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Cape Verdean Students' Perceptions of their English Language Preparation for Higher Education in the US

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A Thesis Presented

By

FÁBIO WILSON TEIXEIRA VARELA

MAY 2021

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Cape Verdean Student's Perceptions of their English Language Preparation for Higher Education in the US

Thesis Presented

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FÁBIO WILSON TEIXEIRA VARELA

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ABSTRACT

Students from distinct parts of the world are learning English as a foreign language with multiple goals including job opportunities, education and so on. More importantly, many of them study English with the goal of pursuing their higher education in a foreign country, and the US is one of the main destinations. Studies have revealed that one of the problems international students face in their academic life has to do with language, specifically academic language. In this study, the researcher examined the retrospective perceptions of Cape Verdean students pursuing their studies at US universities towards their language instruction in Cape Verde and the influence of their prior instruction in studies in the US. A questionnaire was used to acquire information about their language learning experience in Cape Verde and interviews were conducted to understand their experience with language in the US higher education institutions. The findings suggest that the students believed that language instruction in Cape Verde needs improvements as it did not prepare them to study in a country where English is the language of instruction. The participants of the study reported that the English language instruction in prior education did not prevent them from facing several language challenges, especially in speaking and listening. This research reveals valuable information and has influential implications for the curriculum and language teaching practice in Cape Verdean EFL programs; the study also has implications for international student services and second language services incorporated in colleges in the US, allowing them to support international students regarding possible language challenges they may face while studying in the US.

Key words: International students, academic language, English as a foreign language, English language instruction in Cape Verde

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to the loving memory of my dearest mother Samira

Hindira M. L. Teixeira Freire. Despite our physical distance, my mom has been the very

reason behind my pursuit for meaning in life. I also dedicate this thesis to my dear brother

Etienne da Silva.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I: PERFORMANCE OF CAPE VERDEAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE US

Globalization has played a significant role in the lives of people of all stature around the world. The term has been defined as, "the myriad forms of connectivity and flows linking the local (the national) to the global—as well as the West to the East and the North to the South" (Steger, 2013, p. 23). One of the results of this global interconnection is the world's increased motivation to learn English, due to its official role in science, education, and other related fields of study. As Nishanthi (2018) indicated, nowadays English is the language of instruction in most universities and schools worldwide, including countries where English is not even an official language, not to mention that most celebrated universities in the world use English as the language of instruction. The influx of international students and the increase in numbers of international students at universities in English-speaking countries is huge. Only in 2019/20, despite COVID-19 1,075,496 (-1.8% in comparison with the previous year) international students were studying in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2020).

Background Context

Cape Verde (CV) is an Archipelago located in the Atlantic Ocean, 400 nautical miles from the west coast of Africa. The Archipelago is composed of ten islands, nine of which are inhabited. Once a colony of Portugal, Cape Verde became an independent

country on July 5th of 1975. As it was colonized by the Portuguese, Portuguese is the official language of the Cape Verdean people while Cape Verdean[1] is the native language.

As demand for English language programs increases, foreign countries have been improving their English language programs to best suit the future needs of their students, and Cape Verde is not an exception. For example, in Cape Verde, the education system extended English-language programming to earlier grade levels in elementary education. In the past, students could only study English in secondary education, but now students start studying English in the last years of elementary education (5th and 6th grades). This provides students 8 years of instruction in English by the time they graduate from high school (Plano Estratégico, 2017). While this is considered an improvement, extending the years of study does not translate into increased language proficiency outcomes. Strategies implemented in language instruction also play a significant role in the success of students' language acquisition. Similarly, learners' learning contexts condition their learning process.

Research Problem

Cape Verdean students learn English as a foreign language (EFL) and use English for a variety of purposes. A subset of Cape Verdean learners of English goes on to study in institutions of higher education in English-speaking countries. This study focuses, specifically, on how English language instruction in Cape Verde prepares this subset of students to succeed academically in English-speaking universities in the US. Studies indicate that Cape Verdean EFL programs place high emphasis on the teaching of grammar

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[1] In this paper, instead of Cape Verdean Creole, Cape Verdean is used to refer to the native language of Cape Verde. Cape Verdean in this paper is used both for nationality of people from Cape Verde as well as the native language.

rules. They also indicate that the most celebrated language teaching methodology is the so-called Grammar-Translation Method (Dos Reis, 2016; Monteiro, 2015). Therefore, understanding the impact their language abilities have on their academic performance in the US is of utmost relevance.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative design research explores the academic experience of Cape Verdean international students pursuing their higher education in the US. The researcher seeks to examine the perceptions of Cape Verdean students pursuing their higher education in the US regarding their language instruction in English as a foreign language programs in Cape Verdean secondary education. The study also seeks to understand Cape Verdean students' experiences with academic language here in the US. This investigation contributes to the literature addressing English language teaching in Cape Verde, as studies attending to this topic are hard to find. In addition to that, by identifying the challenges that students face in terms of English language proficiency when they come to study in the US, potential implications are identified. This study has positive implications for the improvement of English language programs in Cape Verdean high schools, and it also helps departments such as Second Language Learning Services to assist international students in the best ways possible. To accomplish such goals, this study seeks to answer two main questions.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of Cape Verdean students pursuing higher education in the US towards their English language instruction in Cape Verde?

2. Do Cape Verdean students with English language instruction prior to coming to the US experience any challenges related to academic language when they pursue their education at a US university?

2.1. If yes, what are some of the common shared challenges?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the researcher makes an evaluative summary of some pertinent literature concerning the topics of language acquisition and academic language. Most of the studies reviewed were published in the last 10 years. Furthermore, the studies included in this investigation were peer reviewed and published in different reliable educational journals found in databases, such as ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, and Project MUSE. Based on the research collected, this literature review is divided into topics including, Language Proficiency, Academic Language Proficiency, Language Learning Context and Academic Performance, English Langauge Learning in Cape Verde and Cape Verdean Students who go on to Higher Education in the US. These topics provide a contextual background of English teaching in Cape Verde and develop on the theories behind language acquisition and academic language/performance to offer a better understanding of the grounds the current study builds on.

Language Proficiency

The main goal of learning an additional language is to achieve a great deal of proficiency in that language. Given that language proficiency remains one of the biggest factors behind academic achievement for English learners (Echevarría at al., 2017), the term is defined here to contextualize the scope this paper focuses on. The term proficiency has been defined by many authors (Gharbavi1 & Mousavi, 2012), and in this paper the definition adopted is that of Peregoy & Boyle (2016). The term language proficiency may be defined as:

The ability to use a language effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social, personal, school, and work situations that comprise daily living. In literate

societies, language proficiency includes both oral and written language. For our purpose as educators, we want our students to become competent in four language processes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (Peregoy & Boyle, 2016, p. 42)

Simply put, a proficient speaker has the ability to manipulate the language in different environments and contexts. When Peregoy and Boyle (2016) mentioned the effective and appropriate use of language throughout the range of school, they referred to academic language (general and content knowledge) that students need to succeed in an educational environment. Therefore, proficiency must be promoted in all four language domains. Students who spend their time learning only grammar rules, rather than focusing on language in all four domains, may not acquire such abilities. According to Littlejohn (2016), in order for students to achieve language proficiency, or communicative competence, "language development needs two main ingredients: exposure and interaction, both in plentiful supply" (p. 31). Learning to communicate means being able to transmit and receive messages effectively in a language. Hence, for better proficiency, all four macro skills must be involved. They are productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading). If students have an unbalanced focus on those skills in their instruction, they are bound to not achieve communicative competence that they seek. According to Littlewood (1981) in a descriptive paper on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) "one of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view" (as cited in Thamarana, 2015, p. 91). Consequently, teaching or learning a language must involve

all four macro skills for it to be effective. Otherwise, students may not be able to become proficient in the target language.

Academic Language Proficiency

International students pursuing their higher education in different countries face many challenges, especially in the first years, and one of those challenges is that of academic language (Haidari & Yelken, 2018; Reed et al., 2013). It is important that we understand the difference between the concept of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) by Jim Cummins. According to Cummins (2008), "BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to students' ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school" (p. 71). The latter refers to the technical language specific to educational environment and the content language across different disciplines (Lenski & Verbruggen, 2010; Schmiedebach & Wegner, 2018). Therefore, being proficient in BICS does not necessarily mean being proficient in CALP. Non-native speakers are not likely to succeed with basic social communicative skills (Kotamjani et al., 2018; Wang, 2009), let alone a more complex skill like academic language. Studies have shown that academic language is complex even to students learning English as a second language (Evans & Morisson 2011; Tan, 2011). Tan (2011) investigated teachers' perceptions on the implementation of a content-based approach in their curriculum in Malaysia where the researcher included 16 teachers from different subject areas. The instruments used in this study were interviews and observations. The mixed-method study concluded that the disconnect between language teaching and content teaching disallowed students the opportunities to develop their language proficiency in

those areas. In other words, teaching only content or teaching only language limits students' learning potentials and opportunities. What the researcher has intended to show is that the integration of language and content in both ESL and EFL is needed. If the development of students' proficiency in academic language is impaired, they are more likely to have poor performance in those subject areas as well.

As reported by Truckenmiller et al. (2019) "academic language is particularly appealing for school achievement outcomes because it conceptually encompasses both the oral and written language skills specific to achievement in school" (pp. 135-136). It is not only about particular vocabulary words; knowledge of academic language entails understanding and using particular and complex grammatical structures at both phrase and sentence levels (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017) as language is used differently in different disciplines (Chauvin & Theodore, 2015). This complex characteristic makes CALP highly challenging for students who lack BICS because, unlike BICS, CALP demands explicit instruction. Therefore, this type of language, unlike language for social communicative purpose, needs to be taught explicitly to both native and non-native speakers. Additionally, Haidari & Yelken (2018) have suggested that, "academic language is no one's 'mother tongue' even if one is born as the speaker of that language" (p. 195). This means that even native speakers of a language must develop their academic language regardless of their elevated levels of proficiency. Nonetheless, academic language becomes easier to acquire when the learner is fluent in BICS. For some language learners, this phenomenon can be complicated due to the fact they are both learning the academic and social languages simultaneously.

Studies have suggested there is a correlation between language proficiency and academic language. Racca and Lasaten (2016) investigated the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement in some relevant courses (i.e., Science, Mathematics and English). The research reported that there was a considerable correlation between high school students' language proficiency and their performance in each of the disciplines involved in the investigation. Although this study involved high school students as participants, it helps us understand how language and performance work in an educational environment. On the same line of thought, Buchmann and Parrado (2006) carried out research on the achievement gap between immigrant-origin and native students. They used data from the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), a survey previously conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement in 1995. The researchers stated that the survey was considered one of the largest international surveys on educational achievement to the date of the publication of their investigation in 2006. They concluded that, although they were not able to explain the achievement gap between immigrant and native students in all the countries involved in the survey, immigrants' low language proficiency and family background could explain the existing gap in schools in the United States. Thus, understanding how these students can be supported linguistically may have extremely positive effects on education. In sum, most studies indicate that students' level of academic proficiency can have a tremendous impact on how students perform since it can automatically affect academic achievement.

English Language Learning Context and Academic Language

The language learning contexts mentioned here have to do with learning English as a foreign language or learning English as a second language. Although they are sometimes

used interchangeably, the two are quite different when it comes to context, instructional strategies, and the use of language. English as a second language (ESL) occurs in a context where English is the societal language. English as a foreign language (EFL) occurs in an environment where English does not have direct links with learners' social or personal life. In fact, most of the time, the language is only used in the classroom (Mayo, 2018; Punchihetti, 2013). Due to such distinctions, techniques used in ESL and EFL teaching are sometimes different. While in ESL students' language learning and development of content knowledge may happen simultaneously (Casanave, 2017), in an EFL context the major concern is (but not limited to) preparing students to communicate in social settings (Sidek, 2012).

   English as Second Language. English as a second language is mostly found in societies where English is the first language. Native speakers of other languages learning English in such an environment are learners of English as a second language. Although ESL and EFL contexts differ in important ways, studies of English language learners in US-American P-12 classroom contexts are included here because the focal participants in the current study transition from an EFL setting to an immersion setting in the US. This body of research provides insight on the role of academic language in learning academic content and lends insight on how participants may have experienced academic language demands once they arrived in the US. In fact, studies have revealed that literacy, a major component of academic language, is vital to academic achievement for English language learners across different academic subjects (August et al., 2014; Schmiedebach & Wegner, 2018). One of the challenges that English learners face in the US has to do with the language used in the classroom and the special language used in textbooks, their main type

of reading source. To succeed in many courses, students must be able to decode and comprehend the information in textbooks. In a study about the appropriateness of close reading procedures prescribed by the Common Core State Standards in the US, Thomason et al. (2016) used reading proficiency tests to collect data on students' comprehension using complex texts (in textbooks) both at grade level and at instructional reading level. The study involved six students from six different high schools. In this research, they found that an achievement gap between English language learners and native English speakers was evident in terms of reading. Thus, in such a context, the learning process concerning content in subject areas is challenging since textbooks are one of the main sources of knowledge acquisition and content learning in education. To illustrate this point, Reed et al. (2013) suggested that one of the ways students are presented with content knowledge is through textbooks, and the language in science books, for instance, may be challenging to all students, especially English learners (ELs).

Basically, a lack of academic language may impair students' abilities to perform both in written and spoken communication. This process becomes more challenging when these issues are ignored in classrooms. DiGisi and Willett (1995) stated that science teachers often do not implement language scaffolding strategies to help students understand and acquire academic or content language (as cited in Reed et al., 2013). Nevertheless, these authors also agreed that significant improvement can be noticed when students have explicit and intensive instruction in academic language. It is clear that the more knowledgeable students are in terms of academic language, the higher the probability of success in different subject areas. Similarly, Tan (2011) found that teachers had a positive perception about the collaboration between language teachers and other subject area

teachers to help language learners improve their academic achievement through language improvement. The consequences of lack of language proficiency that disallow students from fully engaging in classroom discussion and assignments are evident.

English as a Foreign Language. Students learn English as a foreign language in contexts where English is neither the first nor an official language. Studies from a variety of EFL contexts around the world suggest that learning English as a foreign language often results in poor communicative instruction since communicative skills are systematically overlooked in language classrooms (Dos Reis 2016; Monteiro, 2015; Wang, 2009). A meta-analysis conducted in China by Wang (2009), reviewed longitudinal studies of language learners and experimental approaches to discuss the concept of linguistic environment in learners' language acquisition. The study discussed the impact of learning in English as a foreign language, more specifically in China. The researcher analyzed literature on the influence of linguistic environmental setting on foreign language acquisition. He discussed that learners "have a small battery of formulaic phrases but are unable or too shy to put them to use. Although many of them pass their examinations successfully, they find they cannot cope in conversation with a fluent speaker" (Wang, 2009, p. 59). Wang (2009) went on to reveal that in EFL environments in China, language teaching is focused on grammar, and that the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is one of the most celebrated methods. Rickards and Rodgers (2014) described that the focus of GTM is explicit instruction on grammar rules and that "no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening" (p. 6). Students who learn English primarily through this method may struggle to achieve communicative competence in all domains of language.

A study conducted in Malaysia provided a similar point of view. Kotamjani et al. (2018) investigated the perceptions of international post-graduate students towards challenges they face in academic writing in English, using a survey of 128 students who did not have prior education with English as the medium of instruction. The study demonstrated that students faced challenges with general academic language skills in English. According to researchers, those challenges could be linked to the language instruction and curriculum in EFL contexts in students' home countries. Similarly, Haidari & Yelken (2018) explored the challenges that international students face in Turkish universities (Turkish as the medium of instruction[2]). The researchers interviewed 15 post-graduate international students studying at Mersin University, Turkey. The study revealed that students struggled with language in all four domains. More importantly, they struggled with vocabulary and language form (that may be different than what they are used to or their L1). As suggested by the researchers, the problems are common amongst international students who learned English as a foreign language. Even though Echevarría et al. (2017) suggested that learning academic language is like learning a second language for everyone regardless of their first language, students from EFL settings tend to face more challenges in this process due to their possible lack of language proficiency in the target language.

Crandall (1987) suggested that the languages of mathematics and science become more difficult when students are studying these disciplines in their second language (as cited in Tan, 2011). Given that English as a second language learners have more linguistic advantages than English as a foreign language learners, the complexity of mastering content language is even more intense for the latter. That is because their learning context

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[2] Even though the language studied was not English, the study is related to this research as both are about international students studying a language other than their native or official language.

offers limited language benefits. To be precise, when an EFL learner comes to the US to study, even though s/he becomes an ESL learner, the linguistic knowledge that s/he uses in his/her daily academic interaction or social interaction is the knowledge s/he acquired in the foreign language learning context. It is not until after some time that these students may show linguistic changes.

Studies show that there is a correlation between low language proficiency and low academic performance amongst international students (Azzolini et al., 2012, Buchmann & Parrado, 2006; Singh 2019). Singh (2019) studied the academic English language-related challenges among EFL international master's students where the researcher interviewed 16 lecturers in higher education in Malaysia. The inquirer found that lack of English proficiency usually impaired students' ability to understand the instructors' academic language, and such a lack of proficiency also lessened their willingness to communicate orally. Given that interaction is key in language acquisition (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), these students were not prone to progress language-wise, jeopardizing their academic success. Nevertheless, Haidari and Yelken (2018) found that, in their studies, the most prominent problem was linked to writing. That is because, besides the knowledge of special vocabulary and content language, writing requires more complex structures that are not transferred from speaking abilities (Herrera et al. as cited in Lenski & Verbruggen, p. 47). Hence, providing explicit instruction may be the best approach to implement with ELs.

English Language Learning in Cape Verde

English language has been one of the most, if not the most, studied foreign languages in countries around the world, and Cape Verde is not an exception. In Cape Verde, students learn English as a foreign language. According to Trigueiros (2010), the

introduction of the English language in the curriculum[3] of the education system of Cape Verde dates back to 1860 (as cited in Dos Reis, 2016). At that time, students could choose English from a number of foreign languages. It was not until the 21st century that the education system of Cape Verde ascribed more significance to English, and English became mandatory in high school. At that time, students were required to study English for at least four years. In the last decade, years of English language instruction were extended and subsequently, Cape Verdean students have had the opportunity to study English for 8 years before graduating from secondary education. Although this change is significant, extraordinarily little research has studied the effectiveness of English as a foreign language programs in Cape Verde. Most studies have been theses undertaken as graduation requirements for bachelor's or master's degree programs.

Studies suggested that in Cape Verde, students learn English as a foreign language. Therefore, one of the most celebrated teaching methodologies used in those classrooms is the Grammar-Translation Method[4] (GTM) (Dos Reis, 2016; Martins, 2013; Monteiro, 2015). Studies show that in EFL programs in Cape Verde, learners are taught through explicit grammar instruction and the very basics of the language. This approach often results in students' poor oral language proficiency because conversational skills are ignored in their classrooms. Martins (2013) conducted a study (document analysis) with a focus on analyzing the curriculum/syllabuses for 12th grade students in the Cape Verdean educational system. The researcher found that the curriculum was designed in a way that emphasized certain language skills while excluding others. According to her, "students

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[3] In this paper, curriculum refers to formal curriculum, which is defined as type of curriculum that explicitly states the program of objectives, content, learning attitudes, time frame and assessments. In Cape Verde, this curriculum is designed by the Ministry of Education.

[4] Explicit instruction of grammar rules

were used to reading, writing, doing grammar and vocabulary exercises and were assessed on those skills (Martins, 2013, p. 1). Basically, the language curriculum excluded conversational skills. For Martins (2013), her experience as a learner of English in Cape Verde excluded speaking practice. In her own words:

> I was practically not able to carry out a conversation in English although I was considered one of the best students in the English subject in my class. Speaking English in the classroom, apart from some classroom language such as *Good morning, May I come in, Can I go to the toilet…* and those basic comments and questions that learners usually ask the teacher for clarification (*I am confused, Can you repeat, I did not understand*), was something really rare among the learners whether they were good or weak students.

Simply put, being good in English did not mean being a proficient speaker. The researcher suggested that such results often are the consequences of the syllabi developed by the Ministry of Education in Cape Verde. According to the author, the curriculum pays more attention to grammar, reading and writing instructions rather than focusing on communicative skills.

In Cape Verde, students often lose great opportunities because of their lack of English proficiency. In Cape Verde, English is necessary in education (Martins, 2013). That is to say that English is important in preparing global citizens. There are few universities in CV, and a subset of students often have to study abroad in case they dream of pursuing higher education in a course that is not offered by universities in the country. Every year, there are scholarship programs facilitated by the Ministry of Education in Cape Verde with multiple countries including China, USA, Australia, Hungary, UK, to name a few. The medium of instruction students are instructed in in the universities included is

English. Base on the literature, if students lack English proficiency, they often lose the opportunity to pursue their studies in the courses they always dream of. Additionally, in terms of master's and doctoral degree programs, students often feel forced to leave the country because only a few programs are offered in CV. In the event that language requirements are not met, they lose the opportunity to achieve their goals.

Cape Verdean Students who go on to Higher Education in the US

Few studies have researched the linguistic case of Cape Verdean students who go on to pursue higher education in an English-speaking country. Research suggests that English language teaching in Cape Verde does not meet the linguistic goals students may have for learning English. Therefore, studying the linguistic case of the subset of Cape Verdeans who pursue higher education in English[5] in the US is necessary. Only one study examining the linguistic case of a subset of students who came from Cape Verde to study in the US was identified.

Dos Reis (2016) studied the perceptions of 17 high school Cape Verdean students in the US (these were high school students in Cape Verde before traveling to the US also) towards their language instruction in Cape Verde and the impact of their prior language instruction on the academic performance in high schools in the US. He used a questionnaire with open ended questions to collect data. The participants of the study reported that they had poor English proficiency when they arrived. This information was emphasized by the students as they mentioned that the approaches implemented in their classroom did not support their English language learning goals. According to them, the assessment in their class did not meet their needs. For example, the students indicated that most times,

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[5] English here is used to refer to language of instruction and not College English Programs.

Portuguese and Cape Verdean languages were the mediums of instruction in English language classrooms. Dos Reis (2016) found that English language teaching was poor in Cape Verde since the programs did not train students to use language communicatively in different contexts, be it either social or academic. Although the participants of the study suggested they had language proficiency issues upon arrival in the US, they felt that these issues had little to no impact on their academic performance.

Dos Reis (2016) disputed the findings of most research that indicated that such students often had impaired academic achievement due to their low English language proficiency. This could be related to many factors that we simply cannot explain without conducting further research. It is important to note that the participants in Dos Reis' (2016) research were students who came to the US to continue their secondary education. Cape Verdean students pursuing higher education may have different experiences. Although Dos Reis (2016) found that the low proficiency level of Cape Verdean students arriving in the US did not affect their academic performance, studies show that, in high school, the achievement gap between English native speakers and non-native speakers is evident (Thomason et al., 2016).

Summary

The existing literature on the topic under study revealed that there is an achievement gap (in P-12) between native English speakers and non-native speakers in educational environments where English is the medium of instruction. Although Dos Reis (2016) suggested that there was no correlation between low English proficiency and academic performance of Cape Verdean students who arrived in the US to pursue their study, many studies show otherwise. They show that most international students in an educational

environment where the medium of instruction is English face language-related challenges that impair their academic performances. In addition to that, studies also revealed that these problems can be traced to the instruction of English language in their home countries.

Although many studies addressed the challenges international students face while studying abroad, few of them directly addressed the problems concerning academic language in the US institutions of higher education. When it comes to education in the US, most of the studies included students in elementary and secondary education. Dos Reis (2016) was the only study identified, which addressed the case of Cape Verdean students (continuing secondary education in the US). Nonetheless, no study addressing Cape Verdean students pursuing higher education in the US was identified. That said, there is limited research on students who learned English in Cape Verde and came to the US to pursue higher education. With that said, this research will include students who acquire English language in Cape Verde and come to the US to pursue higher education. The research will examine their perceptions of English instruction prior to coming to the US and the impact of that instruction on their academic performance at a US university.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to investigate the perceptions of Cape Verdean students pursuing their higher education in the US about their prior language instruction in EFL programs in Cape Verdean secondary education. Also, the study intends to examine subsequent academic language challenges they face/faced in the US. The study was undertaken in the US, with current and former students from four northeastern higher-educational institutions. As for their secondary education, the students involved in this study went to schools including seven secondary education institutions from three Cape Verdean islands. In what follows, philosophical worldview, research design, research procedures, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations and the researcher's role are described.

Constructivist Worldview

This research employed a constructivist worldview to study and understand the experience of Cape Verdean students with English language acquisition in Cape Verde and its impact on their academic experiences in US higher-educational institutions. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) indicate, constructivist investigators attribute a solid focus on understanding participants' views towards the phenomenon under study. Such understanding is primarily forged through the means of deep interaction between the researcher and the participants. In order to achieve such a goal and provide an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences and views, Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended that interview questions should involve unstructured and open-ended questions. In fact, "the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings." (Creswell & Creswell, 2017,

p. 46). As a result, this study consisted of a questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews to investigate and endeavor to understand the participants' experiences and views of the subject under study.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to research because of its strength in the exploration of the subject being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2012; Flick, 2009). According to the authors, qualitative research deals with in-depth exploration and understanding phenomena concerned with individuals or groups. The researcher needed to deeply explore the participants' experiences so as to understand their perceptions about the relationship between the quality of English instruction in Cape Verde and their academic journey in the US.

Participants

The researcher used a sample by convenience whereby participants were recruited based on their convenience and availability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Seven participants who had pursued their secondary education in Cape Verde and traveled to the US to pursue higher education were recruited under the idea that they would have lived experiences that would fit the goal of the research. The goal was to understand their views towards their English language instruction in Cape Verde and the way they believe that instruction has factored into their educational experiences here in the US. Hence, it was important that the participants had either completed a higher education program in the US or were currently enrolled in one.

First, the researcher recruited participants by contacting Second Language Services and International Student Scholar Services at four institutions of higher education in the

Northeast of the US to identify Cape Verdean international students that fit the criteria for the project. Second, the researcher reached out to acquaintances who also fit the criteria designed for recruitment. Lastly, with the contact information (names and respective emails) provided by the offices mentioned above and those acquired by the investigator, the potential participants for the study were identified.

Seven potential participants were identified, and the researcher emailed the Informed Consent Form that contained a description of the study, the procedures, participant's risks and benefits, narrow and broad possible implications, participants' rights, and protection of data. All participants who responded to the call were included in the study. As described on the table below, the participants studied English in Cape Verde for at least four years and have been residing in the US for at least eighteen months (See the table below). All names are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participants

Names	Degree	Years of Residence in the US	Years of EL Instruction in CV	L1 in Cape Verde	Gender
Hannah	BS (ongoing)	5	6	Cape Verdean	Female
Kleidy	AA (ongoing)	1.5	6	Cape Verdean	Female
Vinny	BS (ongoing)	12	6	Cape Verdean	Female
Lenira	BS	9	4	Cape Verdean	Female
Angela	BS	8	4	Cape Verdean	Female
John	BS	5	6	Cape Verdean	Male
Melanie	BA	7	4	Cape Verdean	Female

1Note: BS=Bachelor of Science; BA=Bachelor of Arts; AA=Associate of Arts.
2Note: L1 in the box refer to speaking and listening skills. For reading and writing their L1 was Portuguese

Researcher's Role

Qualitative research is interpretative in nature and the researcher's personal background and experiences may shape his interpretations during the data collection and/or data analysis (Borowska-Beszta, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, making those biases, values, experiences, and other aspects that may influence data interpretation explicit is important (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Similarly, LeCompte (1987) has indicated that, "researchers who use paper and pencil instruments, such as tests, interviews, and questionnaires, are required to make the biases in their data collection instruments explicit" (p. 43) and face two potential sources of bias: personal bias and bias from professional training. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated, "the experiences may cause researchers to lean toward certain themes, to actively look for evidence to support their positions, and to create favorable or unfavorable conclusions about the sites or participants" (p. 260). In simpler terms, lack of reflection on such biases and making them explicit may influence a researcher's interpretation process. Therefore, it is important that researchers practice what LeCompte (1987) named as "disciplined subjectivity" in order to determine all sorts of sources of bias in their investigation.

The researcher of this study relates to the participants in the sense that he learned English in secondary education in Cape Verde and later traveled to the US for studies. With that said, the researcher is aware that his perceptions of language instruction in his secondary education may be a source of bias towards the data interpretation. Furthermore, the researcher also taught English as a foreign language in secondary education in Cape Verde and is aware that this experience may be a source of bias, especially when it comes

to participants' perceptions of their teachers' instructional practices implemented in their classrooms.

To minimize personal bias, the researcher made member checks during interviews where the inquirer would summarize interviewees' responses for them to confirm the accuracy of the respective summary of information. Another strategy that the researcher used to minimize bias was related to the way rapport was built. The researcher avoided providing answers to any question prior to participants' responses to avoid having any influence over their responses. In addition to that, using Zoom for the interviews reduced personal bias, given that the setting of the interview was more neutral; participants could choose to be in a location of their choice during the session. Interviewing participants in spaces chosen by or associated with the researcher may influence participants' responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), thus risking the results of the study.

Instruments

For this research, the investigator used a questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative questions (see Appendix A) and a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B).

Questionnaire. A questionnaire with both Likert scale and open-ended questions was adapted from a previous study by Seo (2011) and modified to meet the goals of the research. Some of the questions were restructured with simpler wording, and some response types were altered as well. Based on the researcher's language learning and teaching experiences, lists of activities were extended to offer a more detailed description and a wider array of choices concerning strategies and activities involved in the participants' language learning.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections including 20 questions. The sections included were (1) participant demographics, (2) perception on English language learning in Cape Verde, (3) English language learning experiences, and (4) the effectiveness and enjoyment of teaching methods and learning activities.

The first section was composed of questions about demographic information. Demographic information is important as it helps the researcher understand the differences and similarities in participants. Additionally, such information served as a confirmation that the participants were fit for the criteria designed for the investigation. The second section focused on collecting data concerning participants' perceptions of English language learning in their home country and their personal reasons for studying English. The third section involved questions related to the participants' English language learning experiences. The last questions were concerned with participants' perceptions about the effectiveness and their enjoyment of teaching methods and learning activities implemented in English language classrooms. These questions dealt with instructional activities that were implemented in their classrooms.

The types of questions involved in these instruments were 5-point and 6-point Likert scale questions as well as yes or no questions. Also, there were checkboxes for participants to indicate whether they had experienced specific language teaching activities implemented in English language classrooms. Lists of activities were presented in tables, and the participants were asked to check boxes and rate the enjoyment and effectiveness of different activities in their language learning process. These questions were crucial in determining the language instruction strategies implemented in the classrooms of the

participants of the study. In addition to these types of questions, three open-ended questions asked participants to support their choices.

In-Depth Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection, and all the participants were included. The interview complemented the questionnaire by exploring participants' experiences in their home country and their experiences with language in academic context in the US. In fact, given that the goal was to study and attempt to understand students' perceptions of their English language instruction and its impact in their academic life in the US, interviews were deemed the best tool to collect data. As Flick (2009) indicates, "[the interest in semi-structured interviews in research] is linked to the expectation that the interviewed subjects' viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire" (p. 150). Although semi-structured interviews are generally unstructured (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick, 2009), the researcher included a set of six questions with possible follow-up questions for organizational purposes (see Appendix B). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017) this number is reasonable given that the number of questions in such instruments should lie between 5-10 questions. It is important to note, however, that the researcher was not driven by the structure designed. The interview included open-ended questions "intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p.263). Hence, the researcher often followed up with "could you explain" and "why" to gain a broad and detailed picture about the participants' experiences and views. Semi-structured interview allows the participants more control over the information they wish to share. All the interviews were conducted in English except for one in Cape Verdean according to a participant's preference.

Ethical Considerations

For ethical considerations and the commitment to ensure the protection of human rights in research, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was completed and submitted to the IRB at Bridgewater State University for approval prior to collecting data. After the approval, the potential participants were contacted and invited to participate in the research only after they had fully understood and voluntarily agreed to participate. The researcher made sure that all the risks, benefits and procedures were clearly described to the participants. They were then sent a descriptive email and a Formal Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) prior to undertaking the study.

Research Procedures

Data Collection

The data collection procedures consisted of two stages: the distribution of the questionnaire and the administration of interviews.

Questionnaire. First, the questionnaires were sent to the participants. In the face of the pandemic, an online format was considered the best approach to applying questionnaires. The researcher used Qualtrics software for questionnaire distribution. Before working with the system, the researcher completed a Qualtrics online course. The questionnaire was piloted in Qualtrics to confirm functionality and the validity of the questions regarding data collection. The survey was analyzed by a professional in language teaching. Then, the researcher conducted a pilot test. The results were read to confirm that the questions collected data pertinent to the purpose of this research. The questionnaires were also analyzed to test if questions overlapped. All seven participants who were

recruited returned their questionnaires, and afterward the Qualtrics survey was closed and deactivated.

   In-Depth Interviews. Interviews of all seven participants were conducted. After the application and preliminary analysis of the questionnaire, the researcher worked with the participants to carry out the interview through Zoom.

   It is important to note that, for matters of comfort and privacy, the researcher turned off the "video on" option for participants. They would only enable their videos if they felt comfortable. As it was the case, all the participants turned on their videos on Zoom. The researcher started the interview by reviewing the purpose of the study, research procedures, participants' rights, projected benefits and protection of their identity, not to mention their rights to withdraw at any time. Although all the participants agreed to be video recorded, the investigator asked them to confirm their consents before starting the interview. With their consents, the interviews were recorded. The recording process helped the researcher in the transcription process, but handwritten notes were taken as well. This strategy has been proven successful and helpful in case the recording equipment fails (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data collected from the interviews were saved on Microsoft One Drive and transcribed within 48 hours (about 2 days) after the interview. The transcriptions were completed, and the recorded tapes were deleted.

Data Analysis

   For the interviews, the same strategies were applied except that data were coded paragraph-by-paragraph rather than line-by-line. All the recorded videos were fully transcribed. The handwritten notes taken during the interviews were also typed on a word document. After data preparation and organization, the researcher read the transcript many

times to make sense of participants' responses as well as to search for irregularities, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Flick (2009). Then, the researcher started coding the data paragraph by paragraph. In this process, inductive coding was used as the codes arise directly from the responses rather than being established prior to analysis (Flick, 2019). Different concepts (codes) were used to label the paragraphs according to the subjects' discussion after each question. Notes in short sentences were taken in the "comment" section of the Microsoft Word document. The researcher also used colors to highlight different views and experiences as expressed by the interviewees. They were copied and pasted in a table in a Microsoft Word document for cross-checking similarities and differences amongst the participants' experiences.

The Likert scale type of questions were analyzed by studying the frequencies of the participants' answers. The data were represented in a table for better analysis. This strategy allowed the researcher to see the similarities and differences between participants' responses to such questions. For the open-ended questionnaire questions, the answers were put on a Microsoft Word document and reviewed several times before starting the coding process. The researcher used inductive coding to analyze the data collected. Although coding software has been quite useful in the scientific world (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick, 2012)), the researcher decided to use manual or hand coding since a researcher needs training to effectively use the software available. The researcher applied the line-by-line coding strategy to code data from the open-ended questions from the questionnaire. Each line was labeled with codes (concepts) related to the subject discussed in the questionnaire.

The categorization process was implemented using the hierarchical code frame. At this stage, the researcher identified experiences in their home country and in the US, and

under each segment, themes that emerged from the open coding were categorized. Although the researcher used an inductive approach to data analysis, especially coding, a deductive approach played a significant role in the process of categorizing the themes that emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Limitations and Delimitations

There are three limitations concerning this investigation. First, the sample is rather small (seven participants) which means that the conclusions of this research should not be generalized to other Cape Verdeans who were not part of the study. The second limitation has to do with the number of participants involved in the interview and questionnaire. The researcher had initially intended to use the questionnaire for ten students and interview five, but due to limited response all the participants included in the questionnaire were interviewed. The third limitation has to do with the triangulation of instruments for data collection. It was the researcher's initial goal to use participants' graded papers with embedded professor's feedback for data analysis. Since only one paper was received, the researcher used interviews and the questionnaire only. That said, the data collected relied solely on participants' self-report on the questionnaire and interview.

The delimitation yielded in this study is the researcher's decision to work with a small sample of students who studied their secondary education in Cape Verde and came to the US to pursue higher education.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The data collected were analyzed and coded using the inductive coding model. The data were coded with words, phrases, and short sentences. The researcher analyzed the coded data to identify similarities and avoid overlapping themes. In the end, six themes emerged from the data and they reflected participants' perceptions of the English language instruction in Cape Verde as well as the impact of their language instruction in pursuing higher education in the US. The themes derived from the data are described below.

Introduction: Broadly speaking, we felt that there is a need for improvement of English instruction in Cape Verde

Generally, participants expressed a certain degree of dissatisfaction with English language instruction in their home country and a feeling that instruction could improve for students who would eventually go on to pursue higher education in an English-speaking country. Participants' dissatisfaction was directly connected to the nature and focus of English instruction in CV, specifically lessons that mainly aimed at non-conversational activities such as reading and writing, where grammar rules were highly emphasized. For example, Hannah suggested that, "if it were the high school-only experience that I had, I wouldn't say it was sufficient. . . I would say there is a lot of things that could be improved". It is interesting how the student perceived her education to have not prepared her well, suggesting that enhancements are needed. Similarly, Lenira reported that although the language classes allowed her to learn English, the programs needed improvement in terms of teaching strategies (i.e., student engagement with the language). Her view on English instruction in her secondary education was that it was "elementary. Very elementary based. . . and it's not conversational enough for people to actually be able to learn to speak."

Lenira's perception of good language instruction seems to be connected with that of communicative approach instruction; this perception may be linked to the challenges faced in the US.

Participants' responses revealed the teaching of certain topics in their English instruction in CV. "I had one teacher through my years of secondary education, and … the only thing that he taught us, it was the verb 'to be'. So, everybody called him to be. That was his nickname.", said Vinny. Here, Vinny's wording seems to imply that her instruction focused too much on grammar. I have had experience with students that use the term "verb to be" to indicate that the teaching is highly based on explicit grammar instruction. Most participants shared the same views with Vinny on this issue, except John. He indicated that, however basic, English language instruction in his home country helped him a lot in the US. In expressing his overall perception about the EFL program in CV secondary education, John said, "I think, I think, the little bit of English that we learned in Cape Verde, is, is very helpful for people trying to come to the US because it teaches you the basics, the very basics of English. And with that you can build off." John's thoughts make one wonder why there is such a difference in their perceptions, especially for the fact that his general views are somewhat different than all other participants. The views shared in these two paragraphs are more developed in the themes that follow.

I could not express myself in English in my classroom

Most participants revealed that the lack of communicative activities in their language instruction in Cape Verde impacted their experiences in the US. According to them, the English language instruction received in Cape Verde did little in preparing them to communicate in English in both academic and social contexts in the US. In the

questionnaires, participants reported that common language activities for communicative purposes (e.g., conversation and discussion, use of magazine, TV show, visual materials, songs, oral games, role play, classroom presentation) were not implemented in their classrooms, as they believed they should have been. For example, according to most participants in the questionnaire, the frequency of the development of activities that promoted speaking and listening skills varied between "sometimes" and "never". In fact, only John indicated that these activities were used about half of the time in his classroom. This shift in the line of thought between this one student and the rest of the group suggests the existence of some extraneous factors, either concerning the instruction or participants' individual experiences.

One of the concerns that emerged from the data was connected to the use of language in the classroom in Cape Verde and its impact on their education in the US. During the interview, Melanie indicated that (in Cape Verde) the use of language was not stimulated in class. "The instruction I had in Cape Verde contributed to my learning, but it also made me a disservice by not training me well enough to be able to fluently interact in English even after six years of study," she added. According to participants, despite the lack of speaking activities in the classroom, the lessons were delivered in Portuguese and Cape Verdean for the most part. Similar to Lenira in the previous paragraphs, Melanie's comments revealed that interaction in English should have been a focus in her classroom. Furthermore, in response to questions involving oral language in the classroom, Vinny revealed that, "English was not mandatory. More when teachers spoke." In spite of being in English classrooms, students communicated in a different language. She went on to say, "I am not saying my teacher was not good. I thought we could have more discussion. More

group discussion: more talking, you know, like a presentation. I think it would be great it would be like helpful." The responses of some participants brought up the idea that in their lessons, the English language should have been somewhat "mandatory" or stimulated, at least.

Participants suggested that interaction in class in the US was hard since they rarely practiced communicative English in the classroom in Cape Verde. Classroom interaction depends a lot on how much students know about the subject under discussion and the language level a student must have to be able to express their thoughts and opinions. It is also associated with their ability to decode and process the information shared by peers and professors. The data indicated that the participants, main problem was that they could not fully express themselves in English. For instance, Angela said, "if all teachers demanded we spoke English and taught us as much as my last teacher did, I wouldn't have faced so many challenges." It is curious to note how students kept bringing up the ideas of making English speaking mandatory in the classroom as a way of stimulating the practice of spoken language. Hannah hinted at the challenges she faced in higher education in the US by stating, "I think the main difficulty was that I couldn't express 100% what I was thinking, or what I was feeling. So, I think, giving back was the hardest thing for me." The participant stressed the importance of speaking skills in classroom interaction. The feeling of not being able to express in English made her experience more arduous. John shared similar experience saying, "I would say speaking [was my major challenge], because I wasn't used to speaking English every day. I would only speak it at a, you know, in the English class sometimes". John had suggested that the language instruction in CV helped him a lot, but when it comes to interaction in class, he did side with the other participants to indicate that

their struggles with expression in English in the US were a result of poor speaking activities developed in prior instruction. Although he suggested that he spoke English in the classroom, he emphasized that it was only sometimes.

Similarly, findings suggested that students had a hard time making themselves understood by their peers and professors. Kleidy had challenging experiences in her first interactions in an academic context in the US. According to her, it was hard for people to understand the little that she tried to utter. She remembered an instance where she went home crying because she could not express herself in the classroom. Her cousin asked her, "bo bu ka studa ingles la Kabu Verdi? Npensaba bu studaba la pa sax anu". [did you not study English in Cape Verde? I thought you studied English for six years]. She replied by stating, "N kumesa studa ingles na Kabu Verdi desdi setimu anu. N studa ti desimu sigundu anu mas kuasi nka prendi nada." [I studied English for 6 years in Cape Verde, but I did not learn a lot]. This event provokes critical thoughts and invites us to think about the different factors that might have been behind Kleidy's inability to speak fluent English even after studying the language for six years. She added that in Cape Verde she did not speak English in class until a teacher she had in the last year of her secondary education promoted activities that demanded the use of English.

Some students were able to self-assess their proficiency level and made strategic choices that allowed them to learn English outside the classroom. Angela and Lenira believed that this was the best approach they could have taken. Unlike Angela, Lenira had taken extra English classes in a language school back in Cape Verde, but in their first semester in the US they both chose to avoid classes that would require a lot of speaking because they did not feel prepared. According to them, choosing only math and science

related courses helped them buy some time to improve their English skills in the interim. The participants said that choosing science-related courses was an intelligent choice. Angela said, "I never actually needed to talk to anybody in class. I took like a bunch of math class, my first year, mostly classes that I wouldn't need to interact with anybody." They indicated that the lack of speaking practice in English language classrooms prior to coming to the US made their oral contributions in the class more difficult in the US. Curiously, although the participants criticized the lack of use of language in classrooms in Cape Verde, in the US they avoided being in a class where they would be asked to interact in English. Apparently, they would feel more confident in interacting in an English language class than a content class with English as the medium of instruction. Perhaps, the language support offered in an English language classroom makes some difference.

I could not understand my professors in lectures

In addition to challenges concerning self-expression in English, participants also indicated that they had a hard time understanding their professors during lectures. In academic contexts, students must be proficient in academic language to engage in a comprehensive discussion; one must understand the message being conveyed so they can answer, rebut, agree, disagree, and so on. A student must be proficient in speaking and listening skills to fully participate in classroom discussions.

Listening skills were a reported challenge for most participants in US higher education contexts. According to Hannah, Lenira, Angela and Melanie, it was hard to understand everything that professors said in their lectures. They asserted that the main problem was related to the pace of professors' speech and the level of language used. For example, Hannah said that she, "usually used to leave the class without knowing 100%

what the professor was explaining . . . The level of language back in CV was not high. So, I wouldn't understand simple words that the professor would use." The participants' words indicate that the problem related to the level of language professors use, but the data also imply that exposure to listening activities involving native speakers' speech might be one of the issues. The participant reported that she would write the words as she understood and googled them at home to understand their meanings. Here, the participant indicated that another problem was with vocabulary. Some of the "simple" words were unknown to her. Consequently, the researcher asked the participant if the issue were with technical terminology, but Hannah suggested that although then (in her first months in the US) she would think they were "sophisticated words," now she can say that they are words of regular use.

Angela revealed that understanding professors was difficult because they spoke at a fast pace. Her response suggested that phonological phenomena may have made understanding a lot more difficult. If she could not listen to the words uttered clearly, she could not make sense of them either. In classes that depended a lot on professors' explanations, Angela stated:

> I did not understand. To be honest, like my first semester was the worst. I did not understand I would say like, 60% of anything that was going on. So, I would go to the office hour, and they would sit down, where they could talk to me like at my pace.

Angela expressed that the lack of activities promoting listening skill improvement in her prior instruction in CV caused her a lot of trouble and arduous work while studying in the US. According to her, not only did teachers in Cape Verde speak English in a slower pace, but they also used Portuguese to give instructions for the most part. Similarly, Hannah suggested that because her classrooms in the US were big, the teachers could not modify

their language to meet the level of international students with low language proficiency, not to mention that the class consisted of mainly native speakers. This is an interesting point. It makes us curious to think if language scaffolding (comprehensible input) for international students is something that professors consider in their instruction in higher-education institutions in the US.

Lenira commented on the same subject when she suggested that her perceptions of her professors' speech changed from feeling their speech was "super-fast" initially to a simple speech pattern and rhythm. According to her, the instruction she had in Cape Verde did not give her enough preparation to enable her to understand native speakers. She referred to her history teacher where she said, "I thought he spoke fast, but his speech pace was normal. It took me a little bit longer to assimilate than the other students who were born here and were used to English." The participant's listening skills were not at the level required for college students, especially because she did not have a lot of exposure to the English language in Cape Verde. Her views stress the importance of including activities that stimulate listening awareness regarding English language in English classrooms in Cape Verde.

Unlike some of the participants, John had a different view. According to John, although he had problems with speaking sometimes, he believed that the chances of facing challenges regarding listening were reduced due to his preference for listening to English songs and watching American movies with English subtitles, to name a few. Such activities allowed him to better his listening skills and learn the pronunciation of different words. It is also interesting to see how personal initiatives helped reduce the degree of perceived

challenges. This could be understood as one of the factors that makes John's experiences a bit different than the other participants in this study.

There was too much emphasis on grammar

Another theme that emerged from the data was connected to explicit grammar instruction in participants' studies in Cape Verde. There was a pattern in participants' responses hinting at Grammar Translation Method as the main used approach in their language classrooms. While they expressed that grammar teaching was necessary, they believed their instruction emphasized it too much. The results from the questionnaires revealed that most participants, except John, described learning grammar through explicit rule teaching and exercises most of the time. They also expressed that this was because most teachers focused heavily on teaching for the midterms and quizzes rather than having them speak the language. Vinny said:

> It's funny because I had like 19 to 20 [in a scale of 0-20] in the grade. I had 19 in English, so I should like be able to try to speak and write in English because I had instruction back in Cape Verde, but in truth, it was just for testing. It was just like you study and memorize the verb and stop and do the test. That was it.

The participant was an A student, but she indicated that she could hardly formulate a sentence in spoken English. This viewpoint tells us that in her studies, the performance on tests did not correlate with her language performance in all four domains, especially in speaking. On top of that, situations like this also inform us that perhaps balancing the focus of the four domains of language on tests are of utter relevance. Hence, her knowledge of English grammar was insufficient to help her communicate in English when she started studying in the US.

Findings hinted at grammar, indicating that the verb "to be" was focused on too much. "Mi Nta atxa ma prusoris sa mesti mas instrusao na ensinu di Ingles pamodi e so

verbu to be ki nu ta prendi." [To my mind, teachers need more instruction in English language teaching methodologies because the verb "to be" is all we learn], said Kleidy. It is interesting how students perceived that teachers were not trained well due to the way instruction was approached in class. Melanie stated that grammar was important, but the way it was taught was not enjoyable. She went further to say:

> There was too much verb conjugation, especially the verb "to be", and explicit verb tenses teaching. Instead of learning grammar in a sentence, or in context, we only filled in gaps according to the pronoun. I was so good at it. Always got full score, but if you asked me to articulate a full sentence using those verbs orally, I would have issues.

Here we can see that the student was dissatisfied not only with grammar-based teaching, but also with how grammar issues were approached in her class. It is also interesting to note that such observations were only noticed or reflected upon after the students traveled to the US. Being in the US and not being able to use the language raised certain awareness regarding their instruction in Cape Verde. After all, in Cape Verde their lives did not depend on English.

According to most participants, an overfocus on explicit grammar teaching drove away their chances of developing other skills, such as speaking and listening, that would propel their conversational skills. "I always got good grades in English in most of my English tests without even been able to speak English. Everything was on paper, and most of them were filling in the gaps with verbs", said Angela. She also suggested that things changed after she had an English native speaker as her teacher. In the views of Angela, learning only grammar does not make a person a good speaker.

The participants felt that grammar was important, but they expressed that explicit grammar teaching alone is not sufficient for students who want to learn to speak the

language. Additionally, they purported that most of their assessments consisted of written tests that focused on explicit grammar exercises more than other functions of language. They indicated that these types of exercises allowed little or no room for developing speaking and/or listening skills because oral activities were not developed. Essentially, in their instruction, English classes developed basic reading and writing skills rather than conversational skills.

Students wanted to learn more than just the basics

Another theme that emerged was that of basic English in their instruction in Cape Verde. Unlike the results presented above, here specific references to basicness in participants' instruction in CV as well as the contents of the curriculum are made. Participants referred to their English language curriculum stating that it focused on the basics of English throughout their secondary education, not to mention that there was too much content to cover in a single academic year. Due to that, teachers were obligated to rush through content, allowing students little time to engage with them. For instance, in response to questions concerning content, Angela said:

> Every end of the semester, it's like they rush to finish the curriculum that they were given to teach us, but it's not like everybody learns at the same pace. You might need more time with this one specific class, because we learn at a different pace. But yeah, that was definitely an issue. I don't think we ever covered, like the whole curriculum, to be honest.

According to the participant, even though each topic was taught for a limited time, she did not believe they ever completed the syllabus in a year. It is interesting that teachers rush through content to finish curriculum in a limited time. The participant suggested that learning should be the priority rather than finishing the content.

Participants also hinted at repetition of content over the years of secondary education. They felt that they studied the same basic English content through their years in

secondary education. Lenira claimed that, "most teachers kind of went around the same thing as verb to be and all those basics, basic things and I get none of them were very conversational." John also suggested that although he had the basics of English language, he had to admit that the contents were repetitive, "specially the verb tenses." Similarly, Melanie stated that she "got tired of studying present simple, present continuous and other verb tenses. It was the same every year." The responses above are linked to the idea that learning English goes beyond grammar. Additionally, repeating content year after year made the learning process monotonous.

Although participants shared some dissatisfaction concerning their language instruction in their home country, they credited some aspects of their prior language instruction. Lenira admitted that, "even though it was very elementary, it helped a bit. For example, I was good at conjugating verbs. With that, I only had to worry with the practice piece, the hardest part though." Like Lenira, Melanie suggested that the teaching of grammar helped her with the basics to build on her English proficiency, especially in writing. "I saw the importance of prior grammar-based instruction in my writing. Professors gave me feedback in structure and sometimes punctuation issues, but my verb conjugations were always right," said Melanie. The participant indicated that although she had a few problems with grammar in her writing, using grammar in conversation was an arduous task since communicative skills were not focused on in her English language classroom in Cape Verde.

There are some other activities that participants claimed were helpful in their experience in the US. Some of the activities are related to listening skills and some pronunciation aspects. Hannah suggested in her last year a teacher promoted oral

presentation projects in class. As she described it, "those are the best memories I have from my experience there . . . I enjoyed it a lot, but it didn't happen a lot, just in the last year." Here it is important to note that a shift in the strategies as well as in the outcomes (as a result of a new instructor) was noted by the participant. It is interesting to think about the factors behind this shift in both the instructions as well as outcomes. Similarly, Angela said, "we did learn a lot of like basic English, but we never actually had the chance to practice for the most part. So, I think that was what was missing; like practicing." Nevertheless, she admitted that the pronunciation of some of the most difficult English sounds she learned in Cape Verde was useful to her as she started to interact with people in the US. "I remember in high school. My first teacher, he used to help us like with the pronunciation of the "th" sounds . . . and that helped a lot." The participant also illustrated that oral presentation activities developed by her foreign teacher (American) helped her face the fear of speaking in public in the US even if she made mistakes. Hannah and Angela revealed it was sad that these interactive activities only happened in the last years of their instruction in secondary education. They attributed this difference to changes in teachers. The teachers they had in the last year advocated for communication in the classroom as opposed to some of their previous instructors.

Basic English instruction has also been mentioned to have impacted students only with asking and delivering very basic personal information. Kleidy indicated that the instruction she had only helped her with providing and asking for basic information. "Nu ta prendi apresentasao, my name is [Kleidy], I live in . . .. Era kela, mas djuda un poku" [we learned to introduce ourselves, say my name is Kleidy, I live in . . . that was it, but it helped." The participant said that even though it was not much, she did make the use of

some of the linguistic knowledge she acquired in Cape Verde. The participant suggested that she only spoke English in oral presentation in her last year of secondary education, and that such experience helped her a little when she came to the US. It is curious how such changes happened with different participants, and all of them towards the last year of instruction. On the other hand, John had a different view on how the language instruction in Cape Verde helped him in the US: "People could surprisingly understand what I told them, even though I had harder time understanding them. But I did." He also suggested that the instruction in his home country could be a lot better, but it provided him with what he needed to build his proficiency in English. Additionally, he indicated that activities to promote listening and speaking skills were often developed in his classroom. John indicated that, "they also, like, gave us a bunch of songs to sing, which we learned from; and what else? we watched a couple movies in classes which helped a lot." The participant went on to say that "it's not like perfect, but it's good enough to get us to get our feet wet." It is also interesting how John felt he was able to interact in an intelligible interaction while others, like Kleidy and Vinny, felt they could hardly make themselves understood by native speakers or understand native speakers' speech. Perhaps either instructional or personal factors are involved.

Participants recognized the teaching of the basics of English, but they also commented on how weak the promotion of interactive activities to foster their speaking and listening skills was. Participants stated that communicative activities should be implemented so that speaking and listening skills are not overlooked. They also understood that the English language curriculum played a role in the deficiency of their instruction in Cape Verde.

The focus on the four macro-skills felt unbalanced

The responses referenced that there was a lack of balance amongst the four language macro skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) in their classrooms. The rationale behind it was that a large amount of their time and focus was devoted to reading and writing activities. Nevertheless, students identified a lack of balance amongst the types of reading and writing activities developed.

The participants indicated that the type of reading they did in English classes in Cape Verde was different than what they would need here. According to Kleidy, the reading activities in Cape Verde were more focused on reading for pronunciation than interpretation. "Kantu N ben, le y intendi foi difisil di mas pamodi na Kabu Verdi nu ka ta fokaba na le pa interpretason. Un prufisora ki N tinha ki faze kela" [When I came here, understanding what I read was difficult because in Cape Verde we did not focused a lot on reading for interpretation. Only one teacher of mine promoted that activity] said Kleidy. Kleidy's views imply that, in addition to teaching reading, it is vital that teachers explain different types of reading to the students. The participant also reported that she was not used to reading in English in Cape Verde, and many words she found in the readings in the US were unknown to her. For her, this was a problem in the beginning because she had not learned the strategies to understand the meaning of words in context, not to mention that the number of unknown words was large. Unlike Kleidy, Angela suggested that she was able to transfer some reading strategies from her literacy in Portuguese to English contexts. Nevertheless, vocabulary is still a big issue in the types of reading she does. "I still use dictionary until this day," said Angela. The participant revealed that if she had more exposure to texts in English in Cape Verde, she would face less challenges in terms of

reading. In fact, she also revealed that sometimes she must read a paragraph multiple times to fully understand the message the author wants to convey, especially due to the complexity of sentence structure and vocabulary used in academia.

Students also suggested that writing has been an issue in their academic context. According to Vinny and Kleidy, writing is still a challenge to them, especially because the types of writing they are engaged in in the US are different from short compositions they wrote in secondary education in Cape Verde. When asked about the main challenges with writing, Kleidy replied, "Nha prublema e ku skrevi y pontuason. Mi N tinha txeu problema ku pontuason y extruturason di frazis." [My problem has been punctuation and sentence structuring]. Although reading and writing strategies can be transferred from one language to another depending on their level of likeness, language distance complicates transfer. For instance, in Portuguese (Kleidy's L1 for reading and writing) punctuation and types of sentences can be different. The participant also reported that in Cape Verde she never learned how to write a five-paragraph traditional essay, which according to her, in the US students learn before 12th grade. In college, students are often asked to write essays, and for Kleidy that was hard because she never had explicit instruction on how to write essays. This does not only refer to English language learning, but it also applies to writing instruction in general in Cape Verde, according to the participant.

Similarly, Vinny expressed her experiences about the challenges she has faced with writing in the US. According to Vinny, she has had issues with writing both in Portuguese and English since she was in Cape Verde. Her perception was that in Cape Verde students just wrote compositions, but their compositions were based on copies from books and

handouts. Vinny remembered the time when she applied for English lessons at PSS (school

pseudonym) as follows:

> When I went to do an essay for PSS, they put me in a writing 90. It's like below the
> writing that you needed to go for the college writing, and I was happy because I
> knew I couldn't go straight for college writing because I couldn't do it. In my degree
> works now if you see it's all A's and B on writing courses.

As Vinny described, writing in English was a challenge she had been facing up to

the date of the interview. Curiously, even though she had previously mentioned that she

had good grades in English back in Cape Verde, she was not able to pass her college writing

test.

The participants in this section understood that reading and writing were some of

the challenges they have faced in their education in the US due to the lack of engagement

with such activities in their language education prior to studying in the US. As a matter of

fact, some of them suggested that if they had not taken extra English language courses,

they would not have succeeded in higher education in the US.

I was frustrated with language issues in the US

Besides the language challenges expressed by the participants, two of them (Kleidy

and Vinny) revealed that they suffered language-related frustrations that have impacted

their lives in the US. Kleidy revealed that she thought of giving up a couple of times

because her language limitation was impairing her academic achievement. She said that,

"skola fika sima um lugar de dezisperu invez di un lugar di aprendizagen. Nta fikaba tristi

so N saiba pa-N baba pa skola" [school was a place of despair rather than a place of learning

for me. Whenever I left to go to school, I suddenly became sad]. Interestingly, Kleidy's

claims show a connection between self-esteem and language proficiency. She got to the

point that she compared school to a place of despair. This is critical. The participant

suggested that as she frequented school and the English language course she later enrolled in, the idea of giving up never crossed her mind anymore. According to her, the experience she had before was overwhelming, and she wishes no one goes through that.

Vinny suffered comparable experiences, but hers were a little more intense than Kleidy's. Vinny was an A student in Cape Verde, but when she came to the US, she had to work in a factory because she did not have the language proficiency required to enter college. As she said:

> I was like mad at first because of the knowledge that I had in back in my country, with the grades that I had and with the two university scholarships and everything. So here, I could feel stuck to begin. I was trapped in this factory work because I could not study.

The participant pointed out that it was not until a decade later that she enrolled in a private English course to develop her language skills for college. According to her she meant to study because she needed a better life and that was the reason behind her registering for English language classes. Although she took the course and later entered college, Vinny states that she still faces many challenges with language. "Recently, I was going to drop a class because it was so complex. The grammar and everything were so hard, and the teachers talked fast. I was sick. I thought of dropping that class; I couldn't deal with that." Although the student has been living in the US for years, she still struggles with the language. Also, Vinny's views tend to portray a poorer instruction of English in Cape Verde. This could be linked to the fact that Vinny is older than the other participants. Hence, she went to school in Cape Verde before any of the other participants, which could explain the differences[6], however small, between Vinny and other participants.

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[6] English language in education has been given more attention by the Ministry of Education in Cape Verde. So, recent students have been benefiting more from the EFL programs.

Two participants indicated that their experiences with language limitations led them to think about giving up. They suggested that they recommend anyone coming from Cape Verde take extra English language classes because the instruction from secondary education only does not suffice.

Summary

The participants of the study expressed their opinions on their language experiences in Cape Verde and in the US. According to them, although the instruction in Cape Verde provided them with some basic forms of the English language to get started or build their English proficiency, they believe there is a lot to be improved. Some of the suggested improvements included a balanced focused on all the four macro skills of English language, as they believed speaking and listening skills were overlooked and the writing and reading activities developed were not effective enough. They also suggested that had they been exposed to activities that promoted the improvement of these language skills, they would have faced less challenges in their education. All in all, participants indicated a belief that exposure to language and practice are vital in language learning, yet it did not happen as much in their education in Cape Verde.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

In this section, the findings are discussed in regard to the research questions of the study. This section focuses on particular aspects of language regarding participants' experience with English language instruction in Cape Verde as well as the challenges they have faced while studying in the US. After the discussion, the researcher elaborates on the implications for EFL programs in Cape Verde and language services and international student services in higher education in the US.

English as a Foreign Language Learning

Research indicates that academic language takes quite some time to develop for any learner acquiring the language of school; however, what is distinctly different for these participants who had experienced EFL as opposed to ESL is that they also lacked communicative skills to help them communicate in informal settings. Students from non-English-speaking countries often encounter language-related challenges when they pursue their education in an English-speaking country. Essentially, amongst the various problems these students tend to face, challenges were associated with the use of language (Haidari & Yelken, 2018; Reed et al., 2013). Studies have revealed that such consequences are often connected to the language instruction in students' home countries. International students learning English as a foreign language often lack opportunities to use the language due to factors in the EFL language learning environment (Dos Reis, 2016; Wang, 2009). The nature of language use in EFL classrooms has been consistently shown to differ from the nature of language use in English immersion contexts. Another cause of this effect is that in foreign countries, English language instruction tend to focus heavily on teaching explicit

grammar using Grammar Translation Method (Dos Reis, 2016; Monteiro, 2015; Wang, 2009).

Research indicates that the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) tends to be popular in EFL settings around the world. The participants' descriptions of their EFL classrooms revealed GTM characteristics in the instruction they received. Furthermore, participants expressed dissatisfaction with characteristics that are associated with GTM, specifically. They suggested that little attention is paid to the use of language. The participants studied English for an average of 5 years (4-6 years) before coming to the US, which according to research is a reasonable period for learners to become fluent in a language. It is important to note that none of these students studied in the new format (up to 8 years) of English instruction since it was implemented recently. Hakuta et al. (2000) indicate that English learners may take three to seven years to achieve proficiency (3-5 for oral proficiency; 4-7 for academic language proficiency). According to Martins (2013), based on the years of instruction students in Cape Verde should graduate from high school with at least a reasonable level of proficiency in English (B1 level in CEFR[7] which is equal to lower intermediate level). This was not the case of most of the participants of this study. The participants believed that the instruction in their home country did little to train them in all four language skills, including both receptive (reading and listening) and productive language skills. This was also true in Wang's (2009) study. Wang suggested that learners in China, which also uses GTM, may have a small repertoire of vocabulary and phrases, but they are often unable to put them in use. The case of the participants of this study was no different, as the results delineate.

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[7] The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Lack of Assessment Effectiveness

Another problem highlighted in the findings was that the assessments in English language instruction in Cape Verde were not in alignment with the goals students had for learning English language. Dos Reis (2016) suggested that in Cape Verde, the curriculum focuses highly on teaching grammar. That said, undoubtedly, as tests are designed in accordance with curriculum, or at least should be, students are more inclined to learn language to perform well on tests rather than learning to communicate. This was also true in Martins (2013), who suggested that English language curriculum in Cape Verde did not assess students' communicative skills. In the findings of this study, one of the participants suggested that her class was mostly about memorizing verbs and vocabulary words to perform well on tests. In contexts where students are taught a language with the focus of performing well on tests rather than their own learning, teachers would be inclined to teach them to perform on tests. If the tests do not address all four macro skills in a language, then students' education will also be impaired. In such instances, tests must be in alignment with all four macro skills so that the language proficiency develops effectively.

In classrooms where the focus is to teach to the test, domains such as speaking, and listening are often ignored. On a study on learning English as a foreign language, Wang (2009) indicated that:

> Speaking is rarely tested, and exams based on grammar often result in a lot of direct grammar teaching with focus on form rather than meaning. At present, China's textbooks pay more attention to listening and speaking activities, but learners (non-English majors) fail to use foreign language correctly and freely when expressing themselves. (p. 59)

That said, test design impacts how language is taught. Because speaking tests are rarely implemented in those circumstances, students are not supported in improving their

conversational skills (listening and speaking) simply because they do not need speaking skills to have high scores on the tests they take. This particular concern was noted as a pattern in the participants' responses with a few exceptions that happened in instances where teachers managed to modify their approaches (discussed below). Furthermore, one of the deficiencies in their language learning was associated with the focus on assessing reading and explicit grammar knowledge in tests. As Ulum and Uzum (2020) indicate, "communicative-based questions should be prepared and designed to motivate learners to use English effectively and efficiently. In addition, English language teaching departments should adopt a more critical approach towards this system" (p. 458). Simply put, tests should focus on the four macro skills, including more communicative types of questions that allow students the opportunity to manipulate the language in multiple ways. According to Martins (2013) the purpose of language teaching in Cape Verde is to prepare students to communicate effectively for future paths, including job opportunities, educational purposes, and so on. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that English language teaching programs in Cape Verde are not assessing the skills students need to communicate in different settings. Although the goal is to prepare students to communicate in English, one of the main causes of language problems Cape Verdean students face is that the approaches implemented in their instruction may not help them achieve communicative competence.

Linguistic Environment in the Classroom

Research indicates that in EFL classrooms, teachers must be responsible to offer students opportunities to use the language as much as they can since the classroom is the only place that they can practice all four domains of English language. Although this is encouraged, findings of this study indicate that exposure and interaction with the language

in the classroom was "not a habit" as Martins (2013, p. 1) has put it. Littlejohn (2016) has suggested that both interaction and exposure to the target language should happen in plentiful forms so that proficiency is achieved successfully. In other words, students must be exposed to language as much as they must be involved in interaction using the target language, so they can become proficient speakers of the language. Indeed, Peregoy and Boyle (2016) defined proficiency as a speaker's ability to manipulate language, in all forms, in different environments and contexts. According to the participants of this study, they did not acquire such abilities in EFL classrooms in Cape Verde. For students who are learning the language in an English-speaking country, opportunities to use the language are readily available both in and outside their classrooms. Nonetheless, for EFL learners, the classrooms are the only place they interact with language, for the most part. In the classrooms of the participants of this study, the use of oral English language was not stimulated. Instead, they used either Portuguese or Cape Verdean for the most part, not to mention that their teachers also used those languages in their teaching practices. It is of critical concern that in English classes, the use of other languages prevails. As a result, most students coming to pursue their studies in the US have had problems communicating fluently (Dos Reis, 2016; Monteiro, 2015). As Wang (2009) suggests:

> The linguistic environmental setting is great practical importance for educators of various kinds. As we are teaching foreign language in the classroom, it is very important to create a real communicative environment and offer students enough effective linguistic environment to exposure to the foreign language and speak in foreign language. (p. 458)

Teachers of students learning English as a foreign language must endeavor to gather resources to expose students to the target language as well as to encourage and motivate them to use the language in the classroom. After all, classrooms may be the only place they

have to interact with the language. Our role as language supporters is vital, given that (in most cases) the classroom is the only place they have the opportunity to learn the language.

Of course, there are theories against using only the target language in a language classroom, under the explanation that it may hamper students' learning process. Nonetheless, there are many strategies that facilitate language learning through the language target alone. One of the strategies is the famous comprehensible input developed by Krashen (1982). Although research has suggested that comprehensible input alone does not suffice, alongside interaction, these strategies can be vital to achieving proficiency (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Here, the researcher's point is that, even though we might believe speaking English with the students may be hard for them, there are strategies to facilitate comprehension. Again, the classroom may be the most available resource for students in foreign language learning contexts. Teachers must provide a holistic environment where students can engage with language in all forms, using communicative activities to improve their language proficiency (Wang, 2009). As noted in the findings, participants often hinted at the lack of conversational activities in their classrooms. One of the participants even pointed out that these activities are enjoyable and motivating as opposed to the most predominant activities, like grammar-based exercises, that were constantly applied in their classrooms. It feels safe to say that the linguistic environment in the EFL classrooms participants of this study experienced was usually not focused on training students to become fluent communicators in English. Nevertheless, there were a few exceptions.

Different Teachers, Different Approaches

The findings reveal that depending on the teacher, participants had different experiences with language learning. According to the participants in this study, while some

teachers promoted the development of all four macro skills, participants suggested that others tended to ignore some of them, especially speaking and listening skills. Different teachers apply different approaches in their classrooms, in turn training students from the same grades differently. In simpler words, two 12th-grade students would have exceptionally different language outcomes because they have different teachers. There were some distinct aspects of instruction as reported by the students. In some classrooms, students had opportunities to participate in some conversational activities in their last years of instruction. According to these students, these years were enjoyable. They also felt they would have ended their secondary education in Cape Verde communicating fluently in English had they had the same teachers throughout their secondary education. Ulum and Uzum (2020) suggested that the policy of a country's ministry of education may lead teachers to approach teaching traditionally, which results mostly in the explicit teaching of grammar, ignoring other macro skills. When instructions and standards are designed as such, students are rarely able to become fluent speakers even when they study the language for years. It depends on teachers to take matters into their own hands and change their approaches to meet the needs of students, and that seems to be the case of the teachers those students referred to.

Dos Reis (2016) suggests that the GTM is the predominant English language teaching approach in Cape Verde, and that the curriculum somewhat indirectly conditions teachers to follow that approach. According to participants' comments, most teachers used that type of instruction. As Lui and Shi (2007) describe, "in practice, [in GTM] reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening" (p. 69). Teachers implementing such an approach exclusively tend to disservice

students in not training them to use the language communicatively. Hence, teachers should be well trained so that they can modify their teaching to meet the needs of the students (learning the language) even if the curriculum tends to lead them to teach traditionally. According to the results, some teachers have succeeded in providing instruction that focuses on all domains of language; so, it may be safe to say that it is not impossible. Of course, this claim does not refute the idea that the policies of language teaching (curriculum) in Cape Verde must undergo relevant alterations. The learning journey of the participants, including teaching approaches, years of instruction and so on, did not meet language goals. Therefore, when they arrived in the US to pursue their higher education, they were met with critical language challenges.

Language Challenges Faced

Research has demonstrated that international students often face an enormous number of challenges when they are studying abroad, and one of the main challenges is associated with the language of instruction in the host country (Haidari & Yelken, 2018; Reed et al., 2013; Wang, 2009). Studies revealed that the most common language challenges international students meet in English-speaking academic environments are related to writing (Haidari & Yelken, 2018; Kotomjani et al., 2018). However, the findings of this study suggest that—although the participants faced some challenges with writing— the main problems students faced in the US higher education environment was linked to conversational skills involving listening and speaking. This result resonates with the results of many studies including Bumgarner (2016), Evans and Morison (2011), and Mehar Singh (2019), where the main problems were connected to the ability of expressing oneself in English followed by the ability to understand professors in lectures.

The Ability to Express Oneself in English. Findings suggest that participants' low level of English proficiency impaired their willingness to orally participate in their classrooms in the US. Language proficiency in English is one of the main barriers international students face in the classroom in the US since many of them struggle with communicating fluently in the classroom (Mehar Singh, 2019). Students with low levels of English proficiency often feel reluctant to participate in different activities that involve interaction simply because they feel that they cannot express their thoughts. Their language limitations may reduce their rate of participation in class, thereby jeopardizing their academic achievement. The findings of this study indicate that participants perceived that they had a low level of language, which impacted their performance in class in the first months in the US. They attributed their lack of participation in US classroom discussions and interactions to a perceived lack of practice during English instruction in their home country. They felt they were not able to interact in a meaningful conversation in English and that, therefore, they could not make contributions to the lesson.

Cummins (2008) suggested that in order for students to succeed in school, they must have the ability to both understand and express themselves in oral and written forms. That said, because most participants of the study felt they were not trained to become fluent users of English in Cape Verde, their English proficiency or their confidence in their English proficiency may have influenced their classroom experiences in their first months in US institutions of higher education. For example, they felt they could not ask questions when they had doubts. Their feeling that they were unable to clarify doubts or at least explain them orally to get assistance could be detrimental to a student's success. This finding is supported by Peregoy and Boyle (2017) who state that students with such

deficiencies are inclined to struggle in their learning process. The participants in this study felt they were falling behind, and they blamed the English instruction they had in Cape Verde for most of it. There are students who even suggested they could barely understand their professors' lectures in the beginning of their study in the US.

Due to such complications with language, students often feel frustrated and give up their education. In fact, more than one participant of this study revealed that they thought of giving up several times, but not one of them did. One of them even stopped studying for almost a decade before returning to college to pursue her studies. The student did not meet the language requirements to attend college in the US because the language instruction she had had in Cape Verde did little to prepare her to communicate effectively in English. Indeed, Buchmann and Parrado (2006) indicated that language proficiency could be one of the factors that explains the achievement gap between native and non-native students. For instance, participants suggested that at times, even though they had ideas to share in class, they could not do so because they either did not have the vocabulary or did not know how to express their thoughts. Kotamjani et al. (2018) also indicated that low language proficiency factors into achievement. The lower the level of proficiency in the language of instruction, the lower the chances of success.

The Ability to Understand Content in English. Another subject that stemmed from the findings was the inability to understand content in English. Students referred to this issue, branching it into two subtopics including the inability to understand professors in lectures and challenges with literacy. The latter is explained later in the paper.

Inability to understand Professors. Studies have revealed that international students often face challenges concerning language proficiency linked to listening skills

(Haidari & Yelken 2018; Mehar Singh, 2019). This aspect was constantly referenced in the participants' responses in the interview. This finding is supported by Zhang and Mi (2018) who suggest that students often could not engage in interaction because they could not understand their professors' speech. Indeed, studies demonstrated that one of the main problems with listening skills students faced involved understanding professors in the classroom.

Some of the specific challenges with professors' talk identified were linked to the pace of their speech, the vocabulary used, and the complexity of sentence structures applied. Initially, international students usually perceive the pace of their professors talk to be rather fast. This is mostly applicable to professors who are native speakers since the students are less likely to be taught by non-native speakers in the US. Haidari and Yelken (2018) have indicated that professors' fast speech pace affects students' abilities to actively listen to their professors and decode the information being conveyed. That is, if students cannot understand the words uttered by their professors due to speed on top of complex vocabulary and sentence structures, they can barely make sense of what is being taught.

As some studies have suggested, learners of English as a foreign language are also not likely to achieve high levels of proficiency with basic social communicative skills (Kotamjani et al., 2018; Wang, 2009). Additionally, Evans and Morisson (2011) and Peregoy and Boyle (2017) have indicated that academic language is more complex than basic social communicative skills, given that the former involve more complex sentence structure and vocabulary. In fact, Echevarría at al. (2017) have indicated that learning academic language is like learning a second language. Furthermore, these authors suggest that, "these skills [academic language] serve as the foundation for school success because

we learn primarily through language and use language to express our understanding." (p. 12). As a result, students that lack academic language proficiency are bound to face challenges that compromise their achievements. Undeniably, the finding of this study suggested that students faced such challenges. They faced challenges with language in social contexts. Theoretically, they were inclined to face greater challenges with academic language due to the complexities that constitute it. These challenges not only apply for listening, but they also extend to academic reading.

Challenges with Literacy. Although students reported that their instruction focused on writing and reading, the types of writing and reading activities did not reflect their literacy needs in the US. Thomason et al. (2016), indicate that an academic achievement gap between natives and non-natives persists. That said, it is expected that students that have had little exposure and interaction with reading in English are inclined to face related challenges. Usually, textbooks used in academia have complex language that can be difficult for students who are still learning the language. As Short & Echevarría (2016) indicate, the level of language used in textbooks is more lexically and syntactically complex than spoken language. Hence, students find reading challenging due to those factors, and that fact affects their performance. An important point to illustrate is that textbooks are students' main academic resources (Reed at al., 2013). In addition to lack of interaction with such resources, participants mentioned that the type of reading they did in the US (reading for interpretation) was not a usual activity in their language learning. Participants reported that although they did reading activities in CV, they were mostly for pronunciation purposes. Teachers must ensure students are exposed to different types of

reading to reduce the chances of facing the challenges that the participants of this study have faced.

In addition to reading, writing challenges were also mentioned in the findings. Kotomjani et al. (2018) suggested that one of the difficulties international students tend to face when they pursue a degree (with English as the language of instruction) is related to academic writing. Additionally, they added that the problems students encounter could be traced to prior language instruction in their countries. In fact, the findings of this study shared the same results with that of Kotomjani et al. (2018). Although not all of the participants suggested they had challenges with writing, more than half the participants suggested that they had problems related to punctuation, sentence structure and formal writing. For them, the types of writing necessary to excel in their writings in the US were not applied in Cape Verde. An example of that is that they only focused on writing short sentences and short paragraphs. That said, it seems safe to suggest that varied types of writing for academic purposes, such as the five-paragraph traditional essay, should be taught in secondary education in Cape Verde.

All in all, the participants involved in this study suggested that their language proficiency affected their performance in class. This study indicated that participants faced a great deal of challenges because in Cape Verde they graduated from high school, but they did not have the language proficiency in English that they expected to have after studying the language for six years. Their lack of proficiency in BICS made both acquisition and understanding of CALP a lot more difficult. For the most part, these consequences were linked to the ability of expressing themselves in English, understanding professors and peers, reading textbooks and writing formal papers. The perceptions of these participants

differ from those included in the study of Dos Reis in 2016. In Dos Reis (2016), although students admitted that they had low proficiency in English when they arrived in the US, they suggested that their English language proficiency did not compromise their performance in US high schools. One of the inferences that could be made is that in high schools (the case of students involved in Dos Reis), teachers are more inclined to use different strategies to support students' language learning (i.e., comprehensible input), not to mention that education policies mandate such action.

Conclusions

As suggested in the literature presented in the study, nowadays there is a great influx of international students studying abroad; and English-speaking countries, including the US, are among the top searched destinations. As the interest in studying abroad increases, so do the demands on English programs in different foreign countries, especially those where English is neither an official nor a second language. The English language programs in these countries must work to provide students with a quality of language instruction that prepares them to use the English communicatively, in all four domains, so that language challenges that impair students' academic achievement while studying abroad are reduced. Similarly, the findings suggest that, due to the aforementioned challenges with language learning in Cape Verde, the participants of this study did not benefit from higher education in their first months in the US as much as they had hoped.

The findings of this study suggest that the EFL programs in Cape Verde did not meet the linguistic needs of most participants of this study. Students perceived that they faced many challenges with English in the US in all four domains of language, but especially speaking and listening. The findings suggest that those challenges may be

somewhat linked to poor English language instruction in Cape Verde. As discussed in the last chapter, participants felt they had had neither enough exposure nor enough interaction with language in their classrooms in the home country. Due to that deficiency in their instructions, they felt unable to fully contribute to their classrooms with ideas or other relevant discussions. Students felt challenged with both BICS and CALP.

Students criticized both the system and teachers' instruction. According to them, they felt like the focus of their instruction should have been balanced, involving all four macro skills including listening, reading, speaking and writing. They indicated that the focus was mostly on explicit grammar teaching, and they also noted that speaking and listening activities were often ignored. As a result, their main challenges in the US were associated with expressing themselves in English and understanding professors in class. Based on such claims, it feels safe to indicate that had more conversational activities been implemented in class, these students would have faced less language-related challenges. The nature of academic language (CALP) is complex. Nevertheless, it becomes even more complex when students lack fluency in social language (BICS). Therefore, preparing them to become fluent in BICS by the time they graduate will reduce the challenges international students are bound to face as well as the opportunities they are bound to lose.

Implications for Colleges in the US

One of the possible implications projected for this study was the possibility of helping international student services and second language services incorporated in universities in the US identify the common challenges that international students tend to face when their L1 is not English. According to the participants involved in this study, the main challenges they have faced are related to speaking and listening skills. Although the

findings are not generalizable, given the study design, Cape Verdean students that come to the US to pursue their studies may face the same challenges. That being the case, college centers/services such as those mentioned above will be able to develop plans to help students develop the English language skills they find most challenging in their studies in the US. Activities that would allow them to interact with native speakers, such as discussions and presentations, are among the common activities that can be adopted to help these students improve their language proficiency.

Implications for EFL Programs in Cape Verde

The study has relevant implications for the education system in Cape Verde. According to students who participated in this study, there is a need for improvement in the EFL programs in Cape Verde, and they pertain to teaching practices and the curriculum. The findings suggest that these features should be reviewed by the Ministry of Education in Cape Verde so that students can achieve their language goals by the time they graduate from high school. Some of the possible suggestions indicated are:

- Developing a student-centered approach to curriculum for EFL programs
- Balancing the language teaching focus on all four macro skills rather than grammar only instruction
- Including tests that assess all the four macro skills equally
- Teaching grammar in context instead of explicit grammar teaching
- Exposing students to English language through different modes in plentiful supply
- Implementing a communicative approach to teaching through interactive activities
- Prioritizing the use of target language
- Encouraging students to use English language both inside and outside the classroom
- Involving parents in students' language instruction
- Operational English clubs with focus on developing communicative skills

Recommendations for Future Studies

The recommendations for future studies are based on the limitations and delimitations described in Chapter 3. First, there were only seven participants in this study,

meaning that it is not a representative number that allows for findings to be generalized. Including more students from all the islands in Cape Verde as well as targeting more states in the US would be recommended. Second, giving that it was not possible to use more than two instruments, the researcher suggests that future studies include more data collection tools. Assessing data other than participants' self-report would help researchers access more authentic information concerning students' performance (graded papers with feedback from their professors, grades, etc.). Another suggestion for further study is to investigate the exact number of international students that come to the US or other English-speaking universities for higher education. Lastly, it would be important to include both students and teachers so as to collect information regarding different perspectives.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Consent

This research is being conducted because the student researcher is working on a thesis, and the topic of the project involves Cape Verdean Students who learned English in Cape Verde and came to the U.S. to pursue their higher education. The purpose is to understand students' perceptions of their English instruction in Cape Verde and its impacts on their academic experiences here in the U.S., especially in terms of academic language. Please select the choice below to either consent or not.

Yes, I consent. ☐
No, I do not Consent ☐

*end the questionnaire if the answer to the previous question was "No, I do not consent"

<u>Demographics</u>

1. **Age**

   18-22 ☐
   23-30 ☐
   31 and over ☐

2. **To which gender identity do you most identify?**
   a) Male
   b) Female_____
   c) Transgender female_____
   d) Transgender male_____
   e) Gender Variant/Non-Confirming___
   f) Not Listed _____
   g) Prefer not to Answer_____

3. **What Cape Verdean Island are you from?**
   a) Santo Antão_____
   b) São Vicente_____
   c) São Nicolau_____
   d) Sal
   e) Boa Vista_____
   f) Maio_____
   g) Santiago_____
   h) Fogo
   i) Brava_____

4. **Where did you go to secondary school? (Name of your school. e.g., Miraflores, Liceu Amilcar Cabral)**

   _____

5. **What is your native language?**
   a) Cape Verdean Creole_____

b) Portuguese _____
c) Other_____

6. What was your first language (most used) in Cape Verde?
   a) Cape Verdean Creole_____
   b) Portuguese _____
   c) Other_____

7. What are the reasons behind your decision to study abroad (in the US)?
   _____
   _____

8. How long have you been in the US? (e.g., 2 years OR 2 months)
   _____

9. Are you a current student?
   a) Yes_____
   b) No _____

10. Select the degree you are pursuing or pursued after arriving in the US and indicate your major.
   a) Associate Degree (Community College): _____
   b) Bachelor's Degree: _____
   Perception on English Language Learning
11. For how many years did you study English in Cape Verde _____
12. How important is learning English in your native country?
   □ Extremely Important
   □ Very Important
   □ Moderately important
   □ Slightly important
   □ Not important at all
13. Do you personally think it is important to learn English?   □ Yes   □ No
   14.1. If yes, how important was learning English for you in your native country?
   □ Extremely Important
   □ Very Important
   □ Moderately important
   □ Slightly important
   □ Not important at all
14. What are your reasons for studying English?
   _____

   English Language Learning Experiences
   Directions: Please indicate which of the following category applies best for each statement by checking in the appropriate column.

15. When you were learning English in your home country, what did you experience that *benefited* your learning?

	Learning activity	Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
1	We learned grammar through explicit rule teaching and exercises.					
2	We did pronunciation practice exercises.					
3	Errors were corrected by the teacher.					
4	We used classroom conversations and discussions.					
5	The teacher gave us vocabulary that we were supposed to study (e.g., vocabulary lists).					
6	We worked and talked in small groups.					
7	The teacher used materials from real life (e.g., TV, magazines, newspaper, radio shows, etc.).					
8	The teacher used visual material such as pictures and movies.					
9	We used songs and games to learn the language.					
10	We worked and talked in pairs.					
11	We did role-plays.					
12	There were a lot of teacher explanations.					
13	We did translation exercises.					
14	We gave oral presentations in front of the class.					
15	We studied language related to different disciplines in our curriculum.					

16	The teacher used content from other disciplines to strengthen our language development.					

16. Did you do any additional (that were not listed in the previous question) activities to improve your language skills?

□ Yes   □ No

17.1. If you checked off "yes", please indicate which of the following apply to you:

□ I had additional lessons outside of school (e.g., at language schools).

□ I studied abroad in an English-speaking country for a longer period.

□ I attended special language programs (e.g., summer programs).

□ I listened to English music.

□ I watched movies and television shows in English.

□ I travelled to English-speaking countries.

□ Other: _____

17. How effective has your previous English language instruction in your home country been for your studies here in the United States?

□ Effective
□ Somewhat Effective
□ Neutral
□ Somewhat Ineffective
□ Ineffective

Explain   your   choice:
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Effectiveness and Enjoyment of Teaching Methods and Learning Activities
Directions: Please indicate which of the following category applies best for each statement by placing an "X" in the respective box.
18. What do you think could have helped you in your English language learning that you did not experience in your own language instruction in Cape Verde?

	Learning activity	**Check box.**
1	Grammar exercises	
2	Translation exercises	
3	Pronunciation practice	
4	Singing and listening to songs	
5	Classroom conversations and group discussions	

6	Small group work	
7	Role-plays	
8	Usage of real-life materials (TV, radio shows, newspaper, etc.)	
9	Vocabulary lists	
10	Playing games	
11	Error corrections by the teacher	
12	Usage of visual material (e.g., pictures, movies)	
13	More teacher explanations	
14	Oral presentations	
15	Academic language development	
16	Content area language development	

19. Which of these activities did you find to be *enjoyable*?

	Learning activity	Enjoyable	Neutral	Unenjoyable
1	Grammar exercises			
2	Translation exercises			
3	Pronunciation practice			
4	Singing and listening to songs			
5	Classroom conversations and group discussions			
6	Small group work			
7	Role-plays			
8	Usage of real-life materials (TV, radio shows, newspaper, etc.)			
9	Vocabulary lists			
10	Playing games			
11	Error corrections by the teacher			
12	Usage of visual material (e.g., pictures, movies)			
13	More teacher explanations			
14	Oral presentations			
15	Academic language development			
16	Content area language development			

20. Which of these activities did you find *effective* for your studies?

	Learning activity	Never Practiced in class	Not Effective et all	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very Ineffective	Extremely Effective
1	Grammar exercises						
2	Translation exercises						
3	Pronunciation practice						
4	Singing and listening to songs						
5	Classroom conversations and group discussions						
6	Small group work						
7	Role-plays						
8	Usage of real-life materials (TV, radio shows, newspaper, etc.)						
9	Vocabulary lists						
10	Playing games						
11	Error corrections by the teacher						
12	Usage of visual material (e.g., pictures, movies)						
13	More teacher explanations						
14	Oral presentations						

15	Academic language development					
16	Content area language development					

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Question 1: What are your perceptions of language instruction in Cape Verde?

    Possible follow-up questions:

    a) What made you have those perceptions?

    b) What could have changed your perceptions about your language instruction back in Cape Verde?

Question 2: How did your English instruction in your home country prepare you for living and studying in the U.S.?

    Possible follow-up questions:

    a) Did your instructions provide you with the language you need to perform well at university level in the US?

    b) Did your language background provide you with the academic language specific to your major?

    c) Did your language background provide you with the language you needed to communicate with friends/navigate day to day life in the U.S.?

Question 3: Are there any language-related challenges you have faced here in the US that is somewhat the result of the quality of your language instruction in your home country?

    Possible follow-up questions:

    a) What activities or teachers' practices in your language instructions you believed contributed to your facing these challenges?

               OR

    b) What activities or teachers' practices in language instructions you believed prevented you from facing any of possible challenges you could have faced?

Questions 4: How well and often do you interact in classroom discussions?

    Possible follow-up questions:

    a) Does your language proficiency dictate how often you interact in such discussions?

    b) Are you able to fully understand your professors and peers in this type of discussions?

    c) What are the main reasons or aspects that may reduce your chances of both understanding and participating in such discussions?

Question 5: What kinds of reading and writing do you do in your major?

    Possible follow-up questions:

    a) How do you describe your reading experiences here in the US?

    b) How do you describe your writing experiences here in the US?

    c) Were there any activities in your language instruction in Cape Verde that contributed to such experiences? If yes, what are these activities?

    d) What activities could have made these experiences better?

Question 6: Could you summarize your experience/performance while studying in a US university in terms of language?

APPENDIX C

Bridgewater State University Informed Consent Document

Title of Research: Cape Verdean Student's Perceptions of their English Language Preparation for Higher Education in the US

Researchers: [*Melissa Keh, TESOL, 508-531-1845; Fabio Wilson Teixeira Varela, TESOL, 857-237-1418]*

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Bridgewater State University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and purpose of the Project**

This research is being conducted because the student researcher is working on a thesis and the topic of the project involves Cape Verdean Students who learned English in Cape Verde and came to the U.S. to pursue higher education in U.S. universities. The purpose is to understand students' perceptions of their English instruction in Cape Verde and its impacts on their academic experiences here in the U.S., especially in terms of academic language.

2. **Explanation of Procedures**

In the process of conducting this research, you will be asked to answer questions (questionnaire and interview) concerning your experiences with language learning in Cape Verde and your experiences with language while pursuing your studies in a U.S. university. The information you will provide concerning your language learning in Cape Verde may include teaching methodologies, content, relevancy and your overall perception of the English language instruction in Cape Verde. In addition to that, you will be asked to provide information about your experiences in the U.S. You will be asked to describe how your language instruction has impacted your academic achievement in any ways. Also, you will be asked to describe any sort of challenges you faced, in case there are any. In addition to the questions concerning the issues mentioned so far, the researcher will also ask access to your graded papers containing your professors' feedback for further analysis. Despite the relevance of each instrument mentioned here, you have the right to participate in all of them only if you feel comfortable.

In case you are undecided, you are given time to reflect and make the right choice for you. You should not participate if you are by any chance doubtful. You should not participate if you feel the nature of the research will put you at any sorts of risks.

Once you start this research you will have three months maximum to go through all the process.

3. **Discomfort and Risks**

In this investigation you will be asked to answer questions that for some reason may make you feel uncomfortable. These are questions of political nature, such as education system in Cape Verde, and questions of personal nature (your experience and performance in academic contexts). Given that the information required may make you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to choose what information you can provide and what type of information you cannot provide. The nature of the research is anonymous, so any risks that may be associated to your identity will be eliminated.

4. **Benefits**

This study is important to you because as you reflect on your experiences with your language instruction and your academic experiences, you will understand how literacy and academic achievement may co-relate or not.

This research will have a wider impact on EFL programs in Cape Verde and the Universities in the U.S. By understanding your perceptions towards language instruction in Cape Verde and your academic experience in terms of academic language, Cape Verdean EFL programs can improve their curricula to suit the needs of students (if needed), and the institutions in the U.S. will have the opportunity to serve Cape Verdean students who come here for studies in the best ways possible.

5. **Confidentiality**

Your information will be kept confidential. You will not be asked to put a name or any other subject that is associated to your identity. As for questionnaire, you will not need to provide name or anything that connects it to your identity. Nevertheless, since it is collected electronically there may be risks of associating it to your name. The researcher will give his best to ensure all the data are safe and your identity protected. That said, the data will be assigned a code, but this code will also have no identity links. Unlike some of the instruments described, the zoom record will be associated to your identity as it may project your image. In this case, the evidence is permanently deleted or destroyed after collecting the information needed. In other words, after the researcher has transcribed the interview, all the data will be permanently deleted from the computer. Before the transcription, the researcher will keep the data stored in the computer and cloud, but they will be password protected. In case you feel that this is not safe, you can refuse to be video recorded. Then, the researcher will only record the audio using a third-party application or device.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
   * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
   * Representatives of Bridgewater State University, including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at BSU;

Refusal/Withdrawal:
   Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw

from the study at any time without penalty. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop participating, the researcher may use the partial information you provided in the study. If you no longer want any of the information you provided to be used in the study, you can withdraw from the study by contacting the principal investigator Melissa Keh at 508-531-1845, email: mkeh@bridgew.edu, and you may request that your information be deleted in your presence.

By signing below, I am indicating that I understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks. **[*If applicable -I agree that all known risk to me have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that Bridgewater State University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries I might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol.*]**

_____
_____
Participant Signature   Date

_____
_____
Witness Signature   Date

I consent to be audio recorded.

_____
_____
Participant Signature   Date

I consent to be video recorded.

_____
_____
Participant Signature

Any questions regarding the conduct of the project, questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or research related to injury, should be brought to the attention of the IRB Administrator at (508) 531-1242.
Any questions about the conduct of this research project should be brought to the attention of the principal investigator: *[Dr. Melissa Keh, 508-531-1845, email: mkeh@bridgew.edu]*