A Case Study for the Leadership Initiative for Supporting (Bilingual) Teacher Acquisition (LISTA)

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Introduction

The Leadership Initiative for Supporting (Bilingual) Teacher Acquisition (LISTA) was the first step in a multi-year effort to empower district bilingual coordinators across East Texas, increase the number of qualified bilingual teachers, and to create a pipeline through our undergraduate and graduate programs to support this growth. The East Texas' multilingual learner population is growing with nearly two million more Texans identifying as Hispanic on the 2020 Census when compared to 2010 (Lopez, 2021). LISTA served as a compelling case study in our effort to empower district bilingual coordinators across East Texas.

Our teacher force must be prepared to meet this demand. The administrators that lead these bilingual educators must also be supported, especially given the passing of Senate Bill 560, which will require a coordinated strategic plan to support emergent bilingual students (Lara, 2021). LISTA will work to develop a community of united and informed bilingual coordinators that will in turn, develop a pipeline pathway for success for future bilingual educators.

Hanushek and Woessmann (2010) suggest that growth simulations reveal long-run rewards in economic growth through investment in educational quality. LISTA aligns with this mission through an investment in the quality of bilingual coordinators and future educators. Phase one will focus on needs-assessments, community building, and planning. Future phases would focus on creating a successful bilingual educator pipeline.

Positionality

The authors' field of research generally focuses on issues of equity in education. More specifically, we analyze opportunities for cultural representation and student empowerment through representation in the curriculum. In recent years, this focus has been in the area of

bilingual education. Researcher 1 worked with undergraduate students at Stephen F. Austin State University to create a Bilingual Education Student Organization (BESO) in her department. She has supported these students as they have completed research in the area of campus racial climates and bilingual curriculum. The racial climate research was presented jointly at a national conference and the bilingual curriculum case study was completed in an IRB-approved study with the students as participants. The paper is in progress.

Through this work, the authors have come to know bilingual coordinators in two local districts - Lufkin ISD and Nacogdoches ISD. The student organization has volunteered with both districts and, most recently, Researcher 1 has worked with these districts and two of our SFA faculty to develop a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum for bilingual newcomers. This project was presented at a national conference in February 2022.

Additionally, researcher 1 has had the unique opportunity to engage in a study evaluating the effectiveness of equity and diversity driven pipeline initiatives (Researcher 1 et al., 2021). Lessons from this methodology can be applied to the future LISTA initiative, if funded. LISTA in Spanish means "ready" or "clever", depending on use. The participants of this program will be both - a clever and ready group of bilingual coordinators who will benefit from this unique networking initiative.

Over the course of her three years working with bilingual programs in local districts, researcher 1 has seen firsthand the lack of an adequate bilingual teacher pool and the struggles that bilingual coordinators are facing. The LISTA program is a plan to address this gap and ultimately lead to economic growth through both these bilingual educators and through the students they will reach. The regional stakeholders that she planned to engage include bilingual

coordinators in East Texas. There are over ninety school districts in Region 7 from Alba-Golden ISD through Zavalla ISD (Region 7 Education Service Center, 2021).

Program Overview

The LISTA program sought to empower bilingual leaders in education in Deep East Texas. Leadership coaching, according to our small district participants, is not something that is received often. And, leadership coaching geared towards acknowledging and affirming the cultural capital of Hispanic/Latino[1] leaders is definitely something they had not previously received. The sessions were organized and developed by our leadership coach, Nella Garcia Urban. Garcia Urban is an executive with over fifteen years of experience with leading teams. She focuses on the "education and nonprofit space where her leadership pursues equity for all, especially individuals of color who have been disproportionately impacted by systems of oppression" (Garcia Urban, 2023). She harnesses the power of identity and mindset to push her leaders to achieve their goals.

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[1] Moving forward, Hispanic and Latino/a will be used interchangeably based upon the preference communicated by the cited materials and participants themselves.

Figure 1

LISTA Scope and Sequence 2022
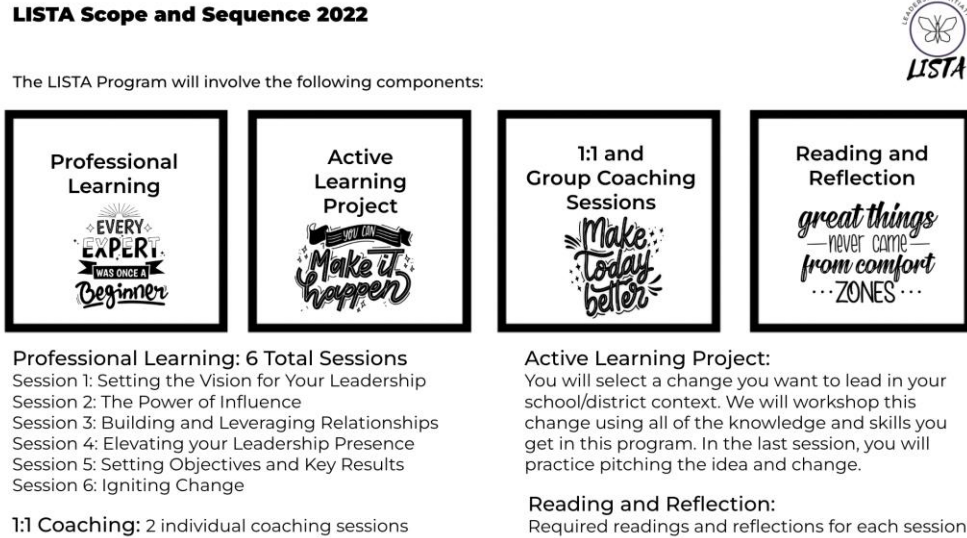
Literature Review

The following section will begin by addressing the current state of bilingual education in Texas. What will follow will be how this looks specifically for Deep East Texas, the region of Texas that was supported by the CARRI grant. Finally, there will be a discussion about women of color in leadership, and more specifically, Hispanic/Latina women in leadership in education.

Bilingual Education in Texas

Bilingual education in Texas has witnessed notable advancements over recent years. A study conducted by García and Rodríguez-Gómez (2020) underscores the increasing recognition of bilingualism and biliteracy within the state, leading to amplified support and resources for bilingual education programs. To address the needs of diverse student populations, including those in East Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has implemented policies and initiatives aimed at promoting bilingual education (García & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2020).

The momentum for bilingual education programs in East Texas is evident. Johnson and Smith's report (2021) highlights the collaborative efforts between local schools and community organizations in the region to enhance bilingual education opportunities and deliver culturally responsive instruction. These comprehensive bilingual programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of East Texas students, reflecting a commitment to equitable access to education and the promotion of linguistic diversity (Johnson & Smith, 2021).

Despite the progress achieved, challenges persist in the implementation of bilingual education in East Texas. López's research (2022) reveals disparities in the availability and quality of bilingual programs across school districts in the region. Limited resources, a scarcity of qualified bilingual teachers, and varying levels of community support contribute to these discrepancies. López emphasizes the ongoing need for advocacy and investment in bilingual education, particularly in East Texas, to address these challenges and ensure equal educational opportunities for all students (López, 2022).

Hispanic/Latina Leaders in Education

As can be imagined, Hispanic women make up a disproportionately small percentage of people in leadership positions in traditional public school settings (Montas-Hunter, 2012). In fact, in 2016, only 3% of all higher education leadership positions were held by Hispanic/Latinos and even a smaller percentage were women (Figueroa Estrada, 2020, p. 4). Robles (2019) counters that, in the case of Hispanic women in particular, there is a need for their presence to serve as role models for the Hispanic students that they serve. She continues by highlighting the challenges that these women face as they pursue leadership experience as well as the sorts of experiences they had that supported this professional trajectory.

There were several themes that emerged in Robles' (2019) study that highlighted what Hispanic women said they needed when it came to support in pursuing leadership roles. These included the importance of having a mentor and working within an organization that promoted female leadership (p. 89). According to Rhode (2017), "an obstacle faced by young Hispanic women in the field of education is that they are rarely prepared for leadership positions because of a lack of prior experience and training. Similarly, Hispanic women often do not have access to the requisite education and training in leadership to advance" (page 130). The hope is that the LISTA program will serve as a support for these women moving forward.

Additionally, Montas-Hunter (2012) reiterates the importance of identity for Latina leaders in education. She writes, "the combination of a strong sense of identity and high self-efficacy lead to perseverance toward leadership positions in academia" (pg. 2). This was a point that was constantly reinforced by Garcia Urban in our sessions. Likewise, Montas-Hunter (2012) shared that the Latina leaders she interviewed articulated a responsibility they have to each other in the path to leadership, the necessary role of the community that supports them, and the need to have allies who are in those 'gatekeeper' roles.

In another article, the focus is on the imposter phenomenon experienced by women from minority backgrounds who are underrepresented in higher education (Manongson & Ghosh, 2021). The authors explore how developers can assist these women in addressing the imposter phenomenon and developing positive leader identities. The study examines five key areas, including leadership experiences in higher education, leader identity development, imposter phenomenon experiences, mentoring experiences, and diversified mentoring relationships. Manongson & Ghosh (2021) highlights several important insights derived from the study. Firstly, professional identities of minority women leaders in higher education are often called

into question due to the imposter phenomenon, which stems from the double binds of racism and sexism. Secondly, minority women who continue to experience the imposter phenomenon may struggle to develop and internalize a positive leader identity. Thirdly, aspiring minority women leaders in higher education can benefit from the support of multiple developers to cope with negative stereotypes and imposter phenomenon, while fostering positive leader identities. Lastly, diversified developmental relationships, if not carefully managed, can exacerbate the challenges faced by minority women leaders due to the imposter phenomenon.

They further explore how multiple developers can support minoritized women. Sponsors, individuals in senior positions with power and influence, play a crucial role in developing the leader identities of minority women by challenging them to gain self-confidence necessary for undertaking stretch assignments or high-pressure leadership projects visible to influential individuals within organizations. Sponsorship support may empower minoritized women to act authentically, free from the imposter phenomenon. Mentors, who are senior colleagues providing various forms of support, can also be instrumental in helping minoritized women develop their leadership identities in higher education. Effective mentors engage in discussions about career options and dilemmas, offering specific strategies for achieving career goals. They also provide psychosocial support, enhancing the mentees' sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness in their professional roles.

Additionally, learning partners, such as friends, spouses, parents, or siblings, can contribute to the development of minoritized women as leaders in higher education. By encouraging reflection on social and community engagements, learning partners help these women become aware of their virtuous qualities, such as courage, integrity, compassion, and

humility. This recognition of virtues by learning partners broadens the women's worldview on leadership.

The concept of mentorship and *who actually does the mentoring* was explored over and over again throughout this leadership program. A strong acknowledgement for the support of community and family was identified while the glaring lack of support from upper administration was also a common characteristic.

Methods

This project was a qualitative case study. After identifying a convenience sample of participants, these participants were provided with both a needs assessment and a pre-survey. The needs assessment followed a protocol supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Center on School Turnaround (Corbett & Redding, 2017). Throughout this year, participants received one monthly Zoom training hosted jointly by Researcher 1 and Nella Garcia Urban. Garcia Urban also provided a one-on-one coaching session each semester for each of the participants. Researcher 1 hosted two recorded semi-structured focus groups to collect data regarding success in the areas of leadership empowerment, networking, and planning. One was held in June (the end of AY 2021-2022) and the other in August (the beginning of AY 2022-2023). Upon the completion of this six-month initiative, the participants were provided with a post-survey.

### Participants Recruitment

The participants had very specific characteristics. They had to be ESL/Bilingual Coordinators (or similar title) in one of the twelve approved counties located in Deep East Texas. Identifying potential participants began with a demographic study of student populations in each of the districts within the twelve counties. In total, there were fifty six identified independent

school districts. Student demographics were used to identify likely districts to have a Bilingual/ESL Coordinator. Immediately, this eliminated thirty school districts that had a hispanic/latinx student population of less than 10%. At that point, we searched through the remaining ISDs to see if their websites identified an individual in the specified position. Other related titles that were accepted included Directors of Special Programs, Directors of Special Services, etc. If an individual was not easily identified on the website, emails and phone calls were made to district offices. This further excluded three districts as having self-identified as not having an individual in this role.

The plan for recruitment settled on rounds. Round 1 included eight ISDs that had a Hispanic/Latinx population of more than 20% and an individual identified as having the relevant title at the district level. Participants were recruited with an initial email, a recruitment letter, and a follow up email. If they did not respond or declined, the researchers proceeded to Round 2. These individuals had relevant district positions and had an identified Hispanic/Latinx student population between 15-19.99%. The same recruitment procedure was followed: initial email, recruitment letter, and follow up. This was followed by Round 3 that included individuals with district positions as well as a Hispanic/Latinx student population between 10-14.99%. The final group included n participants from Round 1, n from Round 2 and n from Round 3 for a total of six participants.

Figure 2

Deep East Texas Participant Maps

■ LISTA Participants　　■ LISTA Potential Participants
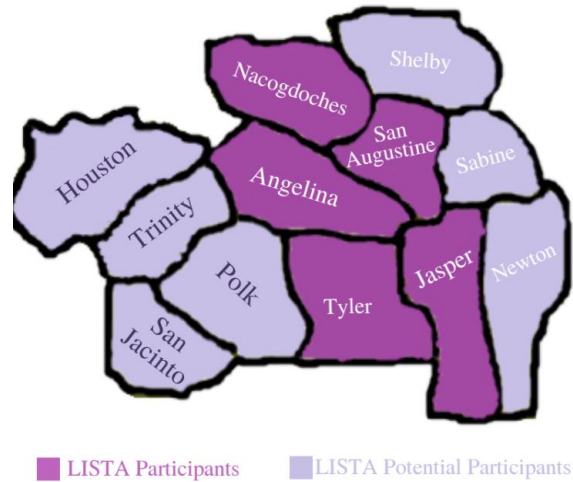
Note: The map above indicates where LISTA participants are employed by county.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ultimately, each participant was provided with a pre-survey and an identical post-survey. This survey included simple Likert-style questions to ultimately gauge the effectiveness of their training. While the data is not generalizable, these questions do show general trends in perception of the training. They completed reflection questions at the end of each session that asked them to identify something that was "*En mi mente, en mi corazón, y estoy lista… (In my mind, in my heart, and I am ready to…)*". These reflections, as well as comments made during the sessions all added to the thematic analysis that was conducted.

The sessions were transcribed and then in-vivo coding was used to identify emergent themes. In-vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis in which the spoken word is evaluated for places of emphasis (Manning, 2017). It is considered to be a useful form of qualitative analysis in situations where the researchers are engaging with a set of participants from a particular culture. In this case, the participant group were all women in educational

leadership and, almost exclusively, identified as Hispanic or Latina. Manning (2017) suggests that in-vivo coding is "championed by many for its usefulness in highlighting the voices of participants and for its reliance on the participants themselves for giving meaning to the data" (para. 2).

Findings/Results

Based on the recording sessions and the reflective journaling as well as the open-ended post survey questions, the following themes emerged: (1) the power of community, (2) the urgency for systemic change, (3) firefighting over changemaking, (4) needing support from those in positions of authority, and (5) positive self-concept based on cultural identity as an intentional choice.

Power of Community and Collective Responsibility

Throughout our meetings, the participants brought in their lived experiences. When talking about places where they felt empowered, one participant mentioned the Hispanic Leaders Committee that she served on in her town (ES, Session 5). She expressed surprise and happiness that such a committee even existed and highlighted that what made it so powerful was the collective and representative nature of it. Membership included community members, parents, and educators. Having this community allowed this participant to feel like she had a support system behind her.

Another participant explained that, for her, the support came from the parents of her students. She came from the same community and ethnic background as her students and she felt that getting these families involved gave her the extra power behind her message to advocate for larger change. In one interview, the participant stated, "Our parents have so much influence on their kids' future. If the parents say it's a great opportunity for the students, the students will

listen. If the parent's don't… the kids won't go after their dream" (EA, Session 3). While not explicitly about her leadership style, this participant understood the power of included oftentimes marginalized parent communities.

Urgency for Systemic Change

During our conversations on the state of their respective ISDs, participants highlighted how they wished to better serve students who were like them. One passionately pushed for all school leaders to view their Hispanic students as "worth the fight"... she continued, "I just want everybody else to be like, 'Hey, are you ready? Do you know what to do?'" (EA, Session 1). She knew that, in this leadership role, she expressed how she had been overlooked and that she was working arduously to ensure that it didn't happen again for students like her.

Another participant stressed that she had been placed in a leadership role without the resources to do her job effectively. She clarified, "I have fourteen campuses that [I] work with and it's really just me and [another participant] and I cannot make it to all of these campuses. To me, it's not for lack of trying, it's just to be truly effective and work with administrators at each campus… it's not effective. We cannot be engaged and involved with all these campuses like we want to be" (BM, Session 2). A colleague reinforced that idea. She stated, "There's just so little time and sometimes I Feel that I spend my days, or my time, just going to put out fires. I want to be effective… and yes… there are things that are beyond my control. I just wish I had the resources to delegate" (ES, Session 2).

Firefighting over Changemaking

During the discussions on the state of their respective ISDs, participants expressed their desire to better serve students who shared their experiences. One participant, identified as EA, passionately advocated for school leaders to recognize the value and potential of their Hispanic

students, urging them to be prepared and supportive (Session 3). She revealed her own experiences of being overlooked and emphasized her commitment to preventing such oversight from happening to students like her.

Another participant, BM, highlighted the challenges she faced in her leadership role, specifically mentioning the lack of resources to effectively manage her responsibilities (Session 4). With fourteen campuses under her purview and limited support, she acknowledged the difficulty of being present and engaged with administrators at each location. This sentiment was echoed by ES, who described her days being consumed by troubleshooting and problem-solving, leaving little time for proactive initiatives. She expressed a strong desire to be effective in her role and wished for more resources and delegation opportunities (Session 4). AS, another participant, acknowledged the demanding nature of her job and the multitude of tasks that constantly required her attention, both at work and at home (Session 4). These quotes reflect a recurring theme of firefighting, where participants are overwhelmed by the need to address immediate issues rather than having the time and resources to engage in meaningful change-making activities.

Positive Self-Concept Based on Cultural Identity

The participants' quotes reflect the theme of developing a positive self-concept based on cultural identity. ES emphasizes the interconnection between her identity and education, highlighting how their experiences are shaped by their cultural background. She recognizes that her identity plays a crucial role in influencing their perceptions and interactions (Session 1). BM shares a similar sentiment, expressing a strong connection between her identity and lived experiences. She indicates an ongoing journey of developing her identity and expanding her range of experiences (Session 1).

EA expresses a desire to cultivate confidence and approachability, with the intention of establishing meaningful connections with others (Session 3). ES further expands on the theme by expressing the need to unlearn oppressive beliefs ingrained in their cultural context (Session 3). She highlights the challenges she faces as a female Latina leader, acknowledging the cultural norms that perpetuate such oppressions. Despite these obstacles, she strives to overcome guilt and embrace her cultural identity. These examples collectively underscore the significance of cultural identity in shaping one's self-concept and the ongoing process of personal growth and empowerment.

Discussion/Implications

Even before analyzing results, we saw that recruitment for the second round, if approved, would target bilingual and ESL leadership in Shelby, Sabine, Newton, San Jacinto, Polk, Trinity and Houston Counties. The assumption would be that our first LISTA Cohort would serve as mentors to the incoming class and that we could work to establish this regional organization as an advocacy and support group to promote issues relevant for our emergent bilingual students and the paraprofessionals and teachers that support them.

Ultimately, the LISTA project was not funded for a second round. The rationale provided was that the project would not make a significant economic contribution to Deep East Texas. However, we know that this would not be the case and are saddened by the lack of vision for investing in education. Investment in education has the immediate benefit of raising productivity and creativity, as well as stimulating entrepreneurship and technological breakthroughs; all of which lead to greater output and economic growth and which are only increased when equal opportunities have been available across races and ethnicities (Reis, 2021). Decades of research have confirmed that an increased investment in education and the leaders in this field increase

economic growth through higher salaries for individuals and greater workforce effectiveness which has a waterfall effect on the students (Lynch, 2020; Sudderth, 2022).

In the long term, an economy is more valuable when equal education and labor opportunities are available across gender, race, age and ethnicities (Ventura, 2018; Administration of Joseph R. Biden Jr., 2022) – in the case of LISTA, while it was open to all candidates, we were getting referrals and applications based on potential LISTA leaders that had not previously been in leadership and who had been identified as having the potential for strong leadership, often from underrepresented groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Leadership Initiative for Supporting (Bilingual) Teacher Acquisition (LISTA) was a critical step towards addressing the growing need for qualified bilingual teachers in East Texas. With the region's multilingual learner population on the rise, it is imperative that our teacher force is adequately prepared to meet this demand. The passage of Senate Bill 560 highlights the need for coordinated strategic plans to support emergent bilingual students, emphasizing the importance of supporting bilingual coordinators. LISTA aimed to develop a community of united and informed bilingual coordinators who would create a pipeline for future bilingual educators, aligning with the mission of investing in educational quality for long-term economic growth.

The case study employed a qualitative approach to assess the effectiveness of the LISTA program. The data collection process included needs assessments, open-ended response pre-surveys, Zoom training sessions, focus groups, and open-ended response post-surveys. Thematic analysis revealed several key themes, such as the power of community, the need for systemic change, the prevalence of firefighting over changemaking, the importance of support from

authority figures, and the positive self-concept based on cultural identity. The participants' reflections and feedback demonstrated the perceived effectiveness of the training and its impact on their professional development.

In conclusion, the LISTA program holds great promise in empowering bilingual leaders, addressing the shortage of qualified bilingual teachers, and promoting economic growth through improved educational quality. By investing in the development of bilingual coordinators and supporting Hispanic/Latina women in leadership roles, LISTA can make a significant impact on the education landscape in East Texas. It is crucial to continue supporting initiatives like LISTA to ensure the success of bilingual education and the well-being of multilingual learners in the region.

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