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International students' perception of the development of their digital academic writing identity based on their participation in an intensive English language program

Francesca L. Nesfield

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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR
DIGITAL ACADEMIC WRITING IDENTITY BASED ON THEIR PARTICIPATION IN AN
INTENSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Learning Technologies

by

Francesca L. Nesfield

January, 2023

Paul Sparks, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

My grandmother passed away when I was a child, but my mother often reminded me of the last few words my grandmother spoke to me, "*Frankie, finish your homework.*" I thought I finished my homework long ago, but I think I finally finished.

I proudly dedicate this body of work to my family. Because of you, I am here. We are here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am ever thankful to those who've helped, pushed and encouraged me during the process of completing this dissertation. I want to thank Dr. Lisa Bortman for supporting me at the beginning of this exciting journey and Dr. Paul Sparks who pushed me to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you to my friends who cheered me on. I hope you are proud of me as much as I am proud of y'all. I want to give a special thanks to my Chico Peeps, thank you for being my sounding board when I needed to talk through ideas and encouraging me along the way. Lastly, I owe the biggest thanks to my family. My mom knew I was capable of more than what others saw and trusted that I would flourish. To my aunts, thank you for believing in me and cheering me on. To my sisters, cousins and additional family, thank you for being there and also encouraging me along the way.

VITA

EDUCATION

EdD in Learning Technologies
Pepperdine University
December 2022

MA, Teaching International Languages
California State University, Chico
August 2014

BA, Journalism
California State University, Chico
May 2011

CERTIFICATIONS

Supplemental Instruction Supervisor Training, March 2019
Certificate in Teaching College-Level Writing, December 2013
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
Certificate, May 2012

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

Supplemental Instruction Services Coordinator
Think Tank, University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ
August 2021 to Present

- Managing large-scale learning assistance program with 80+ student employees and partnership with 20+ faculty members across academic disciplines
- Meet organizational and departmental goals through innovative and strategic planning and optimizing partnerships
- Produce regular reports monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating stance of program for management and stakeholders
- Strengthening and cementing SI program operational procedures to maximize efficiency and productivity for student employees and program staff

Office of Peer-Assisted Learning Coordinator
Allies in STEM, California Lutheran University
Thousand Oaks, CA
January 2019 to August 2019

- Assisted with expansion and refinement of the STEM supplemental instruction program and manage on-campus tutoring program
- Supported and maintain the supplemental instruction and peer tutoring budget

- Oversaw roughly 16 student employees and provide employee training and professional development opportunities
- Marketed learning assistance services to students, faculty, departments and campus community
- Forged and maintained faculty partnerships as well as partnerships with various entities on campus

Learning Assistance Specialist

The Learning Center at Pacific Oaks College and Children's School

Pasadena, CA

September 2015 to December 2018

- Developed and implemented institutional Academic Success Program for the college and 2 affiliated branch campuses
- Established and oversaw daily operations of the Learning Center including management of annual departmental operating budget
- Lead curriculum designer of the Academic Writing Seminar (AWS100) for low and intermediate level ESL students
- Hired, trained, and supervised part-time writing tutors and adjunct academic writing instructors
- Created and coordinated workshops, writing seminars and writing resources as needed for faculty and student communities
- Provided monthly managerial and fiscal oversight for seven writing evaluators responsible for assessing admissions essays

INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCE

ESL Substitute Lecturer and Writing Tutor

International Academy at University of Southern California

Los Angeles, CA

July 2019 to Present

- Teach and adapt to various prescribed English curricula designed for international students in beginner to advanced levels
- Align my teaching skill based on students' learning needs for greater lesson impact and maintain positive learning environment
- Communicate and support colleagues during their absence with managing their classes and providing updates
- Tutor international students with English reading, writing, speaking and listening

Adjunct Instructor

Pacific Oaks College and Children's School

Pasadena, CA

August 2016 to July 2018

- Facilitate an accelerated online beginning/intermediate academic writing seminar designed for ESL students
- Create and refine curriculum as needed to meet designed objectives of the seminar and needs of the students

- Maintain open lines of communication with students through the online learning platform used for the seminar
- Provided supplemental support for students and ensured a strong connection to the Learning Center for additional student support

Teaching Assistant
 Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services
 Los Angeles, CA
 April 2015-August 2015

- Instructed and assisted high-risk and special needs students in the juvenile justice system complete their high school English credits
- Supported lead instructor with lesson planning and occasionally taught class lessons
- Identified and addressed individual student learning needs and provided one-on-one assistance if needed
- Performed standard classroom duties i.e., attendance keeping, grading and behavior management
- Enforced administrative policies and rules while governing students in various areas of the campus

Adjunct Instructor, Office of International Education: English Language Program
 California State University, Stanislaus
 Turlock, CA
 August 2014 to December 2014

- Taught international students grammatical and syntactical structures of written English, approaches to reading, listening and speaking
- Developed course curriculum emphasizing the testing subjects found on the TOFL exam
- Developed in-class assessment tools and administer/proctored program specific exams
- Mentored individual students and help facilitate student success in the American academic environment

Instructor-of-Record, English Department
 California State University, Chico
 Chico, CA
 August 2013 to May 2014

- Designed course curriculum and materials with integrated technology as learning tools
- Facilitated students' approach toward composition through various writing conventions
- Instructed first-year students including the Educational Opportunity Program cohort section
- Utilized management skills as it related to classroom management, grade keeping, and student feedback

Teaching Assistant and Writing Tutor, Upward Bound
 California State University, Chico
 Chico, CA
 June 2014 to July 2014

- Assisted instructors with class lessons
- Focused on students who need more academic support
- Established a writing center for study hall
- Created policies and procedures for the center
- Supported students with various writing assignments

Writing Tutor, English Department ESL Resource Center
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA

August 2012 to May 2014

- Assisted international students with various forms of writing such as essays, presentations, cover letters and personal statements
- Supported student conversation skills focusing on pronunciation, sentence structure and fluency
- Created reference materials for writing development
- Assisted in coordinating ESL Resource Center events for international students
- Trained and evaluated on-boarding tutors

Writing Mentor and Workshop Leader, English Department, Early Start Program
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA

January 2013 to August 2013

- Mentored international students enrolled in English courses, first-year EOP students and other students at CSU Chico
- Tailored workshop lessons toward students' need in relation to writing and literacy
- Successfully facilitated an online mandatory writing seminar for first-year CSU students
- Assisted students with multiple writing tasks through feedback and explanation of assignments

Peer Educator and Office Assistant, Campus Alcohol and Drug Education Center
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA

August 2009 to May 2011

- Welcomed and assisted students with various campus and community resources including advising students
- Managed main office, trained new student staff, drafted documents, verified timesheets, paid office bills, manage office equipment
- and inventory
- Frequently gave presentations and coordinated events with various campus organizations and departments
- Coordinated large-scale campus and community events unique to the Campus Alcohol and Drug Education Center

ABSTRACT

The U.S. economy receives consistent and increasing benefits from international students in higher education, an estimated \$41 billion during the 2018-2019 academic year. However, the existing research literature has failed to determine whether Intensive English Language Programs (IELP) adequately prepare these students for college-level composition in digital mediums. The objective of this study is to distinguish the perceptions of how academic digital composition and identity were developed among international students relative to their experiences in an IELP. This dissertation research sought to understand the cultural perspectives of international students around a) their digital writing identity, b) digital composition in academia, and c) their perceptions of preparedness for undergraduate studies. The theoretical paradigm is grounded in Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and constructivism. The methodology took a transcendental phenomenological approach based on the work of Husserl. The research took place online with international students who attended an IELP in the United States amid a pandemic in 2020. Data collection included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with nine students holding F1-Visas for academic study in the United States. The findings of this study reveal that international students are unaware of their digital writing identity and have limited opportunities to explore their identity through digital composition in their IELPs classes. However, international students' preparedness for their undergraduate or graduate coursework varies on the individual experience studying at an IELP.

Chapter 1: The Problem

For centuries international students have traveled from their homeland to other countries for education and opportunities to gain new insights. The Western view of education became attractive for its progressive philosophy, practices, and prestige of studying in a superpower country. Long before the possibility of air-travel, international students voyaged by sea to the United States for post-secondary education. The rise and prominence of American colleges and universities can be attributed to the amalgamation of extrapolated ideals, traditions, and customs sourced from foreign countries (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Gürüz, 2008).

The structure of early American colleges and universities was shaped by German research universities, which were extolled and respected. Benjamin Franklin advocated for the replication of the German university in the United States, but strong opposition prevented him from seeing his dream realized (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Decades later, George Ticknor unwittingly brought Franklin's vision to fruition.

Ticknor's contributions made the United States a preferred place to study. His innovation brought new elements into education, such as the global branding of colleges and universities, which resulted in hosting international students to study in the United States. Yung Wing, a Chinese scholar, was the first known international student to graduate from an American university, finishing his education at Harvard University in 1854 (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Wing's story exemplified the desirability of traveling overseas for an American education.

The university admission process in Wing's time is unclear, but today's international students' admission requirements are complex and challenging. Requirements mandate that students wishing to study in the U.S. must establish English language proficiency as measured by the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing

System (IELTS), or Pearson Test of English. In addition, academic competence is measured by the SAT, ACT, or GRE (Kim et al., 2017). Passing one or more of these exams is required for direct admission to a U.S. college or university. However, an alternate path to direct admission is attending an Intensive English Language Program (IELP) for pre-matriculation.

IELPs throughout the U.S. are called by many names (Kim et al., 2017). But they all have a single unifying purpose of creating a pathway into higher education by helping students gain the academic and linguistic proficiency required for college and university admission. The faculty teaching in IELPs usually have a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) or similar fields with concentrations in pedagogical grammar, second language theory, and pedagogy (Kim et al., 2017).

There are vast numbers of IELPs across the United States with equally numerous curricula designed for English language instruction. It is difficult to determine the precise classes offered at IELPs to help international students pass exams needed for college admission. However, they typically address English reading and comprehension, writing, listening, communication, and language acquisition or language enrichment.

The focus of this dissertation study is to examine the limited mission and purpose of these programs and the potential they have in the educational sector. A vast problem with IELPs is the curricula that tend to focus on teaching to the test (Styron & Styron, 2012). A number of IELPs rely heavily on teaching skills needed to pass an exam with limited forethought or planning to address academic writing skills beyond the exam. A central focus of this dissertation is the under-preparedness of international students for academic writing in digital forms that reflect modern writing practices while incorporating their identity as students grounded in a foreign country with different ideals.

Background

For decades international students have ventured to the United States for post-secondary education. The rapid increase of international students traveling to the United States began after World War II. The first recorded group of international students numbered 25,464 in 1948; by 2019, those numbers had increased to 1,095,299 students (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2019*b*). California and New York together host the majority of those students averaging 142,985 students in 2019 (IEE, 2019*a*). Many international students in the United States come from China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, Columbia, Kuwait, and Italy (IEE, 2018). There is no consistent rationale as to why these are the leading countries with students studying in the United States. Researchers suspect the underlying causation relates to global and political relations, economic climate, and student motivation (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Kim et al., 2017).

The U.S. economy benefited from international students by an estimated \$41 billion during the 2018-2019 academic year, with California receiving \$6.8 billion (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers [NAFSA], n.d.-a). The revenue potential has encouraged the growth of significant institutional networks to maintain competitiveness. Although the IELP market is competitive and there are governing bodies to measure the quality of programs and instructional practices on behalf of international students, how effective are the governing organizations are to ensuring international students are receiving an education reflective of the 21st century with the inclusion of technology in curricula design is unclear.

This dissertation research focused on IELPs to determine if they are genuinely meeting the needs of international students to be adequately prepared for college-level composition in digital mediums.

Problem Statement

International students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States diversify the student population but are also a lucrative revenue stream for institutions and the U.S. economy. International students spend money on standardized exams and seek learning support at an additional cost by enrolling in IELPs. IELPs are to support students' second language acquisition needs and transition into undergraduate studies, yet elements of teaching to pass an exam became a strong driving force. In 2010, the Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act was passed, requiring IELPs to join an accreditation organization (USICE, n.d.). Since the initiation of the Accreditation Act, it is not clear to what degree accreditation organizations are ensuring international students are gaining a comprehensive education emphasizing technology and digital composition in the 21st century.

Many international students in the United States begin their post-secondary education in an IELP. Students are often underprepared for undergraduate-level writing and multi-media writing in English composition classes. By design and mission, IELPs intend to prepare students to study in colleges and universities in the United States, serving as a gateway program into higher education by teaching English language proficiency (Kim et al., 2017). However, a growing number of educators believe that a shift is needed to move beyond teaching English language proficiency with static curricula and materials. This dissertation research examines the gateway and phenomenon of IELPs that should not be merely a gateway but a bridge, teaching students robust composition styles and developing their writing identity across varied digital environments. Allowing students to participate and practice their academic writing, as well as other genres, in online environments and with native English speakers helps international

students to define and evolve their writing identity gradually over time before they enter their undergraduate studies.

Technology has become an important component of higher education and has significantly changed how teachers teach. However, many IELPs may not integrate technology into their curricula. The introduction of technology in higher education, especially using digital platforms, enhances the learning experience and learner preparedness. Digital composition combines several concepts, such as multiple literacies, sociocultural theory, communities of practice, activity theory, and information technology (Yang, 2018). Many of these theories are incorporated in IELP pedagogy, but the element of student online learning and exploration is largely absent.

The population of students currently studying in colleges and universities is known as Generation Z (GenZ), a generation born into the era of technology. Researchers disagree about the exact span of Gen Z (Iorgulescu, 2016), but it roughly encompasses the people born between 1997 and 2012. GenZ is the first generation born into a world dominated by computer technologies and the internet; they are the first generation born into a world shaped by social media, smart technologies, and the internet of things, offering a rare glimpse into the future (Prensky, 2001).

If higher education by way of IELPs are to fully support and integrate international students on campus, it is critical to understand how Gen Z thinks about and uses technology and what they need to be fully prepared to leverage this critical tool. This dissertation sought to understand the cultural perspectives of international students around a) their perceptions of preparedness for undergraduate studies, b) their educational experience in IELPS, and lastly, c)

their identity in digital academic writing. These insights will provide a lens into the mindsets of current second language learners.

Purpose of the Research

The objective of this study was to distinguish the perceptions of digital composition and identity among international students relative to their experiences in an IELP. It is imperative to recognize these students' views of and preparedness for digital composition and their sense of writing identity during this critical pre-matriculation period.

The practices in an IELP and the expectations of students are vastly different compared to traditional undergraduate studies. In traditional undergraduate studies, faculty expect students to have background knowledge, understand the nuances of writing, and feel comfortable exploring technology platforms regardless of their feelings about or experiences with technology. Many international students come from countries that do not permit freedom of speech or limited to no access to specific unfettered use of technology. Furthermore, having lived in countries that do not promote free speech, these young international students may not yet have the courage to authentically share their opinions or assume an identity needed to excel in academia. Finally, it is with great hope that scholarship on IELPs advances to provide greater awareness about progress, challenges and innovations within the field of Second Language Instruction.

Significance of the Study

Structurally, IELPs are not governed by an organization to ensure program goals are met, and student academic performance and student satisfaction are aligned to the purpose of supporting and preparing international students for their academic journey in the United States. There is an underrepresentation of literature produced by faculty and researchers about student experiences in IELPs. This deficiency creates a gap in scholarship, leaving researchers unaware

of the academic sub-culture of IELPs and the pre-matriculation journey of their English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Understanding this journey more thoroughly offers faculty and researchers a greater understanding of the writing development of ESL students prior to their undergraduate studies. The writing expectations set by undergraduate teachers are achievable by ESL students, but the additional challenges they face must be mitigated; additionally, it is helpful when undergraduate faculty are aware of these challenges and why they persist. This dissertation aims to address these issues.

Research Questions

This dissertation sought to understand the cultural perspectives of international students around a) their digital writing identity, b) digital composition in academia, and c) their perceptions of preparedness for undergraduate studies. To investigate these issues, this inquiry is guided by the following four research questions:

1. What is the learning experience of international students in an Intensive English Language Program?
2. What types of social cultural practices impact English Language Learners' academic writing and identity confidence levels?
3. What is English Language Learners' perception of their digital academic writing and identity either while enrolled or after enrollment in an Intensive English Language Program?
4. How do English Language Learners perceive their interactions with the virtual tools and resources used in an Intensive English Language Program?

Theoretical Framework

The theory surrounding second language acquisition (SLA) is based on the teaching, learning, and retention of language, including writing, at every point during the acquisition process. Lantolf and Beckett (2009) strongly affirmed that the field of SLA and much of its scholarship cannot be explained without understanding socio-cultural theory. Originally introduced as cultural psychology, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory anchors learning in social interactions (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018). In other words, learning language requires a social and participatory environment (Jenkins et al., 2016). Through the learning process of writing and acquiring a new language, the learner's identity expands based on community participation that creates experiences of autonomous learning.

Furthermore, the notion of constructivism is central to learning and production through problem-solving experiences, allowing the learner to associate trial-and-error with purposeful learning (Stabile & Ershler, 2015). Also, discourse analysis examines identity with regard to the ability to embody and execute norms as a tool (Gee, 2011) and the means of being a participant in a larger community of practice sharing a unified interest (Wagner et al., 2002). Finally, students ought to remain independent learners and thinkers through guided learning experiences as andragogy engages students' autonomy.

Overview of the Methodology

This qualitative study took a phenomenological approach toward understanding international students' perception of their academic readiness, precisely reflecting on their experiences studying at an IELP, digital academic writing, and their digital identity. The data collection process contained three-points of design to gather comprehensive narratives from each participant. The first point of the three-point data collation process was the a) questionnaire,

which informed the researcher to generate b) supplemental interview questions unique to each participant alongside the pre-existing c) interview protocol. Points one and two of the three-point data collation process were static, collecting similar information from each participant. Still, participant responses to the questionnaire generated areas for further insight resulting in the supplemental interview questions.

The subjects of this study were international students from diverse countries. These students brought with them specific behaviors and customs which needed to be taken into consideration. As a means to avoid an environment of self-doubt, shyness, or discomfort with the interview process, the questionnaire was developed.

A questionnaire was distributed to international students at an IELP located on the campus of a private university in Los Angeles, California. The IELP was a part of the university but operated independently; this included funding, recruitment, operations, and the accreditation process. The students who attended the IELP were completing their pre-matriculation studies or taking test-prep courses for admission to a U.S. college or university. The participants in this study were selected using purposeful selection and snowball sampling. The random selection process took place at the tutoring center, where students sought writing or test-prep assistance. Participants were introduced to the study at the completion of their tutoring sessions. Finally, the participants who were recruited via purposeful sampling were asked for referrals to peers using snowball sampling. The preferred location and participant selection process supported the research in gathering a wide array of degree-seeking students, language proficiencies, and pre-matriculation progress.

The questions on the questionnaire focused on themes related to the research questions using information extrapolated from the existing read literature. The themes found within the

survey were technology, writing, and identity. The goal of the questionnaire was to determine if international students studying at IELPs acquired adequate skills to meet the academic digital writing standards necessary to succeed in their undergraduate degree pursuits.

Definition of Terms

- *Culture*: Customs including behaviors, beliefs, daily practices, and linguistic forms belonging to a community of two or more persons in a specific geographical region. (Kramsch, 1996)
- *Digital Identity*: An online persona created for the purpose of sharing a series of interests with a community or audience via an online platform. (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016)
- *Digital Platform*: A term including websites, social media, software applications, and hardware. Digital platforms are focused on users creating new content, modifying or expanding existing content, sharing content, and discussing content in a public online forum. (Jin, 2019)
- *Digital Writing*: Written work created used an online platform for the purpose of sharing with a remote audience via an online platform. (National Writing Project [NRP], 2010)
- *Identity*: A real-life persona based on interests and communities a person belongs to. (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2011)
- *Second Language (L2)*: A second or subsequent language(s) acquired after acquiring a native language. (Juanggo, 2017).
- *Second Language Writing (SLW)*: The action of writing in various genres within a target language other than one's native language. (Silva, 2006)

- *Intercultural Communication*: The verbal and non-verbal manner of communication between people of varied cultures and linguistic systems.
(Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2011)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review presents the foundational research about international students and their experiences studying in IELPs in the United States. The United States is one of several countries in the world hosting large numbers of international students during their educational pursuits. The educational journey international students embark upon is rooted in understanding their path toward an American education.

The literature captures the purpose of IELPs in the United States. The field of second language acquisition, along with instruction and writing, are key concepts that influence the pedagogical philosophies for educating international students as they pursue post-secondary education in America.

Many of these pedagogical philosophies are grounded in cultural perspectives. It is vital to understand not only the culture from which students originate but also how they integrate into American culture and develop identity. Because many international students come from countries where people collectively identify with nationality and ethnicity, being educated in the United States creates significant identity shifts as students work to fit in while studying in the U.S.

Identity research contains many definitions across and between the “real world” and the virtual world. Technology in post-secondary education classrooms and assignments is extensive; however, technology use in IELPs is limited in scope beyond standard equipment, such as projectors and computers. Consequently, international students are limited in their exploration of identity in the online space, focusing mainly on textbook-driven knowledge. The international students who begin their educational journey in an IELP are taught how to navigate the English language through listening, speech, reading, and writing; they often reach their goal of language

proficiency to pass standardized exams. However, they are not taught writing beyond standardized exams and the use of technology, leaving them underprepared for their undergraduate studies.

History and Importance of International Higher Education Programs in the U.S.

Other countries globally respect an education from a U.S. college or university. Higher education in America is viewed as progressive and influential (Gürüz, 2008). It has evolved significantly.

The structure of the American University itself, so influential worldwide, constitutes an amalgam in international influences. The original colonial model, imported from England, was combined with the German research university idea of the 19th century, and the American conception of service to society, to produce the modern American university. (Gürüz, 2008, p.134)

Gürüz (2008) claimed that the competitive edge the American higher education system gained through its merging of imported structures into a single education system spoke to the innovative abilities of Americans. Through this built structure, the United States created a system of global impact (Gürüz, 2008).

Teaching in the United States focuses on student-centered learning, which pushes students to think critically and creatively in an open environment. Critical and creative thinking drives innovation and economic growth for the United States. Ito et al. (2013) argued that the capacity for critical thinking and creative thinking skills are power sources toward success in a global economy. They added, “Americans do ‘creative work’ and less developed countries do ‘routine work’ (Ito et al., 2013, p. 270). This implies that in the U.S., as a first-world country, thinking and strategy are key toward developing citizens for positions of importance as well as

the advancement of the economy and global power. America's goal of creating thinkers by way of predominantly learner-centered pedagogy is an approach distinctive from much of the world.

The American dream and the land of opportunity are foundational concepts in the United States. Because the United States is a unique country of opportunity, global impact, and power, foreign governments around the world create programs to allow their citizens to study in the United States as a means to import knowledge, critical thinking, and creative thinking as well as to improve their global standing in the world. Students from China and Saudi Arabia are frequently seen on American college and university campuses; the motivation for studying abroad is reflected in the literature written about these populations.

International Students Studying in the United States

Higher education in the United States is a coveted experience with many challenges for international students, requiring motivation and perseverance to attain. Students from all over the globe study in the U.S., with Chinese and Saudi Arabian students contributing the largest numbers of students to American colleges and universities (IEE, 2019b). The motivation of international students to study in the U.S. vary based on country of origin, culture, age, and degrees pursued. The quality of American education is undoubtedly a driving force for international students, many of whom cite this as a key factor in their decision-making (Austin & Shen, 2016; Chao et al., 2017; Yakaboski et al., 2017). However, Gürüz (2008) argues that the driving force behind mobility in international student education is due to the inability of foreign countries to fulfill the high demand locally for particular types of post-secondary education.

International Students from China

Many studies have explored why Chinese students are personally motivated to attend American colleges and universities. The United States and China are vastly different in political

ideology and the expression of economic power; nonetheless, China has recognized that a Western education can benefit the country's development. Education in the United States focuses on how students use what they learn through critical analysis, challenging ideas, and encouraging innovation; these are not areas not well-developed in Chinese education. Between 1995 and 2000, many Chinese students were sponsored by the Chinese government to study abroad (Li & Bray, 2007); since 2000, many students have begun privately funding their education in the U.S. (Wu, 2014).

The earliest educational relationship between the United States and China was in 1868 with the signing of the Burlingame Treaty, 14 years after the first Chinese student received a degree from Yale in 1854 (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). The Burlingame Treaty allowed Chinese citizens to immigrate to the United States and Chinese students to matriculate in American colleges and universities. This political relationship did not last long due to growing tension between America and China with the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion in 1899 (Roden, 2003). The working relationship between China and the United States was gradually rebuilt following the end of the Cold War in the 1970s (Roden, 2003). The U.S. experienced a consistent wave of Chinese scholars coming to America for post-secondary education from that repaired relationship.

The multifaceted reasons Chinese students choose to study abroad lie in their academic and professional goals. Chinese students find it challenging to get accepted into their preferred schools in China due to the national college entrance exam and rising college attendance costs (Austin & Shen, 2016; Chao et al., 2017; Zhai et al., 2019). Despite the challenges of IELPs and the college transition experience of many international students, it is still often more accessible and more desirable for international students to attend college abroad. Furthermore, many

American colleges value the diversity brought by international students. Nevertheless, American colleges and universities compete for these students. For example, Zhai et al. (2019) found that students who studied in Australia underwent less rigorous admission requirements compared to the United States.

In addition, not all colleges in China have an equal reputation; therefore, the degrees awarded are not valued equally in Chinese society and the Chinese workplace. Consequently, Chinese students venture to the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia to earn degrees from institutions with equal or higher status than their Chinese counterparts (Primary Research Group [PRG], 2013; Zhai et al., 2019). Austin and Shen (2016) have claimed that a rising middle class in China facilitates families sending their children abroad for post-secondary education, widening the pool of international Chinese students.

The type of education students seek is a significant consideration in the decision-making process for international students. Chinese students are often dissatisfied with education in China due to limited opportunities and a lack of resources, causing them to go elsewhere for post-secondary education (Austin & Shen, 2016). Chinese students are often not allowed to express critical thinking or challenge their instructors or classmates for deeper learning. Thus, Chinese students pursue American education because they want to develop creative and critical thinking (Ito et al., 2013).

Chinese citizens have limited personal power and freedom of expression. The Chinese government is observant of its citizens and vigilant of their actions, which causes citizens to monetarily challenge their government. Wealth or financial resources offers another form of freedom which is speaking with your money with regard to how, when, and where it is spent. Chinese students believe that education is the best way to gain power (Zhai et al., 2019).

Students seek prestigious institutions for post-secondary study as a source of symbolic capital, to be accepted as legitimate (Zhai et al., 2019). In other words, the name of an institution, such as Pepperdine University, or the idea of having completed a specific action, such as studying abroad, is a symbol in and of itself. It builds symbolic personal wealth, regardless of whether an increase in financial wealth accompanies that.

Furthermore, students believe education outside of China will afford them new opportunities and experiences in a superior education system (Wu, 2014). Austin & Shen (2016) found that Chinese students were motivated by a desire for personal wealth as a factor in deciding to study abroad. The study did not offer more insight into this factor, but it can be concluded that young Chinese citizens wish for financial gains to influence their personal power.

Finally, a common reason to study internationally is to gain a competitive edge in the job market. Students want to be income sufficient by landing a lucrative job, but achieving such success is based on access. Zhai et al. (2019) asserted that Chinese students return to China to take advantage of family social networks to get well-paying jobs, whereas 85% of participants in Austin and Shen's (2016) study found that Chinese students preferred to stay in the United States. Austin and Shen (2016) commented that students may use education as a stepping-stone toward immigration, possibly through employer sponsorship. The researchers commented that students would be less eager to return to China after building a career, life, and family in the United States.

China has a long history of international relations with the United States and a strong desire to enhance its economy, as evidenced by the fact that its citizens comprise the largest population of international students seeking education in America. The personal motivations of these students to use their degrees outside of China to build symbolic and financial wealth

appears to be misaligned with China's underlying goal to create educated citizens who drive global competitiveness.

International Students from Saudi Arabia

The earliest Saudi student to study in the U.S. was in 1947 (Abouammoh et al., 2014; Asfahani, 2018). Saudi government created a strategic plan to establish and strengthen partnerships with other countries (Asfahani, 2018). However, the September 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S. created tension between the U.S. and citizens from Middle Eastern countries, regardless of ethnicity or nationality.

The Saudi education system is underdeveloped with the country relying on external experts and resources overseas for many of its key industries (Abouammoh et al., 2014). The cornerstones of Saudi education are classified in four points: "a) a focus on the teachings of Islam, b) a centralized system of control and educational support, c) state funding of education at all levels, and d) a general policy of gender segregation" (Abouammoh et al., 2014, p. 42). Alsqoor (2018) noted that the Saudi education system lacks focus and advancement compared to Western education, including but not limited to advanced critical thinking, analytical skills, and writing.

The motivating factors affecting Saudi Arabian students and their decision to study in America derive from extrinsic motivation. Government officials in Saudi Arabia undertook an intentional initiative to educate its citizens abroad in needed fields of study to achieve educational parity with the West. A 15-year public program, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), committed to offering qualified students the opportunity to study abroad until 2020. The sponsorship program hosted by the government and select employers offers a rare and limited opportunity for students to live and study abroad. An underlying purpose of KASP was to

bring cultural understanding and reduce cultural tension (NAFSA, n.d.-b). It is unknown how KASP affected the Saudi government or how students fared in their native country after their study abroad experience (Abouammoh et al., 2014).

Another motivating factor for studying abroad is working professionals who contractually must study abroad to maintain their employment status; in other words, some students are sponsored by their employers and expected to fulfill their continuing-education obligation. Yakaboski et al. (2017) revealed that some Saudi students study abroad against personal choice due to the demands of their employers.

The Role of Gender. Saudi Arabia is a conservative country with limitations and allowances based on gender. Female Saudi students have unique concerns regarding their education. Women must have a male chaperone; they need permission to live and study abroad (Binsahl et al., 2019; Yakaboski et al., 2017). Saudi culture allows families to limit their daughters' education, meaning there is no law stating that all children must complete primary and secondary education. While the decision for any child going to college abroad is a family decision, allowing a young Saudi woman to study abroad requires much deeper family consideration. Saudi women are motivated by better employment opportunities, the ability to learn English, and the chance to have new experiences; other women cite their motivation to study abroad was due to pressure from a husband wanting to study abroad (Binsahl et al., 2019).

However, the Saudi government supports females going to college through KASP. Approximately 22.58% of all female Saudi students studied in the U.S. in 2012 (Abouammoh et al., 2014). While not supported by research, there appear to be few Saudi women studying or working in STEM fields (Binsahl et al., 2019). Culturally conservative values limit women, as there is fear of women working directly with men; this contradicts the explicit purpose of KASP

(Binsahl et al., 2019). Trying to understand female Saudi international students' drive for an education is limited (Binsahl et al., 2019).

International students come to the U.S. for its prestigious education system, but they also choose other countries that appear to be more culturally tolerant of people from Middle Eastern backgrounds. Australia, for example, is a popular study destination as women wearing the hijab are accepted much more than in the United States and other English-dominant countries (Binsahl et al., 2019).

The United States receives students from around the world, but for the past several years, China and Saudi Arabia have been the countries sending the most students to the U.S. (IEE, 2019b). It is important to understand the desires and goals of these international students. As a whole, international students come to America for an education and long-term personal advantages.

Defining Identity

The discussion of identity is critical to this research study because people often view themselves differently than others view them. Identity is a complex concept lacking a straightforward definition that can be applied to all situations. At its most simplistic explanation, identity references a person's sameness and differences based on characteristics or traits (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Durante (2011) asserted that personal identity is created based on information, or a narrative from communication, with fluidity between reality and virtual meaning. This contrasts with the philosophical concept of identity as "a theory of sensations, or conscious mental states" (Thomas & Polger, 2009, p. 822). However, in academia, the term differs tremendously across disciplines, with a plethora of definitions and theories of identity often specific to the academic discipline.

For example, in psychology, identity is based on Erickson's concepts of psycho-social development through the human life cycle (Poole & Snarey, 2011). Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory, also grounded in psychology, explores membership or belonging to a group as an identity source. In sociology, Stryker's identity theory addresses how and why people assume roles as their identity forms (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2009). Finally, the field of information and technology views identity or transaction identity as personally verifiable information that "has both meaning and function and arguably of a distinct legal character" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 726). These are merely a sampling of the myriad ideas about identity that demonstrate the many possibilities for defining identity in society.

The significance of identity rests in its subjectivity relative to the person being described and the context in which identity exists. When thinking of a student in the field of education, it would be appropriate to combine the related theories of Erickson, Stryker, and Tajfel. In the United States, students are schooled from age five to age 18, a timeframe that aligns with Erickson's lifecycle theory of identity (Poole & Snarey, 2011). This is also the period when students discover Tajfel's (1974) social identity as members of a group or groups. These dynamics can be explained by Stryker's identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2009), addressing how and why students adopt roles as they shape their identities.

Digital Identity

Since the advent of computer technology and the internet, the world has shifted into an online space (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016). To some degree, participating in online activities is a choice, with 70% of Americans using social media (Pew, 2019). When considering the age of social media users, 90% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 use social media, a higher

number compared to other age groups (Pew, 2019). These numbers speak to a demographic that is active online.

The realm of social networking and social media creates a hub where a plural form of self-identity can flourish. Identity as a construct focuses on a person and their placement in the world. Digital identity is a snapshot of a person, most often self-constructed, to present oneself similarly or differently compared to one's identity in real life. Sullivan (2018) asserted that digital identity is created for transactional purposes and is solidified through an authentication process. Conversely, Gill et al. (2015) stated, "a digital identity is the all-encompassing online presence of an individual that includes social media, professional profiles, and other discoverable content" (p. 1219). Finally, Bozkurt and Tu (2016) viewed digital identity through the formation of online profiles used to represent oneself in an online social space.

The online space has created a centralized location to "shape and control an online presence" (Bik & Goldstein, 2013; Mikki et al., 2015, p. 2) for the many identities associated with a person. However, it is important to acknowledge how identity is viewed differently in reality (i.e., face-to-face interactions) compared to the virtual world, which offers new concepts of identity in a dynamic environment. This virtual world can be an extension of the real world, but it also offers an environment where people can try new roles and identities. It is even an environment where people can invent aspirational or intentionally fictitious identities.

Authenticity. Because people can create multiple online profiles across numerous websites, users are asked to "authenticate" themselves. The authentication process may require an email verification or verification of identity with government documents; regardless, people are asked and expected to be themselves (Sullivan, 2012). Cybersecurity is used to limit deceitful online activity; nevertheless, there is ample room for the unauthentic self to flourish digitally.

Generating false perceptions online is a simple process of fashioning a fictitious name using a disposable email address and fillable data such as a home address or phone number through online software (Parkes, 2016). Stryker's identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker & Burke, 2009) and Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory make it clear that people have many identities in reality; however, in the virtual world, the line between the real self and the projected self is often vague.

Multiple Identities. An online identity is constructed based on a person's perception of themselves and how that person wants to be viewed online. One unique quality of online identity is the idea that one person can have many identities, reflecting their true self in the real world.

From Hongladarom's (2011) point of view, merging occurs between a person's online identity and reality; they are constructs rooted in information and have no stand-alone meaning (Durante, 2011). The value of the information presented through one's digital identity is linked to the real person whose character is manifested in both worlds. Gill et al. (2015) claimed that digital identity is not an optional process and "approaching a digital identity with abstinence was based on the fallacy that the physical and digital worlds were separate, and participation in the latter was voluntary" (p. 1219). Some researchers believe the online world is an extension of the real world, where people have many identities, and the online environment is merely a replication and extension of that world.

The Digital Identity in Academia. Traditional college-age adults between the ages of 18 and 22 are the primary drivers of social networking (Pew, 2019). These young adults are known as Generation Z, or Gen Z, born after 1990 but before 2000 (Iorgulescu, 2016). Prensky (2001) emphasized that Gen Z are "digital natives," born into an era of technology and typically comfortable with its capabilities. To effectively teach Gen Z students, it is critical for faculty—

who are mostly Gen Y and Boomers—to understand who these Gen Z students are, what their interests are, and how society views them. Understanding Gen Z not only gives context to their experiences as active online users but also offers colleges and universities the opportunity to modernize education by including more online platforms and resources into their curricula.

In contrast to Prensky's (2001) claims, Akçayır et al. (2016) suggested that age is not a reasonable indication of a person's digital fluency; more important is their efforts and frequent practice to learn how to use technology. Additionally, they found that a person's country of origin was a contributing factor to digital fluency, founded on access and exposure to technology. Considering a person's country of origin gives context to why a person may or may not have experience with technology. For example, a student from a small town or rural village may have limited exposure to technology, which may influence how they feel about technology and its purpose. This is critical for IELPs as they design technology-intensive curricula.

While digital identity in academia is viewed in various ways, the purpose of digital identity is to engage students with multiple communities to acquire and share knowledge. More importantly, it allows learners to mold and utilize their online identity in a way that supports their learning experiences and undergraduate journey. Goode's (2010) case study of the digital divide examined three students and their digital identities. The notion of identity established through technology was clearly evident for these students

Technology identity represents a blend of four areas of an individual's belief system: beliefs about one's technology skills, beliefs about opportunities and constraints to use technology, beliefs about the importance of technology, and beliefs about one's own motivation to learn more about technology. (Goode, 2010, p. 498)

Goode's (2010) study found that access to technology and practice with technology contributed to attitudes and beliefs around technology, shedding light on the relevance and prioritization of technology in students' lives. Finally, the researchers noted that cultural background and gender played a significant role in these students' attitudes and beliefs linking technology to digital identity. Again, this is critical for IELPs as they work to help international students become comfortable with technology and the self-concept of a digital identity.

Colleges and universities have experienced a digital identity shift as well. Lecture-based teaching frequently includes basic technology (e.g., computers and smartboards) and software (e.g., PowerPoint) as the pedagogical norm. Online Learning Management Systems (LMS) have significantly changed teaching practices and student access to learning materials. Incorporating digital tools into student learning experiences offers new avenues for student-to-student and student-to-faculty collaboration as well as connecting students with working professionals to explore new opportunities. This introduces the possibility of creating multiple, diverse identities, including but not limited to learner, peer teacher, and future working professional. For students who are not comfortable with technology or a single digital identity, the notion of supporting multiple digital identities and roles may be overwhelming.

For years, science has eagerly embraced technology; the prevalence of technology has pushed other fields to follow suit. The creation of the internet compelled not only people but organizations, to create an online presence with one or more identities. The monumental takeaway is that digital identity is not merely reserved for individual users on specific platforms but for organizations to connect with those individuals. The implication for IELPs is that they must not only build the digital capacity of their students, but they must also purposefully consider how they represent themselves digitally to those students.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

The foundation of second language acquisition (SLA) must be addressed to understand how non-native speakers of English learn and practice language through writing, reading, and speaking. SLA is the bedrock of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) and greatly informs teaching practices toward this demographic. The field of SLA is relatively new, with origins in the second half of the twentieth century (Ellis, 2001). Neagu (2012) described the purpose of SLA as the globalization of language, specifically English; however, she noted that foreign language teaching remains entrenched in the study and teaching of Latin during the 17th century.

SLA focuses on how second or subsequent languages are acquired. Kubota (2013) coined the term “second language,” abbreviated L2; the abbreviated form does not recognize subsequent languages (three or more) and is limited in meaning, although it is commonly used. During the 1980s, Steven Krashen became widely known for his theory of second language acquisition, and it is often referenced as a foundational core in the field of SLA (Kapur, 2017).

The essence of Krashen’s (2009) theory entails five principles. Krashen’s acquisition-learning hypothesis argues that language is acquired in two forms. The first form is a) acquisition through subconscious processing, such as communication with little attention to the words and a focus on the idea of speaking with others. An example would be a baby who responds to speech; the child cannot fully engage with the words but reacts to intonation and facial expression. The second form is b) conscious process through formal learning, such as learning how to construct sentences, whether perfect or imperfect; this formal learning reflects c) self-monitoring as the learner has time to think and consider correctness. The theory also suggests an d) affective filter hypothesis which emphasizes learner motivation and personality traits linked to language acquisition and the progressive challenge of learning new content through e) a natural order of

language being taught in a natural sequence for language acquisition through comprehensible input (Krashen, 2009).

During early research on SLA in the 1960s and 1970s, behaviorist theory dominated (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). This theory viewed language learning as a process of error, correction, and praise with an emphasis on acquisition through correction. Based on behaviorist learning theory, students were known to be “reactive to conditions in the environment as opposed to taking an active role in discovering the environment” (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 48). A flaw with this theory is the lack of attention to mental processing or student knowledge (Ellis, 2001; Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Modern education embraces a new learning theory that relies on the learner’s active participation in the learning process.

Other cultures outside of the United States, such as China, Saudi Arabia, and India, heavily rely on the behaviorist approach through memorization and correction of content. It is not always clear why particular countries and cultures do not shift their educational approach. However, it is well documented that international students attend colleges and universities in other countries for many reasons, including their teaching philosophies (Austin & Shen, 2016; Chao et al., 2017). International students will likely experience challenges in assimilating to the learning norms of the United States if they were not previously exposed to them.

The Role of Constructivism

The constructivist theory became a central philosophy in education and other fields in the 1990s (Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Kapur, 2017). The premise of this theory is learner agency to acquire knowledge through exploration and participation (Aljohani, 2017). Constructivism is attributed to several theorists (Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky) with varied perspectives

(Aljohani,2017). The common thread is that “humans create meaning as opposed to acquiring it” (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 55).

The meaning humans create is based on personal knowledge, experience, and background; this encourages learner-participation and reflection (Kapur, 2017). Aljoha (2017) noted that students and teachers are both responsible for knowledge-building under constructivism. Constructivism holds teachers and students at an equal level with joint control for student learning through six principles: the learner’s (a) need to know, (b) self-concept, (c) prior experiences, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) motivation to learn (Knowles, 2015).

Learning and development occur in countless ways in an optimal environment that promotes growth, with or without purposefully integrated tools. Constructivist theory, grounded in the fields of philosophy and psychology, posits that learning is a continuous process that takes place through lived experiences in which “knowledge and the world are both construed and interpreted through action, and mediated through tool and symbol use” (Ackermann, 2010, p. 2).

Vygotsky’s view of constructivism was based on the idea that connection is desirable and presents a source of learning and growth as culture naturally embeds learning skills and acquired traits within a community (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018). Culture itself is a tool complete with “instructions” governing how to behave and communicate, among other things, thus ensuring the creation of identity and the continual construction of knowledge (Ertmer & Newby, 2013).

Another key component to Vygotsky’s view is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the steady expansion of knowledge by challenging the learner to acquire new knowledge slightly above their current level of understanding (Ackermann, 2010). An example of ZPD is the idea of trial-and-error by testing new knowledge and gaining results to influence one’s

learning and decision-making skills. Constructivist theory in action changes based on roles in the classroom and the learning space to enact construction.

Constructivist theory is not suitable for all learning tasks and environments. All classroom settings and academic disciplines may not be suitable for student-teacher negotiation, and instructional content may determine the best instructional approach. In fact, Ertmer and Newby (2013) argued that behaviorist theory is best for fixed principles like mathematics, whereas a cognitive approach is best for applying principles to problems in disciplines like law, and constructivism is best for reflection toward undefined problems in disciplines like music.

American education takes a strongly constructivist approach in many disciplines, including language acquisition. The challenge for IELPs is that education takes a behaviorist approach in many other countries. In order to effectively teach English, IELPs must help their students adapt socially and psychologically to this American educational paradigm (Jones, 2015).

Constructivism, Technology, Teaching, and Learning

Ahamadi (2018) asserted that learning with technology develops students develop higher-order thinking patterns and is, thus, an effective method to engage student interest. Furthermore, technology-infused tasks increase student comprehension of literacy, numeracy, and scientific concepts (Kaufman, 2004). Each teaching method has its place in curriculum development, relying on access to effective learning materials and multi-media equipment; however, the evolution of instructional technology has irrevocably changed methods of teaching.

Technology integration enhances the learning environment by effectively reconfiguring traditional lessons and tasks (Ahmadi, 2018). In constructivist theory, the role of a teacher is to facilitate learning opportunities and to provide tools and resources for students to create their

own learning journey. The student is not a passive learner but an active participant who must infer current knowledge based on past events. In the case of computer and online technologies, constructivist theory has shown to be a powerful tool as users design their pathways of learning through construction of educational end-products (Lin, 2015). Students learn about technology, technology participation, and growing a digital identity through trial and error. They grow their knowledge and competence incrementally, in alignment with Vygotsky's ZPD (Ackermann, 2010).

However, Kaufman (2004) asserted that constructivism involves theories of information processing as well as, more recently, linguistics, anthropology, and sociology. This aligns with the theories of intercultural communication and the interdependent role of language and culture in L2 acquisition. It also speaks to the differences between oral communication, which is much more likely to involve cultural nuances, and writing, which is a more structured form of information processing and communication.

Constructivist Technology Pedagogies

There are three teaching methods introduced by Liu (2015) that optimize constructionism: (a) scaffolding instruction, which is reflective of ZPD, as students are guided to the next level of knowledge; (b) anchored instruction, which uses an anchor problem or event, teaching content that allows students to piece their own end-product together; and (c) random access instruction, an intensive form of learning where students acquire all information through frequent access points to the same content in different forms to build their educational end-product.

The act of teachers creating their own digital learning materials, as well as students consuming those materials and making connections through technology integration, is

constructivism at work. Gilakjani et al. (2013) found a positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy and technology integration. However, in the context of IELPs, teacher efficacy may be constrained by the lack of research into the most effective ways to prepare international students for undergraduate studies in the U.S.

Bull (2013) believed digital learning tools had a place in education but argued that “the proliferation of technology, digital materials, and learning technologies have shifted the design focus from teachers and educators to profit technology solutions” (p. 614). Videos, website building, storyboarding, blogging, graphics, and digital images are some of the items constructivism and technology offer in creating enhanced learning experiences and connections to learners’ background knowledge and experience (Bull, 2013; Goldie, 2016). Bull’s (2013) objection was the commercialization of digital learning for monetary gain, not digital learning itself; in fact, Bull encouraged teachers to create their own interactive materials. Again, the lack of adequate research makes it harder for teachers in IELPs to create effective instructional materials, encouraging the use of commercial products which may or may not meet the needs of students in IELP teachers’ classrooms.

Teachers’ positive attitudes toward technology are necessary to innovate and challenge students. Seraji et al. (2017) found that IELP teachers had positive attitudes toward the use of technology in the classroom; however, their feelings towards technology differed based on age, education-level, experience, and tenure. Thus, it may be necessary to support teachers in becoming comfortable with technology as a precursor to encouraging teachers to integrate technology into IELP classes and curricula.

In short, constructivism and technology have greatly changed pedagogy and curriculum design; consequently, students are challenged in new ways to expand their abilities using tools

for both local and global learning. The success of constructivism and technology comes from its ability to fit into the mold of student-centered learning.

The Role of Socio-cultural Theory

Naturally, communities consist of people who create and maintain social and cultural aspects of learning. Today, these communities exist both in the real and virtual worlds. Vygotsky held that learning neither takes place without people nor can be effective merely through interaction; learning necessitates social interaction. Socio-cultural theory is an extension of Vygotsky's work that falls within the confines of constructionism. Socio-cultural theory suggests that learning cannot occur outside of community, regardless of whether that community is in the real world or online (Albusaidi, 2019). By learning within a social environment, higher-order learning skills take shape through attention, planning, and problem-solving skills (Niu et al., 2018).

The complete view of socio-cultural theory and second language acquisition both empathize the use of community to develop a learner's understanding of themselves and others. Lu et al. (2018) believed that "language teaching should not only teach language but also develop students' social potential to make them aware of their identity, beliefs, and world outlook so that they can have a sense of pride to promote students' social development" (p. 75). This aligns well with the pedagogical requirements in IELPs, where faculty must not only teach language but support international students with developing digital identities required for success in American higher education. The social aspect of learning allows students to identify themselves and their place within a community to achieve pivotal self-development and self-reflective skills.

Frawley and Lantolf introduced the application of socio-cultural theory to second language acquisition in 1985 (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009). Their study found that language not only tells stories but marks a person's thought processes through the manipulation and control of language. In other words, speech and other practices make Vygotsky's theory evident in real-time. It can be inferred that oral language and control likely transfer to written control given the social environment of learning. Language of any kind and in any form is a communication tool to tell stories and shared experiences.

Culture and Second Language Acquisition

Language learning is a complex task often taken for granted. It is assumed that learning grammatical structures equates to learning an entire language (Zuana, 2017). The often-overlooked impact culture has on language learning adds to the complexity of understanding language holistically. Many researchers regard culture as a critical area of study that should be addressed as a part of language instruction and acquisition (Chun, 2015; Ho & Coady, 2018; Kramsch, 1996; Omar, 2017; Zuana, 2017). Understanding how people communicate in a particular language community is essential to participating in that target community. There are numerous theories about how culture is perceived and defined; some argue that culture should be experienced and not taught.

Culture, Language, and Societal Identity

The myriad facets of culture shape a society's identity. Culture contributes to language acquisition by understanding social customs, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. Kramsch (1996) claimed that culture is defined by two frameworks: (a) a "social community" within the study of humanities and (b) a belief system including "attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members in a community" within the field of social science (p. 1).

This structure was supported in Omar's (2017) exploration of culture where he stated that culture and language both hold components of attitude and identity.

A larger perspective was introduced by Komorowska's (2006) definition of culture as possessing multiple meanings "as seen from the functional, structuralist, phenomenological, poststructuralist, and social-constructionist perspectives" (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2011, p. 36). Although the term culture embodies many definitions, there is a consistent theme that culture lives in reference to a group of people from a commonplace with shared characteristics unique to those people. In essence, culture lives in society.

Given this understanding of a society as a composite of culture and language, both are needed to maintain a society's identity. For example, many people speak English but come from different cultural backgrounds. Even within the United States, which has a shared American societal identity, there are sub-groups of English-speaking citizens who bring diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Chinese Americans, Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans). And there is diversity within the sub-groups; for example, Hispanic Americans define themselves as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Salvadorans, to name a few.

A bilingual or multilingual person speaks multiple languages that may reflect many communities to which that person belongs as well as multiple identities associated with diverse roles in those communities. For example, a Jewish person in the U.S. may speak English, Hebrew, and Spanish. English is spoken because this individual grew up in an English-speaking country and uses English for daily life. However, Hebrew is a reflection of their Jewish culture and identity; it likely plays a significant role in worship and personal identity. Spanish as a third

language may be used in the context of a profession; for example, such an individual may be an ESL teacher or a healthcare worker where bilingualism is a professional necessity.

To grasp how pivotal learning culture is in relation to language, O'Neill (2011) examined narratives from Australian student nurses in practicums who learned English as a second language. The themes that emerged included the quality of a student's professional identity and their perceived level of competence in the workplace. The participants of the study reported that they were not equipped to interact with patients in the same manner as their native-speaking colleagues. "Native speakers unconsciously use culturally embedded contextual clues to maintain pragmatic coherence in interaction" (O'Neill, 2011, p. 1126). Cultural context clues and nuances of language are experienced and practiced in natural real-world settings. The learning of such nuances requires the acknowledgment of intercultural communication. Meraji and Zamanian (2014) affirmed that language and culture maintain a bidirectional relationship, meaning one cannot be present without the other, and both must be learned jointly.

Intercultural Communication

The term intercultural refers to the merging of culture and language together with personal and linguistic features (Omar, 2017). The teaching and learning of English require the integration of language and culture together in order to teach the nuances and dialects of language. Broadening pedagogical perspectives is important because "intercultural communication means adopting a wider intercultural perspective, depending on learners' needs and motivation" (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2011, p. 46). The teaching of intercommunication is more effective as an experience; being part of the target language community forces authentic cultural communication and participation among natives (Omar, 2017). This is one reason that

study abroad programs and foreign language institutes are so popular. Individuals learn language in the cultural context of that language.

Ziebka (2011) posited that it is crucial for language learners to focus on “a broader context of conventions that regulate the rules of communication in order to function as competent users of a foreign language” (p. 270). In order to experience a different culture or attempt to understand cultural communication, the learner’s native language and culture should be taken into consideration.

For example, Mertin (2017) discussed the effects of native culture on second and subsequent language acquisition (L2) for the Japanese. Japanese culture is centered around the collective group rather than the individual; consequently, Japanese students are often reluctant to share their knowledge or openly participate in class unless called upon for fear of being wrong, in defiance of cultural norms (Mertin, 2017).

Omar (2017) concluded that learners who were exposed to other cultures were more accepting of cultural differences, shortening the L2 acquisition period. While this may seem counter-intuitive, what Omar speaks to is the importance of culture in L2 language acquisition; exposure to cultural differences simultaneously to L2 language acquisition makes L2 language acquisition easier.

To be clear, a learner’s native language and cultural perspectives will influence their perceptions of L2 culture and how they participate in the target culture. Intercultural communication is the merging of culture and language, requiring participants to be willing to accept another culture. Intercultural skills cannot be taught, but they can be practiced while learning among the target language population. This is critical for IELPs, whose faculty must not

only teach English language skills and culture, but they must also do it while accommodating the cultural norms of the students in their programs and their classrooms.

Culture and L2 English Language Acquisition

Research emphasizes the importance of incorporating culture into language instruction. In reference to teaching English, the concepts of culture and language must be considered. There are three major forms of English: Australian English, British English, and American English, all of which originate in what is now the United Kingdom. When teaching English in an IELP, an important question is raised, “Of the three types of English, which form should be taught?”

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011) argued that the teaching of a specific type of English places “emphasis on presenting the economically and politically dominant cultural and linguistic groups as the only right, correct, standard and norm” (p. 37). As a means to avoid the dominance of one English culture over other English forms, there is a movement among researchers to encourage the recognition of other types of English. This focuses on the use of World English, English as a language in its various forms used throughout the world in more than 100 countries (McArthur (2001)). So, the question at hand is not only how to teach English as an L2 language but how to teach culture regardless of which version of English is taught or how to teach culture if the more expansive World English is taught.

The teaching of culture presents an equally large concern. How do you teach “English culture” given the diversity of cultures and societies in which English is spoken? Ali et al. (2015) argue that teachers must be proficient speakers of the target language to promote cultural awareness of the target language. But the way American teachers of varied ethnic backgrounds promote American culture may be vastly different. This is particularly significant for IELP

faculty who, ideally, prepare international students to succeed on increasingly diverse college campuses.

If instructors overlook culture, cultural stereotypes—positive or negative—may inadvertently be promoted. Examples of negative stereotyping are commonly understood (e.g., stereotyping based on race, ethnicity, gender, or ability), but positive stereotyping is less often acknowledged. For example, White English-speaking culture is often portrayed with excessively positive stereotyping, ignoring inconvenient historical truths about slavery and racism. International students may be unprepared when confronted with these issues in the context of politically active college campuses. People of color in under-developed countries may be portrayed with excessively positive stereotyping that speaks to the nobility of their struggle against poverty or political oppression. International students may be unprepared to deconstruct stereotypes placed on them as they transition into college.

Textbooks. Typically, textbooks serve as a primary instructional tool for teachers and a learning resource for students. Textbooks are written from a general or specific point of view, often dictated by publishing companies. The incorporation of cultural learning is essential to language learning textbooks. Whether culture is integrated into the curriculum determines whether the whole language is represented or merely a part or none of the culture.

English language textbooks position culture differently based on language proficiency. Ziebka (2011) found inconsistencies among textbooks published in the 1990's and beyond. Generally, language textbooks published in the 1990's for high proficiency students included culture throughout the text, whereas newer books incorporated less culture isolated in chapters. Ziebka (2011) concluded that “neither old nor new textbooks guide the learners in the field of pragmatic aspects of culture” (p. 267). The teacher does not always choose textbooks and

curriculum design, but the importance for administrators and teachers to learn how to evaluate textbooks is crucial when developing supplemental materials for IELPs.

Artifacts. The careful placement of cultural artifacts and class discussions are sensitive matters but may also foster student interest and motivation in the L2 English classroom. For example, Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011) found that Polish teenagers studying English had a strong sense of identity, were interested in learning English as a practical matter, and were not concerned about culture in English-speaking countries but rather across the world. The teachers in this study were unaware of their students' interests, so teachers tended to speak only about culture in the U.S. and the U.K. rather than taking a world-culture view. This suggests that it is critical for IELP faculty to introduce the importance of culture to their international students in order to fully prepare them to transition into American higher education.

However, a study on student motivation and culture by Meraji and Zamanian (2014) found that teaching culture alone does not motivate learners; they recommended sharing interesting aspects of culture to maintain learner interest. It is difficult to describe how culture is taught in English language learning programs. It is common knowledge that most English language programs focus on listening, speaking, reading, and writing for purposes of passing standardized exams; what is less explicit is that these programs rarely produce English language speakers with sufficient cultural learning (Ali et al., 2015).

The literature demonstrates that cultural instruction is essential as the context for language instruction. There are numerous issues when considering teaching language and culture in concert. For example, the implied message that one language form or its culture is superior. Teachers are responsible for teaching language, but the materials used in classes are not always chosen by them. Teachers should learn how to supplement instruction to include culture, but a

teacher's own understanding of the target language can impact how they integrate culture into their curriculum. This is particularly important for faculty in IELP programs, whose students are learning English with the express purpose of matriculating into undergraduate studies on English-speaking campuses dominated by the complexity of American culture.

The Role of Andragogy. The concept of andragogy pairs well with constructivist theory and SLA, as students are held to be agents of their own learning through an engaged teaching and learning process. Theory of andragogy, or adult learning, is fitting for the idea of teachers and students as co-creators of knowledge-building. The objective of andragogy is to view adult learners as co-teachers working alongside their instructors in the learning environment. Six principles guide andragogy: the learner's (a) need to know; (b) self-concept, (c) prior experiences, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) motivation to learn (Knowles, 2015). Vygotsky's view of constructivism falls in line with students being active participants who learn through experience, as andragogy seeks to empower learners and teachers together (Aljohani, 2017).

Pedagogy in the U.S. has shifted over the decades from teachers giving content for knowledge to students creating their own learning experiences with teacher facilitation. Allowing students to take control of their learning is a novel experience that is not suitable for all disciplines and possibly not for all students. Instructors must be aware and open to curricular adaptability based on class and/or individual students' needs. It is also imperative for instructors to familiarize themselves with their students' backgrounds because students from other countries and cultures may bring limited progressive education ideals.

SLA is an emerging field with theories that attempt to explain how language is learned and how best to teach in alignment with how students learn. The literature appears to focus on

oral linguistic acquisition, but it includes significant research that reflects written language acquisition. What is often omitted is the influence of the American educational paradigm, and constructivist andragogy, in determining the effectiveness of IELP instructional design and delivery.

Second Language Instruction and Acquisition

Written and oral language expression are needed to express opinions and thoughts fully. With spoken language, there is room for error and correction with grammatical and syntactic structures, gestures, and expressions accompanying the speaker's thoughts and opinions. However, written language is typically more formal than oral language expression and requires attention to grammatical and syntactical structures to create and maintain the reader-writer connection. Yet, most literature about language acquisition addresses oral communication with little to no attention to written communication.

Ellis (2001) published a primary text about SLA, explaining language acquisition with respect to specific areas of language study. Ellis (2001) presented meaningful information that emphasized oral communication instruction and acquisition; however, written communication, and its connection to oral communication, were not addressed. Despite the increasing numbers of international students on college campuses, more than a decade later, Polio (2012) remarked that “historically, L2 teaching and learning has been about the acquisition of spoken language” (p. 320); furthermore, he noted that most current SLA theories or approaches do not explicitly define themselves in terms of verbal, written, or both forms of communication.

Ellis (2010) referred to himself as an “applied SLA researcher,” encouraging a shift in SLA teacher education. He introduces principles for graduate programs in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL). He spoke from the perspective of SLA pedagogy of interest to

teachers-in-training and how technical and practical knowledge can enhance language teaching. In this later work, Ellis (2010) called for an expansion of the SLA field:

There is clearly a need for SLA research to advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of L2 acquisition. This can be pursued without any reference to language pedagogy although, as the growing literature on form-focused instruction demonstrates, one of the main ways of advancing SLA as an academic discipline is by investigating how instruction affects learning. (p. 195)

Ellis addressed the idea that more work is needed in the field of SLA, but did not address a particular area in the field; however, it can be inferred that more research in all areas of SLA is needed, including writing. Research on SLA in the context of IELPs is even more limited.

Pedagogical Approaches to Second Language Acquisition

The need to study how SLA teachers are trained in theories and philosophies of teaching may be the key toward improved ESL instruction. Generating a comprehensive view of SLA, from teachers-in-training to teachers conducting studies on oral and written studies, would propel the discipline further. Kim et al. (2017) noted a void in such research. Teachers who teach in English language academies are not required to contribute to the existing body of research; therefore, there are limited studies on non-native English speakers before they enter colleges and universities for their undergraduate studies.

Most often, second language learning takes place in the classroom. The learning environment sets the stage for acquisition. Changyu (2009) believed SLA research and English teaching in college were inseparable and, thus, called for education reform based on SLA theories:

Based on second language acquisition theories, teachers should establish a student-centered class teaching pattern to deliver intercultural communication knowledge, cultivate students' intercultural communication abilities, create language acquisition environments, fully consider students' emotional factors, and improve the teaching quality and learning effect of college English. (p. 57)

Even though Changyu's (2009) message does not explicitly address written communication, intercultural communication alludes to communication with people from other cultures in all forms. Changyu strongly advocates for design instruction with purpose, authenticity, and student focus. The most novel element within Changyu's call is the attention to emotional factors. It is unknown how teacher-practitioners may consider student emotions, but Changyu's message is well-defined and links to Krashen's idea of student motivation and personality. This is particularly important in IELPs as international students are typically young. The IELP experience is, for many, their first time away from home and out of their home country. Like all college students, they become suddenly responsible for meals, cleaning, laundry, and other tasks of daily life. Additionally, they are navigating these changes in a foreign language and foreign culture. Because they are young, their coping mechanisms are often less robust, and their support systems are no longer readily accessible.

Development and Pedagogy for IELPs

The goal of IELPs in the United States is focused on international students establishing language proficiency and competence. In the U.S., international students' English language skills for college and university admission are measured through standardized exams such as the TOEFL and IELTS. IELPs were designed specifically to meet the needs of international students studying in the United States, not non-native English-speaking students from the U.S. The first

IELP was created in 1941 at The University of Michigan as a university-based program, the English Language Institute (ELI, n.d.), after a surge of international students studying in the U.S.

Program Structure. Countless programs throughout the United States emulate the structure of the English Language Program at The University of Michigan. Barrett (1982) wrote that after 40 years of service, the structure of The University of Michigan's English Language Program is notable for nine universal features found across other IELPs in the U.S.: a) students who attend the programs are adults with a high school diploma or college degree; b) students are placed in the program based on standardized test scores; c) multi-level courses range from low-to-high to meet students learning needs; d) instruction focuses on listening, speaking, reading, and writing with grammar instruction; e) there are 20-30 hours of instruction per week; f) programs offer courses year-round for constant student advancement; g) programs are often affiliated with a college or university; h) the program is operated by a director with faculty holding degrees or certificates in TESOL, and i) programs offer an orientation to the program and student advising (Barrett, 1982).

Although Barrett (1982) stated that English language programs were associated with a college or university, he acknowledged privately that independent programs exist. The American Council on Education (Reese & Helms, n.d.) identified and classified IELPs based on operation: a) college and university-based English language programs housed and operated on campuses employing administrative staff and faculty members trained in teaching English as a foreign language; b) proprietary providers who partner with a college or university and are located on the partnering campus, but operate or quasi-independently, and c) for-profit independent language schools not partnered with a college or university where students transfer to a college or university of their choice or return to their careers.

Thompson (2013) argued that “there is an extreme lack of structured mentoring programs in place for ESL programs in the university setting. It is also the case that the lack of mentoring programs is not strictly an ESL program deficiency” (p. 225). Thompson (2013) credited the limited scope of research about IELPs internal structure to their marginalized position of being “homeless” and lacking mentorship from a “university-wide mentoring system” (p. 211). Thompson explained that since IELPs are not linked to an academic discipline or another area in a college or university, they are often “tossed about from department to department or without a department altogether” (p. 213). An important caveat is that Thompson spoke to programs that were specifically housed on college and university campuses. Even less is known about IELPs that operate independently or quasi-independently from their institution’s partners or the for-profit IELPs.

Teaching to the Test. Among the linguistic competencies taught in IELPs, writing is one of the most important skills. For international students seeking a degree in the United States, their second or subsequent-language writing skills are expected to meet standards for college-level academic writing. Many IELPs teach the skills needed to pass standardized exams, such as the TOEFL and IELTS. However, the efficacy of these and other tests is a matter of debate among researchers.

The written section of the TOEFL exam is an attempt to mirror academic text and features students must be able to navigate in the college setting. Although the exam is not representative of the “socially-driven language variation that non-native speakers may encounter in an English-medium university,” the exam is generally accepted as an accurate measure of knowledge and ability (Smart, 2019, p. 82).

Llosa and Malone (2017) studied student and teacher perceptions of TOEFL writing tasks and performance in university writing courses; the study concluded that students felt the TOEFL was representative of the academic writing required at the university level, including the quality required. Another study by Llosa and Malone (2019) compared student writing performance on the TOEFL and in-class writing assignments, finding that the two were closely correlated.

However, Staples et al. (2018) studied the validity of the TOEFL exam. They concluded that the TOEFL exam does not encompass the major forms of academic writing used at the college level but does show similarity to reflective writing in academia. Smart (2019) cited several studies showing that TOEFL was not a true predictor of student success or communication skills.

Given the questionable efficacy of these tests, teaching to the test becomes problematic. In short, pedagogy and curricula designed to teach to a test with questionable efficacy are, by default, not fully efficacious.

Instructional Design and Delivery. Standardized testing may be a convenient predictor of student skill and future writing success, but how students arrive at this success can be impacted by their instructor's resourcefulness and teaching style.

Curricula in IELPs in the U.S. vary greatly. Some curricula are purchased through an educational design company, often with off-the-shelf programs and textbooks. Some curricula are designed and prescribed by the institution, with all instructors delivering the same content. Again, some curricula are created by individual instructors for their classes. And finally, some curricula are designed by IELPs using a hybrid approach of modifying predesigned curricula to fit their students and program needs.

In the case of prescribed curriculum, Ellili-Cherif and Hadba (2017) found that ESL teachers made curriculum changes when materials did not adequately support students; a teacher's commitment to use a prescribed curriculum was based on how supportive it was toward student learning and development. This introduces two problems: (a) the content of a prescribed curriculum may not, in fact, be delivered to all students, and (b) instructors will vary in their ability to adapt curricula to student needs.

A study on an undergraduate writing-intensive class conducted by Marshall and Mar (2018) found that six of eight instructors struggled with the idea of adapting their pedagogical style toward the writing needs of their ESL students, believing that it was neither their role nor the purpose of their class to teach writing. The researchers argued that the rationale for teachers' opposition was that "instructors viewed language and composition as skills rather than content, rejecting the need to teach language and composition explicitly as part of a [writing intensive] course" (Marshall & Mar, 2018, p. 41). How instructors choose to teach their classes raises the issue of inconsistency that can affect student achievement.

Second Language Writing (SLW)

The field of second language writing (SLW) is a young discipline which began after World War II using the philosophies of composition studies and applied linguistics (Silva, 2006). It was based on the study of native language writers (Polio, 2012). Since the development of the TESOL International Organization, formerly Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, in the 1960s, SLW issues were no longer of interest merely to the composition studies community. In the 1990s, SLW became an interdisciplinary field spanning the fields of composition, applied linguistics, and TESOL. SLW is often described as the study of writing in a non-native language (L2). However, Kubota (2013) believed that the term "second language

writing” misrepresents and limits the field; as discussed above, learning an L2 language encompasses speaking, writing, and culture. Furthermore, Canagarajah (2013) viewed SLW as more than a discipline but a concept and activity; in other words, SLW is not merely a pedagogy but an instructional methodology.

For many years, second language writing was thought not to impact second language development (Ulanoff et al., 2017). Kobayashi et al. (2013) studied how native and subsequent language learning impact L2 writing acquisition. Their longitudinal case study found that writing knowledge in both the learner’s native and L2 languages merged into one writing system. They explained this through the learner’s generalization of language acquisition through reinforcement in the form of experience, exposure, and instruction. The participants in their study learned how to control which text feature to utilize based on the language they wrote in.

Semtanová (2013) explored the use of cognitive process strategies and the quality of writing in the L2, especially communication intention, cohesion, and coherence. The findings concluded that students who gave attention to detail in their writing had higher quality work than those who haphazardly applied their skills. This integration is even more critical for IELPs as their students often arrive on American campuses with a skills disadvantage; working to support these students in developing strong writing skills is one way to bridge this gap.

Second Language Writing Theory

Researchers consistently cite the lack of well-developed theories specific to SLW (Curcic et al., 2012; Matsuda et al., 2006; Silva, 2006). Many SLW studies use theories that derive from other disciplines. Curcic et al. (2012) sought to identify the theories SLW researchers use and how they are positioned in their work. They identified a small number of recurring theories: “socio-cultural theory and bilingual language approaches and models, process writing theoretical

frameworks, cognitive theories, and various other approaches” (Curcic et al., 2012, p. 823). They reported that 55% of research explicitly shared their theoretical framework and 45% implicitly shared their theoretical framework (Curcic et al., 2012). Curcic et al. (2012) concluded, “the process of theorizing may evolve through top-down deductive reasoning, or it may evolve through the interpretive building of facts and meaning making bottom-up” (p. 823).

The purpose of a theoretical framework is to ground research in a plausible theory for testing a researcher’s hypothesis. Polio (2012) recommended anchoring SLA research that applies to SLW must discern which approaches are explicitly or implicitly stated. She added that SLW writing process models are not comprehensive enough to inform how SLW is impacted by linguistic knowledge, therefore leaving a researcher to apply abstract theories to the studies of SLW.

Pedagogical Approaches and Written Language Acquisition

Writing is a language skill associated with language learning and should be guided by specific instructional approaches (Neagu, 2012). How a teacher selects and uses materials is often unique to their instructional style, comfort with technology, and willingness to try something different. Pichette et al. (2012) argued that writing is an SLA learning skill that can grow based on the introduction of new vocabulary practiced through writing for proficient second-language speakers.

Focusing on written communication, Kissau et al. (2010) addressed student willingness to communicate in writing online in French. Their findings suggest that online communication is an ideal environment for students of all proficiency levels to participate and feel like equal contributors. The online platform led to both a reduction in student anxiety and improved student self-perception. Students were able to self-assess their work on the online discussion board.

Native speakers thought their oral skills would suffice for online discussions and the non-native speakers realized they needed to communicate more.

The study by Kissau et al. (2010) was corroborated by Prichard (2013), who discovered that students found meaning in online writing in ways that differed from traditional writing forms; additionally, the use of social networking sites enhanced student motivation to write in the target language. Finally, student participation in online platforms affected students' confidence, attitudes, personality, learning style, and subject-matter competency. It is even more critical to encourage participation for international students who may not have had easy access or may lack familiarity with social networking. This is discussed in greater detail below.

To be clear, L2 instruction is an expansive field that marginally includes research about writing instruction. Even though L2 writing is its own sub-field, the primary field of L2 acquisition and instruction overlooks writing as an essential language skill for research in significant ways. It is not clear why this is the case. Furthermore, Ellis's (2010) advocacy for advancement in research on teachers-in-training, more extensive awareness, public use, and development of online L2 acquisition tools could propel the discipline further. This is even more true for research exploring IELPs.

Writing Intensive Programs

Writing intensive classes share a common theme of assisting ESL students with their writing. The structure of intensive courses or programs is different. For example, Tomaš et al. (2014) introduced a model program to teach Chinese students in China strategies to write and read in American English, including cultural preparation before their first year of study in America. The students who joined the program demonstrated academic writing challenges despite gaining admission to American colleges and universities. This is of particular concern for

IELPs because this research indicates that even with cultural preparation, international students may struggle when transitioning to their undergraduate studies.

Llosa and Malone (2017, 2019) demonstrated that standardized testing can accurately predict an ESL student's writing ability; however, writing intensive programs clearly addressed greater issues related to writing and learning in the U.S. that can hinder a student's academic progress if unaddressed. Lin (2015) found that ESL students had the most difficulty with cognitive-linguistic skills like idioms, thesis statements, paragraph development, organization, and psychological or emotional skills (Lin, 2015). Lin's (2015) findings appear to align with the idea that standardized exams represent students' academic writing performance but that many factors contribute to the success and failure of a high-stakes test. Results can be influenced by student anxiety or having a written exam reviewed by someone in a bad mood. Again, this presents challenges for IELPs that focus on teaching to the test.

Digital L2 Academic Writing

The availability of online technology as a platform to create, learn, and share is an ideal environment for student learning. Elola and Oskoz (2017) addressed the technological enhancements of the 21st century and their impact on academic writing practices. Academic writing genres are traditionally fixed, with standard methodologies; however, Elola and Oskoz (2017) argued that digital tools redefined academic writing and how it takes shape. Digital writing created a space for social and collaborative authorship and a place for images and text to live together to tell a story.

The modern era of academic writing began with multiple literacies or multi-literacies. The common understanding of literacy was the ability to read and write, whereas multi-literacy encompasses the overlapping of often diverse literacies. For example, an individual can turn on a

computer, access the internet, go to a quilter's website, log in to a forum, and ask a question with an uploaded picture that visualizes the quilting problem. This small example highlights reading and writing, but for a specific community (quilters) with a culture and language (quilting terminology); additionally, computer literacy here necessitates both navigating the computer and accessing files. The idea of the socio-culture theory is present within this remix of academic writing and blended learning in the 21st century (Elola & Oskoz, 2017). The true challenge with this new mode of writing for L2 students is utilizing complex skills seamlessly to accomplish academic objectives. Teachers must scaffold and demonstrate skills needed for academic achievement, allowing learners to adapt writing conventions to fit into today's technology-driven world.

Academic writing is a genre of writing primarily used by students and researchers. There are several studies about student writing, but few on ESL students and their academic writing performance in IELPs. To stress the importance of academic writing, Sabouni et al. (2017) study focused on improving Syrian students' English academic and scientific writing skills through an online, blended course. The researchers inferred a significant under-representation of scientific research papers written and published by Syrian scholars attributed to poor English writing skills. The researchers advocated for improved courses and activities to strengthen academic writing skills.

The implication of this research is that the teaching and practicing of the mechanics of academic writing should be emphasized in IELP's as students will have to manage expressing their ideas through academic writing. Although academic writing encompasses many sub-genres and disciplines, Peretz (2005) argued that "academic conventions are neither universal nor independent of disciplines" (p. 43). It is evident that the foundational five-paragraph essay and

its elements remain consistent and present throughout many disciplines. However, learning the nuances of writing for a specific discipline requires a community of social learning.

Academic writing is more than a genre but “an act of identity” (Jiang, 2018, p. 62). The notion of identity is linked to being a part of something (e.g., a community, a culture, or a movement); this ties to Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of learning through social interaction. The emergence of technology has greatly shifted what communities look like and where they “live,” in addition to how students create, learn, and share.

Jiang (2018) affirmed identity as a type of capital associated with social, economic, and cultural means that require investment. Investment requires diligence, time, effort, and methodical consideration, which are necessary for developing any skill, especially a digital academic writing identity. How students exercise their digital academic identity or identities is a fluid process; still, institutions and teachers are the authorities permitting students to indulge in non-traditional writing forms and digital communities (Jiang, 2018).

Jiang’s (2018) study on digital multimedia writing and identity found that student investment was pivotal toward writing identity. Overall, digital multimedia writing pushes for new identity formation; additionally, moments occur for students to embrace an emergent identity and their already established identity. Although blogging, website making, wikis, and digital storytelling are becoming acceptable collaborative academic writing genres, IELP students rarely engage with such genres.

Warschauer (2001) firmly supported student access to online communities to view the thought patterns of others as a way to examine their thoughts and behaviors to decide how they choose to challenge, accept, or test boundaries. Goodwin-Jones (2018) believed students grew to appreciate writing and its conventions when given a chance to practice various writing genres

and levels of complexity. Furthermore, he found that students were more invested and engaged in online writing when using digital platforms (Goodwin-Jones, 2018).

Student writing improvement is a standard expectation for students and higher education teachers. Although students are increasingly engaged with their digital writing, writing improvement appears to be questionable. It is difficult to infer how students manage their time, what their writing process is, and what areas of writing will be improved.

Mills and Kennedy (2013) compared Japanese students' English L2 writing in handwritten form and computer-generated. They found little difference in writing errors; however, students wrote more content when writing long-hand compared to writing on the computer. Students may have different thought processes when writing, given the types of tools students use to write. Hoomanfar and Meshkat (2015) found that students spent more time outlining and planning their work when writing long-hand than using a computer. Students' use of computers appeared to remove the planning process because they planned paragraphs moments before writing them; however, they spent more time transitioning ideas within the same paragraph. Finally, students more consistently reviewed their work while writing on the computer.

Summary

For international students, the journey into American education often begins at an IELP. Most programs simultaneously prepare students by improving English language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) and providing standardized test preparation. These IELPs prepare students for their undergraduate studies in often marginal ways, overlooking critical learning in the digital space; this includes cultivating and practicing varied forms of academic writing, skills in online writing, and helping students to shift their identity.

The focus in online writing in digital communities is to move away from paper essays that communicate ideas with one audience; the focus shifts to sharing work with a larger online audience to cultivate a community of learners. This necessitates the creation of one or more online identities. For many international students, this is a new experience. Furthermore, creating an online identity through sharing work provides a way for students to present themselves either as they are or as they wish to be seen. It may provide an opening to shift who they are in the real world by first establishing an online identity.

Successfully creating and maintaining an online identity may subsequently boost an international student's confidence as a writer through external peer support outside the classroom. Online learning communities are identifiable in socio-cultural theory as people who learn from each other; the use of technology encompasses constructivist theory, as learners create their pathways to knowledge. This research study aimed to understand international students' perspectives on their identity, academic writing, and the inclusion of technology in their learning experience in an IELP.

Chapter 3: Methodology

A phenomenon occurs when an event is shared but experienced in different ways.

Thorough investigative measures exploring phenomena' are valuable when research questions are treated as the gateway to exploring shared experiences (Silva & Boemer, 2009). This study aimed to distinguish the perceptions of digital composition and identity (two phenomena) among international students relative to their experiences in an IELP. This study collected and analyzed these experiences and perceptions, focusing on how they learn digital composition, form their writing identity, and use digital technology. The research literature produced by researchers, administrators, and faculty from IELPs to understand these phenomena is minimal. Additionally, the variation of program structures and operations are factors potentially linked to outcomes for student preparation, TOEFL and ILET exam pass rates, and overall program success.

The significance of this study was the expansion of understanding of IELP student experiences with academic writing preparedness before their undergraduate education through the lens of digital identity and technology. The expectations of international students and their coursework in an IELP are significantly different from the expectations during undergraduate studies (Kim et al., 2017). Many IELPs work to prepare students for English language proficiency to function at the college or university level, but through the gateway of standardized testing and assisting students in passing exams. Yet, these students find themselves underprepared as they enter their undergraduate programs of study, especially as it pertains to academic writing. This study was designed to explore why, despite focus and attention, IELPs fail to prepare international students for undergraduate academic writing adequately.

Research Questions

Moustakas (1994b) noted that research topics and questions often carry social meaning and personal significance for the researcher. The interest of the researcher is the primary motivator for this research study. This inquiry will impact English language learners in higher education and satisfy the researcher's curiosity about education from the perspectives of international students. The phenomenological structure of the four research questions seeks to identify core experiences and their meaning through qualitative methodology that requires participant involvement to highlight experiences through accurate accounting in which the researcher does not pursue correlations to predict outcomes (Moustakas, 1994b). These four questions are as follows:

1. What is the learning experience of international students in an Intensive English Language Program?
2. What types of social cultural practices impact English Language Learners' academic writing and identity confidence levels?
3. What is English Language Learners' perception of their digital academic writing and identity either while enrolled or after enrollment in an Intensive English Language Program?
4. How do English Language Learners perceive their interactions with virtual tools and resources used in an Intensive English Language Program?

The guiding research questions constructed an image of how IELP students learn, how they experienced the IELP pedagogy, and how they perceived their academic preparation for undergraduate studies. This study filled a void in research about IELPs and illustrated how

English language learners could be better supported, both during their IELP studies and throughout their undergraduate studies, with academic personnel and departments.

Research Design

Phenomenology is a research methodology designed to understand a phenomenon, with human beings as the source of shared narratives. The phenomenological method is associated with constructivism, as the researcher seeks underlying reoccurrences, meanings, and interpretations (Qutoshi, 2018). Under the umbrella of phenomenology lies several styles of investigation, including transcendental phenomenology.

Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method (Husserl, 2012) is concerned with "seeking realities not pursuing truth" through descriptive narratives at the heart of a phenomenon (Qutoshi, 2018; Reiners, 2012). Narratives are based on experiences accepted at face value as the data necessary to examine a phenomenon. "Perception, thought, memory, imagination, and emotion" are required to understand a phenomenon because intention and awareness are needed to recall past events (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Reiners, 2012). Sharing personal details about past events can be frightening for some participants; therefore, establishing a rapport between participant and researcher is necessary.

Additionally, for a researcher to gain more profound levels of insight, their perceptions and interpretations must be free of biases and negative assumptions (Qutoshi, 2018). Their attention must be placed entirely on the participant with the goal of comprehending how phenomena were experienced, their meaning, and the underlying structure of that meaning (Qutoshi, 2018). Forethought into the research design is an undertaking that requires consideration of the best data collection methodologies and comprehensive gathering of enough

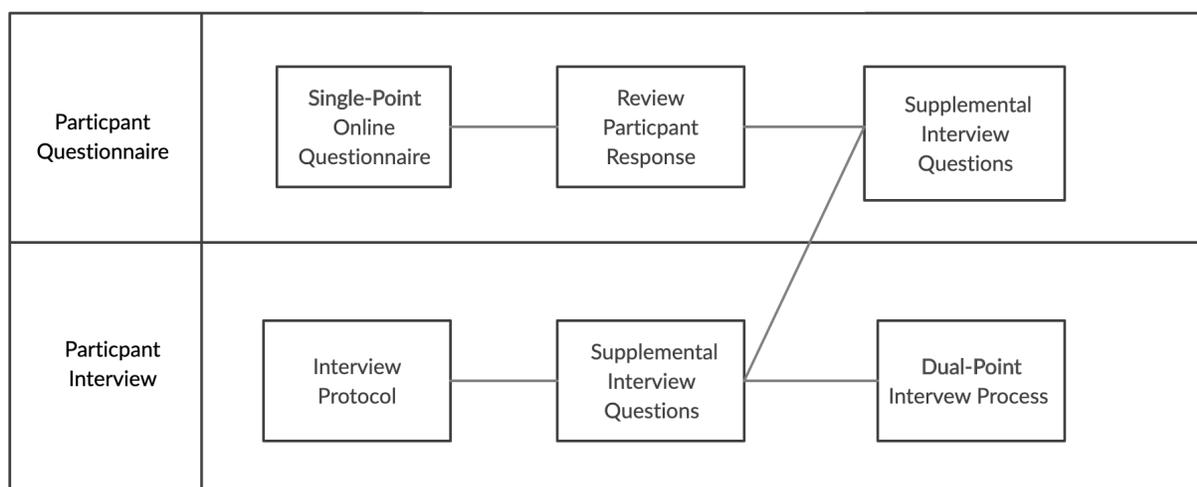
data for an informed analysis. For a thorough understanding of participant experiences, this research study used a dual method.

Triangulation of Data to Ensure Validity and Reliability

Participant data were collected using a three-point data collection process which consisted of an online questionnaire, a standardized interview protocol, and supplemental interview questions (see Figure 1). This triangulation of data ensured study validity and reliability.

Figure 1

Three-Point Data Collection Process



The purpose of validity is to ensure appropriate design measures are taken to reach the intended study objective. In qualitative research, many scholars disagree with how to validate an instrument while concurring that validity is necessary (Golafshani, 2003). For this study, face and content validity were used to justify each designed instrument logically. Logical justification ties the rationale for each design element to its means of achieving the study objective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Drost, 2011; Kumar, 2014).

Creswell and Miller (2000) believe there are two viewpoints for validity in qualitative research: the researcher's lens and the lens of participants. The researcher's lens is the best judgment to determine when data is saturated, how to view the data, and how to construct codes. Data triangulation was used to ground the data through constant comparison of the data to validate preliminary findings. Flick (2018) insists that active triangulation during the data collecting phase can render richer, differentiated, and inclusive findings to understand the issue under study. The researcher's notes, audio recordings, and questionnaire data were triangulated to confirm the accuracy of data, but also consistent refinement of the data to reach data saturation.

In qualitative research, the term reliability means consistency, predictability, and accuracy (Kumar, 2014; Leung, 2015). The determinate factors of reliability are unclear and arguable in qualitative research (Cypress, 2017; Golafshani, 2003). The data from this study was grounded in the human experience with its associated behaviors and attitudes toward those experiences, which cannot be replicated; therefore, the reliability of this research was grounded in its attention to detail during the research process (Cypress, 2017). In essence, the careful handling of the data and researcher transparency was the reliability that showed itself in the form of data collection, data analysis, and conclusion-making in this study

Managing Researcher Bias

Bias is defined as knowingly or unknowingly influencing the outcome of data during the study design, data collection phase, and/or data analysis process (Mullane & Williams, 2013; Šimundić, 2013). According to Šimundić (2013), "Every scientist should therefore be aware of all potential sources of bias and undertake all possible actions to reduce and minimize the deviation from the truth" (p. 12).

This researcher did not foresee having a potential for intentional bias, but the possibility of unintentional bias is real. However, unintentional bias occurs due to the researcher's cognitive blindness, especially in qualitative research and in the context of interviewer bias. Interviewer bias is defined as treating data differently (i.e., with bias), including gathering, recording, and analyzing data (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010).

There is an increased chance of interviewer bias when the anticipated outcome is already known to the researcher, resulting in neglectful attention. However, due to the lack of existing research on how IELPs help international students shape their digital identity, this was not a significant concern for this research. Another area of possible bias is the researcher's attempt to confirm the information by summarizing and retelling the participant's narrative during an interview. In restating information, the researcher may later inaccurately recall interviews. This research used an interview protocol, transcripts, and systematic data analysis procedures to mitigate researcher bias to ensure data is treated appropriately. Finally, using an audio recording allowed the researcher to confirm data by relistening to recordings if necessary.

More significantly, the researcher was concerned about unknowingly influencing the mined data. Mullane & Williams (2013) argued it is the responsibility of the researcher, mentors, and the associated institution to demand high ethical standards during the research process. Even when the checks and balances of maintaining integrity during the pursuit of scholarship and research are adhered to, the onus remains on the researcher to uphold the values and ethics of scholarship. Thus, this researcher used peer review and member-checking to reduce the potential for unintentional bias in data interpretation.

Site and Participant Selection

The research took place with a variety of international students. Students who currently studied at an IELP at a university in Southern California were eligible to participate, as were those who previously studied at the IELP within the last two years. Participants who previously studied at an IELP were recruited using the snowball method. The research site was purposefully chosen to meet the constraints of the research questions (i.e., that the research take place in an IELP). Furthermore, the site was selected for its convenience of location to the primary researcher's home. This was necessary due to the constraints of unfunded doctoral research. Additionally, the researcher had contacts at the university, which helped obtain the necessary permissions.

Protection of Human Subjects

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pepperdine University is an integral process in assuring the rights and well-being of study participants under the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. This study was submitted to the Pepperdine University IRB for approval before the data collection process began (see Appendix A). It was also submitted to the IRB of the research site for approval; this approval is not reproduced in this dissertation to maintain anonymity. Participants were asked to sign a consent form before completing a questionnaire and participating in an interview (see Appendix B). This document spelled out the rights of participants, their ability to withdraw at any time, the protocols that protect their identities, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Participants were also asked to verbally confirm their willingness to participate in the study before the interview process began; they were informed of their rights to confidentiality and to withdraw at this time. Collected data

and information gathered from participants were kept in password-protected files on a password-protected computer.

Participant Sampling

Within the IELP, participants were purposefully selected. The participants of this study were international students holding an F1-Visa issued for academic study in the United States or an international employee holding a work visa sponsored by a US employer. The Institute of International Education (IIE, 2018) data suggested that these students would come from China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and South Korea—the top five countries sending students overseas to the United States. The student participants for this study were enrolled full-time in the IELP.

After IRB approval, IELP directors and faculty were contacted via email to seek their support and permission to recruit their students for this study (see Appendix C). As part of the email communication, a research information document was sent outlining the purpose and design of this study (see Appendix D).

During the email exchange, but after an agreement was finalized, the researcher sent the electronic pre-questionnaire access website address to the study to be forwarded to students for their participation. Students were encouraged to participate in this study with an incentive of a gift card (\$5 each for the questionnaire and interview) for their participation.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation consisted of a pre-interview questionnaire, or audit, and an interview. An online questionnaire supported this research by asking preliminary questions about the participant with a focus on perceptions of their academic writing, identity, and use of technology. The preliminary questions were used as a gateway toward exploring deeper narratives during the interview process. Sorrell and Redmond (1995) acknowledged that participants were not likely to

share as much information on questionnaires as they might in an interview. The participant interviews were enhanced by the intake data generated by each participant. An interview protocol guided the interviews, but the intake questionnaire informed the researcher about which areas to probe in the interview.

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The purpose of the intake questionnaire was two-fold: a) to prepare the participants for the interview and the topics to be discussed and b) to assist the researcher in determining which questions to explore further during the interview (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995). The questionnaire consisted of eight questions using open-ended, short-answer, and multiple-choice structures (see Appendix E). The questions were designed to address demographic information, student perceptions of academic writing and identity, student confidence level, and use of tools and technology. The questionnaire method was anticipated to be efficacious in helping participants think about their experiences and how they wanted to share them.

An online survey software, Qualtrics, was used to host, record, and store questionnaire data. The pre-interview questionnaire was accessible to students via a URL link. Measures were put in place with the online software to limit the number of times a participant could complete the questionnaire to a single instance.

A possible limitation with the survey methodology is recruiting participants, technology access, and timeliness of participation. The researcher believed the support from IELP leadership and faculty would help with participant recruitment. Given that these programs used technology, the researcher did not anticipate that students would be limited by access to a computer to take the survey. Faculty and leadership support was also anticipated to help mitigate the problem of timely survey completion.

Two additional challenges with questionnaire methodology are 1) the inability to clarify questions and respondents' answers and 2) participant reading comprehension levels. The interviews were anticipated to significantly mitigate the survey limitations by allowing clarifying answers and deep exploration of students' lived experiences. The researcher made every effort to pose questions at a reading level that would be accessible to the anticipated skills of the international students who participated in this study.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Given the phenomenological approach of this research study, interviews were used to examine students' lived experiences through shared narratives. During the interview process, the researcher was equipped with tools to aid the data collection process. Sorrell and Redmond (1995) argue that the researcher, in a sense, is also an instrument for data collection. Thus, phenomenological interviews are not "conducted by" researchers; rather, the researcher is seen as an active participant in the interview process (Sorrell & Redmond, 1995; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Active participation includes asking questions, responding to dialogue, reading body language, and being attentive to the interviewees' needs.

Interviews offer a unique opportunity in real-time to speak with participants and seek clarifications about their experiences. The framing of broad, open-ended questions is critical to the data being mined to answer the research questions (Moustakas, 1994b). Depending on the question asked, the participant may react emotionally to an experience that places the participant in a vulnerable state; therefore, establishing rapport is critical. Establishing trust, building a welcoming environment, and emphasizing the participants' ability to proceed, stop, or come back to questions is a starting point toward building rapport. Time is needed to welcome participants and establish a comfortable atmosphere for emotions, experiences, and opinions to surface.

Although interviews have a structured timeframe, moments of heightened emotions may require more time, which is why structure and flexibility are important.

The purpose of an interview protocol was to maintain consistency among all participants and act as a guide for the dialogue exchange. A semi-structured interview protocol was used for its flexibility and to ensure consistency (Moustakas, 1994b). The flexibility of a semi-structured interview allows for dialogue to veer into topics that were not previously identified that may offer additional, relevant supporting information. It is important to note that this approach contrasts Creswell and Creswell's (2017) advocacy for unstructured qualitative interviews. However, given the narrowly defined research topic and questions, this researcher believed an unstructured interview process would likely not yield the specific information she sought to obtain.

The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 22 questions (see Appendix F). These questions covered topics related to the four research questions. The protocol questions placed emphasis on technology, writing, identity, and the IELP experience through the lens of students.

All interviews were recorded. In-person interviews were recorded with an audio recorder; online interviews were recorded using the Zoom Video Communication platform and a separate audio recorder as a backup. A limitation with interview methodology is that physical environments are inconsistent between participants and may not be conducive for an in-depth interview; however, they can allow for greater rapport-building. The Zoom platform allowed for more consistency, but internet bandwidth caused disruptions. Given the global pandemic that coincided with the implementation of this research project, it was anticipated that all interviews would take place over Zoom to ensure both participant and researcher safety.

Data Collection

Research and data collection took place over the Summer 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters. The sample size of this study was expected to be 15 students, which was consistent with the standards for a phenomenological research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

The online questionnaire was required for all participants before the interview. The opening statement of the questionnaire contained the informed consent statement, expressing how participation in this study was voluntary and could be stopped at any time. The participants, at their convivence, completed the online questionnaire. After the questionnaire, participants were asked to enter their email address to schedule the interview date and time; they were also asked to propose two dates and times convenient for them to interview.

Ideally, the interview was scheduled three to five days after completing the questionnaire to allow the researcher time to review the data and prepare extended questions based on the questionnaire data. The supplemental questions were prepared individually for each interviewee in response to each student's personal narrative, addressing missing information and insights worthy of further investigation.

Interviews with participants were confirmed via email after being scheduled through email. At the start of each interview, participants were informed again that the interview was voluntary and that they could ask to stop the interview process at any time or opt out of answering a question. With consent from the participant, each interview was recorded, with handwritten researcher notes being taken as well. Interviews were anticipated to take 30 to 60 minutes. Students were offered the opportunity to review their transcribed interview for

accuracy; they were offered access to the final dissertation once it had been submitted for publication.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data is utilized to describe socially constructed environments. Through Husserl's phenomenological approach (Husserl, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014), a participant's global view of an issue is investigated with a focus on the correlation between noema (i.e., what was experienced) and noesis (i.e., how it was experienced). In this study, collected qualitative data were analyzed using constant coding and comparison of data to evaluate similarities and differences among participant data. Because phenomenology is a constructivist approach, Sloan and Bowe (2014) assert that the outcome of data analysis is influenced by the choices made by the researcher (e.g., construction of interview questions, data gathering procedures).

During the analysis process, the researcher's handwritten field notes and interview recordings were transcribed using the transcription software NVivo. The researcher reviewed transcripts and audio recordings for accuracy while taking preliminary notes about the data. This data was triangulated with the questionnaire data to ensure reliability and validity. Additionally, the researcher used peer review and member-checking to increase reliability and validity. Initially, close reading was necessary and utilized to generate themes and codes to complete the data analysis process. This process was followed by bracketing.

Bracketing

The Van Manen thematic data analysis approach argues that researchers use their background and experiences they share in common with participants to validate data (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). However, the use of bracketing, or epoché, is essential for data analysis in transcendental phenomenology (Butler, 2016). Bracketing involves three processes of data

distillation: removing learned knowledge, removing personal background knowledge, and consciously remaining focused solely on the data to unravel the phenomena structure in an attempt to define and analyze it (Allan, 2009; Starks & Trinidad; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The bracketing process is complex because it aims to consciously create a blank canvas through which the researcher adjusts their lens in viewing the data as it is. To accommodate the needs of epoché, this study used the modified Van Kaam Method of phenomenology data analysis, as proposed by Moustakas (1994b).

The Van Kaam data analysis method (Moustakas, 1994a) employs a sequence of steps used to dissect participants' interview dialogue (see Figure 2, below). This method ensures the researcher focuses on the data, utilizing transcribed data and searching for reoccurring codes and themes. Participants and their associated data are given a pseudonym to protect their identity. In compliance with the Van Kaam data analysis method, horizontalization will be conducted. Horizontalization is the equal treatment of data by “opening up possibilities for seeing things differently and changing one’s perspective” to add new codes previously overlooked or disregarded (Allan, 2009, p. 16).

Limitations

As a phenomenological research study, the primary approach of this research was first-person narratives based on students' lived experiences. Because the researcher asked participants to retell and reflect on events, accurate memory recall may have been an issue. This is a consistent challenge in qualitative interview-based research. The researcher listened for inconsistencies between the questionnaire and the interview, as well as divergent answers within the interview itself.

The questionnaire was designed to be short and comprehensible. However, due to differing English language proficiencies between students, the length may have been a deterrent for some participants. This may have caused a partial completion of some questions or students avoiding answering some questions at all. However, this challenge was mitigated by the interview process.

Figure 2

Van Kaam's Model for Bracketing

Step	Description
Listing and Preliminary Grouping	List every expression relevant to the experience (horizontalization)
Reduction and Elimination	Determine invariant constituents by testing to meet two criteria: 1) a moment necessary and sufficient to constitute understanding; 2) can be abstracted and labeled. Constituents not meeting these criteria are eliminated
Clustering and Thematizing Invariant Constituents	These are the core themes of experience
Final Identification of Invariant Constituents	Are these expressed explicitly or compatible as expressed in transcripts? If not, they are deleted.
Constructing Individual Textural Descriptions	Identify verbatim examples (i.e., direct quotes) from the transcripts for each participant
Constructing Individual Structural Descriptions	Create a mental picture for each participant of how the experience occurred and how it was structured
Constructing Textural Structural Descriptions	Integrate the text and structure of participant experience using invariant constituents and themes
Constructing a Composite Description	Integrate the text and structure of the group using invariant constituents and themes

Finally, this dissertation relied upon gathering data during a time of global pandemic when the California government significantly limited person-to-person contact based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization. Interviews conducted online may impede the researcher's ability to observe participants' environment and non-verbal language. Also, due to complete reliance on technology, building and sustaining the proper rapport was more difficult and may have limited the extent to which participants opened up about their experiences. Finally, the interviews may have been influenced by computer and internet access, bandwidth issues, appropriate lighting, background noise, and privacy issues.

Summary

The objective of this study was to distinguish the perceptions of digital composition and identity (i.e., two phenomena) among international students relative to their experiences in an IELP. The significance of this study was the expansion of understanding of IELP student experiences with academic writing preparedness before their undergraduate education through the lens of digital identity and technology.

The study used Husserl's (2012) transcendental phenomenological methodology as the foundation of the research design. The lived experiences of students were explored through a pre-interview questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and researcher field notes. Triangulation of these data ensured reliability and validity.

Data analysis used a modification of the Van Kamm analysis method for phenomenological data. Data was bracketed and continually assessed throughout the data collection and data analysis process. The research took place in IELPs; participants were purposefully selected.

Chapter 4: Findings

This phenomenological study, based on Husserl's (2012) approach, sought to understand international students' perceptions of online academic writing, digital composition, and digital identity. This took place in the context of studying at an Intensive English Language Program (IELP) in the United States. The notion of self-reflection as a process of evaluating one's online writing identity and the connectedness to academic writing, especially online academic writing, is part of the necessary preparation for studying at a Western college or university. It is a process of preparing students for shifting norms in academia.

IELPs are one pathway for international students to reach their goal of attending a college or university in the United States. However, they are not equipped to support students with English language proficiency skills and academic skills success; attention to digital technology and online academic writing are not adequately addressed in IELP curricula. IELPs may introduce some elements of technology, but they rarely emphasize or require practice in the use of online academic writing beyond traditional discussion boards and online peer feedback. More student exploration of "self" academically in an online environment was needed.

The data presented here include responses from nine participants gathered during a three-point data collection process—an open-ended online questionnaire, supplemental interview questions designed to deepen information from the online questionnaire, and an interview using a standard protocol containing open-ended questions. Participants' experiences were compared and contrasted with constructing a narrative of meaning designed to answer the four research questions guiding this study. Chapter 4 describes the study participants' demographics and the research findings.

Impact of the Global COVID-19 Pandemic

At the time of data collection in the summer of 2020, life in the United States and around the world stopped due to the COVID-19 global pandemic health crisis. Day-to-day operations in all business sectors, such as education, government, and commerce, and citizens' daily routines worldwide shifted. As a result, the data collection process for this research was not a smooth process.

The pandemic made seeking participants more difficult and posed an actual and greater task to physical health. Initially, the researcher anticipated recruiting 15 international student participants for this study but could only recruit nine participants. Also, the researcher intended to work with international students in California but needed to expand the participant research criteria to create a greater potential participant pool. This resulted in the inclusion of students from other states and extended the time frame when students last attended an IELP. Overall, locating responsive international student participants proved to be a significant challenge.

The greater challenge in finding participants resulted from the California state Stay-at-Home order (State, 2020). This mandate required all residents to stay at home; all public and private education institutions moved operations online, necessitating all students to attend online school. International students with F-1 visas by Federal law are required to attend school full-time with no more than three credits from online classes (USICE, 2020). The California Stay-at-Home order created peril for international students who risked violating visa requirements by virtue of having to attend school full-time but online rather than in-person. Ultimately, the Federal government allowed international students to stay in the U.S. and continue their education online for the spring and summer semesters of 2020 (USICE, 2020). However, because of the original F-1 visa requirement, delayed communication due to office closures, and

students' personal preferences, some international students choose to return home. This further hindered the recruitment process.

After a few months of searching for participants, gathering data, and regaining confidence in this work, the researcher felt it was necessary to move forward to complete the dissertation. The research data presented is not only a representation of the researcher working through barriers academically but also a glimpse into the vulnerability of a student demographic. These international students were pulled between wanting to reach an academic milestone, fear of potentially violating visa requirements, worrying about family and friends thousands of miles away, and simply trying to survive in an unprecedented time in the world.

Demographics

The researcher's goal was to have a true representative demographic array of international students from various countries to provide a multi-faceted view based on participant background. The nine participants' countries of origin reflect the home countries of international students in the United States (IEE, 2019b). All nine participants shared information about their country of origin, highest degree earned, and other key data points. Five participants held a bachelor's degree, and four held a master's degree. Each participant is referenced with a participant number to maintain confidentiality. See Table 1, below.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Country	Male	Female	Total
Saudi Arabia	3	3	6 (66.7%)
China	1	1	2 (22.2%)
Japan	0	1	1 (11.1%)

Participants attended an IELP between 2008 and 2020; the average was 7.8 months (see Table 2, below). Two of the participants (22.2%) attended two IELPs. The nine participants participated in 11 IELPs at six institutions; six participants (66.6%) attended the University of Southern California IELP. The institutional structure for the IELPs was not well defined. However, during the interview process, participants offered information about their program's structure for context to understand their experience and challenges.

Table 2

Schools Attended by Participants and IELP Attendance

Participant	Location of School	Name of School	Months of IELP Attendance
Participant 1	California	University of Southern California	5 - 8 Months
Participant 2	California	University of Southern California & University of California Los Angeles	5 - 8 Months
Participant 3	California	University of Southern California	9 - 12 Months
Participant 4	Rhode Island	Johnson and Wales University	9 - 12 Months
Participant 5	California	Fresno Pacific University	9 - 12 Months
Participant 6	California	University of Southern California	9 - 12 Months
Participant 7	Hawai'i & Milwaukee	University of Hawai'i at Hilo & University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	9 - 12 Months
Participant 8	California	University of Southern California	1 - 4 Months
Participant 9	California	University of Southern California	1 - 4 Months

Findings for Research Questions

Examining this study's research questions fell within the domains of "noema" (what was experienced) and "noesis" (how it was experienced); the data was situated in the analytical framework of Husserl's phenomenological approach (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For themes to

surface for data analysis, constant coding and comparison of the data took place; this process required the researcher to categorize text into specific groupings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher began the data analysis process by reading the transcribed interview data and narrowing it into three categories: major, recurring, and emerging themes.

The major themes, such as IELP, writing, technology, and identity, came from the broad umbrella of questions asked during the interviews. To identify recurring themes, the researcher looked over the contents of each major theme to find recurring keyword phrases or words (e.g., goals, stress, community). Finally, the researcher located themes not anticipated by the researcher or identified in the existing literature (i.e., emerging themes), such as negative interactions with program administration.

From the collected information, the researcher's duty was to find reoccurrences, meanings, and interpretations free of personal influence through bracketing, also known as epoche (Allan, 2009; Qutoshi, 2018; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The researcher's key focus during the data mining process was solely to look at the data for what it was—experiences belonging to others that did not require judgment, assumptions, or self-willing interpretations by the researcher or others. The data was not discussed with persons not affiliated with this study to ensure the researcher's authentic eye toward the data.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “What is the learning experience of international students in an Intensive English Language Program?” This section reports the findings linked to understanding the learning experience of international students who studied in an IELP.

The initial common goals participants identified were 1) to meet college or university admission requirements for undergraduate or graduate school by improving their writing and

speaking skills and 2) to gain enough skills to pass the TOEFL or ILETS exam. The responses from participants regarding their overall experience studying at an IELP ranged from “fun and interesting” to “difficult” and “stressful.” The underlying reasons for this diversity of experience were issues with school administration, frustration with teachers, and unsatisfactory curricula. Five themes were identified: a) course placement, b) communication, c) limited academic rigor, d) diversity of students, and e) classroom environment. These themes are examined in the sections below.

Theme 1: Course Placement. Attending an IELP was the entry point for participants to get closer to their academic goal of studying in their desired field in the United States. However, to reach that goal, participants were required to take a series of classes focused on written and spoken English. They took general core classes (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and elective classes (e.g., American culture; campus life; communication skills like email writing and public speaking; exam preparation).

Participants felt that program structure influenced their academic progress and, therefore, their overall experience. There is no unified programmatic structure for IELPs in the United States; each program is framed differently in terms of how students are placed into courses, how courses are taught, and the sequence of courses offered as well as how program administration and staff manage student issues. The participants in this study lamented how this lack of programmatic structure directly impacted their academic journeys. Participants argued that the structure of their IELP program was not beneficial to their learning and that they were placed into classes that did not meet their needs.

For example, Participant 7 attended the IELP at the University of Hawaii’ at Hilo because she wanted to transfer from the campus IELP to an undergraduate program there. While studying

in Hawai'i, she felt her overall experience and progress were slow and easy. She did not feel like she was making adequate progress and that the program challenged her skills towards growth because she believed she knew much of the course material (i.e., she believed she was placed in a lower course than what she needed). However, she admitted that it wasn't until she changed IELP programs that she realized how much she didn't know. She explained, "The whole time I felt like I was just never going to get near ready to college." But when she transferred to the University of Wisconsin, she had to "retake most of the classes and restart because my English wasn't [developed] enough, especially writing." at the University of Wisconsin, she believed she was placed in advanced classes but lacked sufficient skills for advanced classes.

I transferred to Wisconsin. I failed many classes my first year because my counselor didn't know my level. There's a mismatch. . . so, my counselor just took a look at the paperwork [course transcripts] and was like, "Okay, you completed 100-level. . . you could actually start taking like second year, third year stuff."

Student misplacement into courses is frequent; students often recognize the misplacement and attempt to change their courses. For example, Participant 2 was enrolled in a beginner-level course that focused on English proficiency exams; he requested to move to a level that better met his needs. But he reported that the coordinator explained, "there are no different levels, so you need compensate, you need to solve this with your teacher." He did not say how he and the teacher resolved this matter but described the situation:

While he [the teacher] was lecturing, he knew that I knew some information and I needed other information, or I needed to focus on other things. I took the ILETS for the beginner level two times. I already passed it but there was not [an] available level [for my knowledge] so. . . they put me again in this elective course.

Similarly, Participant 5 did not like that some courses did not have levels to segment novice learners from advanced learners. “It was only one class for all of us and we were at different levels. They explained, “So sometimes, the teacher would pay attention to the whole people in the class. But sometimes you are advanced and this [class] is less skilled than what you need”

Students were sometimes pushed into taking and completing courses that did not meet their needs; however, it is not clear from the data what tactics international students use to overcome such challenges.

Theme 2: Communication. Communication between students, teachers, and the school administration was an element continuously present during the learning experiences of international students. The interaction and communication between students, teachers, and school administration is a complex relationship where students look to teachers and administrators for support regarding academic and personal matters. Often international students who attend IELPs in the United States do not have a support network for help; they seek help from teachers, coordinators, counselors, or other administrative staff personnel. This section explores how communication impacts international students learning experience.

For example, Participant 2 reflected on a time when he was newly arrived in the United States and needed help with housing; he compared the help he received from another IELP he attended. “I was very stressed and very overwhelmed. I go to the coordinators for help, and they did not help.” He explained how he perceived the program staff lacked sympathy, “This was my first time to come here in the United States. I had difficulty like miscommunication. The coordinators, they were not helpful. Honestly, I feel like they didn’t care.” They told him, “It’s your problem, we cannot help.” Participant 2 added, “My experience with USC [IELP],

especially the coordinators, I was very stressed and overwhelmed. I had a problem with housing, and I was thinking where can I move?" His experience with the IELP influenced his feeling about his pre-master's program: "Well, my experience [at the USC] pre-masters [program] was good. . . but in the IELP, no. . . it was very stressful, and I needed someone too. . . [my experience at USC] wasn't that good." However, coordinators at UCLA gave him recommendations about where to find housing and asked if they could help with housing and other things. Although Participant 2's issues were not directly related to his learning experience, this narrative demonstrates how a student in a time of need can seek help from the people they have a lot of interaction with on campus. In other words, the problem is not that students are unwilling to ask for or accept help. Second, interactions such as the one he experienced leave an impression that the program administration does not care enough to help solve non-academic matters that impact students' lives and, consequently, the environment in which they learn.

Participant 1 shared a similar experience with program administration and a teacher who appeared not to care. During her studies at the IELP, she had the same teacher three times for different classes; she explained how this altered her confidence as a student writer. "At the beginning, I felt this was my fault. . . I had doubt with myself. I had this teacher for three semesters [who] made me feel he doesn't give a sh** because, like, I've tried my best in his classes." Participant 1 described how the teacher would not offer feedback, made students feel bad about their mistakes in class, and was not helpful. She spoke with the administration for help but did not receive any help.

I told the administration that he is so harmful to me, and I can't be with him. . . they [school administration] told me this, "You have to deal with him because in graduate schools you will face people like him." They [school administration] didn't believe me

and so I decided to record everything. And I gathered evidence so they can't argue with me or make doubt myself.

Participant 1 and Participant 2 both experienced communicating with program administration that proved not to be fruitful. The potential loss of confidence in program administration and their lack of care toward students' issues can alter students' view of their experience at an IELP and their confidence in themselves.

Theme 3: Limited Academic Rigor. Another feature that appeared to impact the learning experience was reaching a plateau or the feelings of not making progress (i.e., programs lacking rigor). This plateau was illustrated by Participant 6, who saw his personal growth as he learned to speak and write with confidence, crediting the IELP he attended for his achievement.

At the beginning, it was interesting. I was learning a lot and there were a lot of things I hadn't known before. But as time went on, it started to become more boring" Participant 6 specified that "after five to six months, I started to reach a plateau phase where you don't learn new things and, at that time, I felt bored because I had to finish that semester or the course. But, at the same time, I was not getting new things or new information from that course.

On a similar note, Participant 5 saw improvement in her studies but felt she did not attain her goal of improving her writing. "From attending the English language program, I noticed an improvement in my listening skills and speaking skills, but I was looking for improving my academic writing and I didn't see any huge improvement in that area. She added that "for GRE, didn't see any benefit from the school, so, I had to stop my study there."

The measure of self-progress can be seen in various ways, and students frequently searched for markers of progress as a source of self-motivation during their studies.

Student participants also shared what they liked the least about their programs that contributed to how they perceived their IELP experiences. Participants 3 and 9 wanted more rigorous classes and additional learning materials. Participant 9 argued for more teaching instruction], noting that “most of the time [instruction] is enough for us” but expressing an interest in being able to “practice more or provide us more learning materials that we can learn outside [of class]. Resources, or something like that.” Participant 3 added, “I didn’t like that there were some subjects that I didn't benefit from. . . such as communication. It was like I'm playing.” They added that if they were “more interested, like writing and speaking, it would, it will be more benefit for me.” Participant 8 did not like the lessons and stated that they were not helpful for his major, while still being helpful for language building. “I am computer engineer major and some classes cannot help me, but [were] helpful for language building.”

Theme 4: Diversity of Students. For more insight into the learning experience, participants explored what they liked the most about their programs, which contributed to their positive experiences. First, roughly a third of participants commented on the diversity of the program, meeting students from different countries and learning about new cultures. Participant 4 exclaimed, “What I like the most, the diversity of the people who were with me. I meet so many people from different countries and I learned so many new cultures and that formed the person I am now.”

Participant 6 liked the idea of communicating only in English with students who spoke a different native language but would have liked to see more diversity and fewer students cluster with others who were from a similar background. The diversity of the student body at an IELP influences the students’ learning experience because knowledge is exchanged by students from diverse backgrounds, which is valued in a learning community.

Theme 5: Classroom Environment. The learning environment and classroom space was an important factor for two-thirds of the participants. Students used various phrases to describe the classroom environment: “fun and safe to make mistakes,” “opportunities to speak in class, but not pressured to speak in class” (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9). Giving more detail, Participant 1 said, “I had fun with the teachers. . . they have their ways to teach English. And I really appreciate. . . they were open-minded, and they accepted us and [were] respectful also.”

A welcoming learning environment allowed students to be themselves and build valuable academic relationships with their teachers. For example, Participant 8 stated, “even though some classes were not helpful, and teachers cared about results, the teachers made the class exciting to learn information.” Student and teacher engagement with course content was key in constructivist learning. Although some course material may not have helped all students in class, directing student attention toward the lessons being taught was the pull needed for an exciting learning space.

Summary. Research Question 1 revealed that an array of learning experiences influenced participants’ learning experiences and other aspects of education beyond personal education goals. The qualitative data shows that participants gauged their learning experience at IELPs based on their academic progress and the IELP’s ability (or inability) to meet their individual needs over a period of time. Students were not satisfied with their learning experience with regard to issues such as accurate course placement, academic rigor, sympathy and caring from school administration, and meeting student expectations. However, students were satisfied regarding cultural diversity, teacher open-mindedness, class participation opportunities, and space to make learning mistakes safely. One thing that should be noted from this data is the commonality of shared experiences of international students across this participant group.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “What types of social cultural practices impact English Language Learners' academic writing and identity confidence levels?”

International students choose to participate in communities, whether school-based or the broader local community, that often have shared nuanced practices that can find its way into influencing other aspects of students' lives, including academics. One broad sociocultural aspect of this research question looked at communities as a source of learning and improving writing ability while boosting confidence. Student participants spoke about how they were taught or learned how to write, whether inside or outside the classroom, online or in-person. Two themes around social cultural practices discovered were a) community membership and b) writing confidence and instructional methods.

Theme 6: Community Membership. Overall, most participants stated they did not belong to a community outside of school, whether in-person or online; a few participants mentioned seeking and participating in other communities. For example, Participant 1 tried to get involved with a political activist group but felt the group's methods of activism were not well-suited for her to participate. She explained, “I wish I can find a group, but I cannot find. I tried once to be a part of a group, but they were. . . extremist.” She continued, “They just want to have hate feelings. . . when you [I] just try to say solutions, like talk to lawyers. . . they just [say] no. We want to protest. This kind of activities, it's just not my thing.” The issue Participant 1 faced was the inability to participate in a community that did not support her voice or how she self-identified as a political change maker. Had Participant 1 been given a chance, she may have learned to write a simple legal analysis to gain the support of local lawyers to help push the

political group's concern, which would likely have boosted her writing confidence and identity as a writer, which could transfer to her academic studies.

Participant 9 joined an online painting group through Facebook and used Nextdoor, an online app for neighbors to communicate. "I love painting, so I . . . I'm not sure if I can join, but I searched some groups, painting groups online, and to see people's work. And we post our own works and make comments to each other." The idea of offering written critiques of someone else's artwork gave Participant 9 a way to exercise her written voice, observe the writing patterns of other commentators, and practice the elements seen in the critiques of others, either in her online group or transferred to her academic writing. It built her writing identity and increased her confidence as a writer.

Finally, Participant 7 intentionally limited her involvement with the international student groups on campus to immerse herself in local Hawaiian communities to improve her oral language abilities. Although she had a connection to people on campus and in the community, both groups offered benefits. The local Hawaiian community expanded Participant 7's network, and the campus community offered events and opportunities to meet other international students. Jokingly, Participant 7 shared, "I hate to admit this. I was trying to stay away from the international student group, but I think I was part of that. I was in a group with international students who lived on campus." Participant 7's goal for limiting her interaction with international students was to improve her English by interacting with locals. "There are a lot of Japanese people, Japanese immigrants in Hawaii. So, yeah, I was I was good friends with them as well. . . they helped my English, and they give me some information about local communities." Participant 7's community membership did not focus on building writing capacity but on oral

language ability. Sometimes the patterns of oral language heard and spoken influence the development of student writers' academic voice.

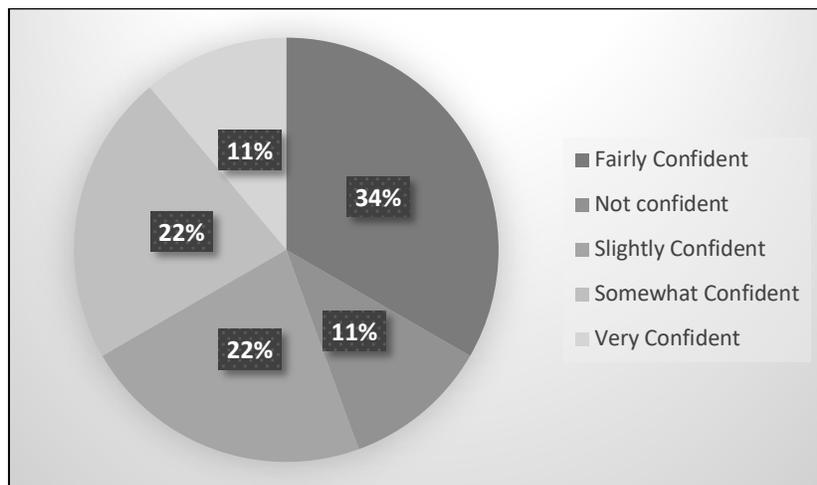
Theme 7: Instructional Methods and Writing Confidence. It can be inferred that all participants in this study were part of a community of writers in the IELP classrooms, where they practiced their writing skills and simultaneously built their confidence. Even though most participants in this study did not recognize their classroom environment as a source of community membership, they were nonetheless part of a sociocultural group that happened to be in an academic setting. The instructional methods and practices used by teachers and students influenced how students viewed their writing confidence. Participants were asked about their writing confidence since completing their studies at an IELP (see Figure 3, below). The majority of students (56.0%) felt fairly confident (34.0%) or somewhat confident (22.0%) in their writing ability. A third of students felt only slightly confident (22.0%) or not confident (11.0%). Just 11.0% felt very confident.

Participants reflected on their teachers' teaching styles as they influenced their writing confidence. Participant 3 described how her teacher showed examples of end-products, which helped her know what to do and how to write her paper. She reported that the teacher's instructional style "was really good; the teacher "first showed me examples and. . . a format for writing. . . in the introduction and the body and the conclusion, they taught me exactly how to do it this way. . . taught me every single detail in writing." This teaching style helped her understand the components of writing, and she continues to see the benefits of this teaching style in her master's program. "I like the most the writing skills because when they teach me how to write I benefit from when I enter the master's degree." She added that in her master's program, she

receives “good compliments from my professors about my writing.” Overall, the support Participant 3 received in her IELP proved beneficial in her master’s degree program.

Figure 3

Degree of Writing Confidence After Completion of IELP



Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned that he learned matrix writing to build his academic writing. He described matrix writing as learning to “synthesize different articles and how to critique. . . [in] your words, your paragraphs, you need to reflect on other readings.” Participant 2 believed this writing form was helpful in his master’s program, making writing easier. “I am happy with my writing. I use the matrix and my writing is good.”

In contrast, Participant 1 learned through an adverse experience. Participant 1 recalled a teacher who did not use effective teaching practices in her sociocultural classroom group. “In his classes, [the teacher] didn't do anything to express what kind of sentences [to use] in English. He just read grammar [rules].” Teaching grammatical rules and structures alone was not helpful for Participant 1 in learning to write. Because of her experiences with this teacher, she felt discouraged about her writing. “I had bad luck to be with that teacher I hated. . . when I asked

him for feedback, he wasn't very helpful.” She added that she hated her writing because of him, admitting, “I tried my best. You now understand why feelings hurt [the] education process for any student.” Participant 1’s experience shows a correlation between academic writing and identity confidence. The lack of teacher support and feedback on student writing leaves students to self-identify problem areas in writing, which negatively affect their perception of their academic writing and identity confidence levels.

All study participants were part of a community with fellow academic writers, primarily in the IELP classroom setting. While in this community, participants were able to see the growth and benefits of sociocultural practices for academic writing. The types of social cultural practices were different for each student but nonetheless linked to their teachers’ instructional methods. The study participants were able to recognize the benefits of these practices when they began to use the knowledge learned outside of the IELP environment.

These results show a positive connection and influence on academic writing and writer confidence through effective sociocultural practices, looking at writing examples, using a writing matrix, and positive feedback. These practices lay the groundwork for students to continue to transfer what they learned in one learning environment to a new learning environment. There is a connection between sociocultural writing practices and instructional style that aids or hinders the development of academic writing skills as well as identity and writer confidence levels.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, “What is English Language Learners' perception of their digital academic writing and identity either while enrolled or after enrollment in an Intensive English Language Program?” This question sought to explore how participants viewed their digital academic writing and identity. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to

generate findings as participants attempted to reflect on their digital academic writing engagement as part of their studies at an IELP. Two themes emerged from this research question: a) Perception of Digital Academic Writing and Identity and b) Cultural Voice and Vocabulary.

Theme 8: Perception of Digital Academic Writing and Identity. None of the nine participants were able to explain their perception of their online academic writing and identity. The online questionnaire revealed that 22.0% of participants used an online platform for academic writing tasks during their studies (e.g., Microsoft Suite, Google Suite discussion boards through BlackBoard or Canvas); yet the qualitative data showed none of these participants were aware of the connection between digital academic writing and identity, especially when utilizing online platforms for academic purposes. The remaining 78.0% of participants did not have any online academic writing presence or engagement and, thus, were not able to articulate their perceptions.

The data revealed that the top three platforms used by participants to practice their English writing skills were Zoom (25.0%), Instagram (22.0%), and WeChat (22.0%). Furthermore, the use of FlipGrid, an online video discussion application, emerged among participants. Participant 9 used FlipGrid for assignments such as sharing her favorite campus library or a visit to a museum and recording her visit, then upload the video with a written comment for classmates to other viewers read and respond. It is unclear if the participants regularly wrote in English on the online social network platforms or how they participated in communities on each platform (see Figure 4, below).

Additionally, participants were able to explain how they see their native identity and culture as it transferred to their academic writing identity when not using digital platforms.

Roughly half of the participants frequently noticed or sometimes noticed their native identity within their English writing (see Figure 5). Several participants spoke about using their “English brain” as a reminder to think and write in English. However, participants saw key cultural markers reflective of their native language in their writing. They perceived they did not have to give up any or all of their native cultural influences to become a competent writer in English.

For example, Participant 7 shared that she does not hide or alter her Japanese culture when writing in English but finds it necessary to remove her American identity when writing in Japanese because of cultural norms. Since her return to Japan, her writing identity has lived between these two worlds.

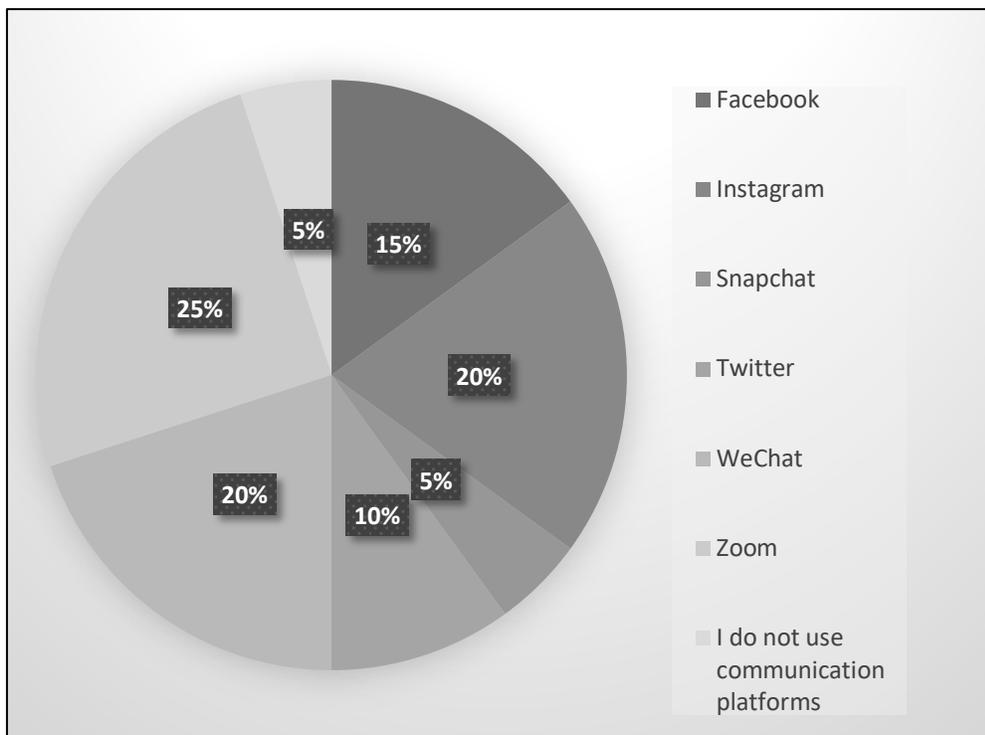
I just feel like ever since I . . . moved back to Japan, I have to dial down myself a little bit to match the culture. Even though I am originally from here [Japan], I'm just really Americanized at this point . . . when I'm talking, it might be okay because I could kind of gauge [a person's reactions]. But when it comes to writing, especially like email writing. . . I'm trying to be extra careful when it comes to writing.

For Participant 7, it appears Japanese, and perhaps other written languages, are not flexible and accepting of outside cultural linguistic features and influence. Even though she seemed to perceive writing as an expressive form, Participant 7 worried that her fun and exciting personality might not appear in her Japanese writing as in her American writing.

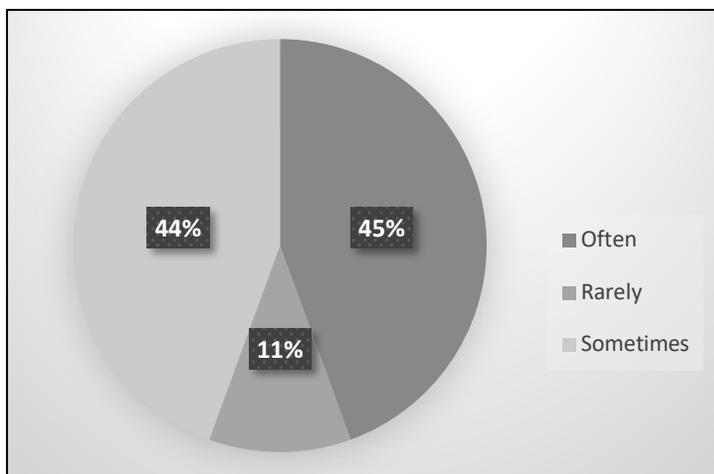
Similarly, Participant 1 enjoyed writing in English because she could openly express herself without fear and have more confidence in being accepted by others for her different thoughts and opinions. Personal expression and identity appeared to be easily identifiable within English writing, and international student writers seemed to enjoy that element of English writing.

Figure 4

Communication Platforms Used to Support English Writing

**Figure 5**

Degree of Native Identity Noticeability in English Writing



Theme 9: Cultural Voice and Vocabulary. Somewhat in the same vein of having to limit cultural voice or personality, the participants touched on the impact of vocabulary, specifically how it alters how they could express themselves and how they felt about writing. The participants reported using simplistic words and smaller sentences because international students believed their writing was not strong enough or did not meet academic expectations. At least two participants spoke about using “grand vocabulary” in their native language but felt their English writing was weak because of their limited vocabulary. Participant 5 shared that in using Arabic, “I can use big, large words, but in English I'm limited to only what I know in the dictionary, so I have to give up some of the ways that you [I] may enjoy writing.” Similarly, Participant 2 had a stronger vocabulary in Arabic and preferred to write in his native language, although he did not see himself as a good writer in either language. Among the participants, the ability for word choice and personal expression appeared to have a connection to writing confidence and, in turn, identity preference when writing.

Participant 3 had a different experience with native culture and English writing identity than other participants. Participant 3's native language is Arabic, yet she shared how she found herself “thinking in English, I write faster. But sometimes I think in Arabic, and I write slower because. . . I will not write like native speaker because I don't know how to write Arabic.” This finding was rare and caused the researcher to dig deeper to understand it. Participant 3 shared that she learned British English, which she used in her career in medicine, school, and daily life. The data didn't reveal her Arabic cultural identity as visible in her English writing while in Saudi Arabia, although the data showed she had a strong preference for the written English language; this may be attributable to sociocultural practices within her career in medicine or her day-to-day life.

The data showed that while participants engaged in online platforms, they were not able to articulate how their online academic writing translated into a digital identity. This may be due to the minimal academic opportunities to write online while studying in an IELP and to participate in communities where they were noticed or gained a perception of themselves online. However, participants were able to offer a perspective on their overall academic writing and identity, with participants working at keeping their native cultural influences out of their American academic writing. Finally, participants utilized several communication platforms to support their English writing. It is unclear in what capacity or to what extent these platforms aided in their individual writing development; nonetheless, they were navigating online communities without having to isolate or remove an element of their identity because they could all be used on the platforms.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, “How do English Language Learners perceive their interactions with virtual tools and resources used in an Intensive English Language Program?” This question examined how participants viewed their use of and interactions with technology while studying at an IELP. There was clear use of technology in the IELP classrooms. The data explored the hardware and software used but could not answer how these resources were used. Data fell into two categories: a) Use of Hardware and b) Use of Software, Online Tools, and Online Resources.

Use of Hardware. Learning about the types of hardware teachers used in their IELP classrooms was important for understanding how technology was used in the classroom and how students used it. Roughly 78.0% of participants reported teachers using projectors, laptops, and computers during class. Participant 5 described taking an elective computer class to learn about

using Excel and other programs “to do things like make charts and graphs. . . to make footnotes and[other] stuff, too.”

Use of Software, Online Tools, and Online Resources. Most participants mentioned the use of learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard and Google Suite) by teachers and students in the classroom. Participant 2 recalled some teachers being “advanced” with technology; he reported learning how to use Google Slides, Google Documents, Microsoft PowerPoint, and Microsoft Word. “When it [class] was in-person, we used some technology. I learned a lot and the teacher was very advanced.” Within the qualitative data, several participants mentioned using these same software programs. For example, Google Suite was mentioned five times, Microsoft Office Suite four times, and Microsoft Office PowerPoint five times. Participants discussed the other online software used in class that did not involve word processing or compiling information for a presentation: Kahoot (33.0%) and FlipGrid (33.0%). Participant 5 was introduced to Kahoot, an online software to gamify questions, where all students can engage in a lesson. Participant 9 used FlipGrid, an online video discussion application, to document and comment on experiences around campus.

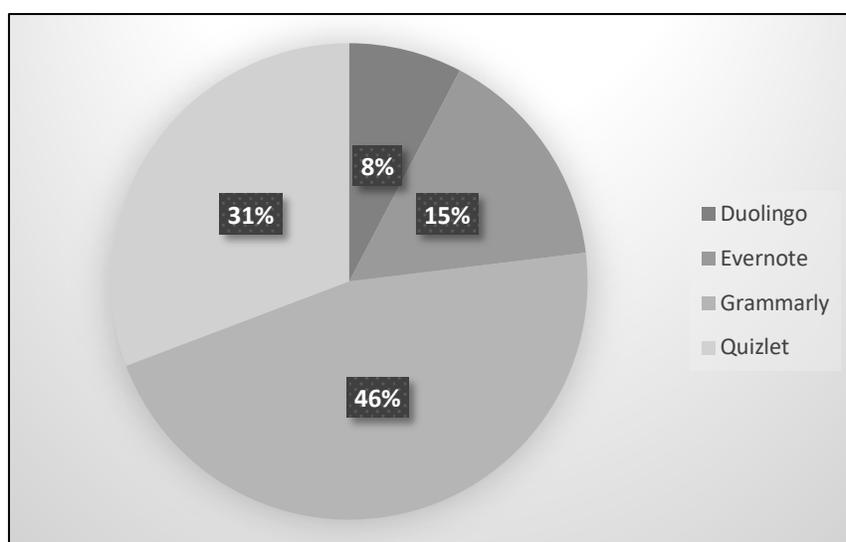
Similarly, Participant 2 recalled using online resources as part of course assignments “for speech and listening class and other classes”—National Public Radio (NPR.org); TedTalks (Ted.com); and The Moth (Moth.org), a curated storytelling site. Although Participant 7 did not use online software and tools in class beyond Microsoft Word, she stated that some of her ESL teachers encouraged students to use Facebook to connect with others; her teachers would recommend readings and other things to do.

It was clear from the data that participants often learned about new online tools and resources through school, self-exploration, or by interacting in other communities. For example,

Grammarly, an online editing software for writing, was introduced to Participant 6 by friends, and he began to use the program to support his writing for his classes. Based on the quantitative data collected, 46.0% of participants used Grammarly, and 31.0% used Quizlet, an online platform to create flashcards and games or take assessments. However, the data did not show how these online learning assistance programs benefitted participants individually (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Learning Assistance Software Used to Support English Writing



Summary

The findings of this study explored and described the layered academic experiences of international students; however, the data shows an overall emphasis on the program itself. The narratives shared spoke of course placement, classroom environment, academic progress, academic rigor, communication, and program diversity, all of which are elements of the learning experience while studying at an IELP. Table 3, below, summarized the nine themes that emerged from this research.

Table 3*Themes Emerging From This Research*

Research Question	Themes
1) What is the learning experience of international students in an Intensive English Language Program?	1) Course Placement 2) Communication 3) Limited Academic Rigor 4) Diversity Of Students 5) Classroom Environment
2) What types of social cultural practices impact English Language Learners' academic writing and identity confidence levels?	6) Community Membership 7) Writing Confidence and Instructional Methods
3) What is English Language Learners' perception of their digital academic writing and identity either while enrolled or after enrollment in an Intensive English Language Program?	8) Perception of Digital Academic Writing and Identity 9) Cultural Voice and Vocabulary
4) How do English Language Learners perceive their interactions with virtual tools and resources used in an Intensive English Language Program?	

Understanding the types of sociocultural practices participants took part in required learning about the communities in which they were members and how those practices impacted their academic writing and identity confidence. Most participants did not recognize themselves as a member of a community, either on or off campus; however, all participants were, part of a classroom community that took part in sociocultural practices, even if this was not visible to participants. Participants noticed the positive association with the writing practices they learned and could transfer them to new settings, positively affecting their identity confidence levels.

Participants' engagement with digital academic writing and their digital identity while writing shaped their perceptions of themselves as online academic writers; however, they had limited opportunities to utilize online applications for digital academic writing. Curriculum design (i.e., instructional practices and pedagogy) was one of many factors that contributed to

participants having so few experiences with digital academic writing and difficulty viewing their writing scholarship as another identity. Finally, participant interactions with virtual tools and resources varied; many of these tools and resources are common to higher education classrooms in the United States but new to these international students. The majority of participants used online tools for word processing and creating presentations, as well as being introduced to new websites and platforms to deepen their learning.

The implications of this data on how IELPs educate international students, as well as recommendations for IELP pedagogy and future research, are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The United States is one of several countries where international students choose to study abroad to attain a bachelor's or an advanced degree. To enter into university or college-level degree programs, international students encounter a layered admissions process that begins with establishing English linguistic competence through standardized exams which are required by most institutions of higher education (e.g., the Test of English as a Foreign Language, International English Language Testing System, or Pearson Test of English). The pathway toward a university education for international students with an F-1 visa depends on passing one of these language competency exams required by most U.S. colleges and universities. These visas are valid for five years and how those five years are spent in the United States varies from student to student, often influenced by their English language proficiency. Some international students must enroll in IELPs to improve their English language competency and acquire the skills needed to pass the standardized exam to gain admission to an American university or college.

The structure of IELPs varies; however, one constant found across IELPs is classes targeting English skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as academic preparedness. One broad area of interest is understanding how IELPs prepare international students for their university or college-level experiences through writing, identity, and other important areas of student growth. This study sought to understand the cultural perspectives of international students focusing on their a) digital writing identity, b) digital composition in academia, and c) perceptions of preparedness for undergraduate studies. This is particularly important given that American-born college students come from a generation immersed in and molded by the internet and varied technologies, making them “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001;

Seemiller & Grace, 2018). International students must learn to build relationships and compete academically with their digitally adept peers; this can be difficult for international students from underdeveloped countries where social media is highly regulated or where a digital presence has not become commonplace.

The problem is that IELPs are not adequately supporting their student population, helping them develop or adapt their relationship to technology, or taking a broader view of technology in academics. Though IELPs have been shown to foster English language development with the goal of passing a competency exam, the inclusion of technology in IELP curricula and pedagogy is almost entirely absent. Including technology and using it as a learning tool prepares students for the academic settings outside of IELPs; it prepares students for participation in a technology-based society. Providing international students with a new perspective on utilizing technology as a part of language development and growth as a student should be an area of growth IELPs commit to fostering in their students.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

When looking at their digital writing identity in the context of academic writing, roughly half of the participants in this study could identify their cultural identity in their academic writing and academic writing process; however, these same elements were not identifiable by participants when using digital platforms for academic writing. Moreover, the findings illustrated how international students studying in IELPs perceived their experiences linked to meeting their academic goals, academic needs, and personal needs; the link to the IELP was stronger when goals and needs were met.

The experiences of the nine participants in this study were not the same, but consistent themes were identified. IELP students often voiced dissatisfaction with their course placement,

academic rigor, instructional methods, and communication with faculty members. Participants were exposed to common technologies (i.e., hardware, software programs, and platforms) used in college classrooms; however, they were not supported in developing a digital identity.

Community membership and a sense that instructors cared influenced their confidence in writing. However, they were often unsupported in navigating the expression of their cultural voice in their digital writing. These themes are explored below in the discussion of conclusions for each research question.

Conclusion 1: Learning Experience in IELPs

The learning experiences of international students studying in IELPs varied greatly, yet all participants shared a similar goal of seeking admission into an American university.

Participants were overall critical of their experiences in their IELPs, believing they impacted their studies due to a lack of academic rigor, errors in course placement, and poor interactions with IELP administrators.

Class Placement, Academic Rigor, and Learning Plateaus. One common theme among the participants was improper class placement, creating misalignment with the student's abilities. This finding is consistent with previous research on language class placement (Kokhan, 2013; Saenkhum, 2016), particularly concerning the institutional processes for placing students into courses based on exam scores or other one-size-fits-all methods. Kokhan (2013) concluded that standardized language proficiency exams should have no place when determining a student's placement in an English language course, positing that the exams are designed based on particular English language programs and, therefore, cannot adequately assess a student's skill set. The need for the meticulous placement of students in specific classes aligned with their development is critical because misplacement adversely effects a student's academic journey and

overall learning experience (Kokhan, 2013). Additionally, differences in academic rigor between institutions pose additional challenges, potentially impacting a student's ability to earn good grades and make academic progress. What may be sufficient English language skills for one IELP or an institution that provides significant campus support may be entirely insufficient at another IELP or campus with limited student support services. Similarly, international students coming from affluent families or sponsored by their home country may have access to external support to be successful. In contrast, students with no ability to pay for external support will be disadvantaged.

With regard to academic rigor, 22.0% of participants in this study indicated a lack of academic rigor; they reported that their classes did not challenge them and caused them to feel bored. Some students later realized that what they learned did not transfer well into a new course or onto campus. The participants of this study attributed the lack of rigor to several reasons. Some participants felt course content was not challenging or prioritized the needs of the majority, overlooking those who wanted more challenge. This challenge was identified by Saenkhum (2016), who evaluated the experience of two international students. The first student had advanced background writing in English, having worked as a paralegal; this student did not contest their English course placement and was not stimulated by the course content. In contrast, the second student negotiated skipping an English class but regretted the action and thought the academic skills from the skipped course could have helped their overall academic goals.

Based on her findings, Saenkhum (2016) claimed that students should have agency in their academics but also be equipped with all information needed about course options to assess their needs and placement properly. Furthermore, Saenkhum (2016) suggested that students should be able to contest their placement and have their request honored, as doing so may

promote academic rigor and class engagement. Students in this study affirmed these positions. The importance of listening to students and their needs is part of the academic journey for these students, and an informed conversation should take place with a genuine interest in finding the best placement for students. A genuine interest in international students' academic well-being is needed because they rely upon their IELP staff to anchor their academic experience and experiences studying in a foreign country. This was a gap for students in this study.

Similarly, improper class placement, cited by 22.0% of participants, contributed to learning plateaus. The experience of learning plateaus may cause disinterest in a course or a student's loss of confidence in their ability to acquire new skills. There are two classifications of variables associated with a learning plateau. First are instruction-related variables like "curriculum and syllabus, learner autonomy, emphasizing accuracy over fluency, and teacher action (Mirzaei et al., 2017, pp. 213-215). Second is learner-related variables, which include "learners' affection, metacognitive factors, automatization of producing language with minimal of physical energy" (pp. 213-215).

Two participants in this study described experiencing a learning plateau and feeling bored with their courses. Still, they recognized the benefit of the plateau as an indicator that they had grown since the beginning of their studies at their IELP. Helping students overcome a learning plateau is complex because many variables can cause a plateau (Mirzaei et al., 2017). An in-depth evaluation would be required, looking at instruction-related and learner-related variables; this might necessitate a longer timeframe to help place a student experiencing a plateau into another course or helping a teacher refine course materials during the semester. As such, learning resources ought to be available to students to help identify the possible cause of their learning plateau; this might be in the form of an assessment with an evaluation of the course and

instructor. The need for continuous assessment of student development could also help identify the next steps students need to take to move closer to achieving their academic goals.

Lack of Communication and Empathy. The second theme generated from the data was criticism of IELP staff communication and a lack of empathy toward international students' challenges. This finding has been reported in other studies exploring the experiences of international students (Cho & Yu, 2015), particularly as the students are often vulnerable, having traveled long distances to a relatively unknown place with minimal connections and networks outside of school. Cho and Yu (2015) asserted that international students depend on the host university for support beyond academics. They sought to understand the connection between a student's well-being and the student's perception of support from the host university. They noted that increased university support directly influenced school-life satisfaction and reduced psychological stress.

The mixture of communication, confidence, and vulnerability for international students is a delicate balance. The largest international student group population who study in the United States are East Asian (42.1%), China (34.7%), South Korea (4.3%), Taiwan (2.2%), Hong Kong (0.6%), and Japan (0.3%) (IIE, 2021). Kettle & Luke (2012) point out that in East Asian pedagogy, student expression of ideas with teachers and those of authority is not commonplace. In other words, teachers and school staff are seen as authorities in other countries, and students would likely not share their concerns. The idea of personal expression via oral communication can be challenging for many international students, especially in an academic setting studying in the United States.

Time Pressure. A third theme that surfaced was external pressure from sponsors to complete studies in a specific timeframe; the results suggested that this pressure may alter the overall perception of the IELP experience. Participants reported feeling the need to pass courses rapidly to stay on track with their desired timelines. One participant reported having a limited timeframe to complete her studies in the United States before returning to her native country; she explained that if she did not pass the GRE and IELTS exams to gain acceptance into a university program and spent too much of her time in the IELP, she would not have enough time to get her degree and would have to return home without a degree. IELPs and higher education institutions have an opportunity to share information and resources about managing stress which contributes to the learning experience. In doing so, these programs may discover areas of concern academically that can also cause such stress; such discovery relies upon a solid relationship between students, teachers, and program administration.

IELP Diversity. A fourth theme was the diversity of IELP students; several participants reported enjoying having chances to meet other students from far-flung parts of the world. IELPs are educational grounds for students to explore different cultures, which often mirrors the student population at the university level. Some participants felt their academic needs were not met, and other participants felt safe to learn and make mistakes. Having teachers with an open mindset was an added benefit to the IELP experience. The idea of a learning environment being an inviting space to learn with other students who may be similar or different from one another is an optimal setting for any learning experience.

Conclusion 2: Sociocultural Practices, Academic Writing, and Identity Confidence

Overall, the data showed that the majority of participants did not engage in sociocultural practices outside of the classroom by joining organized social groups that could have influenced

their writing (e.g., campus organizations or those from online platforms like Meetup, designed to help people explore and create communities local to the area they live). The participants who joined communities beyond the classroom, in-person or online, engaged in group-specific activities and language norms through written and oral communication.

Although most participants could not see the impact of their sociocultural practices on their academic writing and identity confidence, one participant highlighted being able to see an improvement in her English oral communication since interacting with local community groups off campus. She also claimed that this boosted her confidence and perception of identity.

Moneva and Tribunalo's (2020) concluded that academic achievement and self-confidence go hand-in-hand, with high confidence levels influencing academic performance. Pertaining to this study, it is possible that the knowledge obtained from sociocultural practices was used in academic settings and positively influenced identity as a writer and confidence level. These data suggest a connection between sociocultural practices and identity confidence; further investigation is needed to substantiate the level of confidence through oral language and its ability to permeate and improve international students' academic writing skills.

None of the participants in this study directly viewed their identity as all-encompassing; they held an identity of student along with other identities, some of which were associated with a formal organized social group (e.g., campus clubs or community groups). Nonetheless, all participants in this study were, in fact members of a group of classroom learners acquiring the nuances of academic writing; this constituted a sociocultural group and environment, the writing classroom, which should not be overlooked. Boyes et al. (2021) note that "writing as social practice" is "fundamentally embedded in a mesh of cultural, social, material and ideological relationships" (pg. 1).

In this study, the classroom was a prime demonstration of sociocultural dynamics at work, where students learned through a communal practice with a teacher who organized the practice. The practices in the classroom included but were not limited to using matrices to dissect journal articles, using examples as a preview of targeted end-products, and free-writing ideas with minimal emphasis on grammatical errors. Participants also reported experiencing an ease of writing due to the skills they learned and receiving positive feedback about their writing from teachers not associated with the IELP (i.e., college and university professors).

Looking at sociocultural practices in the classroom, participants were able to see the impact of their learning on their academic writing and identity confidence. Participants recognized the influence of the practices from their classrooms as they became tangible skills that they later exercised in other academic courses, resulting in increased confidence with regard to their academic writing and identity. For example, a group of writers can decide what writing means to the collective; they can identify what writing should look for group members and what the process or evolution of writing should look like based on the group's ideology or other writing guidelines. Consider the specific example of a doctoral candidate who is part of a collective of researchers and must follow prescribed disciplinary practices for written research to have quality and meaning; the collective has decided what scholarship should look like with an aim toward contributing to the field of study through a progression of research. Thus, writing is a practice within a specific cultural environment and context that validates the value of the practice among group members (Boyes et al., 2021).

Conclusion 3: IELPs Influence Perception of Digital Academic Writing and Identity

The data shows that none of the participants were able to articulate a perception of their digital academic writing and identity; 78.0% of participants mentioned not having opportunities

to engage with online applications of digital academic writing, which points to the need to explore and assess IELP curricula for inclusion of technology as well as teacher perception of digital platforms for online academic writing. In this technology-driven world, just 22.0% of participants used online applications for digital academic writing.

One possible reason the students who were engaged in digital academic writing did not have a perception of their digital identity is the inability to see themselves as scholarly writers in an online space, and perhaps not as scholarly writers at all, given their limited English writing ability. They may not have viewed digital platforms as a place for academic work or understood the importance of digital platforms for academic writing, especially given that this was not emphasized while taking classes in an IELP. This further emphasizes the need to offer students a space to write not just for a teacher or themselves actively but to contribute to scholarly conversations in digital spaces. For example, blogging, where English language learners can self-correct their writing, with a teacher potentially giving equal ground to the review and editing process of the work, would likely motivate students to thorough blogs (Calderón & Álvarez, 2022). There is a wealth of research supporting the effectiveness of online writing in the English language learning space (Calderón & Álvarez, 2022; Fithriani et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the findings from this study suggest that few IELPs make any effort to modernize their curriculum to incorporate digital academic writing benefit of its students.

Interestingly, participants mentioned seeing indicators of their native identity appearing in their non-digital academic writing. That is, it appears that students were more cognitively aware of their native identity in standard academic writing forms such as essays or short summaries, possibly because their academic writing was often corrected on paper or a computer

screen via Microsoft Word. Participants mentioned having a limited English vocabulary, which affected their writing and how they viewed themselves as writers because they could not write with the same nuance as they could in their native language. Other participants felt more comfortable writing in English as they could express themselves and their ideas more freely, whereas writing in their native language required a different writing voice.

Overall, the findings from the study illustrate the potential need to explore and assess IELP curricula for the inclusion of technology and teacher perceptions of digital platforms for online academic writing. Zhang et al. (2022) argue that using technology for English language learners, collaborative writing benefits both students and teachers. Students' writing and thought patterns in collaborative environments are visible in varied forms, such as in workspaces with others and in groups. Teachers' comments are organized, and data related to the writing process is available for analysis. Furthermore, the idea of writing in a public forum for others to read can empower students and strengthen their voice and writing identity.

Conclusion 4: IELPs Influence Perception of Virtual Tools and Resources

This research data suggests that participants used a number of virtual tools and resources which teachers or peers introduced; these included commonplace programs and platforms from Microsoft and Google for word processing and creating presentations. A small segment of participants mentioned using new online applications like FlipGrid and Kahoot; some used common web resources and websites like Ted.com, Moth.org, and NPR.org. Participants perceived their use of technology was average, and at least one participant felt they made progress in learning about different technology resources and utilizing specific computer software. However, the data did not measure the impact of these virtual tools and resources as an influence on participants' learning experiences while in an IELP.

One avenue to understand why some students had experience with online applications, tools, and resources and others did not reside with the IELP teachers. Participants reported that their teachers used standard or typical classroom technology and online programs such as a learning management system. Still, teachers did not appear to innovate with regard to technology in the classroom. Beyond classroom exposure to technology and online resources, participants learned about virtual tools and resources from peers; Grammarly and Quizlet were widely used among participants to support their writing, and they perceived these tools are helpful.

Using Facebook and other online applications and tools in the classroom can positively affect students and their writing in English. A study of Facebook and its use among Indonesian students showed that students experienced an increase in confidence, improved language fluency, and increased motivation to participate in class assignments and activities (Fithriani et al., 2019). A study about the use of the Kahoot platform among Malaysian students found similar results, with a caveat that student motivation was helpful for the learning experience and reinforcing concepts introduced in the classroom in an entertaining online medium (Tan et al., 2019). In sum, the exposure to and use of new online software, tools, and resources allowed students to view and interact with technology and people in a new way through online sociocultural learning. The promotion of technology and online resources—or the minimal use of technology and online resources—in the classroom was important in preparing students to engage with new technological skills, or not. This had the potential to influence their academic success in an American undergraduate or graduate classroom as well as the workplace.

Implications for Practice

This body of research reveals that international students do not come to IELPs with a sense of their digital academic writing identity or a rich development toward digital academic

writing. The IELPs represented in this study were primarily focused on teaching international students writing and other writing-focused skills in the context of traditional formats. This omission in providing writing instruction that includes the robust use of technology as an essential 21st century skill reveals a critical gap in the field of second language acquisition at the college level. IELPs must catch up and narrow this gap to adequately prepare their students for writing in online environments commonplace in higher education.

A starting focus for the proposed governing bodies could be the use and application of online platforms, tools, and resources in IELP curricula. All academic writing courses at IELPs should include an element of technology by using online platforms, tools, and resources integrated into the curriculum with clear objectives for students to understand the purpose of technology within the course and the overall benefit for coursework in higher education.

Understanding teachers' perspectives toward technology and online platforms, tools, and resource for academic writing are needed to appropriately and purposefully integrate technology into curricula and pedagogy. This would be supported by utilizing experts to identify the most appropriate educational platforms, tools, and resources to aid international students.

Additionally, IELP instructors must be supported in developing their use of technology through in-service training opportunities that allow them to engage with and learn about various online tools, software, and resources.

Finally, this study revealed that most international students are unaware of their own learning outcomes. Students don't recognize the impact or benefit of what they have learned, or are trying to learn, in the moment; they may only come to understand what they've learned well beyond a course is completed, or perhaps not at all. The need for students to understand and practice conscious learning would help them to link their day-to-day academic learning to real-

world experiences, see the transferability in their skills, and begin to question what they do and do not notice about their learning. As a way to help students become conscious learners, educators should be encouraged to help students understand the objectives of lessons and assignments through dialogue, in addition to challenging students to think more deeply to see the connection between what they are learning in class and how it may impact other aspects of their lives as scholars and emerging professionals.

Study Limitations

One limitation associated with this study was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020 and extended the timeframe to complete this study. The pandemic caused government orders at the Federal, state, and local levels to require all U.S. citizens and residents to stay home and limit outdoor activity to essential activity. Education moved most activities, such as services and classes, online. For international students, the disruptions to their education created potential F-1 Visa violations, which were resolved through modified Federal laws; however, many potential participants needed to decide whether to stay in the United States or travel home. Due to the challenge in finding participants, the population size was reduced from 15 to nine; the inclusion criteria were expanded to include any international student who studied at an IELP in the U.S. Given the small sample size, the generalizability of this research study is limited.

Second, interviews took place online, which reduced the researcher's ability to observe and interpret participants' full body language, among other characteristics, to add more context to the data received. For example, a tapping or fidgeting hand or foot typically cannot be observed in an online video call; in an in-person interview, the researcher could observe the

behavior and either ask questions about the participant's body language or tread away from certain topics or questions that appeared to cause discomfort.

Third, the participants in this study were from several different IELPs, providing broad, high-level insight into IELP education and student experience. It would have perhaps been more beneficial to study participants from a single IELP to assess the program and its students' learning experiences critically. The potential data from such a study could lay the foundation for a more robust perspective of the international student experience while offering a glimpse into a single IELP. Such an approach might have facilitated utilizing additional data collection methods such as examining writing samples to assess and triangulate the evolution of a student's identity as reflected in their development from novice-level writing to their current or advanced writing level.

Fourth and finally, more focused questions relevant to identity within the questionnaire and interview would have been useful. Narrowing and allowing for in-depth questions about identity would have helped refine and deepen the study results by targeting specific aspects of student identity.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study uncovered additional areas for study that could inform teachers and administrators responsible for IELPs. It could also help international students make more informed choices when selecting an IELP. Presented are three recommendations for future research.

Recommendation 1: Course Placement in IELPs

The researcher believes there is a critical need for appropriate and conscious course placement for international students, including those enroll in IELP courses. Incorrect course

placement creates adverse effects for students' matriculation process and overall academic journey. Several variables may impact a student's placement in a course. The recommendation does not address all variables but focuses on the common variables mentioned in this study.

First, IELPs are encouraged to find an alternative or supplemental forms of assessing students' English language knowledge. Solely relying on standardized exams, whether created by the institution or a third party, does not consider the anxiety that comes with taking exams, especially such a high-stakes exam. Allowing a student to do performative tasks in a low-stakes environment as a supplement to an exam may yield results more in alignment with a student's abilities, resulting in a more suitable course placement. In addition, a supplemental performative task creates space for a student to engage in dialogue about their results on the standardized exam and performative task(s) completed, offering a shared and comparative view of the student's performance.

Second, IELPs should encourage students to revisit their course placement should the course be too difficult or too simple. Exam scores are not an exact measure but an insight into a student's ability. By engaging in several tasks, assignments, and lectures, students may better understand a skill set that is under-utilized or find a skill set that cannot meet the needs to comprehend course material. Allowing students to contest their course placement could benefit the overall student learning experience, empower students to have greater agency in their academic journey, and, finally, be seen as stakeholders in the academic economy of an IELP.

Third and finally, in the case of mixed-level courses with students with varied skill sets and skill levels in one course, I encourage the IELP administration to equip faculty with adequate training to manage student diversity. Realistically, it is inevitable for that mixed-level classes will be offered, but one set of students' needs should not overshadow or be overshadowed by the

needs of another student group in the same class. It is understood that faculty are doing their best, but the need for administration to remedy or mediate such problems are necessary. IELPs should create an action plan to support their faculty. For example, they could utilize a teaching assistant in the classroom. They could create more effective classroom strategies tailored to the unique needs of their class and students, developing a learning plan for the higher-skilled students along with approaches to support lower-skilled students.

Recommendation 2: Use of Online Platforms

This researcher encourages research looking at IELP teachers, their usage of, and their perspectives towards online platforms, tools, and resources in course curricula. Teachers have a direct influence on students; they have the ability to shift a student's perspectives around using technology in new ways for academia beyond the standards of word processing and presentation creation.

Beyond the teachers' roles, IELP itself needs systematic review. Exploring how IELPs position technology, its development and implementation, and the use of technology in the classroom and course curricula are pivotal facets of this study recommendation. Furthermore, an exploration must take place for how IELPs support their teachers and students, the institution as a whole, and their support structures for technology.

It would also be useful to study the commonly used online tools and platforms used by students as a starting point to assess how those platforms can be situated in academic writing curricula, specifically in IELPs but also for undergraduate courses. Exercising creativity and purpose are key elements that facilitate change in how students view technology. Given how commonplace digital identity is in the workplace (e.g., LinkedIn profiles, company bios, personal professional websites) and the integration of personal and professional digital identities,

all students need to understand the importance of purposefully creating their digital identity. Such a study could benefit teachers who work with international students to help them gain a better perspective on their students' academic journeys and academic preparation.

Finally, because there are very few studies examining the implementation and use of technology in IELPs, this proposed recommendation would help create a unique space for IELPs within the research community, possibly working towards a new wave of research to develop robust research communities and foster academically competitive IELPs.

Recommendation 3: Academic Writing During Undergraduate Studies

Exploring the benefits of digital academic writing in IELPs and their influence on academic writing during undergraduate studies could offer a view into the aftereffects of such practices. This recommendation has the potential to add depth to understanding how digital academic writing is taught in IELPs and how it influences practice for undergraduate students. In addition, such a study can further examine the goals of IELPs to see if they are adequately designed with international students' success in mind. The overarching goal would be to refine and redefine the educational bridge from IELPs to undergraduate studies. Finally, this recommended study offers an assessment of student development and a direct assessment of IELPs and their pedagogical methods. This research has the potential to contribute a new perspective to the IELP bridge into college and university-level academic writing in the digital era.

Recommendation 4: Study Prior to Arrival in the U.S.

The third area of research that could shed light on international students' English proficiency is exploring the types of English preparation undertaken prior to studies in the United

States. This research study suggests that preparation for IELPs is key to success and satisfaction. Therefore, additional research into the types of preparation for such programs is recommended.

Such a study can establish a timeframe for how international students began the study the English language, if English was initially acquired in school or somewhere else, and how it was taught. IELPs also need to understand international students' goals in studying English and their perception of their preparation upon entering an IELP. Longitudinal studies need to assess whether this preparation actually helped students meet their personal, academic, and professional goals.

The findings of such a study can offer a view into how English as a foreign language is taught abroad and practiced in other countries. It would offer teachers and administrators in IELPs unique access to the backgrounds of the students attending their programs, which is critical when placing students in a specific IELP course and assessing how it will benefit the student. On a larger scale, if such a study were replicated worldwide, there could be a catalogue of information about learning English as a foreign language in other countries. The study itself would influence pedagogical strategies worldwide and offer insight for teachers in higher education in the United States as they view the educational backgrounds of their students.

Conclusion

International students study in the United States for many reasons; these students contributed \$41 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2018-2019 academic year (NAFSA, n.d. a). Although international students spend large sums of money in acquiring their education, very little research or attention is given to the academic journeys of international students in IELPs or on IELPs as educational entities. Typically, international students leave these programs to pursue

an undergraduate or graduate degree at an American college or university. Thus, the academic preparedness of this student group is critical to their long-term academic success.

The objective of this study was to distinguish how academic digital composition and identity were developed among international students relative to their experiences in an IELP. It sought to understand international students' cultural perspectives regarding their digital writing identity, digital composition in academia, and perceptions of preparedness for undergraduate or graduate studies. The existing study was small and somewhat inconclusive in assessing whether IELPs adequately prepare international students for college-level work.

Nevertheless, the findings clearly show that the learning experiences of international students attending an IELP are layered. International students encounter challenges such as course placement at the programmatic level that impact their studies. Exploring sociocultural practices in the context of academic writing and identity confidence in the classroom showed strong potential for student development as students reported rarely participating in off-campus social groups. The lack of perception by international students with regard to their digital academic writing and digital identity could be directly attributed to the limited integration of technology in course assignments.

Suppose U.S. colleges and universities will continue to matriculate international students, along with their multi-billion-dollar financial investments in their education. In that case, IELPs must commit to better preparing these students. They must support these students in fully entering the 21st century digital age as it manifests in American education, society, and workplaces to ensure that these students have what they need to be successful. They must support them in understanding and developing digital identities and confidence in themselves, so they can compete on a level playing field in school, work, and life. This does not necessarily

require a significant investment of money or other resources. Still, an intention to provide a quality education for these dedicated students who have traveled so far and sacrificed so much to receive an American education. These students deserve nothing less.

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APPENDIX A

Pepperdine IRB Approval



Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: August 28, 2020

Protocol Investigator Name: Francesca Nesfield

Protocol #: 20-06-1388

Project Title: International students# perception of the development of their digital academic writing and digital identity based on their participation in an Intensive English Language Program

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Francesca Nesfield:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the **Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual** at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent

Title of Study: International Students' Perception of the Development of their Digital Academic Writing Identity Based on their Participation in an Intensive English Language Program

Researcher: Francesca Nesfield, Doctoral Candidate

Supporting Faculty: Dr. Lisa Bortman, Associate Provost for Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness

This study seeks a retrospective view of international students' perception about their digital identity as writers, the impact of culture and understanding the effects of learning with and from fellow scholars. Study participants will be asked to complete a 15-item questionnaire followed by an interview. The audio-recorded interview will be for approximately 60-90 minutes. Participants will have the opportunity to review their audio transcription 72-hours after the interview.

I consent to participating in this study and acknowledge the researcher has provided me with:

1. An explanation of the study's purpose and procedure
2. Answers to any questions I have about the study procedure.

I understand that:

- A. My participation is voluntary. I have the right to withdraw and discontinue my participation at any time without reason. My decline to participate will not result in any penalty or disadvantage.
- B. The probability and magnitude of harm/ discomfort anticipated as a result of participating in the study are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.
- C. My participation in this study may take approximately 60 – 90 minutes of my time.
- D. My responses are confidential and a pseudonym will be assigned to protect my identity and possible identifying information.
- E. All data collected (interview notes, recordings, and transcriptions) may be used by the researcher and will be stored on a password protected file and computer and will be destroyed at the end of the study.
- F. My interview will be audio-recorded, but I may withdraw consent to be recorded anytime during the interview. Lastly, I may request to speak "off the record," meaning my expressed statements during the interview will not be audio-recorded.
- G. The researcher may take written notes during the interview.
- H. I may request to review my interview audio transcripts.

- I. I will receive a monetary gift for my participation. The total amount possible is \$10 (max.), which combines \$5 (min.) for the questionnaire and \$5 (min.) for the interview. I understand I must give the researcher my correct email address to receive the gift card.

For questions about research participants rights, please contact Dr. Judy Ho, IRB Chairperson for Pepperdine University at (310) 568-5753 or Judy.Ho@pepperdine.edu.

For questions about this study you contact the researcher Francesca Nesfield via email (francesca.nesfield@pepperdine.edu).

If you agree to the information above and want to partake in this study, please sign your name below and return this form to me via email (francesca.nesfield@pepperdine.edu).

Printed Name of Participant

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's signature

Date

APPENDIX C

IELP Staff Email

RE: Student Participants Needed for Research Study

Dear Mr. X:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study with your students. I am enrolled at Pepperdine University seeking an EdD in Learning Technologies and working on my dissertation. My IRB study attempts to understand international students' perspectives of their digital identity as writers, cultural implications and understand the effect of social cultural theory in action from a retrospective view.

I hope to recruit 15 students who are currently study or previously studies at and Intensive English Language Program. Recruited students will be asked to complete a 15-item questionnaire followed by a scheduled interview. Those who participate in the study are eligible to receive a \$10 Amazon e-gift card. More information about the study is available in the Research Information Sheet (enclosed).

Protecting the study participants is priority. Participant identity will remain anonymous and associated data will remain confidential. I have security measures in place ensuring restricted access to study data. Participants of the study will have the opportunity to review transcripts of the interview for quality assurance.

I appreciate your time reading about my proposition and hope you will encourage your students to participate in this study. I will follow up with an email next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. You may contact me at my email address Francesca.Nesfield@pepperdine.edu.

Should you agree to assist with recruiting students, a flyer is enclosed for students to contact me.

Sincerely,

Francesca L. Nesfield

Enclosures
IRB Approval Letter
Research Information Sheet
Student Flyer

cc: Dr. Lisa Bortman, Dissertation Committee Chair

APPENDIX D

Research Information Document



Research Information Sheet

An invitation for participation in research about non-native speakers' writing and identity and experience studying at an Intensive English Language Program

Pepperdine University Doctoral Researcher: Francesca L. Nesfield, Doctoral Candidate

Supporting Faculty: Dr. Lisa Bortman, Associate Provost for Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness

Title of Study: International Students' Perception of the Development of their Digital Academic Writing Identity Based on their Participation in an Intensive English Language Program

Description of Study

This study attempts to understand international students' perspectives of their digital identity as writers, cultural implications and understand the effect of social cultural theory in action from a retrospective view. Students (current and former) who study at an IELP receive lesson designed for a unique purpose. The primary goal of IELPs are to teach skills for improvement or to pass the TOEFL or IELTS exams. However, is this an adequate goal or do students believe other areas of development are important? This research study will seek student insight to answer the above question.

Process of Data Collection

Students will participate in a two-part process data collection process. 1) Students will be asked to complete a 15-item online questionnaire then participate in 2) an interview, approximately 60-90 minutes to discuss their experience in an IELP.

Participant Incentive

Students will receive a monetary gift for participation. The total amount possible is \$10, \$5 for questionnaire completion and \$5 for the interview. The gift card will be sent via email to the participant's shared email address. Students email addresses will be associated with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Anticipated Study Results

Results may show students have marginal experience with digital writing for academic purposes, and therefore, their writing identity may be in the discovery phase. During the discovery phase students are likely to gain writing confidence as they are beginning to articulate their identity according to academic standards of a host country.

Sharing Results

If participants request, results will be shared with participants after the study is completed.

Benefits of Study

The contribution of this research is to enlighten higher education faculty and administration outside the field of Intensive English Language Programs about the academic rigor international students endure related to their educational journey, but more so, highlight student writing skill and perpetration from the learner's perspective. Lastly, this research hopes to inform IELP administration and faculty on areas to modify curricula and improve program goals to align with student desires

based on their experiences and needs while studying at an IELP in their quest to graduate with a degree from the United States.

APPENDIX E

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Demographic Questions

1. What is your country of origin?
2. What is your highest degree or level of education?
 - a. High school
 - b. Bachelor's degree
 - c. Master's degree
 - d. Doctorate
 - e. Other (please specify)

Intensive English Language Program

1. What is the name of the Intensive English Language Program you attended?
2. What are/were your goals for studying at an Intensive English Language Program?
3. How many months did you attend classes at an Intensive English Language Program?
 - a. 1 - 4 months
 - b. 5 - 8 months
 - c. 9 – 12 months
 - d. Other (please specify)
4. When did you last attend classes at an Intensive English Language Program?
5. Please describe your experience studying at an IELP? **Questionnaire**

Technology

1. Identify the types of technology you used to support your English writing? (select all that apply)

Hardware

Audio Recorder
 Desktop
 Computer/Laptop
 Electronic
 Translator
 Tablet/iPad
 Video Recorder
 Other

Online Software

Google Suite Online
 Grammerly
 Microsoft Power
 Point
 NaturalReader

Office 365 Suite
 (formally Microsoft
 365 Online)
 Other

Learning

Assistance

Platforms

Dragon
 Duolingo
 Evernote
 Khan Academy
 Quizlet
 TED
 Smarthinking

YouTube
 Other

Communication Platforms

Facebook
 Instagram
 Skype
 Snapchat
 Twitter
 WeChat
 WhatsApp
 Zoom
 Other

Other Materials and Platforms

Teacher created online materials

Online materials used with textbooks designed by textbook publishing company

Writing

1. What are/were your goals with your writing while studying at the Intensive English Language Program?
 - a. Explore another country
 - b. Become proficient in the English language
 - c. Pass the TOFEL Exam
 - d. Pass the iELTS exam
 - e. Meet college or university admission requirements for undergraduate studies
 - f. Meet college or university admission requirements for graduate studies
 - g. Other (please specify)
2. What level of writing did you study/practice at the Intensive English Language Program?
 - a. Introductory Writing (sentence building, paragraph writing)
 - b. Intermediate Writing (Essays)
 - c. Advanced (Research papers, Literature Reviews)
 - d. Other (please specify)
3. After completing the program, what is your writing confidence level
 - a. 1) Not Confident
 - b. 2) Slight Confident
 - c. 3) Somewhat confident
 - d. 4) Fairly Confident
 - e. 5) Very Confident

Identity

Identity: how a person view themselef because of their roles, day-to-day actives or duties, this identity maybe different when participating in online activities.

1. To what degree has your identity changed since studying in the United States?
 - a. Always
 - b. Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never
2. To what degree is your identity noticeable in your English writing?
 - a. Always
 - b. Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Rarely
 - e. Never
3. What is your writing confidence level?
 - a. Very confident
 - b. Fairly confident
 - c. Somewhat confident
 - d. Slightly confident
 - e. Not Confident at all
4. To what degree does your writing confidence level influence your writing identity?
 - a. Very confident
 - b. Fairly confident
 - c. Somewhat confident
 - d. Slightly confident
 - e. Not Confident at all

APPENDIX F

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes. During the interview we will discuss your experience studying at an Intensive English Language Program, specifically your experience with online writing, your identity and how technology was used during that time. I would like for you to be detailed as possible so that I may fully understand your experiences.

Intensive English Language Program

1. Why did you choose to begin your studies at an Intensive English Language Program?
2. What type of classes did you take?
3. What classes/subjects would you have liked to studied at an Intensive English Language Program?

Technology

1. How was technology integrated in your Intensive English Language Program?
2. What types of technology did you use in class?

Writing

1. What type of writing did you practice at the Intensive English Language Program?
2. What type of writing did you think you may need to know for your undergraduate studies/major?
3. Since studying at an Intensive English Language Program, do you think your writing has improved?
4. How does culture impact your writing?

Pedagogy

1. How would you describe how your teacher taught writing?
2. Describe how your teacher used/included technology in the class/writing lessons?
3. What types of technology did your teacher(s) use in class?

Identity

1. What does your cultural identity look like in your English writing?