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

As noted in Chapter 3, little research has been conducted on the perceptions and experiences of first-year, international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers as it relates to cultural differences. The researcher's goal was to describe and understand the perceptions of five Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers who completed their first year of teaching in North Carolina to gain an understanding of cultural barriers they may have experienced. The researcher focused on three research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the challenges they faced in their first year of teaching in North Carolina?
2. What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the support they received during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?
3. To what extent do cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceived during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

This chapter presents the demographic survey findings for each participant and their current school district. In addition, information on their country of origin and current teaching location within the state of North Carolina are included. The researcher also includes an explanation of the codes and categories established in the analysis of participant interview transcripts.

The researcher used pseudonyms for the five study participants to provide anonymity and maintain confidentiality. The demographic survey data describe each participant and additional information beneficial to the study. While interviewing each of the five participants using the

semi-structured interview questions, the researcher used transcription services through the *Zoom* platform to transcribe each interview. The researcher then read them for precision and clarity and made any changes from the saved audio to the initial transcription. Given the participants' language and regional dialects, this process was time consuming and resulted in multiple rounds of listening to the audio and adjusting the transcriptions.

During the second reading of each transcript, the researcher extracted data chunks, or meaningful phrases and sentences from the transcripts. Once the list of data chunks had been extracted onto a *Google* spreadsheet, a corresponding code was created. This iterative, analytical process was repeated for each participant, using the codes created from each participant's responses. At the completion of this first round of coding, the researcher synthesized each code into groups and then labeled them using a larger category name. The researcher then took the analyzed categories of codes and data chunks to build themes to describe the findings.

Each of the five individual case studies includes a description of the participant's age range, home country, years of teaching experience, and number of years living in the United States/North Carolina. In addition, a narrative of their experiences and perceptions of cultural barriers during participants' time in North Carolina schools is included. The data set from each of the five participants was then used for comparison, giving rise to themes that corresponded to each of the research questions. These themes are described following each participant's narrative.

Recruitment of Participants

The researcher used purposeful sampling coupled with convenience sampling for the recruitment of participants. Purposeful sampling is described as a technique widely used in qualitative research for identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark,

2011). Given the nature of the study, it was important to identify international, Spanish-speaking, DL/I teachers in elementary schools throughout North Carolina. In addition, each participant had to meet the criteria to be accurately labeled as a first-year teacher in the United States from their respective school districts. Social media platforms such as *X* (formally Twitter) and *Facebook* were used to recruit participants using the purposeful sampling model. Figure 1 shows the social media posting that was used for recruitment.

SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Are you a first year Spanish DL/I teacher in NC? I am looking for candidates to participate in a study through UNC-Charlotte on your cultural experiences. A $10 Amazon gift card will be given for participation! Send a direct message to see if you qualify for this study!

Figure 2

Social Media Post

In addition to purposeful sampling, convenience sampling was also used because the researcher had familiarity with several DL/I programs and teachers based on her current and previous work assignments. In addition, one participant was directed to the researcher as a prospective participant due to working in the same school as another participant. All potential participants identified from the social media post or from other participants were sent an initial email, located in Appendix B, and completed the *Consent to Participate* form located in Appendix A.

Demographic Survey Results

Upon receiving initial communication from potential participants, a demographic survey (utilized as a recruitment survey) was sent to the six potential participants who replied to the

social media post. This survey can be found in Appendix D. The demographic survey, sent as a *Google* form, consisted of eight required questions. This survey was designed to collect demographic information pertaining to international Spanish-speaking beginning teachers who are currently teaching in North Carolina in a DL/I classroom.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the demographic survey frequencies per required question. The recruitment survey's demographic snapshot indicates a predominantly 25-34 age group. All five respondents began teaching in North Carolina during the 2022-2023 school year, which made them appropriate candidates for the target of this research. Research participants showed a gender split of one man and four women, with education levels spanning three bachelor's and two master's degrees. Respondents were born in Spain, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico and predominantly speak Spanish at home. Teaching experience ranged from four to 10 years in their home country, and one respondent has international teaching exposure in the U.K. and Finland.

Table 2

Frequencies of the Recruitment Survey Questions (N=5)

		Frequency
1.What is your current age?	25-34	4
	45-54	1
2.When was your first-year teaching in the United States/NC?	2022-2023	5

Table 2

Frequencies of the Recruitment Survey Questions (N=5) Continued

3.Which gender do you identify most with?	Male	1
	Female	4
4.What is your highest level of education?	Bachelor's	3
	Master’s	2
5.What is your country of birth?	Spain	1
	Colombia	2
	Chile	1
	Mexico	1
6.What is the primary language spoken in your home?	Spanish	5
7.How many years have you taught in your home country/country of origin?		
	4 years	2
	6 years	2
	10 years	1
8.What other countries have you taught besides your home country?	UK/Finland	1

Participants

In the current study, all participants signed an informed consent form as approved by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte IRB process, which is listed as Appendix A. This gave the researcher permission to continue scheduling interviews with each of the chosen participants for the study. To ensure full compliance with ethical and professional guidelines of UNC Charlotte, this study was in full compliance with the IRB review process. The researcher exercised care and caution to participants by providing written and verbal notification to support understanding of the voluntary nature of the study.

Table 3 provides descriptive data on the five study participants based on the demographic survey that was completed by each participant. A pseudonym is used for each participant in order to keep confidentiality of each of the participants.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants fall within the 25-34 age group, comprising four respondents, while one respondent belongs to the 45-54 age range. There was slight gender diversity among participants, with one male and four female respondents. Education levels varied, with three respondents holding a bachelor's degree and two having attained a master's degree. The respondents' countries of birth included Spain, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico. Spanish emerged as the predominant language spoken in participants' homes, with all five indicating it as their primary language. In terms of teaching experience, the survey shows a mix, with respondents having taught for four, six, and 10 years in their home country or country of origin. Additionally, one respondent has co- taught in the U.K. and Finland, showcasing international teaching experience within the surveyed group.

Table 3
Demographic Survey Results

Participant	When was your first-year teaching in the United States/NC?	What is your current age	Which gender do you identify most with	What is your highest level of education?	What is your country of birth?
Carmen	22-23	25-34	F	Bachelor's Degree	Colombia
Juan	22-23	45-54	M	Master's Degree	Spain
Lily	2022	45-54	F	Specialty Degree (Post Master's)	Chile
Maria	22-23	25-34	F	Master's Degree	Colombia
Camila	22-23	25-34	F	Bachelor's Degree	Mexico

Demographic Survey Results

What is the primary language spoken in your home?	How many years have you taught in your home country/country of origin?	Any other countries you have taught in
Spanish	4	None
Spanish	6	Finland & UK (TA)
Spanish	22	No
Spanish	6	None
Spanish	4	None

Within qualitative research it is important to determine which specific persons are appropriate for interviews and choose those most likely to provide substantive answers and responses to your inquiries (Saldaña, 2011). Based on survey data, five participants were confirmed, and the researcher scheduled *Zoom* interviews at a time that did not interfere with school hours or outside commitments. Participants selected a day and time to commit to 60-minute interviews. Follow-up interviews were a possibility. However, none were needed based on adequate participant responses to the research questions.

Codes and Categories

As stated in Chapter 3, the researcher implemented a general qualitative data analysis approach involving thematic analysis for this study. Thematic analysis involves investigating and determining similarities, differences, and relationships in collected data, with the goal of developing themes to answer research questions. Ravitch and Carl (2021) described thematic analysis as an investigation where the researcher determines similarities, differences, and relationships within the collected data.

Initially, the researcher utilized precoding of the data to effectively organize the interview data. The researcher engaged with collected data from the participants, including demographic data and the interview transcriptions via multiple readings and critical questioning prior to starting the coding process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Upon completion of precoding, the researcher began the formal coding process. The researcher followed open coding and axial coding procedures described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). In the initial or open coding phase, the researcher coded individual words, phrases, segments, and incidents of text to summarize the transcribed interview data (Mertens, 2020).

Next, in the axial coding phase, the researcher created pattern coding of the established codes from the open coding phase. This process involved moving coded chunks of data to identifying patterns that can form coding categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). When this was completed, an iterative coding process was conducted by analyzing the categories to develop themes aligned with the research questions. This round of coding allowed the researcher to more clearly define and find patterns within the lived experiences (Saldaña, 2011). The researcher used the program *NVivo* (Lumivero, 2023.) to input analyzed data collected from the initial and second coding of the interviews. A sample of the original analyzed data can be found in Appendix E. That data was then divided into more specific headings: a) Raw words/Phrases, b) Codes, c) Categories, and d) Themes and inputted into a *Google Spreadsheet.*

In the following section, the research provides descriptions of the interviews with each participant. These are followed by a section which describes the common themes that emerged. These themes are aligned with the study's research questions.

Participant 1: Carmen

The semi-structured interview with Carmen was held in August 2023 via the *Zoom* platform. The participant had already completed the demographic survey and all consent forms were completed and uploaded. Carmen logged on from home to complete the initial interview and consented to recording for audio. She is a female between the ages of 25 and 34 who has a bachelor's degree from a university in her home country.

At the time of the interview, Carmen had been teaching at a public school in North Carolina for approximately one year. Her current placement is in a rural school of roughly 353 students in the south-central region (Piedmont) of North Carolina. The school serves students in Pre-K through fifth grade and has both traditional classrooms as well as one DL/I classroom per

grade level. This teacher taught in a third-grade classroom serving DL/I students using a 90/10 classroom model during the 2022-23 school year, which is the timeframe of the study.

Carmen is from Colombia and according to her, "I'm from Colombia, and it is perfect. It is almost perfect!" She has been in the United States since July of 2022 and has taught in the United States since August 29, 2022. She previously came to the United States as an au pair in 2015 and lived in New York for two years with her husband as he worked. She stated, "That experience just expanded my mind and my vision of the world." This was the first step in her considering teaching in another country. She noted that she misses the fruit in Colombia, specifically having fruit close by all the time. She stated, "We have lots of fruits, like right there in the trees, at the houses." Food in general is something that she missed from home.

Carmen taught in her home country of Colombia for four years prior to coming to the United States. School is structured differently in Colombia, and Carmen explained that she taught English to students around the ages of 7-10 years old. However, she did not initially see herself as a teacher. She stated, "It was actually like in my head, I was back and forth on what to do with my life." She went on to talk about a teacher she had that made a difference for her when she was in the 11th grade in Colombia. She said, "And I was like, it might be a good idea, so I started doing it and I like it." Languages had always been an interest of hers, so teaching English was a natural fit. She shared, "All of these rewarding experiences and nice feelings, like helping kids know something else beyond what they have expected before, is something big."

The idea of teaching internationally arose when she spoke to her supervisor at the school she was teaching at in Colombia. She said, "My boss actually told me, look, there is this opportunity if you want to learn more about it." She stated that this was through an agency called EPI, but she ended up working with Participate Learning. She came to her current school

through a partnership with Participate Learning following an online interview for the position. She and her husband came together to North Carolina in 2022, although she is the only one currently teaching.

After informal conversation designed to get to know Carmen better, we began the participant interview questions. We started by looking at the successes and challenges she faced in her first year as a DL/I teacher in her district. Carmen stated, "One of the bigger challenges and accomplishments was the fact of coming here and adapting in every sense in my life." She went on to talk about not just navigating a new educational system, but also personal responsibilities and needs like housing and transportation. "Basically, I was feeling very alone", she explained. "My husband was not here with me yet so I had to do it myself".

Carmen then discussed the challenge of navigating the American school system. Specifically, she noted the confusion she felt from trying to decode acronyms that are often used in the school setting, "So like all these letters, it's like why don't you say the complete name?" She compared it to her schools in Colombia, "I guess that it seems kind of like small, but when you start a meeting or something and they just start talking and saying all these letters and you're like, what's this?" This frequent use of educational acronyms was unfamiliar and frustrating.

When asked about the support she received from the school district upon her arrival, she opened up about how overwhelming the process was. She noted, "It is shocking because I guess it was Friday, and they're like okay, then you start signing papers." She went on to explain that they were expected to immediately begin signing all of the paperwork. She said, "Like I was not expecting that, which I mean is not like a bad thing, but it was like, I thought that it was gonna be a little bit more like, slower and nicer." She went on to explain "We were on that bus for like

four or five hours, so we were exhausted and I was super hungry." She also noted that officials in the district office did not adequately understand international programs or hiring. For example, she said that when she asked what to do about filling in a blank space for a social security number on the forms, the person helping from the district office stated they did not know and that she better apply for one. She noted, "So maybe I guess because it's kind of new in this county, like they are still finding out about these things." By contrast, she noted that once she was introduced to the principal at her school, she was very helpful in assisting with household items through a local Christian ministry.

The researcher asked specifically about the support Carmen received from *Participate,* the company that facilitated her current employment. She stated, "The agency has this local advisor who is a person who has already been here for a couple of years and she can show you more and help you more with what you need." She explained that her local advisor is from Columbia and speaks Spanish. When talking about her advisor, she stated, "It was very nice, we were in touch a couple of months before I arrived here so she was preparing me. That part was good, but it was mostly because of the agency, not because of [district name]." Carmen added that the advisor helped with housing by allowing her to stay in the advisor's home until she was able to find a house to rent with her husband. When speaking of the house, she commented, "Yeah, it is kind of very rural, like you cannot find a lot of houses near it [the school]".

The conversation turned to questions about her regional placement and if she was provided any training or resources to prepare her for the area in which she would be teaching. She noted that the principal helped with furnishings and her advisor helped with housing. Despite having a great team of teachers that will answer her questions, she commented, "mostly like it was by ourselves, we were by ourselves". When asked about her knowledge or experience

with North Carolina before arriving in the state, she said, “The only thing here in the United States was New York and it's very different”. She continued by explaining the language differences in North Carolina. She said, “Like yeah, the way you talk, like I mean my English is not perfect (…) when I got here and they started talking so fast, I was like whoa this is crazy!” Carmen went on to state that she was not given any specific training on American traditions or American customs prior to coming to North Carolina. However, she did have to take courses through Participate “before you can even apply for the visa.” She went on to say, “Not specifically like the traditions, but they just point out some differences between our culture and your culture here.”

One thing that stood out and was mentioned by other participants in the study was public transportation. Carmen noted, “The fact that you need a car because the public transportation here is not easy.” Carmen was concerned about the need for transportation since her rural school was located so far away from where she would be living.

We closed the interview by circling back to the purpose of the research and looking at the cultural barriers that she has experienced in North Carolina. When asked about the specific cultural differences, she noted celebrations and holidays. She stated, “I miss our holidays. We have a lot of holidays, more than you do here, we have like 20 holidays a year!”

She quickly went into discussing people in the region of North Carolina that she interacts with. “Like you guys are very nice, but sometimes I don't know if that's real or not, you know what I mean?” When asked to explain a little more she added, “Like, you're very nice, but it's not like being nice for real”. She continued, “For example, that was something that I was taught in the university, it's like when you ask, Hi, how are you? It's not like you actually mean to ask how I am.” She explained that she would not feel comfortable telling someone how she really felt.

She said, “That’s why I wouldn't feel the way, like to say I am not okay, like I'm sad or I am going through this, or this is very hard (…) you say it without meaning.”

She compared this dynamic to her workplace in Colombia, “I think that that was one big difference, usually when you get to your workplace there in Colombia, people are more concerned about actually getting to know you.” She went on to say, “If they see you, I don't know, if you change or if your face is [different] today they notice. Mostly they notice it and they're like, hey are you okay, like you really know that they mean it.”

She described Americans as impersonal, and the way Americans talk is very “forward” and at times seems “un-nice.” She explained further:

> When I got here at the very beginning I was like, whoa maybe somebody's mad at me…. I thought, did I do something wrong or something? The way people here talk, it was one of the shocking things that I was like, oh, it's very different.

Participant 2: Juan

Juan was interviewed in September of 2023 via the *Zoom* platform. The participant had already completed the demographic survey and all consent forms were completed and uploaded. He identifies as a male and is between the ages of 45-54. He holds a bachelor’s degree from his home country and studied for his master’s degree in the United States through sponsorship in 2012 and stayed until completion in 2014. This participant is unique in the study because he previously served as a co-teacher in both Finland and the United Kingdom.

Juan logged on from home to complete the initial interview and consented to recording for audio. Due to the language barrier and dialect of the Spanish used, the *Zoom* transcription was inaccurate and the researcher had to review audio multiple times for correct interpretation.

Juan often would speak a word or phrase in Spanish and then repeat the same word or phrase in English.

When the interview took place, Juan had been teaching at a public school in North Carolina for approximately one year. His current placement mirrors Participant 1, Carmen, as it is a rural school of roughly 353 students in the south-central region (Piedmont) of North Carolina. The school serves Pre-K through fifth grade and has both traditional classrooms as well as one DL/I classroom per grade level. This teacher taught in a kindergarten classroom serving DL/I students using a 90/10 classroom model during the 2022-23 school year, which is the timeframe of the study. He is currently teaching fourth grade at the same school at the time of the interview.

When asked about his home country, Juan stated he is from a small town outside of Madrid in the southern region. He stated, "I like it there, even though I prefer it, I really like going to other places (…) get to know other cultures." He went on to say, "My life is pretty normal there." He started off noting the differences in transportation, stating "That's like a difference, it is like 10-minute walking [to places], but like here, you need a car for everything." He continued, "But back at my school I go walking." He spoke of his life in Spain as a "quiet life" in which he enjoyed spending time with friends, enjoying clubs [sports], and family.

Juan does not have family in the United States. He stated, "Everybody, my family is in Madrid in Pabla, so yeah, it is just me." He described how being apart from family in a foreign country creates a sense of homesickness for him and his mother. He said:

> I am really close to my mom for instance, I mean I talk to her like every week. I mean, I am ok here. I can talk to her and that is ok, you know, I guess for mothers it is a little bit different.

The conversation turned to his experiences prior to becoming a teacher. He stated, "Yes, I was a programmer [computer] for 10 years, and one day I decided to change my life, do something more meaningful in my life, and I thought what can I do best?" He eventually pursued his love of teaching and learning and decided to study education and philosophy. He shared, "I went to the United States 10 years ago studying education and philosophy because I got a scholarship." He explained that when he arrived back in Spain to get his job, he took his public examination, "It is different there than here, you have to take a public examination (…) and then you will have a job for your life."

It is important to note the differences in his experiences teaching in Spain than in the United States. He said that before he was assigned to a specific school in Spain, he traveled from one school to another each year. He said, "Like every year I change schools, I really like that. I like changing schools because I get to know a lot of people." He described himself as a continual learner who enjoys the challenges of new professional experiences. He said, "To learn how they are in different places, some nice places, some are not that nice, all of that. You learn from everybody, even the darkest times you can learn." He has taught in all grade levels, from what the United States commonly has as kindergarten to sixth grade, as that is what primary schooling looks like in Spain.

Juan acknowledged that his time as a graduate student in the United States 10 years ago was not the same as his current time here teaching. He stated, "I arrived one year and one month ago, last year I guess, even though I arrived here 10 years ago to study, now it is unique, I am working here." We moved to the questions directly relating to the research questions as the conversation was already swaying heavily toward differences within the cultural experience in Spain and in the United States.

Juan became noticeably uncomfortable when asked about his accomplishments during his first year of teaching DL/I in North Carolina. There were frequent, nervous laughs when he responded, and at one point he asked the researcher if she wanted him to be honest. The researcher encouraged him to be forthright and reminded him that he would not be identified in the study.

Juan stated he had a very difficult year last year. He explained, "I was a teacher with another teacher, a teacher who had been here four years." He continued, "She wanted to be with someone else, she wanted to be with the other girl [who arrived with him], and the principal told her she was supposed to be with me." From that point forward, he felt that they did not have a good relationship. He went on to explain that the teacher he was assigned to work with and the other new DL/I teacher were both Colombian, and he felt that had something to do with both of them wanting to be together. "I tried to learn but she didn't want me to be there," he added. That was hard for him, and he noted that his biggest accomplishment was surviving the year. He felt that the first year was almost a waste of his time. He went on to talk about the learning opportunities that were lost, maybe just due to him not being from the same country as the teachers the school typically chooses.

He later described his concerns with his placement, reflecting on challenges related to his hiring process and the composition of his teaching team. He suggested that his hiring may have been a mistake, attributing it to the sudden departure of a teacher from Colombia a few weeks before the school year started. Due to the urgency of finding a replacement, Juan believes he was hired as there were no available candidates from Colombia at that time.

He shared the demographics of his current teaching team. "There are five teachers, three are from Colombia, one is from Costa Rica, then me from Spain." He shared his observations of

a possible preference for Colombian teachers, noting that the majority of the DL/I teachers in his school are from Colombia. He noted that his principal "comes from another school who has everybody from Colombia (…). Maybe she wants to do the same here." Juan expressed uncertainty about whether this hiring pattern will continue as the school needs to hire three more DL/I teachers in the upcoming year.

He noted that one of the biggest challenges, other than working with his co-teacher, was learning to speak Spanish all the time. Officials want him to speak Spanish exclusively in the DL/I program at the school where he is placed, He noted that this expectation was especially hard, particularly because he was with kindergarten students last year. He explained, "For instance, when they are crying or something like that and they do not understand anything, I cannot speak Spanish, I have to speak English. I have to speak English because I want them to realize I do care for them."

Juan also noted his concern about the cultural differences in physical interactions between teachers and students in Spain and the United States. He mentioned that in Spain, teachers are more accustomed to hugging and having closer relationships with students. However, in the U.S, he has been advised to be cautious and avoid getting too close, such as hugging or touching the kids. This was something that Participate Learning shared with their international teachers.

He spoke about Participate Learning, the company that brought him to North Carolina. "Here in North Carolina we are received by Participate Learning, I don't know if you know them, the welcoming was great!" He went on to explain, "I mean there were people in the airport waiting for us. It doesn't matter the time you arrive, they are waiting." He was excited about the transportation and the activities they provided while waiting to travel to the new

school district. When talking about traveling to the school district where he was placed, he said, “It was almost the same, you have people waiting for us, showing us the city, and helping us with all of the things we had to do.”

He then described how helpful school personnel were when he arrived. He noted, “When we first went to the school it was amazing because everyone was trying to help you out and it was great.” He described that items were purchased for him to stock his new home, such as a washer and dryer. He explained, “In Spain we do not have dryers because it is so sunny, it is not humid, it is very dry so in two or three hours the clothes are dry”. This was something he did not anticipate needing, but was provided for him based on being in North Carolina.

Juan expressed his appreciation for certain aspects of American culture. He preferred the American dining schedule, where lunch is around noon and dinner is in the early evening. “In Spain, we eat at 3 p.m. lunch, not dinner, it’s kind of crazy because then you have to have dinner, like at 10:00 p.m.!” However, he mentioned the challenge of finding healthy food options in the U.S., as many dishes are high in sugar and fat. He described his Spanish culture as including fresh produce and fish with each meal and noted how hard it is to find fresh fish in his current location.

Juan went on to share the positive difference he has noticed regarding the appreciation of teachers in North Carolina and the U.S. as compared to Spain. He noted that teachers in Spain are less valued and paid far below other professions. This is something he attributes to the positive interactions he has had with his students and their families in North Carolina.

The conversation shifted and went back to his team and the interactions between the various cultures. He emphasized that successful collaboration and relationships among teachers were not due to geographical or cultural backgrounds, but rather on the willingness to share and

engage. Juan used his positive relationship with a colleague from Costa Rica as an example, highlighting that despite differences in language and culture, they enjoyed spending time together, such as going out for dinner during the week. He stated, "I get we have differences, of course, even the language, the Spanish language in Spain is totally different from Colombia or Costa Rica, but nothing like that makes a difference". He went on to say, "You can share your culture, and then you will get richer and richer because you get to know something different."

Participant 3: Lily

Lily was interviewed from her home using the *Zoom* platform in September 2023. Lily had already completed the demographic survey and all consent forms were returned and uploaded. Lily is a female between the ages of 45-54 who is currently teaching in a large district located in the southernmost area of the Piedmont region of North Carolina, bordering South Carolina. She taught for 20 years in her home country prior to coming to North Carolina, and has a post-master's degree in education. She taught kindergarten in a DL/I classroom during the timeframe for this study.

Lily opened up the conversation and spoke about her home country of Chile. "It is a long place, geographically, we have a short time to get to the beaches and mountains," she said. The more she spoke about Chile the more excited she got, stating "I live in the big city Santiago, it is very different!" She went on to talk about the differences and why they had chosen to live in Santiago. "If you live in the north or the south it is beautiful, but you have no access to things you need in an emergency, like a hospital or medical facility." She compared the city of Santiago to New York City, busy with lots of things to do.

Lily has been teaching for 20 years, primarily in an international school in Chile, located in the city of Santiago. "My international School was different, students were all from different

places around the world," she said. She continued to explain how she strictly taught English during the 20 years she was there. She took a break from teaching when she lived in New York City for two years with her husband. She did not work during this time, but she remained active by helping others in the community. Lily has been in North Carolina for more than a year, and her decision to teach internationally stemmed from a desire for something different. In her home country, she felt that teaching offered limited opportunities for advancement unless one became a coordinator or director.

Despite being far from her family in Chile, Lily utilizes technology, such as *WhatsApp*, to stay in frequent contact with them. She acknowledged the challenges of being away from her aging parents but mentioned that they visit. "I talk to my family very frequently, but my father is 80 years old and it is hard knowing he may be in his last years and I am not there," she said. She went on to talk about an upcoming visit from her family in Chile, "It is an easy process now to get a visa in Chile, it is online and not hard to come and stay, my parents will come April through June, so it is hard, but not too hard knowing that."

Lily's family discouraged her from becoming a teacher. When asked about her entry into teaching, Lily revealed that her mother initially discouraged her from pursuing teaching due to the perceived lack of financial rewards. Her mother wanted her to become a lawyer or engineer. Lily remembered her mother telling her, "You are too smart and there is no pay." However, Lily found joy in helping children and decided to pursue teaching. She emphasized that it aligns with her passion. She went on to share, "My mom said to take her words back. She saw my passion and what I enjoyed, and I was accepted to University for teaching."

Regarding her experiences in the United States, Lily shared that she lived in New York City for two years but did not teach during that time. When sharing about the cultural

experiences, she related back to her dual language colleagues who all come from various Spanish-speaking countries. She said that she appreciates the cultural diversity of her colleagues at her current placement in North Carolina, noting differences in terminology and expressions, especially related to phrases used. Lily laughed about the linguistic challenges and cultural nuances, highlighting instances where she and her colleagues struggled to understand each other's words. She explains, “We have different words in Chile and use animal names a lot to describe things.” She laughed and gave the example, “If you have a good time you have a pig of a time! Sometimes we have to just talk in English so they understand me, it is funny!” She explained that sometimes it is challenging because she has to speak more “general educational Spanish” while at school than her traditional or cultural Spanish.

Moving on to challenges during her first year in the U.S, Lily downplayed the linguistic differences, describing them as funny rather than significant challenges. She even made a video with colleagues highlighting the humorous aspects of these differences. However, she does express feeling "dumb" at times due to unfamiliar acronyms and terminology used in the school setting. She stated, “In my country we say real words and do not use these things” when talking about the acronym PD meaning professional development in her school setting. Lily mentioned that the weekly newsletters sent by the school’s administrators were not helpful because they were heavy-laden with jargon and acronyms. She described a time when she went to her administrator about it: “At one time I told my administrator, please do not think I'm dumb, I went to University and have been teaching for many years!”

In terms of support upon her arrival in the district, Lily received assistance from her school advisor, who also worked for Participate Learning. She shared, “I had an advisor from my school that also is with the company who contacted me before coming.” The advisor, who was a

teacher at Lily 's school, provided guidance on housing, living arrangements, and paperwork all prior to coming to North Carolina. She laughed and shared, “She helped with what I needed for the house and living and things, she told me the best bargain and where to go for the best price!” Upon arriving in North Carolina, the school district, principal, and a parent involved in the school’s Parent-Teacher Organization also offered support, ensuring Lily had what she needed for her home and children who came with her.

Lily acknowledged that there were small items she did not realize she needed until she arrived, like kitchen utensils and bathroom curtains. She disclosed, “When I was in Chile before coming, I felt embarrassed sharing what I needed. “She explained that the principal and co-workers wanted to get her the things she needed, which is something she was not used to in Chile. “This was different for me,” she recalled. Despite initial embarrassment, she appreciated the encouragement to share her needs and the items that were given to her.

In terms of acclimating to the regional placement in North Carolina, Lily relied on her own research using the internet to learn about the larger surrounding cities and the state’s culture. She commented that “Participate makes courses you take to help with culture and knowing things about the state, but they are very small, did not have a lot.” She noted that the courses to help with cultural understanding were limited and did not provide enough information that was specific to where she was placed. The information pertained to the larger cities around the town where her school is located. This information made her falsely believe that her new home would be similar to New York City or her home in Santiago. In reality, her placement school is located in a rural area outside of a city. She noted, “New York City was like Santiago where my family is from (…) busy, busy, busy, and public transportation and many, many people. Based on what I saw on the internet the [town] was different when I arrived here.”

Lily reflected on cultural differences, noting that people in the U.S. are more open and friendlier than those in her home country. She also noted the “trusting” nature of the geographical area where she is placed. “Chile is very different then the way you are here, like [buying] ice you just take it at a shop. If you go to the cinema, you just walk into the movie, like you already pay and they just believe,” she said., She appreciates the kindness but also pointed out challenges, such as adapting to the American practice of saying "excuse me" after burping, which is not a custom in Chile. She stated, “In Chile we do not burp out loud, or burp at all, and we do not excuse it because it's not okay!” She laughed when talking about her students getting used to this practice in her classroom, saying, “They asked if we do not burp in Chile, of course it is an accident if we do!” She also noted that personal greetings in Chile are drastically different. She noted, “Something that happens in Chile is we kiss to greet each other. They [Participate] told us of course this is not acceptable here, you do a handshake!” She also mentioned the convenience of local markets, fresh produce, and outdoor parks which she did not have easy access to in her home country due to living in the “big city.” She explained that she would have to drive long distances to experience these things in her home country.

Despite these cultural differences, Lily felt welcomed by the district and appreciated the support from her team and the overall positive environment in North Carolina. She even compared her time in New York City to her placement here. “New York (…) I could not think about my kids going to New York to live,” she commented. She emphasized that her experience has been different but good, especially for her children, who find the U.S. to be both different and welcoming. She went on to share, “These things here [town] are very good and things I wish for my children [to have].”

Participant 4: Maria

Maria is a female who is between the ages of 25-34. She is currently teaching in a rural area of western North Carolina surrounded by mountains and a national forest. She was interviewed in September 2023 via the *Zoom* platform. She attended the interview virtually from a local community college where she was taking evening classes. Different from the previous participants, Maria is in North Carolina through the international teacher recruitment company Educational Partners International. She teaches in a school with a 90/10 model for the DL/I program and has one "standard" class and one DL/I class per grade level.

The interview with Maria offered a glimpse into her background as a teacher in Bogota, Colombia. When talking about Bogota, she became very excited and animated in her gestures and facial expressions. She shared, "I'm a city girl, I used to ride my bike through the city, it's very beautiful, it's very cultural, you have a lot of things to do there." She continued, "Every day you can just walk downtown and you will see graffiti, you can have some Chicha," which is a fermented drink they sell on the street. She explained, "You can get drunk, but you will have just a little bit of it and it has different flavors!" Through the eyes of Maria, Bogota is a busy city where you often visit neighbors and tour the city with lots of things to do.

Maria came to North Carolina by herself. She noted the differences in her home city and her current placement. She enjoys the mountains, and nature, and even hiking now that she is acclimated to this more rural environment. Her mother is someone she is close to and has a visa to visit her often from Colombia. She has one brother who lives in Florida, but she does not see him often.

Maria highlighted her initial aspirations and the unconventional path that led her to her current teaching placement. Maria initially desired to pursue a degree in psychology but rejected

the idea of working in an office due to her dynamic personality. “I really wanted to study something that every day could be different and not get tired of it,” she said. She recalled her teenage experiences helping a kindergarten child with homework and how as a child she would pretend to be a teacher. With encouragement from her mother, she considered teaching despite the comparatively lower pay in her home country of Colombia. Maria shared her teaching experiences in the six years she taught in Colombia, particularly in kindergarten and first grade, emphasizing her creative approach to education. She stated, “I'm a very creative teacher, I'm not an art teacher, but I like art, I like sensory and hands on!”

Maria expressed a strong desire to observe and understand the differences in educational contexts in Colombia and North Carolina. Having been accustomed to private schools in her home country, the transition to the public-school system in the United States has been overwhelming and somewhat shocking for her. Drawing on her experiences in both public and private schools in Colombia, Maria noted significant differences. She highlighted the rigorous testing and stricter environment in U.S. public schools compared to the more play-focused and less rigid approach in Colombian schools. “So, we focus more on if they can play and learn, so it's less strict with some of the testing in Colombia” she explained. She emphasized the importance of considering children's social interactions, a key aspect of her teaching philosophy in Columbia and the U.S.

The facilitation of Maria 's move by Educational Partners International was a mixed experience for her as the company was tasked with providing financial support and practical assistance, but she felt it was not helpful. She described challenges due to limited support from the assigned contact person from Educational Partners International. She stated, “We had a person but she was actually not helpful at all. Our principal was very, very supportive and she

gave us the contact of another teacher that worked here before." She went on to explain that she had a support system in the form of five other new teachers who also arrived from Educational Partners International with her and a colleague who had experience in the program. She noted that they all had to figure things out on their own. Many of these things were differences in the culture of the area compared to life back in their home countries. There was minimal support from the school district, with any efforts to welcome or acclimate her coming directly from the school's principal.

Maria recalled the interview process and how she arrived in North Carolina. After accepting the teaching contract, Educational Partners International arranged the flight details, specifying the departure date. Upon arrival, Educational Partners International facilitated the process, including airport pickup, a night in a hotel, assistance in opening a bank account, and guidance to a car dealership. They also provided essential items like a Chromebook, phone, and SIM card.

Maria noted how quick the transition was. She recalled, "We got to North Carolina on the 20th and we got here in [town] on the 21st. They dropped us off at our Airbnb. That was it!" She stated that the next day they were expected at the school for all of the beginning of the year meetings. She expressed the difficulty in trying to get things situated personally with preparing for a classroom of students at the same time. She noted that the area of her placement in North Carolina is geographically different than at home in the city, and this was not something that she was prepared for. The lack of public transportation and public housing such as apartments made the transition challenging, "It's very small and there were not very good choices, not many choices, just houses for sale and not for rent, she recalled." Maria acknowledged the challenges, believing that the transition would have been easier in a larger city.

When describing logistical challenges, Maria detailed a situation where a colleague was sick and they did not know what to do. She contrasted healthcare systems in her home country of Colombia and in the U.S. She noted that going to the emergency room in Columbia involves a wait, but the charges are reasonable and this is the customary place to go when sick. In the U.S., going to the emergency room incurs high costs, which is a drastic difference and something that the international teachers who came with her did not realize.

Maria also elaborated about the challenges in adapting to different school jargon, acronyms, and procedures than those in Colombian schools. The interview revealed significant cultural differences, such as the customary physical contact in greetings in Colombia as compared to the more reserved norms observed in North Carolina schools. She explained, "I think physical contact is hard, like in Colombia, we say good morning with a hug and kiss and here, NO!" She also explained the rules of being on "Level 0" in the hallway (meaning silent) was something that is hard for her to comply with. She explained that she walked her Columbian students to where they needed to go while singing. She shared, "We all sing together. It is just really different from my culture where it is ok to be loud, and share, and use opportunities for singing and laughing."

Participant 5: Camila

Camila was recommended to the researcher by Maria (Participant 4) because they work together and arrived at their placement schools at the same time. Camila is also a female who is between the ages of 25-34. She is currently teaching in a rural area of western North Carolina surrounded by mountains and a national forest. She was interviewed virtually from her home in September 2023 via the *Zoom* platform. Like Maria, Camila is in North Carolina through the international teacher recruitment company Educational Partners International (EPI). She also

teaches in a school with a 90/10 model for the DL/I program and has one “standard” class and one DL/I class per grade level.

Camila is from Mexico City, Mexico. She expressed love for Mexican culture, traditions, and food. She highlighted the vibrant celebrations and her affinity for spicy food, which is a norm in Mexican cuisine. Specifically, she spoke to the month of September in Mexico. “So, all the month of September, everything's about Mexican food, Mexican music, and so much festivities,” she explained. She continued to describe many cultural celebrations that are held throughout the year. She noted that only four or five major holidays are celebrated in the United States, which she believes are too few.

Camila initially studied journalism in secondary school. She described not liking that field and not making good grades. So, she switched to kindergarten teaching after realizing her passion for education. She stated, “There was the career for school teaching, a whole major in Mexico has the name kindergarten teaching!” She continued, “I remember that I was like, I didn't even know that kindergarten teachers studied.” After being shown the subjects she would study as an education major, including educational psychology, teaching songs and rhythms to children, education history, language acquisition, and math, she found the field fascinating. Camila expressed her interest in understanding how children learn and highlighted the joy she found in studying these subjects in great detail. She described the joy of teaching kindergarten in Mexico, emphasizing the fulfillment she found in helping children learn foundational skills.

The conversation then delved into her decision to teach internationally, which was influenced by her interest in English and a colleague’s advice to explore teaching abroad. She remembered, “That teacher looked at us so depressed and she told us that we were not supposed to be in the classroom with 40 kindergartens for the rest of our lives.” She went on to share that

the teacher encouraged them all to earn their English certification and apply to teach in an international or English school in Mexico or abroad. Camila recounted her five years of teaching in Mexico, which included not pursuing a job in public schools, but instead leveraging her English proficiency for a well-paid position in a bilingual school. However, she felt "bored" during this time and decided to look into international teaching programs. She found Educational Partners International (EPI) through a *Google* search.

She shared her experience with the Educational Partners International, which facilitated her move to the United States. Camila reflected on her initial challenges upon arrival, such as finding housing, adapting to a different school system, and grappling with cultural differences. The interview touched on the limited support from the agency and the more significant assistance received from fellow teachers in navigating various challenges. For example, she described her arrival to North Carolina at the airport: "One person from [EPI] received us, and I have to say that I expected more". She explained that her luggage was lost and she did not understand the "southern accents" of those in the airport trying to assist. She shared, "I didn't understand anything and this person was just standing there, like I'm just here to work so I don't care." There was no guidance on what to do once she arrived either. She described being dropped off at the bank and told, "they know what to do." The same thing happened at the car dealership, leaving her with confusion and uncertainty in this new place. This was especially hard given the drastic change in transportation from Mexico to where she is located. She explained, "In my case in Mexico, I lived in the city so we have public transportation, so I don't need a car. There's a subway and my school are 15 minutes from my home." Upon arrival she realized, "If you don't have a car, you cannot go anywhere." So, she worked with four other DL/I teachers to purchase a shared vehicle.

Camila discussed challenges and differences she encountered in the school system. She expresses dislike for the expectation that students maintain "level 0" behavior, contrasting it with her education in psychology that emphasized the importance of allowing children to talk while working. Camila found it difficult to enforce this rule, given her belief that it's natural for children to talk. She also expressed discomfort with the emphasis on exams and grading in the U.S., contrasting it with Mexico's kindergarten system in which there is no formal evaluation and the focus is on providing feedback to parents. Camila felt the heavy reliance on testing limits the development of various abilities in students. “We also are taught in our system that tests are not good because they can only evaluate one ability or knowledge, and knowledge is not as important as the voyage,” she explained.

When asked about the biggest cultural challenges, Camila described her personal experiences outside of the classroom. Adapting to the early closing times and quieter atmosphere in her placement town compared to the lively nightlife in Mexico is one of these challenges. She shared her experiences living in Mexico City. “There are a lot of things that are open 24 hours. In Mexico we live at night, it’s 9 p.m. and people go for tacos or 1 am and people go dancing,” she explained. This was quite a contrast from her town in North Carolina where she said that most businesses close at 8 p.m., leaving her with little to do and a sense of sadness. Another cultural challenge she expressed was the expectations for celebrations around holidays like the Fourth of July. She was disappointed to see festivities ending early in the evening. “The whole month is for parties on our Day of Independence in Mexico,” she said. “It's like a thing at 11 p.m. everybody's shouting and dancing and the party starts at that time and the next day it's oh, parades and everything!” She noted the feeling of disappointment on the Fourth of July in her

current town when she said, “There were no cars, that was weird, but it was like here the culture is not important or not the same [as in Mexico]”.

Findings by Research Question

Through the use of the interpretive qualitative design, participants shared rich and authentic experiences with the researcher about their experiences teaching in the DL/I classrooms in North Carolina.While participants displayed some diversity in their responses to the interview questions, the researcher identified several shared aspects in the interview data. These commonalities resulted in themes that were consistent with each research question. More specifically, the themes and associated subthemes that emerged were aligned with participants' perspectives. Each theme and subtheme are described in the following sections and are noted in Table 4.

Table 4

Theme and Subtheme

Research Question	Theme(s) and Subtheme(s)
RQ1	Life Logistics
	Finding a House
	Transportation
	Finances
	Lack of Support
	Emotional Isolation
	Missing Family
	Feeling Alone
	Educational System
RQ2	School/District Personnel
	School Staff

Table 4

Theme and Subtheme Continued

	Other DL/I Teachers
	School Administration
	School District Personnel
	Partnering Organizations
	Lack of Support
RQ3	Language
	Body Language
	Physical Touch
	Actions
	Life Logistics
	Perception of Teachers
	Educational System

RQ1 What are the Perceptions of International, Spanish-speaking Dual Language Teachers About the Challenges They Face in Their First Year of Teaching in North Carolina?

For Research Question 1, the researcher aimed to investigate how participants perceived their challenges in their first year of teaching in North Carolina. To achieve this end, data were analyzed from interview questions related to participant experiences within their first year of teaching in North Carolina. Additional background information gained from the warm-up questions was also analyzed. This included information about their home countries, families, previous international experiences, and pathways to teaching.

Life Logistics

The first theme developed from participants' responses related to the challenges they had managing and organizing various aspects of one's life. Specifically, all participants noted that settling into a new living situation or making significant financial decisions within a new country with different standards and expectations was a major challenge. Carmen illustrated this phenomenon at the start of the interview, "In every sense in my life because I was getting used to a new educational system, but I was also finding a house and finding a car, trying to get used to life here." Maria shared the same sentiment, "You have 30 days when you get here, to get your driver license up, an apartment, to set up everything!" She continued, "So it's everything that's new from your school, your new job, and everything that you need to set up for your life."

Finding a House. Analysis of interview responses revealed that four of the five participants (80%) shared that finding adequate housing within their new communities was a challenge. Maria shared that there were limited housing options in her small mountain community, which was quite a contrast to her experiences in Colombia, "It's very small and there were not very good choices, not many choices." Carmen noted that she had to stay with another teacher due to limited housing options. "She let me stay at her house for two weeks in the meantime that I found a house because it's very hard to find a house here," she lamented. Since all five participants resided in major cities or capital regions of their respective home countries, public housing was widespread and represented the primary residential choice for the majority of the population. Finding adequate housing in their current rural settings was far more challenging.

Transportation. As with housing, analysis of interview responses revealed that four of the five participants (80%) also noted that transportation was a concern in their new placement

communities. Worth noting, transportation was mentioned 36 times among all interviews, the second highest rate of mentions. Juan illustrated this point, noting that in his hometown, right outside of Madrid, most people walk when they need to go somewhere. When talking about going to school he stated, “To go to school we walk.” He explained, “Like every day [we walk], that's the difference, here you need a car for everything.” Camila shared that public transportation is widely used in Mexico City, “I don't need a car because I had transportation in Mexico. There's a subway and my school is 15 minutes from my home. We notice that here, if you don't have a car, you cannot go anywhere.”

Finances. Four of the five participants noted that managing finances was a logistical challenge. Through Participate Learning, international teachers are given an estimated amount of money to bring to the United States for placement. EPI teachers are given a loan of five thousand dollars that they pay back from their monthly pay. Despite these funds, participants felt that the change in currency from their countries to the United States was a challenge. When talking about purchasing a car, Juan stated, “Looking for the car, they were really expensive and at the beginning. You don't want to waste too much money.”

Lack of Support

The second theme that was noted within RQ1 was the lack of support participants found. Although only two participants noted they had a lack of support when arriving, it was mentioned 22 times between them. This made it challenging in their first month after arriving in the United States. Both Maria and Camila described the frustration of not feeling their needs were met upon arriving in the United States. Camila went as far as to say she stopped communicating with the partner organization due to her experiences:

> "The person that was assigned to us from the agency didn't do anything! She actually messed up with our bank accounts, they made a block to our bank accounts because of this girl. We didn't ask for any help, anything from the agency. We were really so mad."

Emotional Isolation

The third theme that was mentioned by all participants was emotional isolation when moving to North Carolina. Three participants noted that they felt an overwhelming sense of loneliness, and three noted being homesick and missing family. During the warm-up questions, all participants talked about their home countries with enthusiasm and excitement, noting the cultural experiences, food, traditions, and geographical landscapes. When sharing these experiences, many reflected on missing family or cultural experiences from their home countries.

Missing Family. All participants spoke about their families during the warm-up questions. The interviewer specifically asked if they had family currently living in the United States. Four of the five participants (80%) had family living in the United States, even though they may not be close. Two of the five participants (40%) have spouses who joined them in North Carolina within their first year of teaching. Three of the five participants (60%) mentioned difficulty being away from family. Lily illustrated this dynamic: "My father is 80 years old and it is hard knowing he may be in his last years and I am not there. You know they get older, so I feel bad." Juan noted his mother is having a hard time with him being away as well:

> "I am really close to my mom. For instance, I talk to her like every week. Actually four days ago, it was her birthday, and I was in the classroom. I called her when the kids went to PE because it was lunchtime back in Spain (…) I think she is having a hard time."

Feeling Alone. Three of the five participants (60%) mentioned feeling alone in their new placements. Each of them noted that upon arriving and not knowing anyone in their new country, they had moments of being alone. There were 24 references related to these feelings within three participants' responses. Both Maria and Camila noted their feelings of isolation or being alone directly related to their arrival in the United States and not feeling supported, whereas Carmen shared being isolated from those she loved and not knowing anyone in the United States. Carmen detailed her experiences when she first arrived without family or friends in the United States:

> At that time, I was by myself, because my husband was back at home and I was getting to know my local advisor… She was trying to help me out but basically, I was feeling very alone. I think that personally it was one of my biggest accomplishments [in the first year]. I was like, okay, I'm here…I'm fine, I'm alive, like everything was fine.

Although Juan did not specifically describe feelings of being alone, he did share his feelings of being "unwanted" at his placement school due to being from Spain:

> It is really tough, to be honest I think there was a mistake when they hired me, because now that I think of it, I'm kind of the one person… they hired me, because they didn't find anybody from Colombia, I guess. I think the principal wants everybody to be from Colombia.

Educational System

Overwhelmingly, navigating the nuances of a new educational system was the biggest challenge for participants interviewed for this study. All participants noted that the protocols in their placement schools were something that they had a hard time adjusting to.

All participants had teaching experience in their home countries prior to arriving in North Carolina. Juan was the only participant who had additional teaching experience (teacher

assistant) in another country (Finland). Four of the five participants mentioned the differences between the private international schools in their countries and the public-school system where they are teaching in North Carolina. One participant compared some of the "tough" schools they had taught at throughout their years in comparison to the school they are currently at in North Carolina.

Three of the five participants (60%) shared the frustration with the over-reliance on educational jargon and acronyms in their placement schools. Lily shared the following:

> I do not understand the words you use in the United States. They are just letters, especially at school. For example, we sit here and talk about things like MTSS, EC, PD and I do not know what they mean. In my country we say real words and do not use these things. I told my administrator please do not think I'm dumb, but I feel so dumb at school. I went to University and have been teaching for many many years but I feel dumb in my school in the United States.

Three of the five participants (80 %) noted challenges related to the "assessment-driven" North Carolina curriculum. They all shared that North Carolina's focus on testing, assessment, and formal data was a shift from their experiences in their home countries. Each of these participants shared a more holistic approach to teaching in their home countries of Mexico and Colombia. Maria shared the following about her experiences in Colombia:

> The context of education has been very overwhelming and kind of a shock. I am used to private schools in my home country and I have three different contexts to compare. Here [North Carolina] it is public and if we compare public schools in my home country, it's very different. Here, the kids have tests and it's very rigorous, and we don't have that in

> public school in Colombia. In private schools in Colombia, we focus more on if they can play and learn so it's less strict with some testing in Colombia.

RQ2 What are the Perceptions of International, Spanish-speaking Dual Language Teachers About the Supports They Received During Their First Year of Teaching in North Carolina? For Research Question 2, the researcher aimed to investigate how participants perceived the support they received in their first year of teaching in North Carolina. To achieve this, data were analyzed from interview questions directly related to participant support within their first-year teaching in North Carolina. The responses were varied within RQ2 as each individual had different support from family, advisors from their home country, contacts from the partnering organizations, and resources within their school placements. It is important to note that all five participants also noted a lack of support in certain areas that will also be addressed within this section.

The biggest support offered to participants related to meeting their physical needs. Upon arriving, all participants noted the need for basic living provisions such as housing and transportation. While all participants received information from their sponsoring organization about the area where they would be living, none had established residency prior to their arrival. Participants also noted the support of groups outlined in the following sections who provided them exactly what they needed for their homes upon arrival. Juan illustrated this point, noting that these groups helped in ways he had not anticipated:

> They bought all of the things you need for the house, because normally you have nothing for the house. They gave me the machines for the dryer. In Spain we do not have dryers. We don’t have dryers because it is so sunny we don’t need it, it is not humid, it is very dry so in 2 or 3 hours the clothes are dry.

School District Personnel

All participants within this study noted they received support from personnel within their placement district. This support included those in central office positions, principals in their schools, and other teachers within the school itself. Each of these support groups are described in the following sections with frequency noted and specific participant responses.

School Staff. All of the participants (100%) relied on their coworkers within the school for support in their first-year teaching DL/I in North Carolina. Carmen noted, "Workmates from third grade, the traditional ones, teachers, they were the ones that helped me the most in the transition to the school." Camila shared the warm welcome she received from the staff at her school, "At the beginning of the school year all of the teachers were there, they welcomed us. They were really kind to us. They even gave us some presents for our house." From help with curriculum, schedules, school expectations, and basic living needs, all five participants shared the support of staff from the school.

Dual Language Immersion Teachers. Four out of the five (80%) participants noted a reliance on other DL/I teachers throughout their transition in the first year of teaching. Two of the five participants (40%) noted a supportive "advisor" set up through the partnering organization. Advisors are teachers who currently are teaching in DL/I programs and have been in their North Carolina school at least two years. Carmen and Lily shared that their advisor was the one who helped them with their basic needs and offered support in the school environment. However, Juan noted the lack of support he received from his advisor, relying instead on another international teacher for assistance. He shared, "This year I'm in fourth grade and one of the one of my workmates, she is helping me out a lot. If you ask for help, they will help you immediately!"

Maria and Camila arrived in their district together and found out quickly that they needed the support of one another and the other three international teachers to navigate their new schools and life in North Carolina. They both mentioned another DL/I teacher who had been in North Carolina longer who really helped them in the beginning. Camila shared:

> The person that helped us was a teacher, a DL/I teacher from this school. She made a video for us a few weeks before we came here. That way we knew each other when we found each other at the airport and at the hotel. If not, we wouldn't know each other. She hired an Airbnb, for us, of course we paid, so we would have a place to stay. That teacher, she received us.

School Administration. All five participants (100%) noted that their school principals were supporting in their first-year teaching DL/I in North Carolina. Each participant shared an experience where the principal helped with transitioning to their new country. Three of the five (60%) shared that their principal helped with furniture or household items or put them into contact with someone that could help. Four of the five (80%) shared that their school principal helped with curriculum or school procedures or had a welcoming information session to help them within the school transition. All five participants noted the warm welcome and positive feelings from their principal. Lily shared, "My principal was very nice and she shared there is a parent who helps beginning teachers. She made sure I had what I needed for our home and kids."

Central Office Staff. Most DL/I programs are run through district-level departments run by individual districts. Four of the five participants (80%) work in districts where dual language programs are fairly new while one participant works at a larger district where dual language has been in place for over 10 years. Four of the five participants mentioned that central office staff were there to greet them upon arrival in the district and assist with completing necessary

paperwork. Lily, coming from a district with an established DL/I program shared, “The district was very nice. They met me when I arrived and there was a coordinator who made sure I was ready to go!” Carmen shared that when she met with supportive district officials who assisted with paperwork right when she arrived off of the bus. However, the experience was overwhelming, and officials appeared uncertain and were unable to answer all of her questions. She said, “So maybe I guess because here, it is kind of new. They are still finding out about these things that were not already done.”

Partnering Organizations

North Carolina insources international teachers for DL/I programs largely through private recruiting companies such as Participate Learning or Educational Partners International. Participate Learning recruits’ international teachers from over 48 countries that are hosted by school systems implementing DL/I programs within North Carolina (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). Educational Partners International, LLC (EPI) is an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to sponsor teachers for placements in K-12 public, private, and charter schools in the U.S. Currently, the majority of North Carolina DL/I programs utilize these services, either through EPI or Participate Learning, which provide trained and experienced international teachers on a five-year contract to their schools.

Three of the five participants (60%) in the study were hired and recruited through Participate Learning and represent two different school districts. Two of the five (40%) work for EPI and represent one district. Although this study is not intended to evaluate individual international teaching companies, those from Participate Learning had more positive references to supports they were given than those from EPI.

All participants shared that virtual courses and videos were provided by their partnering company to prepare them for their time in North Carolina. However, only two participants (40%) felt that the virtual courses and videos were helpful. The beneficial supports offered by Participate Learning were the advisors who were teachers within their schools. By contrast, EPI teachers shared their frustration of having a representative from EPI meet them at the airport and drop them off in their district with little follow-up. Again, Camila shared the frustration she experienced with the lack of support from EPI, “The person that was assigned to us from the agency didn't do anything!” Maria shared the same sentiment and noted, “We had a person, but that person wasn't really helpful.”

Lack of Support

It is worth mentioning that all participants (100%) noted that at some point, they felt there was a lack of support. Feelings of not being supported were also mentioned and coded the most frequently within this section at 13%. Carmen shared the challenge of being without family and the lack of support:

> I was like okay you're here and you need to just figure out what to do because nobody's gonna actually help you like you're used to at home. It was like you don't have your mom here, you don't have your sister here so, it's like you're here and you decided to be here and so you need to figure out how you're gonna do your things.

Two of the five participants (40%) felt that the organization that sent them was not supportive in the transition and offered them little support both with information and daily living needs. Four of the five participants (80%) noted that although friendly, the district personnel were not able to offer the level of support they needed. Therefore, they relied predominantly on school staff to help with educational and physical needs. Maria shared, “I don't know if it was

my district, I don't think so. I think it was more like my principal who invited us to have lunch just to get to know us because we were five new teachers."

RQ3 To What Extent do Cultural Differences Shape the Challenges and Supports That Spanish- Speaking Dual Language Teachers Perceive During Their First Year of Teaching in North Carolina?

For Research Question 3, the researcher examined the intersection of cultural differences with the perceptions of challenges and supports mentioned by participants. Cultural differences noted by participants were cross-referenced with challenges and supports to explore how their perceptions could have been shaped by these cultural differences. It is important to note that participants in the study represent the countries of Colombia (40%), Mexico (20%), Chile (20%), and Spain (20%). These countries are unique from one another, and that is seen in the data. Juan referenced the differences among cultures within his DL/I team at his school:

> We have differences, of course, even the language… but if you can share your culture then you will get richer and richer because you get to know something different. So, for me, it's not a problem, different cultures are not a problem. The point is that you want to share and you want to participate in a global position.

Language

Three out of five participants (60%) shared that language was a cultural difference that shaped the challenges and supports they perceived during their first year of teaching in North Carolina. For example, Lily shared that the Spanish spoken in Chile uses animal names as descriptors, something different than the Spanish spoken by her colleagues in the DL/I program:

My colleagues from school are all from different countries than me. We have different words in Chile and use animal words a lot like if you have a good time you have a pig of a time.

Colleagues don't know what I'm talking about and laugh about how Chile has totally different words. Sometimes we have to just talk in English so they understand me, it is funny… I have to speak more General education Spanish than my cultural Spanish at school.

Camila shared that she had trouble understanding the English dialect that is used in North Carolina. She continues to have difficulty understanding some of the words spoken in her rural mountain community, "I didn't understand the Southern accent. It was hard to understand what they were saying or telling me. I still have trouble. I didn't understand anything, and this person was talking."

Juan shared that he has trouble with the expectation of speaking Spanish in his DL/I classroom throughout the entire day. This is a difference from his typical teaching as he is used to teaching English in his country, which mirrors the experiences of all five participants who were English teachers in their respective countries. He explained:

> Well, one main thing was speaking Spanish all the time. With the kids, we are supposed to speak Spanish all the time and they were kindergarteners. I was in kindergarten last year and we are supposed to speak Spanish. For instance, when they were crying or something like that and they do not understand anything, I cannot speak Spanish, I have to speak English. I have to speak English because I want them to realize I care for them. So, it was really tough. Sometimes they tell me, do not speak English, I can't, I have to do it. I have to make myself understood with the kids. So, it was really tough to speak Spanish as much as possible.

Body Language

Body language, often referred to as non-verbal communication, encompasses the gestures, facial expressions, postures, and movements that individuals use to convey messages and emotions. This is an area that can be difficult to navigate as cultural differences in body language are vastly different. Participants also noted the actions and personality of those in North Carolina was something that they had to get used to within their year of teaching in North Carolina.

All participants (100%) noted that differences in physical gestures among cultures were addressed and emphasized in the information provided by their partner organizations.

Physical Gestures. Four of the five participants (80%) noted that physical gestures were challenging for them when coming to North Carolina. Maria shared how challenging this was for her:

> Colombia, we are very touchy, we hug the kids and we're very loving. Here, they say we should ask first if the kids wanna be hugged or if the kids wanna be kissed. Yeah, I I think physical contact is the hardest thing for me here. In Colombia, we say good morning with a hug and a kiss, it is hard.

Lily shared that in Chile it is also acceptable to hug or kiss in greetings. “Something that happens in Chile is we kiss to greet each other. They told us of course this is not acceptable here, you do a handshake,” she explained.

Juan shared that the physical touch is also a cultural thing for him, however in North Carolina his gender also plays a role into his awareness of greetings, something he did not worry about in Spain.

> It concerns me a little bit. You know, I'm a male, a male teacher, so it's kind of hard. In

> In Spain, we are more like huggers. We have a closer relationship with the kids, but here they told me, just be careful. Try not to get too close, you know, touching the kids or something like that. Like hugging, so I try to avoid that kind of behavior.

Actions. Three out of the five participants (60%) mentioned that the actions of North Carolinians were something that was a cultural challenge for them in their first year of teaching in the state. With a frequency of 42 mentions, this was the second largest perceived challenge that dealt with differences in culture.

Camila noted that there is more trust between people in her North Carolina community trust than where she lived in Chile.

> Chile is very different in the way we are. You all are very, what do you say how do I say, like open. Like [buying] ice, you just take it at a shop. If you go to cinema, you just walk into a movie. You already pay and they just believe! We are not like that. You are also very kind, you ask how we are doing. You don't do that where I am from.

By contrast, Carmen noted that she feels a lack of empathy and a general feeling of being impersonal where she currently lives as compared to Columbia. She noted the differences multiple times with examples from her current placement:

> It's like when you ask, "Hi, how are you?" It's not like you actually mean to ask how I am. You know you don't mean it, you don't care about how I am. That's why I wouldn't feel ok to say I am not doing okay. So, you kind of just say it without meaning. I think that that was one big difference. In your workplace there in Colombia, people are more concerned about actually getting to know you. They see if you change, they notice. They notice it and they're like, hey are you okay, like you really know that they mean it. So, I

> think that would be one thing that I will say culturally just like it is not here. You're very l impersonal I would say in here (US).

Life Logistics

As previously noted, the first theme from participant responses about the challenges they faced was related to managing and organizing various aspects of one's life. This specifically showed up when discussions around cultural barriers took place in participant interviews. Settling into a new living situation or making significant financial decisions in a new country with different standards and expectations challenged all participants. All participants noted this was a significant area of challenge, and it was an area where they needed and were provided support. All participants noted that the cultural expectations in their countries around housing, transportation, and even healthcare were in sharp contrast to those in their placement area of North Carolina.

Maria detailed a time when another new DL/I teacher got sick on a Friday and did not know what to do because of differences in the healthcare system in her home country and the United States. Maria shared that this is not something that was shared with them but something that is very important in living in a new country:

> One day another friend got sick on a Friday. We needed help, like if I get sick, where should I go? Any hospital or the difference between the walk-in clinics and you know an office, so all different things. Yes, the differences between your country and how things work here because in Columbia, if you get sick, you go to the emergency room. You have to wait a long time, but you won't get charged too much. You pay the money price and that's it, you would not have a lot of the bills because you are basically in the emergency room. Here it is different, like you don't wanna go to the emergency room!

Housing and transportation are areas that also challenged participants based on cultural differences. All participants noted that purchasing a car is something new to them. In each of their respective countries, participants did not need a personal vehicle, and the process of purchasing a vehicle was something they were not prepared for. Three of the five participants (60%) spoke to the struggle they had getting a driver's license because they did not drive in their home countries. In addition, three participants (60%) spoke to the challenge of insurance, loans, and the expense that transportation was going to cost, all of which was vastly different than in their countries. Rather, all participants were accustomed to public transportation and walking to get to destinations.

The geographic landscape of the placement communities also proved to be a challenge that participants were not accustomed to. Camila shared her experience of relocating from Mexico to North Carolina:

> If we didn't have those cars, things would be crazy because we didn't know anybody. We needed to move a lot and to go buy fresh groceries to go and look for homes. I was learning how to drive. I mean, I took lessons in Mexico, but I was so afraid to drive in traffic. Here it was like a highway and I have never driven on the highway. So, I was so afraid, but we have to learn there is no public transportation here.

Lily shared that even asking for things or taking donations from those who were helping was a challenge for her:

> They gave me an email stating to list what all I needed for our new house but I was embarrassed. This was when I was in Chile before coming, and I felt embarrassed sharing what I needed. The principal and advisors encouraged me not to feel that way and to

> really put what I needed because they could do what they could. This was different for me, we do not do this in Chile.

Perception of Teachers

Three of the five participants (60%) felt that they were received very well by their coworkers and the families they serve due to the respect for teachers in the United States. Four of the five participants (80%) had not thought about pursuing a teaching career in their home country originally, and three out of five (60%) said their parents did not want their children to go into teaching. Teaching in their countries is a low-paid job without much growth. Lily shared her mother's reluctance in her teaching:

> My mother told me not to go to teaching. She said there is no pay, you are smart. You need to be a lawyer or engineer. I was always very helpful to children. Now my mom said to take her words back because she knew this is what I enjoy, my passion

Maria shared the same feelings as Lily and added that the pay in Colombia is challenging as well, stating "I thought about teaching, it's not a good pay in my country, So I had to find a good college. So at least I can have a diploma from a good college." Later in their interviews, both Lily and Maria shared how well they are treated at their schools and how they feel respected by coworkers and parents.

Educational System

The most frequent cultural difference (mentioned 58 times) among all participants (100%) was the difference between educational systems in North Carolina and their home countries. As mentioned in previous sections, all participants needed support in navigating the educational system as well as describing it as a challenge in their first year of teaching in North Carolina. Worth noting, four of the five participants (80%) taught English in private schools in

their home country. One participant has taught in various types of school in Europe and has taught all grade levels.

Carmen noted that the biggest cultural barrier that she had to overcome was the socio-economic differences between her current high-poverty school and the private school she taught at in Colombia:

> I know that [location] is not like a rich county, you know, like in the social economic like aspects. It's not really good money and I don't have a lot of kids that come from very wealthy families or anything. For example, that was one thing that was hard. The fact that some of them (my students in my class) only have like 30 clothes or you could see that they were not showering. That will be like a cultural thing because back in Colombia again as I told you, teaching a private school, like everybody was showered in the morning. In Colombia we shower in the morning and shower in the afternoon and wealthy kids are usually in a private school.

Both Maria and Camila noted that the procedures in their placement schools were a big challenge for them. They even talked with administrators to seek clarification. Maria (from Colombia) and Camila (from Mexico) shared that instruction in their home countries involves talking, singing, and sharing with one another. It is something that is done with noise. However, instruction often occurred at level zero (silence) in their placement schools. Camila shared:

> All of the schools but they always ask the students to be in level 0. And I really hate that. We were taught in my major and in psychology student personalities, and then the subject of psychology. How bad is that? Our teaching was different in Colombia and also in kindergarten it's required to talk. They talk, but they're working and it's fine what they talk. That is still so hard for me! I talked with the principal, and my students were talking

a lot and I was like, well, they're kids! That's something that I still haven't gotten used to because I don't like. Every time, every single time that I have to ask them to be in level 0, I feel bad.

Maria shared the same feelings as her colleague Camila, “The level 0 here in North Carolina. When they're transitioning the hallways. In my Colombia, I used to sing with the kids when we were doing the line to go somewhere. So, when I got here, and just with the kids, Silence Island.”

Summary

In chapter 4, the researcher included a discussion of the results of the recruitment survey sent to all prospective participants and descriptive data on the five study participants.
The data analysis steps included how the interviews were annotated, coded, and eventually broken up into broad themes. The chapter provided an analysis of participants’ responses to the three study research questions driving the study. The research questions examined participants’ perceptions of the challenges, supports, and cultural barriers during their first-year teaching in North Carolina.

The experiences of the surveyed participants in adapting to their teaching roles in the United States revealed diverse challenges and observations. In the interviews, Carmen highlighted personal achievements in adapting to a new environment, with overcoming loneliness as a significant accomplishment. Juan navigated cultural adjustments well but faced challenges in interpersonal dynamics at his teaching school, feeling isolated as the only teacher from Spain. Lily shared her mixed feelings about settling in, emphasizing warm greetings from her district and support from Participate Learning. Maria discussed contrasts in educational systems and adapting to a quieter environment without the support of the organization she works

for. Camila's experiences showed mixed sentiments about agency support, relying on colleagues for guidance. Each participant's experience reflects a unique blend of achievements and struggles in their transitions to teaching DL/I in North Carolina.

The combination of these perspectives shows the complexity of the adaptation process in North Carolina for DL/I teachers. It highlights the diverse experiences while underlining a common thread of support mechanisms participants employed in overcoming their often-unique challenges. The next chapter includes implications corresponding with the study findings and recommendations for future studies, research, and practice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the research study's problem, objectives, methodologies, and ethical protocols. It further looks into a comprehensive examination of the results for each research question, drawing parallels with established literature. The chapter wraps up by presenting the implications of the study and offering suggestions for future strategies, policies, and research initiatives concerning support mechanisms for DL/I teachers in their first year of teaching in North Carolina.

Interest in DL/I programs has been growing rapidly. Currently, North Carolina has over 244 DL/I programs in operation in eight different languages. North Carolina is ranked in the top five states in the nation in the number of DL/I programs currently in place and leads the Southeast with the same distinction (American Councils for International Education, 2021).

According to Guerrero and Lachance (2018), successful dual language programs rely on qualified educators. With the expansion of these programs, districts across the United States are facing barriers due to the shortage of qualified DL/I educators. Additionally, the United States is facing a steady teacher shortage in general (Wiggan et al., 2020). Teacher demand is projected to increase over the next decade, based on expectations that the school-aged population will increase by roughly three million students.

This teacher shortage dilemma has impacted North Carolina. Specifically, the total number of teachers employed in North Carolina has declined from an historic high of 113,670 in 2009 to 108,470 in 2018, a 5% drop over that period of time. During that same period, enrollment in the state’s traditional public schools and charter schools increased by 2% (Public

Schools of North Carolina, 2019). As a result, DL/I programs in North Carolina are struggling to hire teachers to lead their programs.

Due to these shortages, North Carolina insources international teachers for DL/I programs in a large part through private recruiting companies such as Participate Learning and Educational Partners International (EPI). Participate Learning recruits' international teachers from over 48 countries that are hosted by school districts implementing DL/I programs within North Carolina (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). Educational Partners International, LLC (EPI) is an exchange visitor program which is authorized to sponsor teachers for placements in K-12 public, private, and charter schools in the U.S., specifically North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida (Connecting Worlds, sharing cultures, 2023).

According to LaChance (2017), North Carolina's expansion of DL/I programs is hindered by the shortage of qualified teachers. These shortages often result in states continuously being forced to look to other countries to fill positions as best they can. Based on this shortage of bilingual educators in North Carolina and the state's increased dependency on private companies to provide these teachers, it is imperative that North Carolina retain the international teachers that are placed in school districts across the state.

Therefore, this study sought to further understand the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers about the challenges and support they experienced during their first year of teaching in North Carolina. The study also examined how cultural differences shaped the challenges and supports. This is a salient topic because limited research exists which illuminates the voices of and challenges faced by these international teachers.

Research has shown that international teachers face sociocultural challenges within their placements in the United States. Lee (2015) found that these challenges were primarily related to

cultural differences in classroom discipline, parent conflicts based on\ mainstream cultural differences, and language barriers. Although there has been some research concerning these international teachers, there is a need to further highlight their experiences, particularly in a state like North Carolina where DL/I is growing so rapidly. Therefore, this study gives voice to international, Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers as it explores how cultural differences intersect with the challenges and supports they experienced during their first year of teaching in North Carolina.

This study aligned with the social constructivist epistemology based on the researcher's goal to explore participants' complex views and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher followed a basic, interpretive qualitative research model while conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews with five participants to assist with effectively answering the research questions through inductive coding and theme development. Participants were Spanish-speaking international teachers in their first year of teaching in K-5 DL/I classrooms in North Carolina. The researcher analyzed qualitative interview feedback from teachers meeting these criteria across age, gender, race, and education based on the work of Saldaña (2013).

Although the researcher used purposeful sampling, convenience sampling was also implemented due to the researcher's access to DL/I programs in her current district as well as the districts in which she had previously worked. In addition, since the researcher knew individuals employed by Participate Learning, a list of potential participants was obtained from that organization. The five participants were hired through international teacher programs and placed in diverse schools across North Carolina. Once five participants were confirmed, the researcher sent a demographic survey (Appendix D) for participants to complete. Information was shared and completed using *Google Forms.* Data collected from this survey was used for

dissertation research purposes only. As per Mertens (2015), adhering to ethical standards and obtaining approval from an institutional review board (IRB) is an essential procedure in research. IRBs oversee adherence to the ethical tenets of beneficence, respect, and justice. The researcher took into account these principles at every phase of the study to safeguard the well-being of each participant. To ensure full compliance with ethical and professional guidelines of UNC Charlotte, this study is in full compliance with the IRB review process. The researcher exercised care and caution with participants by providing written and verbal notification to support understanding of the voluntary nature of the study.

The study presented minimal risk to participants because they were not exposed to physical or psychological harm or any type of experimental treatment. Extreme care was taken to ensure that every participant of the study understood the nature of the study and that participation in the study was completely voluntary. To further protect confidentiality and any potential conflicts of interest, no information about any of the participants was communicated to their supervisors, school districts, or the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. All of the previous conditions were also communicated to every participant from the beginning of their involvement in the study.

Additionally, the researcher undertook multiple measures to ensure trustworthiness, as ensuring accuracy and reliability across all study facets is crucial in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Discussions on trustworthiness were held with members of the dissertation committee throughout the research process. The researcher intentionally immersed herself in the collected data throughout the study for an extended time. In addition to completing transcriptions of each interview, the researcher also conducted multiple readings of each transcript to ensure accuracy and provide additional details as applicable. This measure was essential because

language differences required close attention to accuracy in translation. To further enhance trustworthiness, the researcher implemented member checking, or sharing interview transcriptions with participants for review. This process supports confirmability and neutrality of the findings by ensuring the accuracy of participant responses and assisting the researcher with monitoring for researcher bias (Nowell et al, 2017).

The LatCrit theoretical framework constituted the foundation of this research by allowing the researcher to better share the experiences of Latinas/os through a focused examination of the unique forms of experiences this group encounters regarding cultural differences in the United States (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Throughout this study, the researcher considered the intersectionality of race and other issues such as culture and language that Spanish-speaking international DL/I teachers negotiate in their educational careers in North Carolina.

The results of this study indicated that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers in North Carolina's first year face numerous challenges. They grapple with life logistics like housing, transportation, and healthcare, often with fewer options or different standards than in their home countries. Financial stress arises from currency differences and unexpected costs. Many feel unsupported, with some facing severe financial issues due to a lack of agency oversights when setting up bank accounts. Emotional isolation is common, as international teachers deal with loneliness and homesickness. Cultural barriers, including language nuances and body language, complicate communication. Additionally, there was a cultural contrast in the perceptions of teachers; while respected in the U.S., teaching was often undervalued in their native countries. Furthermore, participants encountered differences in educational systems, with adjustments

needed in teaching methods and school procedures, emphasizing the multifaceted impact of cultural differences on their teaching experience.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1 What are the Perceptions of International, Spanish-Speaking Dual Language Teachers About the Challenges They Face in Their First Year of Teaching in North Carolina?

This study found participants encountered substantial difficulties as they transitioned to a new country. These challenges encompassed adapting to an unfamiliar educational system, securing suitable housing, and establishing essential logistics of life in North Carolina. A significant hurdle was housing, with a staggering 80% of participants finding it challenging to locate adequate accommodations, a struggle that was increased due to the rural location of their schools.

Additionally, transportation emerged as another pressing issue, as 80% of participants highlighted the pronounced reliance on cars in the U.S., contrasting starkly with the prevalent use of public transportation in their native countries of Colombia, Mexico, Spain, and Chile. Overwhelmingly, there were numerous references to these challenges including additional challenges with financial adjustments, including shifts in currency and unforeseen expenses, further complicating their transition process.

Both Participate Learning and EPI give cost estimates for international teachers for housing, transportation (owning and operating a vehicle), and groceries. However, all participants noted the differences upon arrival in what was given to them compared to the actual prices of items. Depending on region and availability of housing in the area of placement, cost could sometimes double the estimate given.

Although only a pair of participants directly voiced concerns about inadequate support, this sentiment was pervasive, tallying 22 mentions collectively between them. A sense of unmet needs upon arrival was shared among some participants. In addition to this lack of support that was shared collectively, the emotional toll of relocation was evident in the experiences of three participants who grappled with profound feelings of loneliness and homesickness upon settling in North Carolina. Many echoed these sentiments, expressing a poignant longing for their families and the cultural nuances of their home countries.

These feelings of loneliness align with previous research. According to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (2023), “culture shock” is a process that the majority of travelers experience when adapting to a new culture. They noted that some are able to go through the process quicker and with less stress, while others who are in this stage find it harder to adapt. They specifically noted that symptoms of culture shock include homesickness, depression, and feeling lost and out of place (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2023). All participants experienced these feelings during their first year of teaching in North Carolina, with some noting severe isolation from loved ones as a significant challenge.

Lastly, navigating the educational system in North Carolina emerged as a paramount challenge for the study participants. All participants struggled with adapting to the norms and protocols in their schools, drawing frequent comparisons to their educational experiences in their native countries. A notable point of contention was the frequent use of acronyms in schools. Many participants expressed feelings of confusion and inadequacy, describing moments where they felt "dumb" due to their unfamiliarity with these acronyms.

Beyond terminology, there was a shared observation that North Carolina's educational institutions emphasize a rigorous testing, assessment, and data-driven approach. This sharply

contrasts with the more comprehensive and holistic teaching methodologies participants were accustomed to in their respective home countries. This area of challenge for participants differs from what research from The United States Agency for International Development states on standardized testing in Latin America. The research revealed that Latin American countries are unique among other developing regions in their consistency with wide implementation of international and national tests (Zambrano, et al., 2022). One can only assume from the participant interviews that the private schools they worked in do not place emphasis on these standardized tests.

RQ2 What are the Perceptions of International, Spanish-Speaking Dual Language Teachers About the Supports They Receive During Their First Year of Teaching in North Carolina?

Upon arriving in their new placements, all five participants shared the significance of primarily receiving support with physical needs such as housing and transportation. Although they all were provided with information about their respective areas, none had established residency prior to their arrival. They were dependent on support from others such as advisors, principals, central office staff, or co-workers to help them with this process. Within their placement districts, participants received this multifaceted support from various entities.

School personnel emerged as pivotal figures in their integration process to North Carolina. All participants highlighted the unwavering support from their school staff, emphasizing the assistance they received in both professional and personal capacities. All participants shared that their coworkers played a crucial role, offering guidance on curriculum, schedules, and even providing tangible items for their homes. School administrators, particularly principals, emerged as another pillar of support. Every participant attested to their principal's

supportive role, from aiding in household setups to facilitating their understanding of curriculum and school procedures.

Some participants had an assigned advisor through their partnering organization. *Participant Learning* shares that a part of the support offered through working for them is an assigned veteran "Ambassador Teacher" who serves as a local adviser. This person helps these DL/I teachers navigate their new lives in the United States and their new schools (Weeks, 2023). Participants' experiences varied; while some advisors were instrumental, others fell short. This shortcoming meant that some participants relied on alternate sources of support, including other international teachers. Along with that, the significance of other DL/I teachers in their school cannot be overstated, with 80% of participants leaning on them for guidance during their initial year. This support within their schools stood out as one of the largest supports participants used.

Central office staff, though varying in experience with DL/I programs, played an essential role in greeting newcomers and streamlining administrative processes. While some participants found the support overwhelming, especially in navigating bureaucratic aspects like social security, the overarching sentiment was one of gratitude for the extensive support infrastructure. It is worth noting that some participants felt that the central office staff were "new" to DL/I programming and hosting new international teachers. Forty percent of participants mentioned that there was no interaction between them and central office staff when arriving, and another forty percent noted that while helpful, it was clear central office staff in their district did not have all of the answers.

It is concerning that some district officials were poorly equipped to assist with the transition of international teachers because recent data show that North Carolina has more than

2000 internationally born teachers in the state's school systems. The state has spent more than 121 million dollars on the recruitment of teachers from abroad (Huneycutt, C., 2021). As DL/I programs increase in the state, so will the number of international teachers needed, which is already roughly six times what it was ten years ago (Walkenhorst, E. 2022). Therefore, it is imperative that districts that employ international teachers offer adequate assistance with their transition to North Carolina.

Lastly, the two key sponsoring entities represented in this study were Participate Learning and EPI. Participate Learning has a global reach, recruiting teachers from 48 countries for DL/I programs in North Carolina, while EPI is authorized to sponsor teachers for various school types in the U.S. In the study, three out of five participants were affiliated with Participate Learning, and the remaining two were with EPI. Notably, teachers from Participate Learning expressed more satisfaction with the support they received compared to their counterparts from EPI.

Both organizations provided preparatory materials, such as virtual courses and videos. However, the efficacy of this approach was questioned by 60% of participants. Participate Learning stood out for its provision of on-site advisors offering tangible assistance. In contrast, EPI teachers felt a lack of post-arrival support, with some describing their initial interactions with the organization as inadequate.

Given the strong perceptions found in this study concerning supports, or lack thereof, future practice, policy, and research should focus on the education of these organizations on international teaching as well as the respective cultures of the teachers entering their employ. Central office staff in local school districts must have a point of contact for these international teachers who is knowledgeable in all of the processes these teachers complete in order to work

and thrive in their placement communities. In addition, principals and school staff must recognize the interpersonal relationships between DL/I teachers from other countries and the benefit of acceptance of all Spanish-speaking countries. The goal should be to build teams that honor this cultural diversity. Doing so will benefit students and the international teachers who seek to teach them.

In addition, future practice, policy, and research should also focus on companies used in the employment of international teachers and their placement in schools across the U.S. and specifically North Carolina. These companies should inventory the resources they provide to DL/I teachers and gather feedback about their effectiveness. The findings of this study suggest that the individual participants are split on the value of the resources provided to them from these companies. As the initial contact and placement provider, it is important that these companies provide meaningful information to these international teachers about their specific placement, not just generalized information about the state or region.

RQ3 To What Extent do Cultural Differences Shape the Challenges and Supports that Spanish- Speaking Dual Language Teachers Perceive During Their First Year of Teaching in North Carolina?

The research showed various cultural differences among participants in contrast to the United States. It is important to revisit participant data noting that participants within the study represent the countries of Colombia (40%), Mexico (20%), Chile (20%), and Spain (20%).

In this research exploration of cultural differences affecting first-year teaching experiences in North Carolina, language emerged as a prominent challenge. Among the participants, sixty percent pinpointed language as a significant cultural barrier. Participants noted oftentimes it was not the English that caused the challenge, but the Spanish spoken between them

and other colleagues. According to *LatinoBridge* (2023), there are various linguistic diversities in Latin America which directly reflect the region's rich cultural heritage. This can be seen in four of the participants' reflections on the Spanish language within their countries. Each version of the language represents unique traditions, customs, and worldviews such as the participant from Chile, who highlighted nuances in Chilean Spanish, which heavily incorporates animal-related descriptors. This divergent usage often led to communication hiccups with colleagues unfamiliar with such terminology, necessitating a switch to a more universally understood form of Spanish or even English (their second language) among her fellow DL/I teachers.

When the English language was specifically addressed, only one participant noted the intricacies of the Southern American dialect. This participant struggled with comprehending the local accent, especially within her rural mountainous community. This linguistic disparity occasionally hindered effective communication, posing challenges in both professional and personal interactions. This brings to light the reliance on academic English resources for these international teachers as opposed to regional dialects being addressed and introduced as a support for these teachers.

In the context of DL/I teachers' experiences in their first year of teaching in North Carolina, body language emerged as a universally nuanced area of cultural adaptation. All participants (100%) acknowledged receiving guidance on cultural differences in physical gestures from their partner organizations. Notably, eighty percent of participants found adjusting to North Carolina's norms challenging. The participants from Colombia highlighted the cultural contrast of physical touch in greetings, emphasizing Colombia's affectionate approach compared to the more reserved North Carolinian customs. Both participants from Spain and Chile noted that hugging and kissing are common, contrasting with the more formal handshake in North

Carolina. The male participant from Spain expressed heightened awareness around physical interactions due to his gender and the cultural differences regarding personal space.

In addition, participants identified cultural discrepancies in the actions of those living in North Carolina compared with their home countries as a significant challenge. Although actions and personalities were mentioned by four of the five participants, their experiences differed from a higher level of trust and openness in North Carolina compared to experiences in Chile. Conversely, feelings of impersonality and a lack of genuine concern in North Carolina contrasted with the more empathetic environment in Colombia. These insights underscore the intricate nature of cultural adaptation, where nuances in body language and actions significantly influenced interactions and perceptions for the DL/I teachers. Although literature and virtual courses are available to visiting teachers, given the frequency found in this study between these areas, future practice, policy, and research should focus on how these cultural differences can be mediated and overcome while teaching in North Carolina.

In the realm of international teaching experiences in North Carolina, the theme of "Life Logistics" emerged prominently, underscoring the multifaceted challenges participants faced in adapting to new living standards and norms. The participants consistently highlighted how cultural differences between North Carolina and their home countries made managing essential aspects of life, such as housing, transportation, and healthcare especially challenging.

Healthcare emerged as a particularly salient concern. Navigating the U.S. healthcare system was noted as a cultural difference for a participant because it significantly differed from the more straightforward approach in Colombia. The complexity of the U.S. system, including distinctions between emergency rooms and walk-in clinics, posed unexpected challenges for the participant as well as other DL/I colleagues working in North Carolina.

Housing and transportation also presented considerable hurdles. The concept of personal vehicle ownership, commonplace in North Carolina, was alien to many participants' experiences. Three participants highlighted the difficult process of obtaining a driver's license given their lack of prior driving experiences in their home countries. Although all had driver's licenses in their home county (a requirement through Participate Learning), they had not had much practice with driving due to dependence on public transportation. Additionally, navigating the intricacies of insurance, loans, and the overall cost of transportation was daunting, especially when contrasted with the public transportation-centric lifestyles they were accustomed to in their native countries. The geographic layout of their placement communities further exacerbated these challenges. The absence of familiar public transportation systems compounded their reliance on personal vehicles, necessitating rapid adaptation to unfamiliar driving conditions.

Furthermore, cultural nuances around accepting assistance and expressing needs were evident. One participant expressed initial discomfort in requesting essential items for her new home, a sentiment rooted in cultural norms from her Chilean upbringing. Others shared the initial surprise of co-workers providing for them or asking about their needs.

There is intricate interplay between cultural differences and practical challenges faced by international teachers in North Carolina. Based on the interwoven themes presented, future practice, policy, and research should focus on the need for comprehensive support systems to facilitate transition and integration into the new environment for DL/I teachers. Additional details about the specific towns, cities, and schools where these DL/I teachers are placed would be invaluable. Such information would enable them to conduct more targeted research and identify essential resources before relocating to North Carolina. Many participants expressed

feeling stressed due to the limited timeframe available for preparing both academically and personally, compounded by the urgency to address immediate living needs upon arrival.

Additional Data and Follow-up

Upon completion of the initial interview, participants were contacted with an additional follow-up question as it indirectly related to the cultural experiences they may have had. Participants were asked if in the last year they had experienced discrimination because of their race/ethnicity while in their placement school, town, or city. This question was asked due to reflection of responses and no mentioning of racism. Given the current political environment and current divisiveness on the southern border, I was interested to see if any participants had experienced racism or discrimination in their first year. None of the participants indicated that this had happened to them, with one participant shocked that the question was even asked. However, one participant shared that while on vacation with family, not in their placement region, someone told them to return to their country and used profanity. She indicated that this had nothing to do with her role as a DL/I teacher and could not be attributed to her specific country of origin. She also stated that this occurred after her school year was completed.

It is worth noting that overall, participants felt grateful and welcomed through their experiences as a DL/I teacher in their first year of teaching in North Carolina. The communities and schools in which they work have largely supported an inclusive environment for DL/I teachers.

Conclusions and Implications

Specific research focused on first-year international Spanish speaking DL/I teachers in North Carolina is scarce. Studies focusing specifically on cultural implications are even fewer. This study was intended to add to the research literature, inform educational policy, and

provide guidance to district and school leaders about processes to promote effective experiences for DL/I teachers. Ultimately, this guidance will help facilitate the success of DL/I teachers in North Carolina and inform research in other states as well.

Study interview questions, collected data, and findings were all guided by and analyzed through the lens of the LatCrit Theory. Doing so allowed the researcher to better share the experiences of international DL/I, Latinx teachers through a focused examination of the unique experiences this group encountered related to the cultural differences in the United States. The addition of participants from four Latino countries enriched the research and gave perspectives from four culturally different countries.

The findings from this study revealed numerous implications and recommendations including the urgent need to develop comprehensive training and orientation for DL/I teachers specific to their placement location. Information should be specific to housing, transportation, and local information, including the dialect of residents and daily logistics such as hours of service of businesses. Having these trainings virtually did allow flexibility for participants, however many noted that they were insufficient. The training was not comprehensive enough and focused broadly on "American customs" without noting the intricacies of state and regional differences.

Of equal importance is the need to provide international teachers with opportunities to plan and secure housing and transportation prior to arrival to their placement area. Participants struggled with the short timeline of securing these things prior to starting their teaching placement. The combined requirements of the first weeks of school in addition to securing housing and transportation can be overwhelming and caused participants to question their choice in coming to the state.

Finally, future practice, policy, and research, should focus on how to familiarize international DL/I teachers with the educational practices in their respective schools which can differ among districts across the state, let alone between states. Currently, a great deal of time and materials are dedicated to the curriculum of the DL/I program and resources to implement. Additional time and resources need to be directed to the structure of schools in North Carolina and the differences between schooling in their own countries. As seen with the majority of participants, their teaching experiences in their home countries consisted of private international schools where they taught strictly English. The hours within the school day differed as did the socioeconomic status of the students they taught and the rigid adherence to standardized testing. District staff need to acknowledge these differences and provide additional support to DL/I teachers who will be entering their workforce. Additionally, school-based administrators need to be cognizant of these differences as well and adjust professional development and usage of jargon that may be confusing to these international teachers.

Worthy of consideration are challenges that exist in relation to these recommendations. With reliance on companies such as Participate Learning and EPI, school districts are dependent on them to provide training as well as resources to assist their international teachers in their new placement regions. This would require each company to examine their current practices and make chances to support their teachers. Accountability for these districts would be difficult given the quick time frames between hiring and arrival of international teachers. School districts often have little communication with these international teachers after the interview process and their arrival. A large part of the information international teachers are given comes from their advisors, who are also international teachers with school responsibilities in addition to helping acclimate new DL/I teachers to their placements.

In addition, school districts would need designated points of contact at the central office focused on DL/I programming. There are potential funding challenges for this to occur as school districts would need to hire for these positions. School districts are currently experiencing budget constraints with a need to cut expenditures. Adding additional positions to already lean staff in smaller districts could be challenging. Providing the additional professional development in educational practices for these teachers would also require their arrival earlier in order to complete this as well as the typical back to school meetings beginning teachers and veteran teachers must attend. Having staff available over the summer would also cause logistical difficulties as well as funding concerns.

To continue telling the stories of International DL/I teachers in their first year more research on the topic must be conducted. Valuable data can be gained by expanding the scope of study in this field to include a larger group of participants. Additionally, expanding DL/I participant recruitment to other regions within North Carolina could provide comparative information based on location. In addition, including perceptions from participants from other Spanish-speaking countries could help with solutions to address the cultural differences that may be causing barriers for international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers in their first-year teaching in North Carolina.

Summary

Through studies such as the current one, additional information is added to the field of international Spanish-speaking DL/I teachers that can be shared and analyzed with a goal of encouraging additional research on this topic as well as changes to practice and policy both by school districts and international teaching companies.

In conclusion, while dual language immersion programs in North Carolina have experienced significant growth and continue to grow, the essential cultural support for international DL/I teachers remains absent. With the influx of educators from companies such as Participate Learning and Educational Partners International (EPI) calls for comprehensive support for addressing social and cultural challenges as made evident through the research. It is imperative that both international recruiting companies and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction recognize and prioritize the critical need for fostering an environment that goes beyond the recruitment numbers.

The NC Department of Instruction needs to put a freeze on the acceptance of new DL/I programs until it can provide districts with training to help provide cultural support to international DL/I teachers within these districts. Implementing a mentorship between districts who have had successful DL/I programs in the past with those who are newly implementing may be one way to mediate the current shortfall. In addition, accountability measures are needed to ensure that districts or private companies are providing the needed resources, professional development, and cultural information to help their international teachers navigate their new communities is essential. It is paramount that North Carolina not only recruits a diverse population of international DL/I teachers but steadfastly commits to providing the necessary social and cultural support, ensuring that the growth of dual language immersion programs coincides with the success of students as well as the success of the International DL/I teachers at the helm.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE

Department of Educational Leadership

9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: An exploratory study of the lived experiences of first year, international Spanish-speaking dual language teachers in North Carolina

Principal Investigator: Lindsay Merritt M.Ed, UNC Charlotte

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Hart Ed.D, UNC Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study as a part of the dissertation process for the Educational Leadership doctoral program. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Important Information You Need to Know

- The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of first year, international Spanish-speaking dual language teachers in North Carolina.
- I will send a Google form for you to complete prior to the interview to gain demographic information. Questions will be optional in this form and last no longer than 15 min.
- We will schedule a convenient time for virtual interviews via Zoom. Interviews will last no longer than one hour.
- Some of the questions may be considered sensitive. For example, we'll ask you about your school environment, experiences you've had with students and/or parents in your respective positions, and questions about your personal experiences in your respective school. These questions are personal and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer. You will not personally benefit from taking part in this research but the study results may help better understand what factors influence cultural barriers for teachers such as yourself.
- You may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to gain further information. These will last no more than 30 minutes.

- All interviews will be recorded and transcribed
- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?
The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of first year international Spanish-speaking teachers who currently teach in DL/I classrooms in North Carolina.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study.
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a Spanish-speaking public-school educator, age 18 and older, currently teaching in a DL/I classroom as a first year international teacher.

What will happen if I take part in this study?
If you choose to participate you will complete one hour long virtual interview. Prior to the interview you will be asked to complete a demographic survey using *Google* form. The survey should last no longer than 15 minutes. I will start the interview with questions about your background (age, ethnicity, etc.), the environment of your respective school, along with your experiences with students, co-workers, parents, and administrators. Your total time commitment if you participate in this study will be roughly 75 minutes between the survey and virtual interview. You will be sent a transcript of the interview and can make corrections or add to responses at that time.

What benefits might I experience?
You will not benefit directly from being in this study. Others might benefit from our study results by helping better understand what cultural barriers international first year Spanish-speaking teachers experience in public school classrooms in North Carolina.

What risks might I experience?
The questions we'll ask you may be considered sensitive. For example, we'll ask you about your school environment, experiences you've had with parents, students, and colleagues in your respective positions. I will also send a presurvey which will ask demographic questions which can be personal. You might experience some mild emotional discomfort when answering these questions. We do not expect this risk to be common and you may choose to skip questions you do not want to answer.

How will my information be protected?
You are asked to provide your email address as part of this study. I will use your email address to send a *Google* survey with demographic questions. In addition, you will select a time which is convenient to you for a virtual interview (*Zoom*). Interviews will be recorded through the *Zoom* platform and transcribed by hand after. If the camera is on and video is recorded, it will be immediately deleted upon completion of the interview. Once I have completed the study and transcription all recordings will be deleted. I will use participant numbers in the transcription and keep all identifiable information private in the study. While the study is active, all data will be stored in a protected database that can be accessed by the primary researcher as well as faculty advisor. Only the research team will have routine access to the study data. Other people

with approval from the Investigator, may need to see the information we collect about you. Including people who work for UNC Charlotte and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study is over?

After this study is complete, study data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies without asking for your consent again or as may be needed as part of publishing our results. The data we share will NOT include information that could identify you.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?

There will be a $10 Amazon gift card given for participation in the study. This gift card will be given at the conclusion of the interview.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

For questions about this research, you may contact Lindsay Merritt, lnmullis@uncc.edu, 980-230-8519 or Dr. Walter Hart, walter.hart@uncc.edu, 704-687-8539

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Consent to Participate

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 receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact Lindsay Merritt using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Name (PRINT)

_____

Signature Date

_____

Name & Signature of person obtaining consent Date

APPENDIX B: INITIAL EMAIL CONTACT/SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Hello there,

As a part of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Degree from UNC-Charlotte, I will be conducting a study about the experiences of first year DL/I teachers in the state of North Carolina. I am hoping to talk to teachers who identify as Spanish as their native language and are currently finishing their first year of teaching within a school district in NC.

For this study, I will:

- Send a Google form for you to complete prior to the interview to gain demographic information (questions are optional).
- I will schedule a convenient time to meet for virtual interviews. Interviews will last no longer than one hour.

This is completely voluntary and it is your choice if you would like to participate.

Prior to the publication of any data gathered from this study, participants will have the opportunity to review a draft of their responses and provide feedback to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Only the research team will have routine access to the study data. Other people with approval from the Investigator, may need to see the information we collect about you. This will not include hiring agencies or school systems.

You'll receive a $10 online gift card through Amazon for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please email Lindsay Merritt, Ed.D Educational Leadership student at lnmullis@uncc.edu.

Thank you,
Lindsay Merritt

This study is approved by the UNC Charlotte Institutional Review Board: Study #IRB-

SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Are you a first year Spanish DL/I teacher in NC? I am looking for candidates to participate in a study through UNC-Charlotte on your cultural experiences. $10 Amazon gift card will be given for participation!

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project Title

An exploratory study of the lived experiences of first year, international Spanish-speaking dual language teachers in North Carolina

Structure

This was a semi-structured one-on-one interview with seven (7) open-ended warm-up questions, fifteen (15) open-ended interview questions linked directly to applicable research questions, and two (2) open-ended supplemental questions. The interviewer will possibly ask some probing questions depending on the response of the interviewee during the interview process.

Procedure

1. The researcher and participant found and secured an appropriate area outside of school premises and outside of school working hours to conduct the interview. Interviews took place virtually via *Zoom*.

2. The researcher asked the interviewer to complete the 6-question demographic survey (see Appendix D) via Google Forms prior to scheduled interview.

3. The researcher asked if the interview may be audio recorded and transcribed.

4. If the participant verbally provided his/her consent (paperwork had already been collected), the recording began.

5. The researcher asked the interviewee questions.

Interview Guidelines

Thank you for agreeing to an interview as part of this project. As you know, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of first year, international Spanish-speaking dual language teachers in North Carolina. I am going to ask you a series of questions. Your name will not be reported. There are no wrong answers, so please answer as freely as you can. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. No penalties will be applied if you decline to participate in the study, decline to participate in the study once the interview session has begun, decline to answer certain questions during the course of the interview, or voluntarily withdraw from the study. Later I will transcribe the interview [type up what we both said]. You will be provided a copy of the transcript within two weeks of the interview. If you have any issue about anything you may have said, you can provide further comments or corrections. You may stop at any time for any reason. Would you still like to proceed?

- If the participant responds no, the researcher will stop the interview and ask whether the participant is willing to be interviewed at another time.
- If the participant responds yes, the researcher will continue the interview.

Research Questions

1) What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the challenges they face in their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

2) What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers

about the supports they receive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

3) To what extent do cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

Warm up questions:

1. Tell me about your home country
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Why did you go into teaching as a profession?
4. How long have you been in North Carolina?
5. What made you decide to teach internationally?
6. Is this your first experience teaching in the United States?
7. Do you have family here with you?

Interview Questions:

RQ1 What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the challenges they face in their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

1. What were the biggest accomplishments you had in your first year in the US/ NC?

2. What challenges have you faced in your first-year teaching in the US/NC?

RQ2 What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the supports they receive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

3. How were you received by your district when first arriving in the US/NC?

4. How were your personal needs set up prior to your arrival or when you arrived (housing, transportation, furnishings, etc)?

5. What resources were you given to help acclimate to your regional placement? District? School?

6. Who was your contact when you had questions about navigating personal life in your location? The school/procedures? The curriculum?

RQ3 To what extent do cultural differences shape the challenges and supports that Spanish-speaking dual language teachers perceive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?

7. What training were you given any training/courses in American traditions, customs, culture prior to arriving?
8. What were the biggest cultural differences upon arriving in the US/NC?
9. What challenges did cultural differences pose in your first-year teaching in NC?
10. What supports were you given to assist with these differences?

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This survey was designed to collect demographic information pertaining to current International Spanish-speaking beginning teachers who are currently teaching in North Carolina in a Dual Language classroom. Information will be shared and completed using *Google Forms* Data collected from this survey will be used for dissertation research purposes only.

- What is your current age?
    - 18-24
    - 25-34
    - 35-44
    - 45-54
    - Above 54
- Which gender do you identify most with?
    - Male
    - Female
    - Don’t want to say
- Explain your levels of education
- What is your country of origin?

- What is the primary language spoken in your home?
    - Spanish
    - English
    - Other
- How many years have you been teaching outside of the United States prior to teaching in the United States?
    - 0-3
    - 4-6
    - 7-10
    - 11-13
    - 13+

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE INITIAL DATA

Perceptions of DLI Teachers- Initial Coding

Name	Description	Files	References
(RQ1) Challenges	What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the challenges they face in their first year of teaching in North Carolina?	5	320
Co-workers		1	16
Feeling Alone		3	24
Finances		4	24
Finding Housing		4	24
Healthy Habits		1	9
Lack of Support		2	22
Language		2	8
Missing Family		3	14
New Educational System		5	69
Transportation		4	36
Travel		1	4
(RQ2) Supports	What are the perceptions of international, Spanish-speaking dual language teachers about the supports they receive during their first year of teaching in North Carolina?	5	226
Advisor		2	17
Coworkers in NC		5	27
EPI		2	25
Family		2	5
Home Country Supervisor		2	2
Housing and Furniture		5	15