"DROP OUT" FACTORS OF STUDENTS FROM THE FEDERATED STATES OF

MICRONESIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS: THE STORIES

THAT HAVE NOT BEEN TOLD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY
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By

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Dedication
Mo loʻu tama peleina (To my late Father)

Afioga Faʻaolatane Paʻo Sosaiete Siaunuʻua

Ou te tusia nei manatu ma loimata. E leai se aso ou te lē mafaufau ai iā oe ma au osigātaulaga,

lou tomai anagata, ma lou faʻatupu naunau mo le ola aʻoaʻoina e ui na muta lau aoga i le vasega

8. Ou te iloa o lou atamai ma lou naunau i le ola aʻoaʻoina na maua mai i lesona sa e aʻoaʻoina

mai le potuaoga o le mativa i tamaoaiga, faʻatoaga o tiga ma faigata aemaise lou Atua e te tapuai

iai i aso uma. E te talitonu lava oe e mafai e lau fanau ona faia soʻo se mea tusa poʻo le a faigata

ma faʻamanuiaina latou pe tuʻu atoa o latou loto ma mafaufau iai. Ua ou ausia lenei tulaga

faʻaleaʻoaʻoga ona o au aʻoaʻoga ma timaʻiga na faʻavaeina ai loʻu ola galue ma faʻatautaia ai

loʻu olaga.

I write this with tear-filled eyes. Never a day goes by that I do not think about you, your

leadership in our family, church, and village, and your sacrifices, uncommon wisdom, and

salivating passion for education, considering that you dropped out of 8th grade. I can only

attribute this passion and wisdom to the lessons you gained from the classroom of financial

poverty, the farm of painful struggles, love for your people, and your God whom you worshiped

daily. When you paid to install so another family in the village could have electricity, you were

doing social justice work way before I knew it was a thing. When you advocated for village

criminals, you did justice and mercy work. You always believed your children could do hard

things and become successful if they put their hearts and mind into any good thing they pursue. I

am at this point in my educational pursuits, even getting a terminal degree, because your

struggles, life, and teachings have shaped my work ethic and guided my life.

intelligent but also kind, caring, beautiful, graceful, yet powerful and hold rigor to the highest standards. You wholeheartedly took me on as one of your advisees of which I am forever grateful. You have the gift of perceiving what people need. You are AMAZINGLY PHENOMENAL! You are humanizing! You affirmed and reaffirmed, again and again, my worth, value, talents, skills, and intelligence, even when I doubted I had enough smarts in me to finish what I started. You heard me say "I quit" many times, but you loved me enough to let me have my moments, always believing that I would return and carry on. I count myself blessed to be tutored and influenced by you. You know how to do student success! Your leadership is moving and inspiring. You were not only my dissertation chair, but an advocate for justice and mercy. You have made it possible for me to gain financial means to complete this journey. Your ethic of caring is contagious. I want to do better because I have been touched by your leadership and aloha. Thank YOU SO much!

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Abstract

The high school dropout problem in the U.S. has been studied extensively; however, the dropout of English Learner (EL) students is an underreported phenomenon. This study sought to understand the lived experiences of EL students from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) who attended high school on the Westside of Oʻahu, in the state of Hawaiʻi and what contributed to their decisions to discontinue their high school education. The study used a phenomenological approach (Reiners, 2012; van Mannen, 2016) to understand the participants' experiences with the schools and data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 EL Indigenous alumni and elders from the FSM and RMI regions. Factors that impacted the discontinuation of high school education for EL alumni from the FSM and RMI included personal care, the impact of school personnel, language discrimination, policy inequities, and invisibility. Other themes that emerged from the participants' lived experiences included the strength of character, poverty and transience, and other forms of discrimination such as microaggression, racism, and bullying. These findings indicate the critical and most significant need for parent engagement at school, instead of parent involvement, having own-race teacher representation, a student cultural club, and culturally sustaining and translanguaging pedagogies. Other essential implications include teacher training on unconventional means of assessing EL students, adding additional years for EL students to complete their high school education, and for researchers to stop the perpetuation of deficit labels of Indigenous people in their research.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

O le fuata ma lona lou - Samoan Proverb

There is a lou (harvesting pole) for every season.

In every generation there are problem solvers.

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences and factors that had an impact on English Learner (EL) alumni from Truk (Chuuk), Kusaie (Kosrae), and Yap of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and those from the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) on the Westside of the island of Oʻahu in the state of Hawaiʻi who chose to discontinue their high school education. Citizens from the abovementioned regions and Palau are permitted to migrate to the United States (U.S.) to live, work, study, and seek better medical care under the Compact of Free Associations (COFA) agreement between the U.S. and these nations. This study uses COFA migrants to refer to first and second-generation migrants from the FSM and RMI. While Palau is the third nation in the COFA agreement, Palau is not included in this study. According to a report on COFA migrants by the Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism Research and Economic Analysis Division (2020), "Citizens from FAS [FSM and RMI] are known as COFA migrants to distinguish them from immigrants subject to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services." (p. 1) Because those from the FSM and RMI do not need visas to enter the U.S., they are legally known as "nonimmigrants without visas." The term alumni in this study refers to those ages 18 and older who graduated high school and individuals ages 18 years and older who attended but chose not to finish high school. It is important to note that the dropout rate in the United States (U.S.) has decreased in the last 40 years (Mcfarland et al., 2018). School professionals have been using various methods to identify students who are at risk

1

of dropping out and implementing different programs to prevent students from dropping out of school early (Rodriquez et al., 2020). However, the early warning indicators of at-risk students and school dropout interventions are not differentiated to address the varying needs of English Learner (EL) students, let alone those from the FSM and RMI. Moreover, while schools have pinpointed dropout risk factors and implemented dropout interventions, the dropout rate of students from the Pacific Islands between 2010 and 2019 has remained the same (Irwin et al., 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Micronesians and Marshallese are the most recent and fastest-growing group of immigrants to Hawaiʻi (Tan et al., 2014). Chuukese and Marshallese are number two and three of the total EL population in the Hawaiʻi Public Schools at 13% and 10%, respectively (Hawai'i Data Exchange Partnership [DXP], 2019). EL students are invisible in schools across the U.S. and are most likely to drop out due to their racial and ethnic background and their parents' immigration status (Callahan, 2013). Pacific Island students, of which those from the FSM and RMI are a part, face many challenges, including chronic absences, language barriers, lack of academic achievement, discrimination, and the paucity of understanding the culture of the FSM and Marshallese among people, not from these regions (Asian Development Bank, 2017; Fujimori-Kaina et al., 2019; Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, 2019b; Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, 2019c; Twomey et al., 2017; Stewart et al., 2017).

The FSM and RMI education systems have high rates of out-of-school students, especially at the secondary level (Digest of Education Statistics, 2018; National Department of Education Data Management, 2019; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). For many years as an EL coordinator and teacher, I observed a persistent dropout of EL students from the FSM and

RMI. Attendance is commonly thought to affect academic achievement (Kim et al., 2020). However, existing research is silent on what impacted EL students' dropout in their native countries and the U.S., especially in the Westside of Oʻahu. Rodriquez et al. (2020) postulate that not only is EL dropout an underreported phenomenon that needs the crucial attention of those in the education system but more research on this issue is needed. In order to address the dropout issue among the FSM and RMI EL students, it is crucial to illustrate the past and present stories to examine why this is happening to the youth from these regions. The stories and lived experiences of the EL students from the FSM and RMI who dropped out of any school need to be told to see what is hidden and closely looked at to better address the needs of EL students, their families, and future generations.

Research Questions

The research question is as follows:

> What factors contributed to the "dropping out" of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI in this study who lived on the Westside of Oʻahu?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

The dropout phenomenon has been studied extensively, but there is a paucity of literature on why EL students from the FSM and RMI discontinue their high school education. One of the well-known leaders in school dropout studies is Rumberger (2012). After empirically reviewing literature and dropout models, Rumberger and Rotermund (2012) shared some crucial conclusions worth considering: dropping out is a choice unique to each individual, a result of decisions and activities that happen over time without uniformity of reasons and intentions among dropouts, and behavior both in and outside of school affect dropping out. These are notable interpretations; however, it is unsure whether the study by Rumberger and Rotermund

(2012) includes EL students, even those from the FSM and RMI. If reasons for dropping out are unique to each individual, then it becomes imperative to see why EL students from the FSM and RMI drop out of school and use these findings to affect school programs, school services, policies, and the implementation of policies governing the education of EL students and improve school offerings that support these students.

The literature review shows a need for more research on why EL students from the FSM and RMI drop out. For example, a 2017 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on the event dropout rate (the percentage of 15 to 24-year-olds in grades 10 to 12 without a high school diploma or an alternative certificate) reports 523,000 individuals without a high school diploma between October 2016 and October 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), which is a significant amount of young people without a high school education. The record also shows that the event dropout rate in 2017 was higher than in 2007. A published report on the status dropout rate (the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school credential) across the U.S. shows a decrease from 14.1% in 1977 (Marfarland et al., 2018) to 5.1% in 2019 for students without a disability (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021) which means more students were enrolled in an educational program. On graduation rates, the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for Asian and Pacific Islanders in the school year 2018 - 2019 was 93%, the highest among all races (Irwin et al., 2021). While these are positive trajectories, these hopeful numbers are aggregated based on race and ethnicity, making it impossible to decipher the dropout rate for FSM and RMI EL students and the factors that resulted in students dropping out. The reports do not contain specific interventions targeting EL students from the FSM and RMI to stay engaged in school and graduate. As Rodriquez et al. (2020) postulate, the EL dropout and factors affecting the dropout

of EL students is an underreported phenomenon; therefore, more research on the EL dropout phenomenon is needed. Preventing one EL from dropping out saves the world of adverse ripple effects for that student, the community, and society. This study aims to gather and include the stories of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI in the conversation on the EL dropout phenomenon. Their stories can be instructive in leading school offerings that affect the success of EL students, their families, and the community.

The significance of looking at this educational issue is connected to the heartache and pain of seeing students from the FSM and RMI dropping out of school at such a sustained rate. The results of this study intend to transform and reform EL service offerings for the said EL population, their EL peers, families, and those yet to come. The lack of national literature on the FSM and RMI students necessitates this study to include the voices of these students in the conversations and prevention of further EL dropouts. Educational institutions have identified early warning indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out and also provide interventions; however, the lived experiences of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI are not included in the conversations. The stories of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI can bring in a wealth of information to improve services and offerings to EL students from the FSM and RMI. While educational institutions both in the FSM, RMI, and the U.S. have created frameworks and guidance to improve educational programs for their respective students (Grossman et al., 1990; Hawai'i State Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, 2019a; Peacock, 1985; State of Hawai'i Department of Education, 2015; UNESCO, 2016), the impact of these school initiatives can be found in the stories and lived experiences of students affected by these promising developments.

Background and Beliefs of the Researcher

In this study, the Indigenous participants from the FSM and RMI shared their stories with me. In the wisdom of Dr. Mary Hattori, the cultural broker for this study, telling my story is not from a place of positionality but in the spirit of reciprocity, a critical aspect of our shared Pasefika culture. While I am an outsider to this study, not from the FSM and RMI community, I am also an insider as I share many similarities with the participants that brought me closer to them. I am a citizen of the Pasefika community, an education practitioner, a mother, and a Christian. I am the third child of twelve children of a father and a mother who dropped out of eighth grade. Nevertheless, their salivating wisdom and passion for education influenced my pursuit of academic education. I am Samoan and an immigrant to Hawai'i, where I spent most of my young adult life and worked as an education practitioner. I grew up in Samoa in the culture of the majority, where racism was not an issue. As a Christian, I learned to love and serve others, so I also believed racial discrimination was not an issue. I carried this belief for most of my life.

I was a struggling EL student in Samoa, where all subjects except Samoan Language were taught in English. Nobody questioned why a Samoan child living in her homeland had to learn academic content in the language of an outsider and where the child was relegated to using her native language only when it was time for the Samoan Language class. Perhaps no one thought to question the injustices of English only policies and wanted anything different because being schooled in English was the norm; it was what every school child was doing. There was no EL program, counselors, or student support system. I was taught the same way as everyone else and expected to show up equipped to succeed in a language that was not mine. As an EL student, I understand the pain and adversities experienced by EL students from the FSM and RMI who are transplanted in many U.S. schools learning English and academic content in English. I was a

teacher on the Westside for 15 years and eleven years as an EL coordinator, where I taught EL students from Asia and the Pacific regions. Throughout these years, I witnessed students from the FSM and RMI who stopped coming to school. While I had used my training in teaching EL students, I continued to wonder what caused the students to leave school. It caused me pain because I felt hopeless, not knowing how to stop this from happening. My work with EL students engendered great reflection on issues affecting EL students from the FSM and RMI.

I come from the paternal line of the Chief Fa'aolatane, which translates to "to save." Chief Fa'aolatane is responsible for serving the village and its people and sitting on the council for the betterment of the village and its people. One role of Fa'aolatane is to advocate in councils where the fate of village lawbreakers is decided and then mediate and advocate for the saving and betterment of the individual, family, and community. My forefathers' fearless leadership, advocacy, and intentionality impacted how I see the world and act in my capacity in various circles of influence to make a difference. My cultural epistemology, motherly and Christian frames of reference to care for and build up people, and my liberation through education, drove me to seek solutions to address the matter. It seemed EL students from the FSM and RMI with the lowest proficiency in English were ignored and neglected when entering the U.S. school system. Language translators in human form were nonexistent within the school community. Language support materials such as Chuukese dictionaries, either in paper or online formats, were nowhere to be found. My lone voice as an EL advocate and coordinator was outnumbered by other school initiatives and eventually limited to weekly EL tips freely shared with faculty members and one-one conversations with teachers who sought my help. It seems easy to overlook the needs of EL students when administering programs in the same inequitably way over and over, with administrators and teachers becoming desensitized to the need to change

processes and pedagogies. Perhaps it is easy to neglect and ignore the needs of EL students when the EL population is small, which may not affect the outcome of standardized tests if they do not make passing scores. It may also be easy to gloss over the needs of EL students when school administrators do not value feedback regarding EL students from the surveys that they send out every year and when they do not know how to help teachers teaching EL students, or when they do not seek out parents' concerns about their children.

Parents may not know how to communicate their ideas to the school due to the language barrier and personal reasons. Moreover, school administrators and teachers may need to learn how to conduct equitable communication. I reminded the administration and coaches to provide translations for our EL students and their families. Some school parent notifications in English are sent home with a note saying that if parents have questions or need translation of the material, they need to call the school's principal. Why do parents need to ask for these services when the school can prepare the translation and send it home in the first place? Moreover, if parents do not speak, read, and understand English, how do they understand what is in the letter to know they can ask for help?

The students from the FSM and RMI expressed that they left their native countries for the U.S. to seek a better life and better education, yet they continued to drop out. Some of these students did not know how to read and write in their native language, which made learning the English language all the more challenging. These challenges caused me pain and heartache during my teaching career. I witnessed EL students from the FSM and RMI participate in the school community by attending classes, striving to learn English, and hoping to graduate; however, I had heartbreaking moments seeing seats that were once occupied turned empty. I waited with anticipation for EL students who never returned after many communications with

parents, guardians, counselors, and the students themselves the few times they showed up to class.

I struggled with thoughts of what I have "shoulda" or "woulda" done differently to help EL students from the FSM and RMI stay in school and graduate. I felt there was something else besides what the school system had already provided and what I had done to resolve this issue to bless the lives of EL students and their families. There was no paucity of assessments, strategies, or training on teaching EL students. There were also policies governing the education of EL students. However, there needed to be a holistic look at all the factors affecting the system that offers educational services to EL students, their parents, and the community. I felt the greatest need to include EL students' stories and perceptions in anything involving them and their families. I did not believe these students needed pity. I believe they wanted to be understood and supported in ways lacking in the current education system. I also believe the implementation of EL policies and even the over-interpretation of these policies may have had a negative effect on the school programs serving our Micronesian EL population and their peers. These students understood what they lacked academically, yet the current systems offered solutions born from the perspectives of the school leadership team and its data points and statistical platforms without the voices of EL students and their families. Even the data produced by these systems aggregated the data for Pacific Island (PI) nations because the numbers are too small to report. This aggregated reporting is an injustice to the individual students from these regions and their families. While the numbers may be small, within these numbers are precious people, their stories of triumphs and struggles, intelligence, excellence, and the merits of their existence. Their data and lived experiences should be disaggregated to understand better their many assets and what they want from school institutions to help them thrive and reach their expressed purpose for

being. How does aggregating data for Pacific Island nations impact school counseling services, dropout interventions, and determining who is at risk of failing? How can equitable services be determined for EL students when data is not disaggregated? How can schools do the work of equity and justice to the unique needs of Pacific Island EL students, even those from the FSM and RMI, when the data is not separated into respective regions?

I believe we have passed the stage of grade point average, attendance, and failing courses to determine who is at risk of dropping out. Schools need a different lou (solution). Schools need unconventional interventions and funds of knowledge from EL students and their families regarding problems that affect them in the U.S. school system. Funds of knowledge refer to the encompassing knowledge systems, cultural practices, expertise, and lifeways of people (Marshall & Toohey, 2010). There is a place for school data and what has already been done to serve EL students, but schools need the stories of their EL students. These stories can assist school professionals in forming new lenses to see problems and transform services for EL students and their families.

It is essential to know that although I am not from Micronesia or the Marshall Islands, I have a connection with EL students from these regions, as English is also my second language. The struggles of learning a new language are the same among second language learners. I also do not speak the languages of Micronesia or the Marshall Islands. I am a fluent speaker of Samoan and English. There were no school EL programs, academic counselors, or student support services when I struggled to learn academic content in English besides developing English language skills. Despite this lack of support, I completed high school.

On the other hand, the U.S. education system provides various interventions to retain and graduate students, offers academic counseling, and trains teachers in many teaching and learning

methods. However, the sustained attrition of the FSM and RMI EL students has remained an issue. Therefore, I am simultaneously an insider and an outsider in this study.

Definition of Terms

For this study, below are the definitions of some key terms:

Alumni. Former high school students ages 18 and above, both graduates and those who chose to discontinue their high school education.

COFA Migrants. First and second-generation citizens from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). While Palau is the third nation in the COFA agreement, Palau is not included in this study. COFA migrants "distinguish them from immigrants subject to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services." (Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism Research and Economic Analysis Division, 2020, p. 1).

"Drop Out". Those who chose to discontinue their high school education are no longer attending school because they left or were pushed out prior to graduation and do not have a high school diploma (McFarland et al., 2017).

English Learner. "An individual, whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards; ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or opportunity to participate fully in society." (Hawai'i State Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, 2019a, p. 17)

Indigenous. A descriptor for Pacific Islanders

Pasefika. The Indigenous people (inhabitants and diaspora) of the Pasefika (Pacific Islands), including Melanesia, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Polynesia

Snowball or Relational Sample. Using persons who know one another to access individuals for the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I starts with an overview of the problem of practice and introduces the statement of purpose, research question, rationale for the study, background, and beliefs of the researcher, and definition of terms. Chapter II is the literature review connected to the problem of practice. In Chapter III, I share the reasons for the qualitative approach chosen for the study, describe the participants and the site of the study, and provide data gathering procedures, the pilot study, and the limitations. Chapter IV is the analysis of the data. In Chapter V, I summarize the findings and discuss the implications of the findings for practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota - Samoan Proverb

The more the lights, the better the fishing.

To better understand a matter, one needs to use a variety of resources.

Introduction

This study focuses on factors affecting the dropout of EL alumni from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands who attended school on the Westside of Oʻahu. It is critical to remember that the Indigenous people from the FSM and RMI are racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse. It is also important to note that the terms Micronesia and Micronesian are used synonymously to refer to the political solidarity of the people and nations within the Micronesia geopolitical area (see Figure 1 Micronesia). Due to the racism accompanying the terms Micronesia and Micronesian, this study strives to use the terms FSM and RMI, except for ideas from the published literature that this study cites that use the names Micronesia and Micronesian.
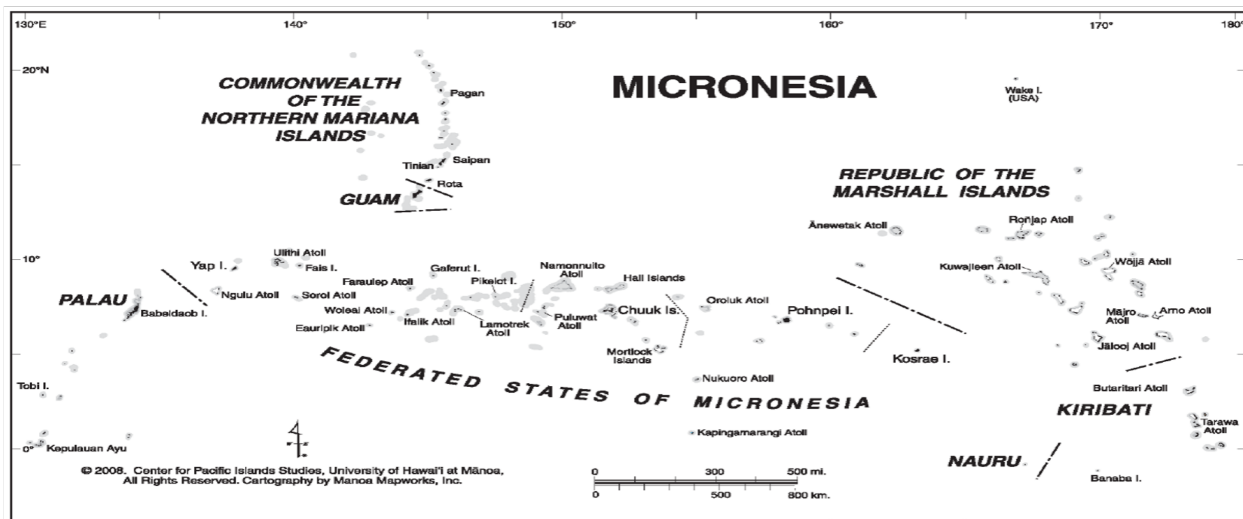
Figure 1 Micronesia

The number of EL students in the public school system across the United States has increased from 5.1% or 2.1 million students in 1994 to 4.6 million or 9.4% in 2015; this number is projected to increase to 40% by 2030 (Lambert et al., 2018). Schools face many challenges meeting the needs of at-risk EL students who do not have adequate access to mental and health services, are from low socio-economic backgrounds, and live in poverty areas and unsafe neighborhoods (Lambert et al., 2018). Furthermore, schools in rural areas of the U.S. have seen an increase in racial and ethnic EL populations, and many of these students are not proficient in the English language. In addition, many teachers in rural areas lack the skills to meet the needs of EL students (Gagnon et al., 2019). Those living in poverty and those who are most likely never to attend school are the most challenging dropouts (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2019). Given the non-compulsory nature of high school enrollment in the FSM and RMI (CES Chair of Education Systems, 2022), it is reasonable to postulate that some EL students from the regions who move to the U.S. to live, study, and work without having academic content training may not be proficient in these areas and therefore need critical and urgent support to engage in school and become successful (Ratliffe, 2010). This chapter starts with the Pasefika demographics, colonization and education in the FSM and RMI, cultural ways of learning and educational dissonance, a sense of belonging, laws governing language support for ELs, preparation for education and migration, and historical factors regarding who drops out.

The Pasefika/Pacific

This study centers on EL alumni of the Pasefika community from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. To understand the identity of the Pasefika community and its Indigenous people, it is essential to return to its beginning. Sadly, due to no written prehistoric

records by the Indigenous Pasefika people (West & Foster, 2020), we are left to learn about the

early history of the Pasefika people from incomplete European written documents (Puas, 2021).

Figure 2 below are examples of names that Europeans assigned to the various Pasefika regions.
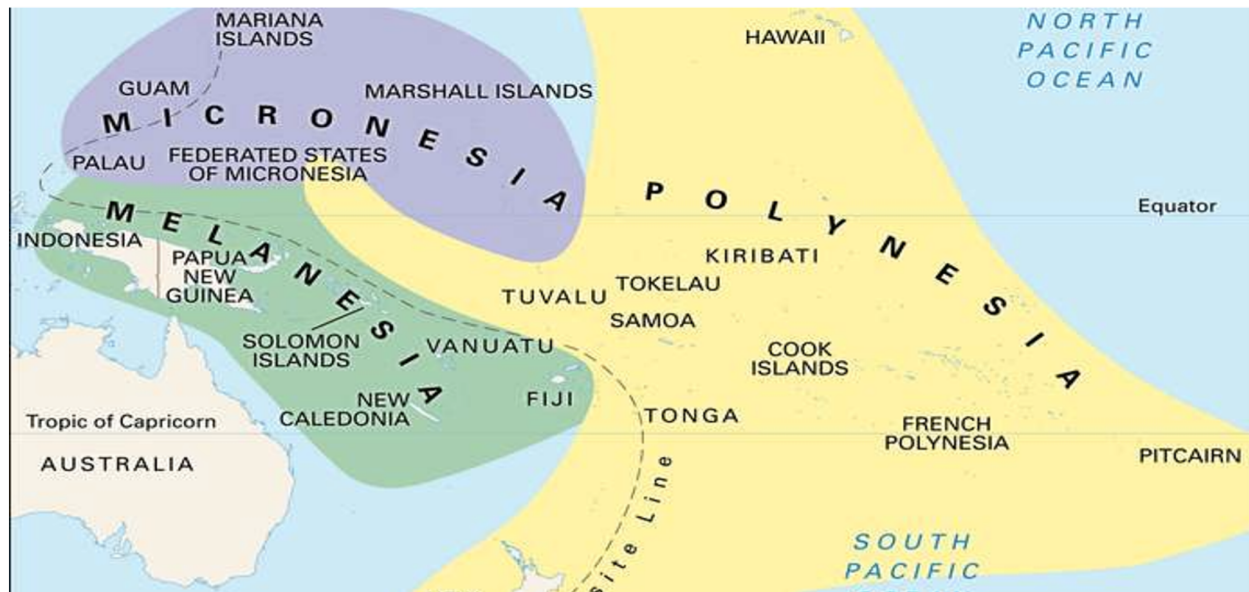
Figure 2 Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia

The racial and cultural groups, including Melanesia (Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea,

Solomon Islands, Vanuatu), Micronesia (Guam, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia [Chuuk,

Kosrae, Pohnpei, Yap], Marshall Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Nauru), and

Polynesia (Hawai'i, Rapa Nui [Easter Island], Samoa, American Samoa, Niue, Tonga, Cook

Islands, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Wallis, and Futuna, French Polynesia [Tahiti, Marquesas, Austral,

Tuamotu Archipelago, Mangareva [Gambier] Island, and Pitcairn Island) are names given to

these regions and people of the Pasefika by a French navigator named Jules-Sébastien-César

Dumont d'Urville (Weste & Foster, 2020). The Pasefika is not synonymous with Oceania, which

includes nations from Asia and Australia. Archeologists and scientists suggest that the

Indigenous people of the Pasefika originated from Southeast Asia. Their unique languages

belong to the Austronesian dialect (Thomas, 1993; West & Foster, 2020; United Language Group [ULG], n.d.). Table 1 below illustrates this linguistic parallel.

Table, 1.

Concept	Samoa & Tahiti	Fiji	Tokelau, Niue & Cook Island	Marshall Island & Kiribati	Chuuk	New Zealand
canoe or boat	va'a	waqa	vaka	wa	waa	waka

Table 1 Linguistic parallel among Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia

Thomas (1993) points out that a chieftain system ruled the people of the Pasefika, with chiefs having power over small islands. It seemed no one dropped out of the Indigenous communal education systems. The young successfully graduated to adulthood with the knowledge and skills to apply and thrive in various cultural contexts (Ballendorf, 1974). Thomas (1993) further states that pre-colonial education was oral; people learned by hearing, doing, imitating, and participating in activities deeply woven into the fabric of daily life, mainly through observing the adults and practicing cultural traditions from a young age until adulthood. The Indigenous people are known for their hospitality, legends and oral histories, collectivist cultures, and uncommon intellect of natural medicine, tattooing, canoe building, and ocean navigation (Hezel & Foster, n.d.). The Indigenous navigators used the wind, stars, the moon, the sun, clouds, the rhythm of the ocean, and even wildlife as instruments to guide them to their desired destinations (LearnNZ, n.d.). The Pasefika cultures are similar in many ways. Family takes precedence over other priorities (Ratliffe, 2010). Lands and oceans are the lifeblood and

key to survival. Their stories, music, and dances become the perpetual means of passing on legacies, genealogies, and ways of being (Thomas, 1993).

There was a spirit of love, respect, cooperation, and service. It was a norm for people within the community to share resources freely with one another (Hezel & Foster, n.d; Puas, 2021). For example, islanders who lived in the mountains exchanged their taros, bananas, breadfruits, and yams for fish from those who lived in coastal areas. It is customary in the Pasefika for extended families to contribute during times of crisis and celebration, such as funerals and weddings. Parents, children, and grandchildren lived together and cared for one another. Kahn et al. (n.d.) and Puas (2021) share that there was a good balance between the people and their environment in Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. People not only devoted time to providing for their daily needs but also spent much time in social activities such as dancing, visiting one another, and eating. The islanders believed in creating security and managing conflicts to be on good terms with each other. It is worth knowing that Micronesians are some of Earth's most skilled traditional ocean navigators. Hezel and Foster (n.d.) point out that in Micronesia, on the island of Satawal, traditional ocean navigation is still taught and practiced. The late Mau Piailug, a renowned Micronesian ocean navigator, guided the Hokule'a on its voyage from Hawai'i to Tahiti in 1976 (Hawai'ian Voyaging Traditions, 2010). The same Mau Piaulug also trained Nainoa Thompson, the Hawai'ian navigator of the Hokule'a, who then taught this knowledge to many others (Hawai'ian Voyaging Traditions, 2010).

Despite having a shared origin, and cultural and linguistic similarities, the Indigenous chiefs of the Pasefika, even those of Micronesian nations, would go to war with one another to amass lands, control, and resources (Kahn et al., (n.d.). Apparently, the Pasefika Indigenous chiefs were well into their own quest for power before outsiders got in. While Indigenous chiefs

fought for control, unbeknownst to them, curious and opportunistic Europeans who were navigating the Earth's vast oceans would soon control them. These navigators eventually made their way to the shores of the Pasefika, beginning with Ferdinand Magellan, who landed in Guam in 1521 while circumnavigating the Earth, and Alvaro de Mendana de Neyra in 1567, who landed in the Solomon Islands. Pedro Fernandez de Queiros went to Tahiti in 1606, Willem Cornelis Schoten to Tonga in 1616, and Abel Janzoon Tasman to Fiji in 1643. Louis Antoine de Bougainville landed in Samoa in 1768, James Cook visited the Cook Islands in 1773, then went to New Caledonia in 1774 and New Zealand in 1788 (Foster & West, 2020). Other Europeans also visited Papua New Guinea during the sixteenth century. Records of these voyages show European explorers trading rusty nails and fabric for coconuts, water, and fish (Encyclopedia.com, 2019; Tcherkézoff, 2008; West & Foster, 2020). These explorers' stories about the Pasefika people illustrate how these explorations led to a simplistic view of the islanders and their cultures, completely negating the perspectives of the people whose stories these explorers published. Louis Antoine de Bougainville, a well-known French explorer, and navigator whose records were translated and edited by John Dunmore, informed explorers that came after him. Bougainville recorded the following about the people of Tahiti:

Nature has placed it in the finest climate in the world, embellished it with most attractive scenery, enriched it with her gifts, filled it with handsome, tall, and well built inhabitants. She herself has dictated its laws, they follow them in peace and make up what may be the happiest society on the globe. Lawmakers and philosophers come and see here all your imagination has ever been able to dream up. A large population made up of handsome men and pretty women, living together in abundance and good health, with every indication of the greatest amenity, sufficiently aware of what belongs to the one and the

other for there to be that degree of difference in rank that is necessary for good order.

(Bougainville & Dunmore, 2002, p. 71)

The call for "lawmakers" and "philosophers" to come and see the simple and beautiful people of Tahiti nurtured the impulse of the Europeans to continue exploration and eventual colonization of the Pasefika (Stella, 2007, p. 71). It looked as if the epistemologies and ontologies of these explorers had misled what they wrote, canonized, circulated, told, and retold about the whole beings of the Pasefika people. These writings made the indigenes' spaces gems available for the taking.

The condescending views of the Europeans about the Pasefika people and cultures reflect poorly on the explorers' intellect. It seemed the natives of the Pasefika repulsed the ways and presence of foreigners when these outsiders strategically maneuvered their way into the islands. For example, the Chamorro people rebelled against Spanish control of Guam in 1670, and the Samoans attacked Jean La Pérouse and his voyagers, killing 11 of his men (Tcherkézoff, 2004). Unfortunately, the power of the colonizers' guns, cannonballs, and misguided interpretations forced Europeans into the sacred soils and spaces of the Pasefika community. Perhaps the Europeans misinterpreted the islanders' hospitality in offering coconuts and fish to signify they wanted materialistic things. Perchance, the opportunistic Europeans saw the wars between the island chiefs as a chance to showcase the power of their guns and take advantage of the islanders, as seen in Europeans supplying the natives with guns during the Samoa civil wars (Hempenstall, 2016). The harmful effects of colonization on Indigenous people are many and long-lasting, such as the introduction of European religions, the idea of paid work, and having materialistic things. In addition, European guns and deadly diseases, such as the 1919 influenza, wiped out families and populations of islanders. Mixed marriages between colonizers and Indigenous people

reduced the number of Indigenous pure blood. Also, colonization erased Indigenous languages and cultures, stole lands from Indigenous people (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Indigenous Peoples, n.d.), dismantled the traditional chieftain system, and destroyed the natural environment. Furthermore, the Europeans established schools for the islanders after the European learning environment (Encyclopedia.com, 2019), turning traditional subsistence living into alternative lifestyles. These injustices continue to affect the Pasefika people to this day.

The Greater Micronesia

Dr. Mary Hattori, a native Chamoru of Guåhan (Guam) and Interim Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the University of Hawaiʻi - Mānoa East-West Center pointed out that there is Micronesia and there is also the idea of Greater Micronesia (M. Hattori, personal communication, October 22, 2021). She also conveyed that because of racism, it is best not to use the term Micronesian to refer to those from the FSM and RMI. The name Greater Micronesia describes the political solidarity of the Northern Marianas, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Nauru, Kiribati, Guåhan (Guam), and the Federated States of Micronesia (Truk [Chuuk], Kusaie [Kosrae], Ponape [Pohnpei], Yap). While this study focuses on EL students from the FSM and RMI, learning some basic information about the linguistically and racially diverse states within the Greater Micronesia community is crucial.

The Federated States of Micronesia

According to the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (2021), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is a name given to the four culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse regions within Micronesia under the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands which the U.S. administered on behalf of the United Nations after World War II until 1978. These four regions

consist of many groups of islands. The U.S. went into a Compact of Free Association with the FSM in 1986 in which the U.S. has full access to the FSM waters and lands for military purposes, and the U.S. provides defense and financial assistance to the FSM, including permitting FSM citizens to freely migrate to the U.S. to live, work, and study. The agreement also acknowledges that the FSM is an independent nation freely associated with the U.S. (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2021).

This study sought participants from the four linguistically and racially diverse states within the Federated States of Micronesia who were represented at the site of the study on the Westside of Oʻahu. The EL alumni and elders this study looked for came from the regions listed below, and it is essential to develop an understanding of these spaces:

Truk (Chuuk) – changed from Truk to Chuuk in 1990 and was known as Hogoleu Islands. Chuuk, in the Chuukese language, means "high mountains," where the natives sustain themselves by fishing, raising pigs and chickens, and planting taro, bananas, yams, and breadfruits with copra as the primary profit agricultural crop. Chuukese is the largest population of the FSM. The central city of Weno has a commercial dock and an international airport (The Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2022; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013).

Ponape (Pohnpei) - changed from Ponape to Pohnpei in 1984, the second-largest population of the Federated States of Micronesia. Pohnpei is known as the "garden of Micronesia," a product of its fertile soils and rainfalls. The lagoon Namadol contains the tombs of ancient kings that once ruled the islands. The Indigenous Pohnpeians fish, raise pigs and poultry and grow various crops such as cacao, taro, and breadfruit (The Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2022; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016).

Kusaie (Kosrae) – also known as Ualan Island or Strong Island, the third-largest populated region of the Federated States of Micronesia. Kosrae is a volcanic island. From its fertile soils come trees capable of producing timbers and grow various crops such as taro, breadfruit, and bananas. Minerals such as bauxite and guano are also found on the islands (The Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2022; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). Guap (Yap) - smallest of the population of the Federated States of Micronesia. In prehistoric times, Yap was an ethno-geographic area where the use of the stone-disk money was prominent. The increase in tourism and the production of consumer goods provide Yap the most robust economy and standard of living. Like its sister islands in the FSM, Yap produces various crops and copra that are exported to nearby islands (The Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2022; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015).

The Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Republic of the Marshall Islands comprises 29 atolls and five remote coral islands (Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, 2022; Republic of the Marshall Islands, n.d.). Kiste (2021) posits that the native people, Marshallese, are Micronesians. Marshallese speak two dialects of the Marshallese language known as Ralik and Ratak (Republic of the Marshall Islands, n.d.). The Republic of the Marshall Islands (n.d.) and Kiste (2021) suggest Micronesian navigators settled the islands 4000 years ago and named it Aelon Kein Ad (Our Islands), which was then changed to the Marshall Islands in 1788 after William Marshall, a British Naval Captain. Spain, Germany, Japan, and eventually, the U.S. controlled the RMI at different times from 1494 to 1978. The RMI and the U.S. entered into a Compact of Free Association (COFA) in 1986, agreeing that the RMI would remain a sovereign nation, with the U.S. providing national defense and substantial financial assistance to the RMI. In the agreement, the U.S. has

exclusive access to the islands' waters for military purposes. Due to the U.S. using RMI's Bikini Island for nuclear testing that left the islands and nearby areas poisoned and uninhabited, the U.S. has a settlement agreement with the RMI where the U.S. provides "direct financial settlement of nuclear claims, resettlement funds, rehabilitation of affected atolls, and radiation-related health care costs" (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2021, para. 3) to RMI citizens. The agreement also allows RMI citizens to live, work, and study in the U.S. without visas.

Northern Mariana Islands

The Northern Mariana Islands contain 22 islands with a 2023 estimated population of 43,400 and a land area of 182 square miles (Ballendorf & Foster, 2023). The Indigenous people are Micronesians. The official languages are Chamorro, Carolinian, and English (Ballendorf & Foster, 2023; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). The island's contact with outsiders began with Ferdinand in 1521, then Spain took control in 1668. Spain sold the islands to Germany in 1899, then Japan seized them in 1914. One of the islands, Tinian, served as the host for U.S. planes that dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Northern Marianas was given to the U.S. as a U.N. trust territory in 1947. The Northern Mariana Islands eventually gained independence in 1978, with its residents becoming U.S. citizens (Ballendorf & Foster, 2023).

Belau (Palau)

Shuster and Foster (2023) explain that the Republic of Palau has a diverse mixed genealogical line consisting of Malay, Melanesian, Filipino, and Polynesian. Palauans speak Palauan and English (Shuster & Foster, 2023). However, the two islands, Sonsorol and Hatohobei, speak a local Micronesian dialect, Sonsorolese, and Tobian, together with Palauan as

official languages (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). Palau has a land area of 189 square miles (490 sq km) with an estimated population of 17,600 in 2023. The government is the major employer on the island, and most of the rural population depends on fishing. Spain had a stronghold on the islands until it sold Belau to Germany in 1899. Japan then seized the islands from Germany in 1914. Palau became a U.S. Trust Territory in 1947 and became independent in 1994. The U.S. provides financial aid to the islands and has a U.S. military presence in the region (Shuster & Foster, 2023).

Nauru

Foster and Kiste (2022) report that Nauru, officially known as the Republic of Nauru, had a population of about 14,000 in 2022, has no official capital city with a land area of about 8.2 square miles. Nauru is a coral island with highlands of about 30-60 feet high and no harbors. Nauru used to have the biggest amount of phosphate in the world, which unfortunately had depleted, turning the islanders to fishing for economic support. The Indigenous people, Nauruans, speak Nauru and English. Nauru's contact with outsiders happened in 1798 with British navigators, Germans in 1888, and Australia during World War I. Britain, Australia, and New Zealand had joint custody of Nauru in 1919, and the Japanese occupied the nation during World War II. Nauru finally gained self-governance in 1968.

Guåhan (Guam)

Foster and Ballendorf (2023) provide the following summary on Guam: Guam's estimated population in 2022 was 152,600. Guam's physical geography consists of highlands and volcanic hills. The land area is 562 square kilometers and is the largest and southernmost in the Mariana Islands in the Greater Micronesia region. The natives of Guam are Charmorro with ancestral roots in Spain, the Philippines, and Mexico. The official languages in Guam are

Chamorro and English. Guam's contact with foreigners began with Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. Spain took over the islands in 1565, and the U.S. took over during the Spanish-American War in 1898. Guam went to Japan during World War II, and the U.S. made the islands a territory in 1950 and established a U.S. air and naval base in the region. The military base is one of the significant sources of revenue for the island nation.

Kiribati

The official language in Kiribati is Gilbertese or Kiribatese/Ikiribati (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). The language of the Kiribati people was in oral form only until the Protestant missionary Hiram Bingham Jr. put it in written form in 1860. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (n.d.) reports that the population of Kiribati in 2022 was 126,463, with a land area of 811 square kilometers. Kiribati consists of 32 atoll islands with a population of 135 people per square kilometer. The report also points out that climate change seriously affects the islands in Kiribati, making the islands 6.5 feet above sea level. Foster and Macdonald (2023) state that Kiribati's Indigenous people are Micronesians living off fishing and farming. Kiribati's first contact with foreigners started with Fijians and Tongans in the 14th century. The British and Europeans arrived in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Britain eventually set up a crown colony with a few islands. Kiribati became an independent nation in 1977.

Colonization and Education in Micronesia and the Marshall Islands

As seen from the brief history of each region in the Greater Micronesia community, one can see that the generations of people from these islands had gone through some daring and astounding afflictions in language and cultural shifts, let alone mental and emotional trauma. Like other Pasefika people, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall

Islands' Indigenous people rely on their cultural protocols and ways of learning for progress and success (Ballendorf, 1974), which is often left out of research conducted on Indigenous people (Walter & Suina, 2021). There was no written language until the missionaries arrived on the islands in the 1800s and started creating a writing system for the regions. It is common knowledge that Pacific island nations such as Micronesia and the Marshall Islands are of oral history. The only documentation of pre-contact history was written by European explorers that left out the voices of the natives. During the pre-contact era, what is known about education includes the auditory and oral passing on of stories, culture, language, and genealogies. Unlike the expensive colonized idea of school buildings, student per capita costs, and highly paid qualified teachers, the pre-contact islanders did not fundraise or ask the government for money to erect an expensive dedicated physical school building and pay the teachers. The bounties of nature, the ocean, the land, and the home were readily available for instructing and learning.

The people of Micronesia are descendants of ocean navigators who found the atoll islands between 2000 and 500 BC (Couper, 2009). Like Melanesia and Polynesia, the name Micronesia was a label given to the islands by the European explorers. The islands of Micronesia are the smallest of the Pasefika nations, as reflected in its name from the Greek words mikros meaning small, and nesos meaning islands (Baker, 1951), formed from volcanic and coral atolls and covering an area 2,400 miles long and 1,200 miles wide. Most islands are too small to be on the regular maps of the world. The attitude that accompanied the colonization of Micronesia, like other Pasefika nations, seemed to be under the notion that the islanders and their sacred lands were commodities to be taken and sold without regard to who owned these spaces. For example, in the 17th century, whalers and traders from Spain visited Micronesia and eventually ruled the islands. Germany then bought the islands from Spain in 1899 at the end of the Spanish-American

War. Under the League of Nations mandate, Japan took over the Micronesian islands from Germany in 1914, and the U.S. seized the islands from Japan during World War II (Foster & Hezel, n.d.). In 1947 the United Nations Security Council placed Micronesia in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under U.S. rule (Foster & Hezel, n.d.; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021), from which Micronesia eventually gained independence in 1979. While foreign powers were buying and selling the general Micronesia regions, foreign missionaries taught the islanders English and how to read in their native language so they could read the Bible (Hezel, 1985). One destructive action the U.S. committed while in control of Micronesia was the nuclear testing and anti-ballistic missile development in the waters of the Marshall Islands, resulting in lifelong illness among the islanders and poisoning of the islands' waters, marine life, soils, and crops (Nyarko-Odoom, 2018). A declassified report by the U.S. Secretary of Energy reveals that the U.S. conducted 66 nuclear tests in 39 sites across Micronesia (Simon & Robison, 1997). Not only did the nuclear weapon testing destroy the health of the people and the natural environment, but it also led to the displacement of the islanders because their islands were so poisoned that it was uninhabitable. As a result, the islanders began migrating to the U.S. and its territories under the 1986 Compact of Free Association (COFA), an agreement between the U.S. government and Micronesia (Simon & Robinson, 1997). Alternatively, COFA could be said it was an act of trying to reconcile the wrongs being done to the Micronesian people. In the COFA arrangement, the U.S. is to render financial support to defend Micronesia and allow Micronesians to live, work, and study in the U.S. in exchange for access to Micronesia's waters and lands for military purposes (Office of Insular Affairs, 2015). Most Micronesians choose to live in Guam, a U.S. territory, while many others reside, especially in Hawaiʻi and other U.S. states. It is evident from the history of these islands that colonial

activities resulted in changes in not only the political but the economic, educational, and social structure of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. Colonization has converted the Micronesian economy from a traditional subsistence way of living to the idea of a cash economy and made the islanders see their own culture and lifestyle as inferior to the colonial materialistic way of life (Hezel, 1985). Peacock (1985) reported that some Micronesian parents wanted their children to learn English in school to gain economic upward mobility. It is critical to note that while colonization, initially, had forced Micronesian children into the colonial-prescribed school systems that negated the use of their native language and cultural strength with the hope of giving them a competitive and gainful advantage in a cash economy, becoming an independent nation returns the decision to the islanders to do as they please, to be creative in their education programs allowing the islanders to infuse their language and culture into their children's academic pursuits (Blaz & Lee, 1971; Grossman et al., 1990; Peacock, 1985).

By 1979, Micronesia had been colonized for 458 years. The FSM and RMI Indigenous people have gone through culture and education dissonance of outrageous magnitudes, having been ruled, bought, sold, and introduced into learning systems not of their making. A search in the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) for peer-reviewed literature on "Micronesia" produced 14 articles about education topics such as assessments and benchmarking in various Micronesian regions and one article on establishing a culture-based charter school for Micronesians in Hawai'i. Statistically, that is a dismal amount of less than two articles per year on the region within the last ten years. A search for "colonization AND Micronesia" generated no results. A search for "Micronesia Colonization" resulted in only three unrelated articles which are not peer-reviewed. Also, a search for "Education in Micronesia" yielded only two related peer-reviewed articles. It is concerning that literature and stories on this topic and Micronesia's

Indigenous people are lacking. While some helpful information on the history of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands was found in fact-checked articles in the Britannica Encyclopedia, the work of Blaz and Lee (1971), Ballendorf (1974), Hezel (1985), Peacock (1985), and Grossman et al. (1990) helped construct some perspective regarding the changes in Micronesia, especially the state of education in the islands from the time of colonization and thereafter.

With a colonized education system in place and about half of the population of Micronesian children in school from 1870 to 1940 (Hezel, 1985), how was the other half perpetually affected by not being in school? For the colonizers, schools were to advance their economic activities and eventually assimilate the islanders into the colonizers' way of life (Hezel, 1985). One example of assimilation was teaching American folk dances to students in a Saipan school instead of teaching them to practice their cultural dances (Peacock, 1985). Hezel (1985) and Peacock (1985) further stated that after becoming well-versed in the local dialects, the Protestant and Catholic missionaries began formal schooling for Micronesian natives. The priests began teaching the islanders to read in their native language so the natives could read the Bible. After Germany bought Micronesia from Spain in 1898, Japan took control of the islands in 1914 and set up the first public school in 1915. The school had strict discipline for students, only had five grades, and the main focus was learning the Japanese language and vocational subjects. Under Japanese rule, Micronesia shifted into the Western way of life, where the islanders saw their new way of learning as the means to prosperity. Micronesians affectionately remembered the times of peace, plenty, and civility during Japan's control of the islands (Blaz & Lee, 1971). Japan lost World War II, and the U.S. gained control over Micronesia. After receiving the trusteeship of Micronesia from the United Nations, the U.S. was on a mission to help Micronesia become independent (it already was before colonization). The U.S. also assisted the islanders in

becoming self-sufficient (they already were before colonization) and developing education systems focusing on the island culture and advancing the islanders' social standings and vocational and academic pursuits.

Peacock (1985) and Hezel (1985) pointed out that the U.S. Navy set up a compulsory education policy for children ages six to fourteen. The Indigenous became teachers and superintendents of elementary schools while Americans filled in as principals in the middle schools. The Navy established elementary schools and teacher training with an island-style curriculum having the native vernacular as the language of instruction and leaving out learning the English language for the fifth and sixth years of schooling. English as a second language was the focus of the seventh to ninth-grade curriculum. The U.S. Navy and the advisory committee of outside entities, including the University of Hawai'i, have attempted with island educators to create a Micronesia-focused school curriculum that supported the needs and goals of the Micronesian community. The goal was to teach the youth about their cultures and vocational skills to prepare for future careers. In other words, to function in a colonized society. Running a school today as it was in the 1950s required funds; the Navy needed more funds and had difficulty securing more funds from Congress, which stunted what schools could do (Peacock, 1985).

Despite the lack of funds, professionals in the systems had creative ideas to fund the schools and continue the education of Micronesian children. Peacock (1985) pointed out that Dr. Robert Gibson, the first director of education under the U.S. Department of Interior, administered the schools in Micronesia after the Navy. Gibson believed that problems of social change and economic development problems also affect education; he was also instrumental in getting elementary schools funded by local taxes (Peacock, 1985). An advocate of curriculum

created by local people for local people, Gibson mobilized the local school educators and administrators to create a curriculum based on the local culture, various vocation contents, government, and functions of being citizens of the world. There was also an emphasis on involving the natives in their children's learning (Peacock, 1985). One crucial and disturbing thing that emerged from the literature is the discrimination of Micronesian children through education. For example, most children in intermediate schools were taught vocational, and only a few selected ones received a general education. The few selected students went on to the only high school in Micronesia where teachers who had overseas training taught a more Americanized curriculum. These few students became the educated best of Micronesia who would venture off to study in overseas universities. It begs the question: What and who determined who got a vocational and general education? Who determined which students worked with local teachers and who was taught by the ones with foreign training? How did these decisions affect generations of Micronesian families and their children? In the 80s, Peacock (1985) echoed some continuing concerns over education in Micronesia:

> Despite the attempts over the years to relate schools and manpower needs, to tie education to community aspirations, Micronesian has always lacked communication and a fine communication between administrative departments … the time may be ripe for a return to the island-oriented, community-supported schools of the past. (Peacock, 1985, pp. 100-101)

Peacock (1985) and Grossman et al. (1990) reported that education had become a crucial part of life in Micronesia with changes in U.S. administration and policies over the years and more secondary schools being established. Schools in Micronesia have shifted to be more similar to U.S. schools, and parents want more English teaching for their children to help them move up

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to U.S. colleges. The Indigenous FSM and RMI's shift in education and mindsets resulted in more elite natives going off to U.S. universities. At the same time, more and more non-elite native families and their children have also migrated to the U.S. to live, work, and study. Some educated elite returned to help their people at home, while many remained in the host countries under COFA (Peacock, 1985; Grossman et al., 1990).

Cultural Ways of Learning and Educational Dissonance

Although dynamic, culture and language are critical components of a person's identity and should be embraced and perpetuated in the school environment. Dr. Hilda C. Heine, a Micronesian native, in her introduction to Hezel's 2002 publication called "Taking Responsibility for our schools: A series of four articles on education in Micronesia," gave an enlightening view of culture that should be considered when serving Micronesian EL students:

> The culture of a people is always evolving. Therefore, the definition should include the living culture found in the islands today not just some historical relic preserved in a jar on a museum shelf. Culture today includes not only the oral narratives and chants of the past but also the automobiles, VCRs, grocery stores, gas stations, and paychecks of the present. It includes any of the practices, beliefs, and attitudes that a people hold those that can be traced back centuries, like canoe construction and traditional navigation, as well as those adopted from abroad in recent years like ear studs, baggy pants, and tastes in rock music. If education is to embrace and respond to the culture, then it must take into account both the new and the old. (Hezel & Heine, 2002. p. 14)

Honoring the past of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, students from these communities come from ancestors who were fearless and heroic ocean navigators, rich cultural heritage, and innate talents and gifts. They grow up in a significantly different society than their

ancestors did, and given that cultures shift as time goes on, the students' ancestral and "living culture" (Hezel & Heine, 2002. p. 14) should be a crucial part of the school and classroom experience because it builds growth mindsets, resilience, and pride in one's cultures (Hattori, 2016). The students' heritage languages need to be an integral part of lesson plans and school curricula instead of ignoring them. Abandoning and ignoring students' native language and culture in the classroom is a form of language discrimination (Valdez et al., 2016). Using student language repertoire facilitates understanding, meaning-making, and connections to new concepts (David et al., 2021). Max Weinreich, a Russian Jewish linguist, once said, "Language is a dialect with an army and a navy" (Sipka, 2021, pp. 214-218); it signifies that language is power - it has the power to preserve collective and individual cultures and also to do damages. Valdez et al. (2016) suggest that language plays a vital role in how people communicate their ancestral knowledge, values, beliefs, skills, and truths. That language has the power to dominate, control, and even discriminate. An example of language discrimination is when EL students receive instructions in English even though they lack competency in the English language (Valdez et al., 2016). Indigenous language gives power to its people politically and socially. Not only that, but when Indigenous languages are recognized and used in the classrooms, it becomes equitable practice and the means of perpetuating cultures, strengthening connections to ancestors, nurturing family relationships, and creating language equality among EL students and non-EL students (Paris, 2012; Winstead & Wang, 2017). Indigenous cultures fade when the power to speak their language is erased (Winstead & Wang, 2017).

Despite the significant hurdles in the history of education in Micronesia and the Marshall Islands from colonial times and during the nations' independence, EL students from these regions are successful in their own rights. They are expanding their horizons to seek opportunities to

improve (Puas, 2021). Knowing the educational background of these students in their home countries is instructive in understanding students' educational exposure and the dropout phenomenon. A dropout is defined as "no longer attending school (public and private) and do not have a high school level of education" (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 78). This study seeks to understand and describe the lived experiences of EL students from the FSM and RMI who dropped out in the context of the U.S. high school system. While the term dropout carries a deficit tone, this study uses it interchangeably with the phrase "chose to discontinue their high school education" to clarify and honor the intelligent use of agency and power of EL students from the region to carry out courageous choices to meet the challenges they experience as EL students at the schools and the communities they live. In light of embracing Indigenous people's culture and languages in U.S. classrooms, looking at the FSM and RMI cultural and traditional ways of learning and the current culture in U.S. classrooms is essential. Ballendorf (1974) shares an important observation about the Micronesians' ways of learning:

> Before outside intrusion by the West, education in Micronesia was something totally integrated with life. Learning and teaching transpired in real life situations, and there were no sharp lines drawn between childhood and adulthood in one's physical environment. All took an active part in family life, religious rites, and economic processes. One observed and participated when ready, and readiness was intrinsically determined by each individual. Moments of instruction were not segregated from moments of action. A traditional Micronesian education was a response to social needs. Knowledge was sought where it was thought to be meaningful and a useful guide to one's survival. Education then was not a distinct process, nor was it primarily an intellectual process. Education was life itself. (Ballendorf, 1974, p. 1)

When education is life, and greed and colonialism's unrighteous dominion eliminate the traditional means of life, Micronesian children suffer in many areas, including education. For example, while primary-level enrollment is better than the secondary level in the FSM alone, student enrollment declines at age eight. The trajectory continues to grade 12, where many are out of school (Digest of Education Statistics, 2018; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). The compulsory education laws are only enforced at age five, early childhood education until age 14, or grade eight. Beyond the eighth grade, education is optional (CES Chair of Education Systems, 2022), and many students stop furthering their education. Students are either not enrolled in school or dropped out without finishing their education (Digest of Education Statistics, 2018).

Similarly, the Marshallese education system experienced low enrollment. For example, many children ages five were out of school during the 2012 - 2013 school year (Marshall Islands. Ministry of Education, 2014). It was only in 2013 that a public school systems act mandated compulsory education for children ages five to eighteen. Despite compulsory educational policies, a significant number of out-of-school populations persist. The net enrollment (the percentage of students enrolled at the official school age compared to the population of the same age group) at the elementary level declined from 82% in 2016 to 74% in 2019 (Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education, Sports & Training, 2019). At the secondary level, the net enrollment was 48% in 2016 and decreased to 45% in 2019, with a dropout rate at the secondary level of 42% in 2016 and rose to 43% in 2019 (Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Education, Sports & Training, 2019). What is missing in the statistics are the lived experiences and stories of students within the schools and what impacted the discontinuation of their high school journey.

It seems the colonized idea of school, jobs, and material prosperity has enabled the migration of Indigenous people to develop free-market economies resulting in Micronesian students and their families being in the U.S. and will continue to come. Knowing their history during the pre-contact era, the ripple effects of colonization, especially the superimposing of a European style education that parses students into categories of the elite few and the proletariat, should guide the paths of understanding why Micronesian families and their children are in the U.S. Having clarity and insights as to why many come to the U.S. with little to no academic classroom experience let alone proficiency in English can inform school onboarding and registration preparations, teacher instructions, and curriculum planning. An appreciation of Micronesian children in the U.S. can be attained by increasing exposure to literature on this subject; however, there is limited national literature on the FSM and RMI EL students. Other studies also recognize this concern (Kaneshiro & Black, 2012; Floyd-Fraught, 2019; Raatior, 2017; Twomey et al., 2017). Understanding the data on EL students from the FSM and RMI in the U.S. context becomes difficult because it is aggregated into the Native Hawai'ian Pacific Islander (NHPI) figures. For example, the NHPI dropout rate for ages 16-24 in 2017 was 10%, the highest of all ethnic groups, with NHPI foreign-born at a higher dropout rate than their U.S.-born peers (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). This aggregated way of reporting does not allow the unique merits and stories of NHPI ethnic groups, let alone ELs, to be told and understood separately. This way of reporting based on race and ethnicity is also not helpful in determining the dropout rate for ELs because being from an ethnic group does not equate to being an EL. The same aggregated way of reporting is repeated on the local level, suppressing EL sub-populations too small to report. In the Westside district, an aggregated 76% of the high-needs group of which EL is a component did not meet the English Language Arts (ELA) achievement standards

(Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, 2019b). At one school on the Westside, 53% of its EL population are Micronesians; 42% of this group scored in the Non-English Proficiency (NEP) category on the most recent World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) ACCESS for ELs. While this data seemed it was only about the FSM EL students, it was an aggregated number of students from the FSM, RMI, and other Micronesian regions because of Primary DOE race grouping policies.

Migration and traveling to new places affect not only the individual but places and communities. Migrants and receiving communities would need to develop a better understanding and awareness of each other to foster positive experiences and relationships (Drinkall et al., 2019). EL students in the U.S. experience not only cultural but educational dissonance. The disconnect between their heritage and the U.S. culture can make it difficult for EL students to relate to academic content and new ways of living and learning. Not only do EL students experience these disharmonies, but teachers also experience these dissonances (Winstead & Wang, 2017). While EL students wrestle with the challenges of meeting content area standards, teachers across the U.S. lack professional and cultural training on EL teaching and learning (Samson & Collins, 2012; Lopez et al., 2013; Floyd-Faught, 2019). Schools also lack bilingual instructors. A telling tale about this issue is reflected in one of the teacher's sentiments: "We definitely believe preserving their primary language is always going to be a good practice to uphold. We are not as sure about how to help aid . . . due to limited . . . bilingual teachers." (Hansen-Thomas & Grosso Richins, 2015, p. 770, as cited in Gagnon et al., 2019)

The United States not only lacks bilingual teachers, but its teaching force also lacks cultural and language expertise to support EL students. Teacher representation does not correlate to the population of EL students they serve (Winstead & Wang, 2017). Having bilingual or own-

race teachers and teachers of color within the schools is beneficial in addressing various types of dissonances such emotional, mental, and cultural that EL students experience in the classroom. Teachers of color have gained more favor with students than white teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Gerber, 2022). Cherng and Haplin (2016) also found that a teacher of color workforce positively influences student achievement and engagement in school. These teachers may have already weathered discrimination and the challenges of being in underrepresented populations. Therefore, their experience helps build strong relationships with students and assists students in processing and managing their learning in school. While there are many ethnic teachers on the Westside of Oʻahu, there is a paucity of a Micronesian and Marshallese teaching force where the FSM and RMI EL students attend school (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Education Accountability Resource Center Hawaiʻi, 2022). As stated earlier, the lack of bilingual teachers or teachers of color is one of many issues facing U.S. schools working to support EL students. Therefore, schools in the U.S. need to prepare to teach EL students in culturally responsive and sustaining ways. Culturally responsive and sustaining teachings allow social networking to improve language learning (Willson, 2015), recognize the students' Indigenous cultural assets and ways of knowing in the classroom, broaden their understanding, celebrate their unique gifts, and rejoice in their cultural differences. Schools with teachers who are specialized in EL teaching and have some form of EL training have higher EL achievement than schools that do not (Lopez et al., 2013). It is important to note that the Hawaiʻi State Department of Education has mandated that Hawaiʻi teachers have at least six credits in teaching EL students (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Education, 2019). Also, educational professionals have advocated for a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum that meets the needs of EL students, even those from the FSM and RMI (Nimmer, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017; Twomey et al., 2017). It is evident

from the literature that EL students from the FSM and RMI have faced much disharmony in education due to colonization and the historical effects of educational and policy changes. These students will continue to fill U.S. classrooms. Having culturally responsive and sustaining teachings in U.S. schools coupled with professionals who know how to sustain the EL students' languages and ways of life can alleviate the students' academic sufferings and create a sense of community and connection to academic success.

Sense of Belonging

Someone once said fitting in is doing and being like everyone else, and belonging is feeling accepted no matter your differences. EL students and families from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands experience racism and discrimination in Hawai'i (Iding et al., 2007; Okamoto et al., 2008; Fujimori-Kaina et al., 2019), which is a critical matter that needs to be addressed. A sense of belonging is achieved when one is loved and positively connected with others (American Psychological Association, 2023b). Migrating to the U.S. begins a new chapter of EL students' lives. Being in a new country is hard whether they were born or migrated into it. It involves homesickness and longing for home, friends, and family. While migrating is an exciting undertaking, it also involves mental and emotional distress, such as longing and homesickness, which can have devastating effects on children if the homesickness continues and becomes critical (Fisher, 1989; VanTilburg, 1996). EL students also have unique differences from those in the receiving countries. For many, this is the first time they have flown in an airplane, ridden in a car, experienced different weather and culture shock, spoken a new language, and learned a whole new way of being. These are common human emotions that one experiences when migrating to new lands leaving families and familiar surroundings behind. Homesickness can affect one's health and function in a new environment. Ferrara (2020) points

out that homesickness is one of the difficulties with children who migrate, with children often yearning for home and many feeling anxious and abandoned, making it hard to adjust to their new home. To combat homesickness, having social support and a sense of belonging allow humans to live authentic, satisfying lives. Maslow (1954) introduced the theory of the human hierarchy of needs, which suggests that human needs include psychological safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization; these needs are the basis for human connections and development. To add to Maslow's philosophy of human needs, Baumeister and Leary (1995) created the belongingness theory. This theory proposes that the desire for humans to form positive relationships with each other is innate and almost universal among all people; these human connections make them happy and satisfied with life. However, when these relationships and familiarities are cut and lacking, humans experience emotional and mental disharmony.

Knowing these theories and human needs, one needs to look at how the lack of familiarities, human connections, and means to satisfy these needs affect EL students, even those from the FSM and RMI. As mentioned earlier, EL students from the FSM and RMI come from a place where families are of the utmost importance, and people pull together to support each other and show love. They come with varying differences in cultures, languages, ethnicities, socio-economic, and racial uniqueness. One of the most significant needs of EL students who migrate to the U.S. is to transition from longing and homesickness for the native lands to belonging in the new spaces they occupy by forming new relationships and meeting their basic needs, as Maslow suggests. The idea of belonging has been written about extensively. It shows in over a thousand peer-reviewed articles in ERIC on various aspects and methods of building a sense of belonging in schools and communities. Since this study focuses on EL students from the FSM and RMI on

the Westside on the island of Oʻahu, it is crucial to see how a sense of belonging is addressed in the schools and spaces these EL students occupy.

The Hawaiʻi Department of Education (HIDOE) recognizes the need for students and staff within the school community, no matter where they come from, to feel that they belong in these learning environments and have an essential contribution to make. The HIDOE addresses this mission by establishing the Na Hopena Aʻo HĀ: BREATH (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Education, 2015), a framework focusing on "strengthening a sense of belonging, responsibility, excellence, aloha, total well-being, and Hawaiʻi" (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Education. (2015, p. 2). Though focused on Indigenous Hawaiʻian values, this inclusive framework is suitable for EL students and their families, as it includes the practice of beliefs that are universal to all people. While HĀ guides the work of Hawaiʻi schools, the real impact is how EL students and their families feel and are blessed by the policies and work within this framework.

Laws Governing Language Support for ELs

It is crucial for all educators, especially teachers of EL students, to critically examine and question policies, the interpretation, and the over-interpretation of policies that impact them and EL students. One critical aspect of policies governing the education of EL students is the language and perspective from which the policies were created. Valdez et al. (2016) posit that the language of the laws reflects the dominant group, their ideas, and cultural norms, which negates the multicultural and plurilingual student population. For example, civil rights laws obligate schools to guarantee equal access to education for all EL students, as reflected in these statements from the Laus vs. Nichols court case published by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR):

> Where the inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national
> origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program

offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language

deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students. Any ability

grouping or tracking system employed by the school system to deal with the special

language skill needs of national origin-minority group children must be designed to meet

such language skill needs as soon as possible and must not operate as an educational

deadend or permanent track. (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights,

2020, para. 20)

While the memo mandates that schools act to address access to education for EL

students, it discriminates based on language as it shows that EL students are not given

opportunities, in the first place, to participate in school programs because of the lack of English

language skills. The law does not specify how school districts address EL student needs and how

these actions are carried out, except that it is left to school districts to decide how to address the

language needs of EL students for these students to participate in school programs. The language

of the law can lead to misinterpretation and overinterpretation of the law, which can negatively

affect EL students. The law also does not consider the multiculturalism and plurality of

languages among the student population. This law has resulted in court cases by EL students and

their families against the violation of their rights to equal education, which led to changes in

policies for the education of EL students. One of the profound responses by the U.S. Supreme

Court reflects the need for schools to revamp educational programs to meet the needs of EL

students. In its statement in Lau vs. Nichols, the U.S. Supreme Court declares, "There is no

equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers,

and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any

meaningful education." (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2020, para. 9)

The OCR provided guidelines for school districts to ensure their programs effectively serve EL students. Schools are attempting to support EL students; however, schools need to involve the voices and stories of EL in their policymaking and program implementation. A few items of interest from the OCR fact sheet include:

- School districts must have procedures in place to accurately and timely identify potential EL students. Most school districts use a home language survey at the time of enrollment to gather information about a student's language background and identify students whose primary or home language is other than English.

- School districts must then determine if potential EL students are in fact EL through a valid and reliable test that assesses English language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing.

- EL students are entitled to appropriate language assistance services to become proficient in English and to participate equally in the standard instructional program within a reasonable period of time.

- School districts can choose among programs designed for instructing EL students provided the program is educationally sound in theory and effective in practice. (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division & U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, n.d.)

These are good recommendations; however, nowhere does it mention the need to acknowledge and utilize EL students' cultures, gifts, and diversities in school programs, let alone assess EL students' proficiency in their heritage language and more importantly these recommendations left out using EL students' native language in learning. Making this clear in the language of the policy can remove misinterpretation as to how EL students need to be supported. The

identification of potential ELs is done at the registration, where the parents indicate whether or not there is another language spoken at home other than English on the SIS-10W enrollment form. Assessing the needs of students for EL services and creating a program for EL student success are left to the school, which is understandable. However, the language of the law, written from the culture of the host group, again pushes out Indigenous cultural experts, even the elders, parents, and their children, who could have critical inputs into making these laws (Cun, 2020). How does Hawaiʻi meet the needs of EL students? The HIDOE EL Guidance Manual defines an English language learner:

> An individual, whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the: ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or opportunity to participate fully in society. (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, 2019a, p. 17)

The Hawaiʻi DOE's vision for English Learners (ELs) states, "Hawaiʻi's English Learners are educated, healthy, and joyful lifelong learners who develop their cultural and linguistic identities in order to contribute positively to our community and global society." (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, 2019a, p.15) To achieve this vision, "Hawaiʻi's public schools foster socially and culturally supportive environments, provide English Learners with rigorous content and linguistic instruction to ensure academic success, and engage meaningfully with parents, families, and community." (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, 2019a, p.15). It seems Hawaiʻi local policies acknowledge that EL students come with language and cultural gifts that should be considered

when supporting EL students. A measure of the successful implementation of these policies to support EL students can be found in the stories of EL students and their families. It is crucial to determine how schools on the Westside implement the policy to actualize these services for students.

Preparation for Education and Migration

Different countries and school systems use different processes and requirements. It seems the FSM and RMI do not look at age as a marker of maturity and appreciate that their children continue their academic learning until they reach scholarly maturity in this sphere of development. One Micronesian EL student in my class did not come to school because he believed he had time and years to catch up, like his uncle, who graduated at age 26 from a high school in Micronesia. He was shocked to find out that in the U.S., if he did not have the required credits to graduate by age 18, he could not continue with his high school education. He made a good effort to graduate after receiving that piece of information. In the U.S., students not in the special education (SpEd) program age out of the high school system when they turn 18. Knowing the different policies and requirements can help Micronesian students and their families better prepare for their new schools and communities before migrating to the U.S.

As stated earlier, the Compact of Free Association between the U.S. and the regions, including the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau, provides opportunities for Indigenous islanders to migrate to the U.S. to live, work, and study. It is essential to know how families from the island nations prepare for such a big transition in their lives. How do these preparations affect settling into new academic learning environments and communities in the U.S.? Learning in Indigenous cultures starts with age-appropriate tasks until the child progresses, and the tasks change accordingly (Thomas, 1993). The success of any undertaking depends on

good preparation and what is in one's control. The same principle applies to student success. Preparation is multifaceted, including personal preparation, family environment and economy, personal circumstances and beliefs, culture, language fluency, and years of formal education. Religious beliefs are another aspect of human development that can affect decision-making.

Foster and Hezel (n.d.) report almost everyone in Micronesia is a Christian. How these elements influenced EL students to be successful in schools in their native homes can provide insights into how these preparations carry over to affect students from the FSM and RMI in their new U.S. schools. As seen from school reports on Micronesian students, many out-of-school populations are not prepared academically to succeed in local and U.S. schools. It is well documented that preparation from an early age determines future success in academic grades, yet EL students from the FSM and RMI continue to struggle in academic settings. A study on the academic achievement of COFA migrants in Guam, where the largest population of COFA migrants attend school, shows students from the FSM and RMI in elementary, middle, and high school score lower than non-COFA populations on all SAT-10: Reading, Math, and Language Arts (Stewart et al., 2017). The study suggests, among other things, a need for preparation as possibilities for the students' academic struggles. While the study points out the lack of preparation, the study does not provide suggestions on how students can prepare to be successful in school.

Historical Factors Regarding Who "Drop Out"

Historically, secondary schools across the U.S. use a mixture of failing grade point average (GPA), poor attendance, suspension from school, and failing courses (Deussen et al., 2017; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Sheng et al., 2011) to track students at risk of dropping out. Generally, reasons for dropping out of school are unique to each individual: bad grades,

lagging in schoolwork, wanting to get a GED somewhere else, disliking school, working and

taking care of the family, suspension, not being able to participate in school and work

simultaneously, finding that school would not help them achieve their goals, pursuing job

training, and social influence of peers who dropped out (Dupéré et al., 2021; McDermott et al.,

2018). Deussen et al. (2017) and Sugarman (2019) state although schools across the nation use

common indicators to identify who is at risk of dropping out, there is a lack of conclusive

correlation that those indicators cause EL students to drop out that so much is unknown about EL

students' experience to determine what causes them to drop out and stay in school. On the other

hand, a recent report by Rodriquez et al. (2020) on challenges that increase the dropout rate of

EL students mentions that EL students drop out at a higher rate than non-EL students due to

many factors such as linguistic and socioeconomic background, instructional challenges at

school and support services offered by the school. According to Rodriquez et al. (2020), the EL

dropout phenomenon is underreported and a complex issue because while some of the factors

that affect the dropout of EL students are the same as the general population, the EL dropout is

particularly unparallel to the former due to EL students' educational experiences in their native

countries and host country and their linguistic repertoire. After delineating several reports on the

dropout dilemma, Rodriquez and her team made some recommendations that merit mentioning:

engage parents in resolving the absenteeism dilemma, offer a variety of extracurricular activities

for students to connect with peers, provide enrichment activities, utilize data systems to track

struggling EL students and offer appropriate support, capitalize on EL students language and

cultural assets, provide resources and PD for teachers, provide rigorous and relevant instructions

and expose EL students to opportunities in the next level of education (college), enroll in

advanced placement classes and instead of blaming the students for dropping out or having bad

attendance and scores, school leaders need to look at the school structure and offerings to see how these impact kids. Rodriquez et al. (2020) also recommend that more research be done in the EL dropout issue to affect school reforms and address the problem. Thus, this study addresses the dropout of EL students from the FSM and RMI.

It is commendable that some schools have implemented dropout interventions, such as identifying those with bad attendance and providing student support both individually and in groups (Deussen et al., 2017; Rodriquez et al., 2020); however, student perceptions and stories as to why they dropped out of school are missing. An interesting report by the Pew Research Center in 2018 states that 72% of EL students aged five to seventeen born in the United States and attending the U.S. public school system did not speak English very well. The figure above is an alarming number that should be important in any discussion about the EL dropout phenomenon and the struggles of EL students in education systems that address their academic needs and multiple identities. A search for "ELL dropout intervention" in ERIC resulted in only one peer-reviewed article from the last ten years and only two in the last two decades. If EL students drop out at a higher rate than non-EL students, why is there a lack of studies on this matter? An important observation from the literature is the paucity of the student's perspectives regarding the cause of students dropping out of school. It is crucial to consider that EL students are of different backgrounds. Callahan (2013), Deussen et al. (2017), and Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) wrote that many EL students are either U.S. or foreign-born. Some come with either formal or no formal education. Many begin school in their heritage countries, and some start in U.S. high schools. Others are not literate in both their native language and English. For EL students, the warning indicators common among the general population are not enough to assess what keeps EL students engaged in school. For students from Micronesia, aggregating their data with the

Native Hawaiʻian and Pacific Island figures presents challenges in truly knowing their needs and assets. When data is aggregated, school offerings supporting EL students do no justice and are inequitable because students can be from the same continent but are culturally, linguistically, and racially different. The needs of different populations from the different islands in Micronesia are unique and need targeted interventions. For any initiative and policy to effectively prevent dropouts, it should be intentional to meet the various circumstances facing dropouts. Due to their unique language needs, EL students need different indicators to assess their success and prevent dropping out. Most importantly, while there are issues that affect EL drops that are out of the control of the school institutions, EL students who dropped out of school need to tell the stories of their school experiences to understand better the causes of their dropping out and improve school and community offerings for EL students and their families.

Conclusion

The Indigenous FSM and RMI social structure values family, lands, and traditions. The people of the FSM and RMI possess invaluable funds of knowledge and are successful in many areas of culture and life. They lived off their lands and the sea, passed on their stories orally, and children learned from adults to carry out cultural practices and preserve traditions. However, colonization has eroded and erased many essential things pertaining to the people and culture of FSM and RMI that, result not only in cultural and educational dissonance but also in the migration of these individuals away from their beloved islands into the U.S. The U.S. school systems have identified and implemented policies and programs supporting their students; however, EL students from Micronesia continue dropping out. The various *sulu* (lights) offered by other researchers have extensively illuminated the dropout phenomenon and its possible ill-related companions. However, there is a paucity of studies on the EL dropout phenomenon,

especially those from Micronesia, which needs addressing. The voices of EL alumni from Micronesia can transform school offerings for EL students from the region, their peers, and their families. This study focused on the lived experiences of Micronesian EL alumni to better understand the factors that led to their dropout. The study hoped to gather the commonalities among the experience of the alumni who dropped out, those who graduated, and the elders from the FSM and RMI regions to gain insight into their experience and to address the problem faced by the EL students from the regions and their families. This study not only adds to the limited literature on understanding the EL dropout dilemma, but also contributed to the paucity of literature on understanding and supporting Micronesian EL students and their families.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Angang chok aramas - Chuukese Proverb

The value and power of people and unity

Only through people that the work can be done

This chapter presents the study's methodological approach, beginning with the methodological framework, description of the participants, description of the site, data gathering procedure, pilot study, and concludes with limitations.

Table 2 below includes the research question, data collection approach, participants display, and the process for data analysis.

Table, 2. Data Overview

Research Question	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data	Analysis Approach
What factors contributed to the "dropping out" of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI in this study who live on the Westside of Oʻahu?	One-on-one semi-structured Interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015; Bevan, 2014)	Gender, Ethnicity	Themes or interrelated themes - Looking at common essential and critical expressions of experience. (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Sundler et al., 2019)

Table 2 Data Overview

Methodological Framework(s)

Qualitative Approach

This study used a qualitative approach to understand the lived experiences of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI students who dropped out. While quantitative methods measure how many alumni graduated and dropped out, statistics often do not explain the "why" of the data. This study addressed the "why" through a qualitative lens. Qualitative studies honor humans, truths, and lived experiences instead of seeing them only in data and statistics. Creswell and Baez (2020) point out that qualitative research is best when telling the stories of those we know little about, such as those who are racially, economically, and culturally different from those in conventional or non-indigenous groups. The authors also explain that a qualitative study creates a multi-perspective of what the participants experience over time as they reflect on what happened. Creswell and Baez (2020) argue that the usual research tools developed on non-Indigenous groups do not fit Indigenous people whose stories have yet to be shared. Thus, qualitative research provides the opportunity for researchers to visit the places where those whose voices have not been heard experience the world, hear their stories, and learn how the Indigenous talk about things they experience. The data then provides a sophisticated understanding of the problem and situation. The participants in this study are the Indigenous of the FSM and RMI. As the Chuukese proverb rightly expresses - it is doing the study with them that birth understanding and solutions, which critically impacts equity in the work we seek to do. The study employed qualitative methods to gather the participants' stories to discover their lifeways and their experiences with the school and community that affected the decision to discontinue their high school education. The findings could address issues facing EL students from the FSM and RMI and their families.

Phenomenology

In particular, this study used a descriptive phenomenological approach, a type of qualitative research that seeks to understand the participants' lived experiences (Bevan, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenology is a concept that emerged in 1797 to mean the study, observation, and experiencing the physical and natural world (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2021a). Smith (2013) defines phenomenology as the study of "first-person view" or "conscience experience" (Smith, 2013. para. 4, 20); it is participants' assigning meaning to experience and examining how they mentally, emotionally, and physically experience with linguistic activities and other phenomena in the world. Phenomenological research seeks to examine and discover a deeper understanding and find the "essence of shared experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26) or commonalities among the experiences of participants (Creswell & Baez, 2020). According to Reiners (2012), descriptive phenomenology is a research method founded by Husserl, a German mathematician, to focus on what people experience and how they interact with those experiences. The phenomenology method removes guessing and prejudging what the participants experienced. The phenomenological method allows the researcher to ask the participants about their experiences with particular environments and phenomena. It considers that participants' experiences involve recalling what happened and re-experiencing reactions, ideas, and emotions, which is essential in gaining insight into people's decisions and motivations. A phenomenology method also protects the integrity of the participants' stories in that the stories are first-person accounts and not retold through secondary means. In addition, a phenomenological process provides freedom for data analysis to emerge and arrive at the findings, as phenomenological approaches are not restrictive or limited to a predetermined theory or framework (Groenewald, 2004).

Moreover, phenomenology assists us in "Understanding" (Farrell, 2020, p. 6) what the experience is like and what it means to experience something, like knowing what it means to be poor, to be happy, and the like, which is very different from understanding facts. Farrell (2020) posits that the importance of phenomenological studies within the education field is the Understanding that comes from it, which causes us to be sensitive to the needs of others with whom changes in policies and initiatives are created. The Micronesian and Marshall Islands cultures are oral societies; therefore, asking EL alumni ages 18 and older who decided to discontinue high school within the last five years to tell their lived experiences allowed the participants to use a familiar Indigenous tool to construct the meaning of their experiences. Since this study focused on exploring and understanding the experiences of EL students from the FSM and RMI that decided to discontinue their high school education, the phenomenological approach is suitable for this project.

Just as no two participants are alike, qualitative methods also take many forms. Researchers have defined the term qualitative in many ways. Ideta (1996) offers an instructive explanation regarding the qualitative concept that speaks to what this study seeks to understand. Ideta (1996) explains that the qualitative approach has no definitive definition as qualitative practice is a general system used to comprehend people and their lived experiences instead of testing a theory. If EL students were to learn this qualitative concept, they would need to access their personal experiences and see examples to understand. This example may be instructive in the spirit of seeking an understanding of what qualitative means. The song "Do Re Mi," based on the 1959 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical The Sound of Music and performed by Julie Andrews in the 1965 drama film based on the same story (Wise, 1965), teaches a principle of returning to the beginning to understand something. The basic building block for creating

melodies in music is a scale that begins with "Do Re Mi" and then progresses to "Fa Sol La Ti."

To build a foundational understanding of a qualitative study, the importance of discovering the

basics regarding the term qualitative is helpful. Understanding the genealogy of this word leads

to an epiphany and a more profound meaning as to what qualitative means, how it is served as a

basis to construct qualitative studies, why many are drawn to the concept of qualitative study,

and why qualitative study deserves its place in the world of research. According to the

Etymology Dictionary, the term qualitatif, French for physical quality, qualitativus, Medieval

Latin for quality, and qualitas, Latin for "nature and the possession of qualities," have existed

since the early 15th century (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2021b, para. 1). It is quite

enlightening to know that the qualitative concept emerged in the 15th century, also known as the

Middle Ages or Renaissance, a time of growing economically and territoriality. Besides these

growth, philosophies and ideas of the time were the birth of national identity, cultural

preservation, and the idea of universities. In Europe, humans have begun an interest in studying

and understanding humans and their nature.

To further strengthen our Understanding of qualitative, let us look at the word quality

within qualitative. In the 14th century and years following, the Aristotelian belief is that quality

is seeing people's genetic characteristics, dignity, supremacy, and social class (Online Etymology

Dictionary, 2021b). This idea of having physical characteristics and qualities is instructive in

understanding the participants, who they are (race, gender, character, economies, spirituality,

dispositions, multiple identities), their stories, decisions, and lived experiences that led to the

decision to discontinue high school. The phrase "dropout" has a negative connotation, and when

it is attached to individuals who did not finish school, there is a stigma as if there is something

wrong with those who drop out. How does this stigma affect the supremacy and social class of

participants in this study? The FSM's and RMI's superiority and social rank in the U.S. are often seen in deficit terms, such as marginalized, disadvantaged, poor, and minoritized. However, in this "qualitative" study, these Indigenous participants and their people will be seen in all of their glories: their true self, their gifts, talents, assets, and success, as well as the inglorious challenges of their lives, even the decision to discontinue their high school pursuits. An enlightening thought shared by Dr. Mary Hattori, a native Chamoru of Guåhan (Guam) and Interim Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the University of Hawai'i - Mānoa East-West Center further supports seeing all that a person is. She related the idea of seeing dropouts in the light of the breadfruit tree. It is that some immature fruits and leaves fall off the trees and become mulch for the trees. They are still part of the ecosystem, and all significantly contribute to the system (M. Hattori, personal communication, October 22, 2021). Thus, this qualitative study embraced and honored all the stories that fed (shaped) and nourished (impacted) the participants. The study also acknowledged the participants' contributions to the ecosystem.

Considering Ideta's (1996) and Creswell and Baez's (2020) explanation of the term qualitative, the etymology of the words qualitative and quality, together with clarity on phenomenology and qualitative research as the best tool for those whose voices are silent, even the EL alumni from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, this study utilized a qualitative approach to gather the participants' stories on their experiences with the school and community to understand what led to the decision to discontinue their high school education. The meanings of these experiences could lead to transformational changes in services to EL students and address the problem of practice.

Table 3 below is a display of the participant demographics.

Table, 3. Participant Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	8	44%
Female	10	56%
Other	0	0%
Ethnicity		
Chuukese	6	33%
Marshallese	11	61%
Pohnpeian	1	6%
Yapese	0	0%
Kosraean	0	0%

Table 3 Participant Demographics

Description of Participants

Focusing on fewer participants produces substantial information and insight for a phenomenological study of the individuals we know little about (Creswell & Baez, 2020). The participants in this study included 18 persons, eight males and ten females:

- seven elders from the Micronesian and Marshallese communities
- five EL alumni high school graduates from the FSM and RMI

- six EL alumni from the FSM and RMI who chose to discontinue their high school
  education

One of the elder participants is the parent of two EL alumni participants who decided to discontinue high school. There were six Chuukese, eleven Marshallese, and one Phonpeian. There was no predetermined number of genders as the study intended to understand the lived experiences of anyone who discontinued their high school education from the Westside, those who graduated from the same and the elders who resided in the same geographic location. The criteria for selecting subjects were that participants had to be 18 years and older from the FSM and RMI who are first or second-generation COFA migrants who speak and understand English. EL alumni had to be graduates and those who discontinued high school from schools on the Westside of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi, within the last five years. The elders were a mixture of parents, guardians, and grandparents of those who graduated and dropped out and those whose children were still in the high school system at the time of the study. Five participants preferred to be interviewed in person. Of the five, one preferred the interview to be done at a public park, one chose the garage for the interview, another wanted to sit under a popup tent outside the apartment complex, and two chose to do the interview inside the home. The rest preferred that their interview be on Zoom. All participants answered demographic questions before responding to the scripted and structured (Bevan, 2014) or follow-up interview questions. While I knew some who discontinued high school and also graduated, I used a snowball (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) or network sampling where those I interviewed referred me to other Micronesian and Marshallese elders and alumni participants. Once I located prospective participants, I explained who I was, the study, and its intention and asked them if they would like to help. When they agreed, I used appropriate cultural protocols to show appreciation by sharing food items (Raatior,

2017) as a token of gratitude for doing the study with me. At the end of the interview, I asked if they could refer me to others who would be interested in the study. It was instructive to get the perspectives of those who graduated not only to identify the unconventional wisdom and practices (Raatior, 2017) that the EL alumni from the FSM and the Marshall Islands used to stay in school and graduate but also to provide descriptions and insights into the schools attended by those who chose to discontinue their high school education. It was imperative to understand the experiences of those new to the community and those who have lived there for some time to understand the persistent challenges and beneficial initiatives unique to the experiences of the different groups both at and outside of school. The elders' experiences with the school and Westside community are instructive in addressing issues facing them and their families. It could mean continuing the good things that have supported them and disrupting the system so it provides what they need to be successful.

Description of Site

This study took place on the Westside of Oʻahu. A simple Google search will give one a plethora of information about this area. To be brief and to refrain from highlighting the often-negative statistics regarding the place and population on the Westside, the setting of this study is a melting pot of diasporic races, ethnicities, social classes, cultures, and some of the best people you will ever meet. Located more than 30 miles from Honolulu and nestled between the vast blue Pacific Ocean and the majestic Mount Kaʻala is the backbone of the community - the native and part-Hawaiʻians, the diasporic Polynesians, Micronesians, Marshallese, and Asians (United States Census Bureau, n.d.) from various socio-economic walks of life. In this community is the famous MA'O Farm, a Hawaiʻian initiative focused on the Hawaiʻian community and its youth and where everyone is welcome. During her reign as First Lady, Michelle Obama visited MA'O

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Farm and praised the farm as a great model of access to healthy food (Trust for Public Land, 2011). The landscape of the Westside is a sea of Hawaiʻian homestead properties, farms, condos, single-family homes, public housing, multi-million dollar homes, and expensive beachfront real estate properties within minutes of a homeless transitional shelter and a growing tent community of over 100 families and many others living in tents along some of the best beaches in the world (Waiʻanae High School, 2021). With only one road in and out of the community, the drive is a heavenly caress where one finds passports to liberation in three high and intermediate schools and seven elementary schools. Most of the residents have a high school diploma (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), and the schools received a provision where families no longer need to apply for free or reduced lunch; all students receive free meals (Waiʻanae High School, 2021).

Data Gathering Procedure

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that "the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection" (p. 27) for a phenomenological study. The interviews for this study followed the phenomenological method of interviewing suggested by Bevan (2014). Instead of conducting interviews to ask questions, Bevan (2014) suggests establishing a methodical system of interviewing individuals to avoid insufficient analyses. The researcher went into the interview as a "perpetual beginner" (Bevan, 2014, p. 138), having already completed bracketing of not only biases and beliefs about the dropout phenomenon but also engaging a system to manage critical self-reflection. Bracketing biases and beliefs provide ground for maintaining the soundness and validity of the collected lived experience and helps the researcher acknowledge and accept the participants' natural life experiences during the interview. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe semi-structured interviews as a means to "construct site knowledge" and "dig nuggets of knowledge out" (pp. 8–9) of the

participants' experience by asking scripted and follow-up questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also propose that semi-structured interviews have scripted open-ended questions to collect the same information from the participants. Patton (2015) shares the following crucial insight about interviews:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe… . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (Patton, 2015, p. 426)

The interview included "contextualizing questions" (Bevan, 2014, p. 139) that gave the participants the opportunity to share prior lived experiences that had a bearing on the phenomenon being looked at and for the researcher to elicit further descriptions where necessary for clarity. For example, dropping out of school does not occur in isolation but is interconnected with other experiences. The various aspects of the participant's life, context, and background of the lived experience influence the decision to drop out. For this phenomenological study, the interview questions were structured and descriptive (Bevan, 2014). The concept of a structured interview in a phenomenological study did not restrict the participants' experience but managed the questions and allowed the researcher the agency to plan and ask questions that led to understanding the context and background of participants' experience and the essence of the participants' story (Bevan, 2014). Asking one question was insufficient to understand a phenomenon's various facets. Because participants can experience similar phenomena, sites, or

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objects differently, Bevan (2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posit that phenomenological

researchers are free to ask the same scripted or descriptive questions of all participants. However,

the questions should be amended to suit the individual participants so that the follow-up or

structural questions solicit clarity about the particular aspect of the experience being described.

Bevan (2014) points out that to understand the phenomenon, the researcher needs not to limit

data gathering to one participant but include others who experience the same thing the researcher

wants to study. Interviewing multiple participants provides credibility and trustworthiness of the

data as the experiences can be verified by comparing these multiple conscious experiences. The

author also points out that when listening intently to the participant's description of the lived

experience, the researcher can ask questions to determine how the experience would be similar

and different for multiple participants if certain adaptations existed.

Phenomenology asks researchers who have had experiences with the subject they are

studying to bracket their biases. Hence, they engage in the interviews without asserting their

perceptions and judgment of the participants' experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bracketing

my biases began in 2020 when I started thinking about the experiences of EL alumni from the

FSM and RMI who graduated and chose to discontinue their high school education and the

elders' experiences with the schools and community. I had a notebook and a private blog where I

wrote and continued to jot down my reasons for doing this study, my assumptions as to why

students dropped out of school, and my concerns, fears, worldview, and values from which I saw

this issue. Bracketing my perceptions was beneficial during the interview. I attended to listening

and being present with the participants as they conveyed their experience without asserting

interpretation or judging what participants experienced. Bracketing and acknowledging my

biases allowed me to immerse and feel in the ways the participants lived the experience without asserting my assumptions and prejudging the experience.

I strived to understand the cultural protocols involved with asking participants for a study of this nature within the Micronesia and Marshallese populations. I sought to understand the cultural etiquette when locating participants and conversing with them in person or virtually. I was also mindful that some participants in this study who have lived in the U.S. for a long time may have adopted American ways of doing things and given them a choice of how they wanted the interview set up and carried out. Dr. Vid Riaator, a Micronesian native, shares that food is one of Micronesia's most essential parts of meetings and social gatherings (Riaator, 2017). This study utilized this advice when meeting with participants.

Conducting the Interview

The participants for this study were contacted via telephone, face-to-face, and text messages. Before the interview, participants signed consent forms (Appendix H) granted by the Depart of Human Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The consent forms included safeguards of personal information, confidentiality protection, and the participant acknowledging their consent to participate in the study, including being audio recorded. After welcoming and checking in with each participant, I read the interview introduction (Appendix J) before the semi-structured interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some interviews were about 25-30 minutes long due to the participants' English proficiency, and some were 45-60 minutes long, detailed, and in-depth. At the end of the interview, each participant had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym they would be comfortable using in this study to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Except for demographic questions, there were five scripted open-ended questions followed by follow-up or structural questions (Bevan, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to ensure

the participants elaborated on details of the experience and provided clarification. Because I did not know what the participants would share and how they would describe their experience, impromptu questions sometimes took precedence over the prepared structural questions. Micronesia is a collectivist culture, and therefore participants had the option of having an interview individually or with a group. Dr. Mary Hattori voiced that one of the Micronesian cultural protocols is for males to interview males as there may be things that males would not be open about telling a female. While none of the EL alumni male participants requested a male interviewer, an adult Ponpheian male associate of the researcher was on standby to ask questions of male participants when needed.

The study documented the participants' lived experiences and perspectives in the high school system and the community in general. Considering some of the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the participants had the option of having the interview on Zoom. Those who preferred their interviews to be done on Zoom or in person gave consent to do so. While the interview was conducted on a paid Zoom subscription, the interview was audio recorded only after each participant consented. The audio recording was done using a paid subscription to Otter.ai audio recording software. The interview was conducted at a place convenient to the participant considering the challenges of the community, including transportation issues and family commitment. The study preferred an uninterrupted environment to minimize distractions. Because the interview was audio recorded, the participant and I listened and paid attention without worrying about writing down questions and essential points. Also, since the participants were learning English, the chat feature of Zoom was a tool that supported the participants in seeing the question given verbally. After I asked each question, I then typed the question and shared it through the chat feature for the participants to see and read.

Pilot Study

  I piloted the interview questions for this study with three cohort members of the Educational Doctoral Program from Palau and Hawaiʻi to determine the cultural appropriateness of the questions and make necessary adjustments. I chose these peers because the one from Palau belongs to the Micronesian community and understands the cultural approach to questioning. Because I have established rapport with this peer, I know she would be honest in her feedback on the questions. The peers from Hawaiʻi work with Indigenous students from the Pasefika and have experience with the population with which they could give me essential feedback on the interview questions. These peers helped me change the questions from a Western-style interview into a conversational manner appropriate to the participants' culture. Because of the interview time constraints, other suggestions from peers included refining the questions by using language and ideas familiar to the participants so there was a better use of the time and gathering important information. Instead of only knowing that she dropped out, I also piloted this study by interviewing my mother, an elder in the world community and a dropout when she was 14 years old. It was significant to hear the story of my mother to finally understand her lived experiences and the factors that impacted her dropping out. The interview was conducted in Samoan. I asked her demographic questions, two of the scripted questions from this study, and the rest were follow-up questions.

  I spoke with my mother via text messaging about our interview to verify it and to see if she wanted to add anything important she left out and to remove anything she did not want to include. She did not want to add or remove anything from her story and welcomed new questions I wanted to ask. Some themes that emerged from my mother's interview included family, poverty, discrimination, self-determination, and spiritual beliefs. My familiarity with my mother

and using my native language made it easier for me to feel what she was sharing, immerse myself in her experience, and understand her story during the interview by asking many structured questions. Questions that may be sensitive to others were freely asked of my mother because we have a very close relationship. A couple of study limitations came to light during this piloted interview. I acknowledged that speaking in one's native language provides a complete understanding and clarity of thoughts and feelings. Also, those with whom I do not have a relationship might not be freely open in answering the questions. These limitations may have affected the understanding of the stories of the participants.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the impact of Covid-19 on the participants' choice of venue for the interview. The FSM and RMI Indigenous people are of a collective culture; they love to celebrate, eat, visit with each other, and worship together. However, Covid-19 forced a physical and emotional separation of people from one another. As a result of Covid-19 restrictions, I had to consider online platforms as an option for interviewing. While I could carry out a conversation on Zoom and see the participants via the computer camera, it was still a separation as the human touch, physical presence, and connection were absent. This separation due to Covid-19 may have affected the quality of the data collected. Another limitation was that the participants were selected only from the population of FSM and RMI residents on the Westside of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi. The selection was limited to EL alumni and elders. The extent to which they told their stories depended on their proficiency in English, which may have affected the quality of the collected data. Expressing oneself in the native language reveals authenticity in meaning and experience. In addition, I am not of the participants' culture, and I do not speak and cannot interpret their native languages. Also, access to the snowball sampling limited equal

representation in procuring and retaining participants. Some prospective participants moved elsewhere within Hawai'i and the continental U.S., leaving no contact information behind. Another limitation was the length of time since the participants left school. The length of time may have affected recalling their stories about their experience while attending school and living in the Westside community.

Since this study is qualitative, its outcome may not be generalized to a larger population. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the EL dropout phenomenon and the specific groups this study aimed to engage with, limiting background information that could have better informed this study. Moreover, the analysis and description of the findings in this study were limited to the researcher's experience and aptitude in qualitative studies. Lastly, my biases based on my experience learning English and my perspectives as a teacher of EL students may have affected the questions I asked, the collected data, and the interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I listened to the audio recording multiple times over and over to match the transcript to the audio and made the needed corrections. I did this to ensure I did right by each participant's story. Upon completion, I read and listened again to each interview from the three groups of participants: alum dropouts, alum graduates, and community elders. Each interview's transcript and audio recording were returned to the participants for member checking - to check for correctness and reassurance that it reflected their experience. Participants checked for accuracy and what resonated with their experience. They could add anything that may have been left out during the interview. Member checking is a practice for validating data and credibility checks (Birt et al., 2016). Upon completing the member-checking process, I read and listened again to each interview from the three groups of participants: alumni drop out, alumni

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graduates, and community elders. I looked for themes from each story and then examined what was shared among the participants' experiences within each subgroup. I then studied the themes from all three subgroups to look for commonalities or the essence of their experience.

Coding

The data analysis systematically moved from narrow to broader (Saldana, 2013). Using guidance from Saldana's (2013) coding manual for qualitative researchers, the first pass through the data was to familiarize myself with the data. The second pass was a line-by-line coding to generate in vivo codes - using the words and phrases by the participants to describe and label data sets. The third pass was categorizing the codes into themes through thematic analysis. I looked for themes from each interview within each subgroup, compared the themes from interviews within the subgroup, and then compared the themes across all three subgroups to look for commonalities or the essence of their experience. After familiarizing myself with the participants' descriptions, looking for meaning, and organizing meanings into themes, I described the common expression or theme (Saldana, 2013). The themes are described in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

"…the reason was the long walk to school…whenever I get to school I start having cramps all

over my body…my legs would go numb and sore…there's screws in my knees and I have

trouble walking…I also have asthma, so I would have a hard time breathing too."

-Lakagu

This study focused on understanding the factors gleaned from the lived experiences of EL

alumni from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands on the

Westside of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi, who pursued their own paths instead of the Western idea of high

school graduation. Through this data analysis, I was able to glean the factors that contributed to

EL alumni from the FSM and RMI discontinuing high school by gathering and analyzing their

lived experiences. Other experiences that contributed to understanding the school environment

where these EL alumni attended included EL alumni high school graduates and elders. For EL

alumni participants and elders who are first-generation COFA migrants, living in the U.S. and

enrolling in U.S. high schools was also a transition to learning English and all content areas in

the same language. Each participant's story is unique to the individual and will be honored as

such. The major themes that emerged from the participants' lived experiences in this study

include personal care, school personnel's impact, discrimination, policies' inequities, strength of

character and poverty and transience. In this chapter, I will describe these themes and subthemes

in greater detail.

Personal Care

One significant theme in the participants' stories was the exercise of their agency to

choose for themselves what to do during trying situations. While each participant did what was

best for their situation, the various accounts of the participants illuminated personal care as an

underlying substance of their decisions and experiences—the circumstances where the theme of personal care emerged involved individual choices and friends.

Individual Choices

There was chronic absenteeism among the individuals who chose not to pursue high school to graduation. While their problematic attendance may be seen as a detriment to academic progress, understanding each participant's experience is instructive. Two participants in this study chose to take care of their aging parents instead of pursuing high school graduation. As mentioned earlier, the Micronesian and Marshallese people are of a collective society - the success of the family takes precedence over the individual. LeBron James shared, "I stopped because I had to help my grandparents … and look for a job for me to help them… ." Robert said, "I live with my grandma…, my grandparents … there was nobody really around to help them make their food and stuff so I stayed. I dropped out to help them and … work a side job." Kebwe, who also chose not to pursue high school graduation, alluded to the care of parents that affected her focus as a student:

> You guys should check on your students to make sure things at home are good … cause
> in my experience my parents were beginning to become sick people and like, it stressed
> me out to the point where school is not going to help me clear my mind.

In Lakagu's experience, discontinuing school was a priority to manage the discomfort he felt in his body whenever he walked to school. What was disappointing was that even after he told his story of seeking support for the pain, he did not receive any assistance.

It is enlightening to note that none of these alumni felt they had failed school for choosing to take care of their elders and did what was best for their situation. While there is a stigma attached to discontinuing high school, the stories of these alumni did not show that these

alumni shared this belief. Caring for their parents, taking care of health issues, and successfully finding employment revealed their strength of character in navigating personal decisions, the stuff academics could not do for them and their families.

One of the most surprising revelations from the analysis is that none of these alumni were void of the desire to continue their education even after halting their high school academics. These alumni were aware of opportunities such as Job Corp for them to pursue their education later, citing getting a General Education Diploma (GED), financial increase, and other benefits from such pursuits. Robert said, "I stopped because I had to help my grandparents ... I also wanted to go to Job Corp … I think they let you finish your education there … ." LeBron James also echoed the same "I dropped out to help them [grandparents] and like work a side job … . So I was planning on going to Job Corps … ." BigT expressed "I was kicked out of 11th grade because my grades were ungreat, but my counselor was fight [for] me to join Job Corp." Kebwe joined the chorus of alumni with "Ms … actually hooked me up with Job Corp. And I was supposed to go but I didn't turn in my application in time." It is apparent that not only caring for their families was an act of personal care in the context of their culture-based collectivism, but the alumni's desire to continue their academic pursuits likewise reflects a form of personal care, knowing their opportunities are not lost as they take care of themselves and the needs of their families at this point in their lives.

For EL alumni graduates, the choice to finish what they started was personal care. Except for one who chose to resist peer pressure to stay and graduate, some chose to graduate as a bridge to the future of their lives. Others chose to graduate to take care of culture and family expectations and wanted to bring honor to their families. From the story of a Marshallese graduate, "boys have a lot more freedom"; however, girls are expected to "accomplish a lot

whether it be housewife or becoming a worker" and that "dropping out would be the biggest embarrassment." These cultural values and expectations pushed her to graduate because she did not want "to be embarrassing" her family. Mike, Mary, and AJ made personal decisions to finish high school as they hoped they would find better jobs to take care of their families. Mary said her parents reminded her not to be like them [parents], who had no formal education, but that she needed to graduate to get a better life. It seemed that a better life includes having a "good job," a "home," and taking care of one's "family." These decisions were influenced not only by parents who encouraged the alumni to get an education so they could have a better life but by the alumni's personal experiences in the world and observations of the world. It is evident in Mike's story where he mentioned, "don't like living in housing or shelter, I don't want my future family to live in a van, get a good job, a great job, make money and buy a house." Mary's parents told her that "if you are going to live in this world, and you're not going to get education" she would end up being like her parents. AJ was driven by the struggles of her sister's medical condition and the desire to care for her sister in the future. These participants' choices suggest the innate power of human agency to choose what is best for their situations. These stories reveal the power of personal care that moves one to action to accomplish good things.

A form of personal care the elder participants engaged in was using their cultural and spiritual values to navigate various experiences of their lives. The elders all prayed for their children; prayers seemed to be one of the tools the elders used to protect their children when they were away at school. Rose said of her children that she prayed "to God to guide them and protect them from harm and wrong influences" while at school. Fefin also shared that she used prayer on her son "I just prayed for him for that problem [bullying] but now it is gone." Fefin attributed the resolution of the bullying to her prayers. When her daughter told her that she [daughter] was not

smart, Dolphin taught her, "If you wanna be smart, you ask God to help you to be smart."

Dolphin also mentioned that she and her husband were saving to buy their own home. They want

to bring home their daughter, who lives in a long-term care facility because their current place

does not have room and electrical capacity for her medical equipment. She commented, "It's a

long, long, long goal for us and my husband. Only God can help us." Chine taught her children

peaceful means of dealing with conflicts, such as telling them to "just walk away, let it go, let it

go." Linda and Tony advocated for their son by sharing that teachers need to find other means of

assessing their son to stop him from skipping school when he is uncomfortable presenting in

front of the whole class. It occurred from the lived experiences of the elders that their spiritual

practices and advocacy were forms of taking care of not only their concerns but ways to achieve

the goals they have for themselves and their families.

Friends

Having friends is a crucial part of human experiences. The theme of friends showed up

repeatedly within and among the experiences of the EL alumni. These friends contributed to the

positive school experiences, helped them understand complex assignments, and provided support

during challenging situations and to socialize. Instead of paying attention to disparaging remarks

from peers, having friends, she could "go with" helped AJ make it through school. AJ shared:

> … there were kids that tried to put me down by saying things, but I just moved along …
>
> go with my friends … have fun. … I made a lot of friends, good friends, and they helped
>
> me a lot in my classes too … and I helped them with their work also. … if you can deal
>
> with the bad side of the school, like the kids who try to put you down then you … can
>
> keep going into your education. But if you let them get to you, then it's not gonna get you

anywhere ... having fun and just learning more and more. … I think that's why I'm able to

graduate this year … I'm really thankful for … my … friends.

Luna attributed her positive school experience to friendly students and mainly to her friends, who were part of her inspiration to stay in school "having them sit next to me so I can write and feel smart…and we would work together." For the rest of the alumni, having friends who were Micronesians, Marshallese, Samoans, Filipinos, and those who were welcoming, humble, and loving was one of the good things about their school experience. Perhaps one of the unique benefits of having friends who are not English learners is the opportunity to develop English language skills. Most of the elders did not speak of their children's friends; however, one parent talked of the benefit of her children making friends with local kids, "What helped them a lot was they were friends with local kids … not really friends with other Marshallese kids … so their friends at the high school kind of help them understand and pick up more of the language because they will converse in English as much as they could." From the participants' experiences, though unpleasant experiences occurred at school, having friends served as a buffer against such events to brush off the ignorance of others in order to be happy, learn, and achieve a goal.

Impact of School Personnel

Schools serve as places of social and academic interactions. The most frequently occurring theme within and among the experiences of EL alumni and elders was positive and unpleasant encounters with school personnel. School personnel appeared to have an encompassing impact on the participants' experience. These experiences involved student support in its various forms, push factors, English Language Learners' teaching skills, schools as allies, and invisibility.

Table 4 reflects the themes that reported the positive experiences of EL alum graduates with school personnel.

Table, 4. Thematic Array

	Teachers	Counselor	Security Guard	Cafeteria Workers
Impact of School Personnel Care	Did their best to teach and help students with whatever is needed such as passing classes	Helped students apply for college and scholarships	Checked on kids to make sure they adhere to school policies	Good at serving food to the students

Table 4 Thematic Array

Student Support

Most participants shared positive experiences with school personnel who helped them in one way or another. The interactions with school personnel suggested that the favorable and unfavorable emotions tied to participants' lived experiences helped the participants remember these encounters even after some years had passed. The details of the positive experience included "some of the teachers were good," "I like my teachers," teachers... explained lessons easily where I could understand," and friendly security guards who checked on students. In addition, alumni acknowledged teachers who helped them, counselors who assisted in applying for college and scholarships, and administrators who were available to assist with severe issues of bullying. Besides these school personnel, Mary mentioned the positive service from the "ladies in the cafeteria" who served the students well. From the participants' stories, it appeared that the schools had different offerings for students. Some alumni and elders appreciated the various course offerings and school activities such as volleyball, softball, basketball, the Junior

Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), and Career Fairs. Those who attended the English

classes for EL students suggested the advantages of being in that course offering. Chine shared

that her daughter did well in the English class for EL students because "... it went at a slower

pace where she could understand before she could move on to a higher pace". Mary was in the

same course as Chine's daughter and shared that she was comfortable asking questions in that

class but not in other content areas because she felt the teachers would not understand her.

Others enjoyed being in student clubs such as the Gaming and Hospitality clubs. It is apparent

that the schools strived to support students in many areas; however, it is also imperative for

schools to consider the voices and stories of students and their families that highlight what they

needed and how they wanted to be supported.

Push Factor

The multitude of unpleasant experiences among the participants is helpful in

understanding the experiences of the alumni and parents in this study. One of the concerns of

some alumni and their elders was that no one was "pushing" the students to be successful. One of

the alumni said:

> I felt like I would have graduated if they just push me hard enough to want to come to
>
> school. I wish like their security is more on top of it because it was so easy to walk off
>
> campus … the security guards were there for nothing like they have security guards for
>
> nothing. Because we got away with a lot of things, a lot of things. I think it was part of
>
> why I didn't even care about school.

One of the elders echoed the same sentiment:

> … welcome the kids more and push them to better themselves because you know, like,
> when they were in intermediate … they had officer get on their tail to like push them ….
> They started to slack but then they stayed with them and worked with them. So that's why
> they completed the intermediate. While they were in [high] school, … that's when they
> fell back on everything like they don't like go … . I didn't know if they were having any
> issues with other kids or things like that … I was in the dark but I don't know what's
> going on…they weren't really pushed to do anything….It's easy for them to skip school.
> Whenever they wanted to walk out, they walked out to … go to the bush … .

These experiences sounded the alarm on the need for school personnel to be more strict and hold higher expectations of students. It appeared that the lack of student support from school personnel also led to a disconnect between the school and the home. It seemed school personnel were ignorant that Micronesian and Marshallese people work collectively and communally for the betterment of each child, family, and village. Most parents reported the disengagement between home and school, pointing to the lack of communication from the school about their children and their academic progress. It is a common belief in education that attendance affects graduation, and often the home seems to be blamed for the attendance dilemma. However, the experience of the elders and alumni in this study showed that the lack of student support from the school also impacted school attendance. Parents seemed to want to be more involved in their children's school activities, yet they were not informed. Rose shared that "... teachers don't really get in touch with parents more" and "parents don't really pay attention to school and stuff because they're not being called or talked about [activities] to them." Jino sounded frustrated at the lack of communication from the school regarding her children that she did not know "what's

going on" and what her children should do. She also expressed that the schools did not demonstrate support by not checking on the welfare of the children and parents. A contrast was drawn between the services Jino's children received in middle school and what they got in high school. Jino consistently pointed to the parole officers that worked with her children in middle school that helped the children stay and complete intermediate schooling; however, the children did not have parole officers in high school, which Jino conveyed affected her children not completing high school. There was also a contrast between school personnel in the Westside and the U.S. mainland. One Marshallese mother explained:

> I went to mainland. I see the high school kids, when they're not in school, they send somebody … like you didn't even ask … at nine o'clock they send somebody to see what's going on. They don't have rides … or sick and things like that and if they don't have rides then they take them to school. Not like over here.

The story showed the need for school personnel to pay more attention to the students who have attendance issues and visit their homes often. One of the best ways to demonstrate how to support students is by looking at tourist attractions and college campuses. These places offer personal tours to their visitors. They provide personal tour guides to take visitors on an exploratory and informative adventure where the guests learn about the history and essential features of the place. This customer care engenders a memorable experience that can result in return visits and business growth. The conversations with alumni and elders conveyed that they wished for this care. A parent shared the following:

> … send someone to help them adjust to school. Over here really is way different from back home. Like I said before, some kids when they don't know things and they're not

used to it and nobody is helping them they don't like continue. They feel like they're left

behind, or they feel like they're failure and things like that.

It is the epitome of good personnel service to provide a personal guide or a mentor for EL

students and their families, perhaps when they first enroll in school. Instead of handing students

their schedules and a school map, hoping they will find their way around campus, BigT wished

for school personnel to take students to "show them the class," "show them the room number,"

"show them their teacher," "show them the teacher's name." This participant spoke of the small

and simple things schools can do to support students and families from the FSM and RMI. These

may seem small to some, but they are the big things that make a difference in the experience of

EL students new to U.S. schools. While high schools are not businesses working for profit, they

do serve the public, where students and families are their customers. They are paying members

of the school community in the form of tax contributions and deserve the best care. The

individuals in this study needed this service, but the school did not provide it. Therefore the

schools lost valuable members of their community - no return visits and no return customers.

English Language Learners' Teaching Skills

When teaching EL students, the alumni, and parents shared the lack of teacher skills

when instructing. Most alumni found that U.S. schools were challenging. These alumni did not

learn to read, speak, and write in English in their home countries before they immigrated to the

U.S. and had no access to translations of English materials to their native languages at their U.S.

schools. The teachers did not have the skills to support students English language acquisition to

access academic content. The teachers' paucity of skills in teaching EL students was not only a

concern for the alumni who did not pursue high school graduation but also for those who

graduated and the community elders. Linda and Tony conveyed that their son cried and stayed

home from school whenever teachers scheduled student presentations. The presentation may have been for one class, but the son missed all other classes because the teachers did not provide other means of assessing this EL student's understanding. The saga went on without alternative means of student support. Robert shared that the teacher showed an example of completing schoolwork, but he said, "I really didn't understand it. They were going too fast for me to understand it. I couldn't follow the examples." BigT wished he got a translation of English to Marshallese to English because he could listen in English, but he could only speak Marshallese, which made school hard for him. LeBron James spoke of his classes, "It was a little bit hard for me because I didn't really …understand … everything … I don't practice." This same alumnus also wondered why the school discontinued an English class for EL students he was a part of. It is challenging to practice when one does not understand what is being taught and the support students need is eliminated. Mary's story showed the need for schools to provide equitable services to ramp up EL students' proficiency in English. Mary said she "did not like the fact that she graduated with a 30% English" proficiency; she wished she was fluent in English when she graduated. For her, being unable to understand English, should her teacher come to help keep her from asking questions, "I feel like every time I … ask for help … the teacher come and talk to me to help me, and I'm not gonna understand." Luna, a multilingual alumni graduate, remarked on her struggle to form English sentences, "English is not … my strongest suit, but if I have to write it down or think about it, I don't know how to form … words into a proper sentence to meet teachers' expectations … ." The experiences of Luna and Mary showed teachers lacked skills to support these EL alumni in their struggles to learn and produce academically in English. Chine shared how her daughter struggled in other core classes where she "just sit there and not say anything." This mother expressed:

… because the math teacher or the history teacher … science teacher would not take into consideration that she has English as her second language, so he will just teach the class like all of these kids was on the same level of understanding English ….

A participant observed that some teachers did not seem to want to teach. They would offer assignments without teacher demonstration, let alone understanding that these alumni are EL students with little to no English and, therefore, would be unable to access and complete the assignment. The feeling of failure from such assignments had a negative impact on students' view of teachers and their desire to come to school. There was a sentiment from the participants to "hire teachers that want to teach instead of hiring teachers that just [say] … here read this and bring in a report and I'll read it. They're not actually teaching." It is apparent that EL alumni struggled with accessing knowledge and skills in English, a language they wrestled with speaking, reading, and writing. They also experienced language discrimination when they had to learn content areas in English without instructional support due to teachers having no EL teaching training.

Schools as Allies

Some may have the opinion that chronic absenteeism is a result of a lack of parental support. An instructive finding from the conversations with alumni and parents is that this is not the case. One of the alumni said the times he refused to go to school either because he was tired in the morning or woke up late at 8:00 am, his parents told him to go to school. When he refused, his parents continued to tell him to go. Another alumnus who lived with his parents said his parents supported him by telling him to "Go to school." Perhaps parents needed to do more than tell their children to go to school, but what opportunities were available to parents to learn new methods to motivate their children? Parents tend to do the same things if there is no alternative to

the current behavior. It appeared the parents did their part by encouraging their children to attend school because they wanted their children to be successful. However, the elders wanted the high school personnel to be equal partners in motivating their children to do well. In speaking of school personnel as an influential force and ally in helping the children, one elder explained:

> I get motivated too because I know that somebody is with me trying to push them to do better in school ... the parents can only be blamed so much for them [students]...when they were in intermediate and the state was working with them, it helped me a lot. Really, a lot. Because sometimes you can push kids to school but then if nobody's there to take it from wherever you need help with them that's it … . They no like because they don't have motivation.

When EL teaching skills are missing from teachers' instruction repertoire, and the lack of seriousness in reinforcing consistent attendance, EL students and their parents experience dissonance and feel unsuccessful. It also seems kids may not always be motivated; therefore, mentors and school personnel would need to train kids to learn discipline.

The participants also asked school personnel to be allies in providing the following services: translating English materials into their native language and after-school tutoring programs. Some elders shared that parent notifications from the school were not translated into their native language, so they could not understand what it said. How can parents support their children and school initiatives without clarity and meaning from materials not translated into the parents' native language? It is imperative to understand that not providing translations of parent notifications in students' home languages is a violation of civil rights laws. Other elders expressed that some letters were translated, but the translation needed to be done correctly because, for some Micronesians, the Micronesian translation was not in their dialect. Some

Marshallese parents had to google some of the unfamiliar English words to understand the content of the letter. When asked if they understood what the school sent home and if the parent notifications were translated into their native languages, Fefin shared that she could understand some; however, "...some of them are hard. You know, the hard English word… it's a little bit harder for me." Lind and Tony conveyed that the letters were "...English only…we understand it sometimes, but it's good to…translate it to our language…sometimes we can read it, but it's not our language. We need to know to understand it because I can understand English, some other Marshallese don't."

In addition to providing translations in their native languages, the participants asked for after-school programs, tutoring, and a mentorship program to support students. Chine, an elder participant, shared:

> …a lot of kids need that support that push...have one support group for them. Like you know one place where like, you can call tutoring …to come to where they can get like Big Brother support … like one mentor or like somebody they can come to and they trust them and that person going to motivate them … can speak good things to them…open their eyes to what could happen if you do stay in school if you finish school and what could happen if you decide that you want to drop out … .

Fefin sounded the same by saying, "...not just only translate but in fact…tutoring to help him to teach him what that subject is or how to study." The utterances convey the importance of school personnel linking arms with parents in creating spaces and equitable services that could impact student success.

Besides asking for support explained earlier, the female elder participants wanted school personnel to be more strict and perhaps authoritative in supporting their children. To illustrate,

consider that an interesting word most female participants used when speaking of student support was "push." Chine and Jino shared that there was no one to really "push" the kids to do well. The Micronesian and Marshallese cultures are of the matriarchal order, and these females seemed to want the schools to be more authoritative in the way they supported their children. Jino, Chine, Fefin, Linda, and Dolphin spoke of pushing kids to be successful. This pushing of students to be successful was evident in the stories of Jino's children who completed intermediate school because there was a state authority figure, a parole officer with whom the children were accountable for their school attendance and assignments. Fefin used the word "force" to describe how to get students into school activities. Dolphin used the word "command" when she spoke of how the school should recruit Micronesian and Marshallese students to participate in sports and cultural clubs. She pointed out that the school should not invite but "command" that the Micronesian and Marshallese students join the activities to have Micronesian and Marshallese student representation in student sports and clubs. This "push" concept may be hard to manage in U.S. schools governed by a plethora of rules and regulations; however, schools should look into how this cultural aspect of raising children in the FSM and RMI community can positively influence school personnel effort in engaging students from the regions. What better allies can the schools have than parents closest to the students' challenges and aspirations?

Invisibility

The participants' experiences with the schools have existed invisibly and therefore needed to be told and understood without judgment. It may seem like the schools lack student support. However, it can also be enlightening to see these paucities as opportunities to embrace the stakeholders, even the FSM and RMI communities, honestly and dynamically to support EL students and their families. One finding within and among the participants' stories is the

acknowledgment of having no own-race teachers, even Micronesian or Marshallese teachers, in the schools the participants experienced. EL alumni Mary, Luna, and AJ stated the need for Micronesian and Marshallese teachers who can help and relate to the students in their native language. Elders Chine and Rose communicated the same idea of having an EL teacher who is Micronesian and Marshallese to help translate for the students and help them understand academic content and support retaining EL students from the FSM and RMI to complete their education. Rose, a female elder participant, used to work at the schools in the area. She said:

> ...if you look at schools that have like Marshallese, or Chuukese or Pohnpeian workers you will notice that they have more kids that are Marshallese and Micronesian kids that are really going and are really involved in school activities and stuff, but if you look at schools that they don't have any Marshallese or any Chuukese [workers] it's really hard for the kids to come along. They don't feel welcome and they feel scared because of the language barriers as I said…look at the schools that have Marshallese or Micronesian teachers, like ELL teachers, I think that's the thing…they need it. Just one person is enough for them…when I used to work there and not just me but even other Marshallese and the Chuukese ladies. When we used to work there we have plenty kids that were in the achievement awards…Math award…most improved, that's what we get most from the Micronesian and Marshallese kids - most improved certificate and stuff.

These stories are enlightening in acknowledging where the participants wished EL students and their families could be better supported.

Besides wanting Micronesian and Marshallese teacher representation in the schools, one critical element of student support that emerged from the participants' stories is the dearth of a Micronesian and Marshallese culture representation within the school communities. The

participants noted a pressing need for the schools to create a space for a Micronesian and Marshallese student club. Elders remarked that this student club is not to segregate students but to organize a club for the purpose of doing many things, such as creating a sense of belonging, building friendships, and maintaining their collective way of living to support one another. In response to the question on what the school should do to support students from the FSM and RMI, the participants responded in the following manner. Linda said:

> ...let them in group like Marshallese and Chuukese … together to help each other. …can know each other, help each other like talk to each other, … push others to help them …, to have together like sitting together like one or two hour every day … see each other talk story. What kind do they need? What kind they need help for … .? What's going on? Why you never come to school? What's your plan you like go to school like go graduating?

Chine shared:

> … incorporate their cultural things also with our mentorship guidance team in the school because … maybe that's what they're missing … because they come in and they feel like outsiders already from the get go. You know, they're different because they speak a different language and stuff and then maybe if they see that this school is like incorporating their culture, maybe it's showing them that you know, we're accepting of you guys. You know, you guys are welcome in our school and we're gonna try to provide the best educational thing for you despite your language. Just making them maybe feel more welcome …

Dolphin said:

> I'm going to say like maybe … the school can make something that is best for the
> Micronesian students. So they can be active in those things. Like cultural … talking about
> cultural or you know, language … .

Rose stated:

> … maybe try to get a group like this program for kids Micronesians and Marshallese … I
> know they have it in the mainland, that's why there's plenty of kids graduate in the
> mainland is more more like a group thing after school group where they can build each
> other up ..., cultural club...where they can come and express their cultures and stuff and
> talk about their background and how they stay together and strong with each other … .

Possibly, one of the things this Micronesian Marshallese student club could do is find

better ways to showcase the often invisible strengths of the Micronesian and Marshallese people.

In the words of AJ, "Instead of fighting back, at least fight them with better ways, like, let them

see you. That you as a Micronesian can also do good in school, instead of fighting them

physically, and they will think of you as a fool." The Micronesian and Marshallese people,

families, and students from the region could benefit from the student club, where they learn

alternative ways of managing challenges and combating the negative stereotypes against them.

The participants' lived experiences demonstrate that school personnel have a powerful

impact on students. It seemed that alumni and elders wanted more forceful actions from school

personnel as a form of student support and that parents desired to be involved in their children's

education. The stories suggested that EL students and their families would do well in the U.S.

school system if the schools seized the opportunities to embrace their ideas, put them into action,

and had robust and effective communication between school personnel and the community.

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Discrimination

The discrimination that EL alumni and parents experienced at school ranges from language discrimination, microaggression, bullying, and racism. While all participants experienced language discrimination, those who chose to discontinue their high school education did not explicitly report microaggressions, bullying, and racism. All forms of discrimination were a consistent theme among the experiences of most alumni graduates and elders. Perhaps the chronic absenteeism of some EL alumni did not provide ample time to experience what the other participants observed. Because this study focused on the experience of EL alumni who did not choose high school graduation, it is necessary to recognize that various forms of discrimination against Micronesians and Marshallese occurred at schools these alumni attended, though the participants who chose to discontinue schooling this study focused on did not acknowledge all forms of discrimination in their lived experience.

Language discrimination occurred in English-only learning pedagogies where EL students could not use their native languages and at the absence of Micronesian and Marshallese translations. While one elder reported receiving letters from the school that were translated, she said the translations were not correct and were not in her dialect, so she Googled the definitions of English words to understand what the notifications said. The problem with Googling definitions is that one English word can have multiple meanings, and when it is used in different contexts where one needs to learn English enough to understand how the word is used, it makes it hard to make meaning from it. Other elders shared that they received notifications from the school in English only, which made it hard to understand the content of the communication. Linda and Tony said they only "understand little bit" of the letters that came home because "it was not in their language." Fefin said she only understands "little bit English" and would love

translation for her family. Most EL alumni reported having difficulty understanding what they were learning either because they could not find English words to express their thoughts or because there were no translations of learning materials in their native language. Luna said, "English is not my strongest suit, but if I have to write it down or think about it, I don't know how to form it into words into a proper sentence that seems fit for teachers' expectations." LeBron James "did not feel comfortable speaking" in English in class, BigT shared that he only could listen in English, but it was "hard to speak English" in class and then asked for schools to "translate English to Marshall Island" language. Tipo commented, "I don't understand speaking English," when asked about his experience at the school. It is apparent that the English-only way of communicating in the classroom and contacting parents is a form of discrimination as it unfairly treated the FSM and RMI participants and did not support using their native language in the classroom and in school communications that went home. This discrimination prevented the participants from having engaging and meaningful experiences.

What was interesting in the findings was that only the female participants spoke about microaggression, racism, and bullying. The female EL alumni graduates experienced microaggression and racism personally; the female elders also reported microaggression, bullying, and racism experienced by their children. AJ experienced microaggression and racism at school from students who said things about her "being Micronesian." Luna heard students say "racial slurs" against Micronesians and wished that was never said. What was surprising was Mary's experience, who not only encountered discrimination against students who were English Learners but also experienced prejudice against her Christian beliefs from a girl of her own race, which affected Mary to the point of not wanting to speak to anyone. Mary stated:

…Yea I cannot believe it. I cannot believe it. I write I am a child of God. And then the girl looked at my paper and then laughing and then I hear her telling the other Chuukese girl. I was embarrassed. Well, I didn't feel like talking to anybody.

Mary's experience clearly shows that discrimination leaves a destructive emotional toll on its victims. Experiencing discrimination begs the question, how do EL students from the FSM and RMI process the emotional and mental dissonance and heal from discrimination? What are schools and communities doing to support students who experience racism and other forms of discrimination? Chine's Marshallese children experienced bullying at the hands of the Micronesian students. Consequently, Chine's children took matters into their own hands when they physically fought with the Chuukese kids. The fight resulted in Chine's children not only earning the respect of the Chuukese bullies but also putting an end to the bullying.

Consequently, the two parties became good friends. Rose said it is challenging being a Micronesian and mother of children that go to schools in the community because her children would return home with reports of things others said that "hurt them, or they've been bullied because of their race." Dolphin also shared that discrimination occurred in the schools and the community. Dolphin's daughter reported an incident where a Micronesian child drowned at a beach in a different community 30 miles away. The mother shared that her daughter said people "talk bad about Micronesians," that "they don't care," and the "child drowning and them not watching." The negative stereotypes and microaggressions associated with this incident categorized all Micronesians as uncaring bad people who do not watch their children when they go to the beach. How do parents heal from discrimination? How can parents support their children who experience the same type of discrimination when they, the parents, also struggle with the same issue? What are schools and communities doing to support parents who experience

racism and other forms of discrimination? Not only did EL students and families from the FSM and RMI experience discrimination from their peers and the community, but they also encountered the same from their teachers. One EL alumni graduate worked with teachers who are, in her own words, "racists." She pointed out:

> … it was mainly the teachers. We didn't like our teachers much ... they were racist... some teachers didn't really like Micronesians. Some could tolerate them. Some really didn't care for them … they didn't really help much for Micronesians … . I feel like we got picked on more … we're the ones who catch their attention, no matter what it is we're doing. And it's like we're always put on a spotlight … there's a lot of … racism.

The participants' experiences with discrimination of all sorts are incredibly concerning. Whether teachers and administrators were conscious of the discrimination is worth considering. There was no indication that the participants reported matters of discrimination to school personnel. It appeared that the participants dealt with bullying and racism by either confronting the matter on their own or dealing with it passively. While navigating these discriminatory experiences in their own way brought the participants results, school personnel knowing about and addressing these issues can stop this unacceptable behavior and the mistreatment of students and families from the FSM and RMI.

Policy Inequities

Education laws and policies are conduits to education opportunities for the public. In the participants' experience in this study, education policies affected the education of some EL alumni from the FSM and RMI. Many court cases brought forth by EL families regarding EL students' rights to public education resulted in positive policy changes and school program

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improvement. However, for a couple of alumni in this study, the inequity of education policies led to the discontinuation of their education.

U.S. education laws that mandate completion of high school by the age of 18 rendered BigT and Tipo ineligible for continuation in the school system before even reaching grade 12. These two boys aged out as they had to repeat a grade level when they got to the US and therefore couldn't continue to grade 12 due to the age out policy. With this being the case, they opted to find employment to support their families. It is possible that the registration process lacking a contingency plan that includes adjustments and accommodations that take a prospective student's age into consideration has been a key factor in the alumni having no option other than to leave the school system. Tipo expressed, "My parents, when they came back, they told me to go back school … I want to go back to school but that's the reason why I never go back 'cause I'm [I was] eighteen years old."

In conversation with BigT who repeated 10th grade when he moved to the U.S., he mentioned that he was 18 in 11th grade and could not continue his education because he did not have the credits to graduate. He had reached the age-out provisions for high school. High school students, except for those with Individualized Education Plans (IEP), in any U.S. school can only continue with schooling if they graduate by their eighteenth birthday. Those with IEPs can stay in the school system until they are 22. English Language Learners are not afforded the same privilege granted to IEP holders no matter their English proficiency level and formal education. Another area where policy inequity surfaced was in the story of Lakagu, whose physical disabilities caused him to halt his high school pursuit. Knowing that he did not have an IEP and understanding his disability and the options available for transportation to school, he mentioned that he applied for a HandiVan pass but was turned down. It appeared not only did he not meet

the qualifications for the HandiVan service, but he was not qualified for the school bus either because current laws dictate that students who live less than a mile from school do not qualify for school bus service except those with a medical disability noted in their IEP. Lakagu lived closer to the school and had no IEP, so he had to walk. The daily walk to school sent his body into so much pain that some days he only made it to the community library and then went home. In his story, he stated that had he received transportation support, he would have stayed and graduated.

The current U.S. education policies allow EL students from outside the U.S. to enroll in U.S. schools; however, when EL students have to repeat high school grades upon entering the U.S., this can be a detriment to graduating, especially if the students are closer to turning 18 and do not have enough credits to graduate. The inequities of policies and statutes both at the federal and state education level could affect high school graduation for EL students who entered high school closer to their 18th birthday.

Strength of Character

Acknowledging how the EL alumni and the elders from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands managed the challenges they encountered at school is crucial. As migrants to the U.S., they had to adjust to their new environment and navigate a new culture, school systems, housing, and people. It is humanizing to recognize that the participants possess the strength of character that propel them as they journey through their experiences. Besides wanting to do well for their families, what turned up in the participants' stories was their resilience and firm determination to navigate difficult experiences and overcome the challenges in their lives.

The EL alumni graduates shared the same language struggles as their peers who chose not to pursue high school graduation. Most elder participants experienced the same language challenges, too. The strength of character showed up in various situations the participants encountered and dealt with. Most EL alumni who chose to discontinue high school did not think they had failed in their academic pursuits as they recognized the need to support their families financially and found employment to address such needs. The EL alumni graduates seemed inspired by the thoughts of honoring and caring for their families and themselves in the future. Luna said, "I literally pushed myself forward and said, I'm going to graduate because I don't need to be embarrassing my family." Mary spoke of her parents reminding her not to be like them, having no education, and pushing her to go to school to get a better future for her own family. Her youngest sister, with physical limitations and having only one parent with a job, seemed to occupy AJ's mind. Her decision to finish school was part of her financial preparation to care for her youngest sister with physical challenges when her parents could no longer take on this responsibility. Pursuing a nursing degree was to get an excellent job for the betterment of her family and especially caring for her sister. There was peer pressure to skip and smoke, but MT chose to stay away because he felt that had he done it, it would have affected his chance of graduating. Mike's motivation to graduate had to do with the thought of not wanting to be homeless:

> … me staying in school is that I just think about my future and that's it. I don't like living in a housing or shelter like that. And I don't want my future family to live in a van or stuff. And I'm gonna get a good job. A great job. To make money and buy a house … .

How they dealt with bullying is instructive in the elders' experience. Instead of jumping into the problem and possibly making it worse, the parents chose a non-violent way to address it.

While speaking about the bullying her children experienced at school, Chine mentioned that some kids came to their house and threw rocks. She taught her children to "just walk away" from the bullies and "let it go." Dolphin shared that her children came home with reports of kids bullying them because of how they dress as Micronesians, but she taught her kids "don't mind them" and work hard in school so the bullies later on may look at their success and believe they are not who they thought they were. Dolphin also commented on her children's peaceful ways at another school that turned bullies into friends for her children. Some elders commented on using their spiritual beliefs to keep their children safe and address discrimination. For example, Rose addressed bullying by praying for the safety of her children. She stated, "...other days it's been good because we know well, I know God has been protecting them and guiding them. Making them have patience with kids that are bullying them." Fefin prayed for her son's safety when kids at school bullied him. Though her son sustained injuries from the incident, she prayed, and the matter was resolved by school personnel who addressed the issue by walking her son from the bus stop to his classes. As a result, the bullying stopped, and her son graduated.

It is clear that the participants' experiences not only highlight the persistent struggles of Micronesian and Marshallese EL students and their families but also illuminate the strength and power of the FSM and RMI participants to struggle through these painful and hurtful issues and find solutions.

Figure 3 is an excerpt from an interview with an EL alum graduate on what helped the participant stay in school and graduate.

Figure 3

Analytic Memo

"Oh, well, I think it had to do with my family because
  the whole reason why we came out here is for my sister. She's the third
  youngest. She's disabled and my mom brought her for medical care. Because
  back home, we have poor medical care and education. So I just think about my
  family and what I can do when I finish high school, what it can benefit me to
  provide for them, especially with my sister, and like, I just think about
  when my parents you know, when they're gone. I had to take care of her. Get a
  good job in order to take care of her because it's really a really hard job
  to do. My dad is the only one who is working right now. He's like in Alaska.
  I don't want to do that, in my future to be separated from my family. I
  wanted to be closer to them all the time. So I just keep that in mind. You
  know, just to help my family and for myself if I want a better life in the
  future. So I put myself that I had to do school first then college, and then
  find a better job in the future."

"Yeah, it is the fact that he's not here for my
  graduation. that's why so I just, you know."

"He comes down every year. So like this October I think
  he will stay till like."

"Yeah. I mean, there are some times where I go. You know,
  I do a lot of bad things. But I always come back and I'm very religious. And
  I think like that's one of the biggest things that helps us a lot in our
  family. As my mom is very religious. So she believes in God. And we always
  pray and just do things within God stuff. Yeah."

Figure 3 Analytic Memo

I conducted this semi-structured interview on Zoom at about 3:00 pm. I was in a closed-off room in my residence, and the participant was in a private room in her home. I turned on Otter.ai, a speech-to-text transcription platform I paid for to capture our conversation. Otter.ai then produced a transcript of the interview for member verification.

This participant was very articulate, expressive, and passionate. I could tell she was mature, had a vision for her life, and took her various responsibilities seriously. The most common expression from this participant was "my family." It seems her family is of utmost importance in her vision and goals. The story postulates this participant is driven to be successful by adversity. This participant faced significant challenges not only in taking care of her disabled sister when her parents could no longer fulfill this responsibility but also in the struggle of being separated from her father and living in a home with one income earner. I could tell that taking care of her disabled sister weighed heavily on her mind, and it motivated her to complete school to access further education that would help her with a career and financial stability. Although she faces some tough struggles, the power of her determination, mindset, and the spiritual influence of her religious mother fed her fire to endure and achieve her plans. The participant mentioned God as being a big part of her family life. I would dive more into how she has seen God perform specific things for her family. I would also like to see if other participants from religious backgrounds share the same sentiments and explore who of this participant's peers are driven to be successful by adversity.

Poverty and Transience

There is a belief that immigrants and migrant populations such as the Micronesian and Marshallese people are impermanent, moving often due to family instability and unaffordable housing costs. There is also a belief that multi-family living situations exist among this

community of islanders, and the worst of all beliefs is that Micronesian and Marshallese people are lazy. While the participants did not explicitly say they were poor or were living in poverty, most lived in affordable public housing, which in Western thinking equates to poverty. The participants in this study were not living in multi-family situations and had been living in the same area for five to 15 years! Some participants were born on the Westside and have lived there their whole life and called themselves local to that area. This longtime residency implies that permanency and family stability exist among these islanders. It is also important to acknowledge the work the city and state do to provide housing accommodations and financial means for immigrant and migrant populations to have a place to start and continue with their lives. There is certainly a testament to the paucity of laziness. The participants in this study lived purposeful lives. Some engaged in school and graduated with a powerful determination to achieve their goals. Other alumni who discontinued school did not sit around waiting for someone to support them financially; they successfully found employment that supported their families. Some elders had full-time jobs, while others mentioned they helped out at the schools when needed. A spouse of one of the elders works out of state because the job pays better; he sends money to support his family. This elder has a goal of moving out of public housing to buy their own home. It is edifying to note that there is permanency in the participants' living situations as well as the determination to improve their lives and make the most of what they have and where they are in life.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on 18 semi-structured interviews where several themes materialized. The theme of Personal Care illuminated the individual choices of the participants to take care of their families and the importance of support from good friends. The topic called

Importance of School Personnel highlights the encompassing positive effect of the school personnel and the paucity of student support from the same group of people. Parents want school personnel to be more forceful in supporting their children, the lack of teacher skills in addressing the need of EL students, and the elders desire the schools to be their allies and for their children to have a space for their culture within the school. In the theme of Discrimination, the participants expressed unpleasant encounters with bullying and racism due to being Micronesians. The theme of Policy Inequities underpinned the effect of education laws on some alumni who could not continue to high school graduation due to the age limitations provided by the law. Furthermore, the section on Overcoming the Odds underscored the courageous and non-violent ways the participants used to process and manage challenging situations. Finally, the theme of Poverty and Transience addresses the myth about those from the FSM and RMI and speaks to the permanency of residency and productive lives of the Micronesian and Marshallese participants in this study.

Responding to her son's question, "What is the sense of doing this?" Jino said, "To help somebody else. Somebody that are coming up." In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of the findings of this study for EL students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands and their families.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

"... let me tell you something. Lakagu never like do … the interview with you. He never liked it.

He said 'What is the sense of doing it?'

I said 'To help somebody else. Somebody else … coming up.'"

-Jino

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly review the purpose of the study, recapitulate the findings, and suggest implications for practice, policy, and future research. Under provisions provided through the COFA agreement, people from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands continue to migrate to the U.S. without needing a visa for various reasons ranging from seeking medical care to better work and to study. The EL students from the FSM and RMI are the second largest population of EL students in the state of Hawaiʻi and reportedly have chronic absenteeism and made insufficient academic progress (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, 2019c; Asian Development Bank, 2017), yet there is limited literature on this group of migrants that could help in understanding why EL alumni from the FSM and RMI on the Westside of Oʻahu chose to discontinue their high school education. The dropout dilemma has been studied extensively; however, the EL dropout phenomenon is underreported (Rodriquez et al., 2020). While the dropout rate in the U.S. among young people ages 16 to 24 has decreased tremendously in the past 40 years, there has not been a significant change in the dropout rate of Native Hawaiʻian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) between 2010 and 2019 (Irwin et al., 2021). Because the dropout rate among NHPI is lumped into one figure, it is challenging to decipher the specific challenges faced by EL students from the FSM and RMI by looking at mere statistics. As the leading researcher on dropout studies and models, Rumberger (2012) suggested that dropout reasons are unique to each individual; therefore, this study used a phenomenological

approach to understand and describe the lived experiences of EL alumni from the FSM and the RMI who chose to discontinue their high school education.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to understand and describe the lived experiences of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI who chose to discontinue their high school education. To provide further understanding of the school environment these EL alumni attended, the elders and the EL alumni high school graduates from the FSM and RMI on the Westside of Oʻahu also shared their lived experiences. It was the aim of this study that through the findings from the experiences and reasons provided by the participants, the voices of the participants can provide ways to support EL students and their families better. This study also hopes to add to the limited collective knowledge of EL students and families from the FSM and RMI and the paucity of literature on the EL dropout phenomenon. As an outsider to the Micronesian and Marshallese communities and an insider to the environment where EL alumni from the FSM and RMI engaged academically, I was cautious about approaching individuals to engage in the study with me. The participants, especially the elders, did not question the intent of the study in a malicious way but shared gratitude and questioned why someone not of their culture initiated this project and why the schools have not done anything for a long time to serve their children. The elders seemed elated and grateful for this project and were happy to do it. They said they were waiting for the schools and wondering why the schools did not do anything like this to help the students from the region. Through a phenomenological method, the study explored the following research question:

1) What factors contributed to the "dropping out" of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI in this study who lived on the Westside of Oʻahu?

Summary of Themes

The conversations with the participants focused on their lived experiences with the schools, the support they received, and what the schools should and could have done differently to support students and families from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Some conversations were basic and short due to the English language proficiency of the participants, and some were long, detailed, and in-depth. Through thematic data analysis, I was able to glean the factors that contributed to EL alumni from the FSM and RMI discontinuing high school, as well as other commonalities among the participants' lived experiences. The themes that emerged from the findings were personal care, the impact of school personnel, discrimination, policy inequities, the strength of character, and poverty and transience.

Personal Care

In the conversations with the participants, the focus was on their experiences with the schools ranging from describing what the experience was like, the good things about the schools and what was not so good about them, sharing stories about the decision to discontinue school, choosing to graduate as well as what they would have liked the school to do to support students from the region. The participants' experiences revealed the use of their agency to make decisions that provided positive experiences and helped them manage the struggles in the various situations they encountered. Maslow (1943) posits that the hierarchy of needs conveys that the journey to self-actualization begins with meeting basic needs. For some EL alumni, discontinuing schools to take up employment was a critical priority, a choice, and a responsibility to provide the necessities of life and care for their families while also planning to finish their academic pursuits later. Others persisted in graduating because they felt the responsibility to honor their families, meet their parents' expectations, and saw high school

completion as a choice that would help them find better jobs and aid them in getting into college. This finding speaks to the family taking precedence over other priorities within the Micronesian and Marshallese communities (Heine, 2002; Ratliffe, 2010). Personal care also showed up in having friends at school. Most EL alumni spoke of having friends at school they could talk and hang with, which made their school experience a positive one; these friends contributed to positive emotions and school experiences (Çetin et al., 2021; Gorski, 2021) which were the catalyst for EL alumni participants to bear their struggles and gain support in their school journey. The elder participants spoke of their children's friends helping their children learn to speak English, their children helping those who bullied them change their behavior, and for the school to create spaces for their children to form friendships with others from their own culture.

Impact of School Personnel

School personnel play a critical role in EL alumni's sense of connection, community, and scholarship. In her work, The Classroom as a Metaphorical Canoe: Co- operative Learning in Pacific Studies, the late Dr. Teaiwa (2005), an I-Kiribati and African-American Pacific Island Studies scholar, poet, activist, and mentor, addresses teaching Pacific Island students. Besides acknowledging her responsibility as a role model in the classroom and sharing her challenges and successes in the classroom with Pacific Island students, her use of the canoe is instructive in understanding the type of collaboration, shared responsibility, and shared scholarship in the classroom occupied by teachers and Pacific Island students (and all students). She posits that teachers and students are on a learning journey, each a role model for one another with a responsibility to fulfill, like the Pacific Indigenous sailing on canoes to learn, fish, and explore. When done well, everyone achieves. Dr. Teaiwa reiterates that teachers are not the source of all knowledge; therefore, they need to upgrade and reassess their teaching pedagogies as student

demographic change and new research in the education field becomes available. Not only this, but Dr. Teaiwa emphasizes knowing who students are and what they are interested in. Knowing this about students informs teachers' preparation, curriculum, and the facilitation of learning. Teachers also need to train students to listen to each other, get to know who their fellow canoe rowers (classmates) are, and hold students to high expectations of academic work and collaboration with others. In addition to building and expanding the scholarship of the Pacific Island EL students (and all students) and their connection to the school community, this Pacific cooperative way of learning incorporates the cultural, linguistic, and Indigenous knowledge and skills of EL students from the FSM and RMI. The success of it all points back to the teacher's creative effort in involving everyone in the journey of learning.

To further illustrate the significant role school personnel plays in the learning of EL students, even those from the FSM and RMI, the work of Dr. Schlossberg (1989) is enlightening. In her work on Marginality and Mattering: Key Issues in Building Community, Schlossberg (1989) reiterates the crucial role of school personnel in influencing young people to feel they matter and belong to the spaces they occupy. Although her work focuses on college students, her ideas for creating spaces where people feel they matter also apply to any learning environment where humans interact. Dr. Schlossberg posits that those who experience "mattering" (p. 3), the idea that they are significant and that others care about their progress and success, tend to stay vested in their learning and do better in transitional phases of their lives whether it be moving from one grade level to the next or from teen to adulthood. The participants' experiences with school personnel in this study were positive and negative. It was apparent that EL alumni had positive encounters with good teachers, who explained things, and counselors who helped them apply for scholarships and college and find alternative ways to continue schooling.

Furthermore, the participants had positive encounters with security guards, administrators, and cafeteria staff. While those who had positive encounters with school personnel still chose to discontinue their high school education, the rest of the EL alumni stayed and graduated, which speaks to the themes of personal care and the personal choices of the participants to do what was best for them and their families. On the other hand, the idea of "mattering" showed up in the elders, conveying that school personnel needed to be more forceful and hold high expectations in pushing students from the FSM and RMI to engage in school and activities. While a few mentioned the commendable work of security guards in ensuring students had hall passes, one elder and one EL alumni who chose to discontinue high school shared that the friendliness of the security guards was off-putting and unhelpful to alumni who needed a more strict approach to stay in school. Schools employ security guards mainly for the safety and protection of everyone on campus (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, n.d.-c); however, when security guards build a good rapport with students, this can affect their expectations of students. As shared by Kebwe, "...the security guards were chill. I was friends with most of them," which seems to explain the leniency security guards took towards the EL alum walking off campus, skipping school, and not holding high expectations for the student. The encounters did not show security guards even persisting that the student attends class, let alone walking or taking the student to class.

School personnel's impact on student achievement also shows up in classroom instructions. Findings from this study show a lack of teacher skills in "culturally sustaining pedagogies" (Paris & Alim, 2017, para. 1) and "translanguaging pedagogies" (David et al., 2021, p. 2) in teaching English language learners from the FSM and RMI. This paucity of pedagogies does not honor students' lifeways and cultural ways. There was also a lack of translations in the

participants' native languages, which were stumbling blocks to the alumni comprehending and completing assignments. Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) include translanguaging pedagogies (TP). These two families of pedagogies are of educational justice work where teachers intentionally work with parents, communities, and students to include students' life stories, histories, cultures, and languages in the curriculum and the daily stuff of teaching (Paris & Alim, 2017; David et al., 2021) because it is not only the right thing to do, but it critically influences and sustains students' understanding of themselves (Paris & Alim, 2017), their ancestors, others (Paris, 2012) and facilitates success in school and life. For the elders, this lack of English-to-native language translation was a hurdle in understanding what the schools were trying to communicate through parent notifications sent home. Not providing translations of information that go to the parents is a civil rights violation. The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education both issued this mandate: "Schools must [emphasis added] communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English." (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights, n.d.). Besides recognizing the paucity of EL teaching pedagogies and the nadir of translations in the native language of the participants, the participants also noticed the invisibility and dearth of Micronesian and Marshallese teachers in the schools. This concern also appeared in the 2020 - 2021 school year data published in the Hawaiʻi Department of Education Data Book. The report shows that while the Micronesian student population was the fourth largest enrollment at 8,888 students, no Micronesian teachers were in the Hawaiʻi K-12 schools (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Education Accountability Resource Center Hawaiʻi, 2022). Not only were there no Micronesian teachers at the schools that EL students from the region

frequented, but the participants also commented on the non-existence of a Micronesian Marshallese student club in the schools where students from the FSM and RMI attended. The impact of school personnel in the lives of EL students from the FSM and RMI and their families is critical, as shown in the stories shared by the alumni and elder participants in this study.

Discrimination

Discrimination is a broad concept that encompasses prejudices and stereotypes against someone's race, religion, and nationality (American Psychological Association, 2023c). There were ten females and eight males in this study. All participants experienced language discrimination where their native language was not used in classroom instructions and also in parent communications that went home. While the EL alumni who chose to discontinue their high school education experienced language discrimination, none explicitly reported other forms of discrimination, such as microaggression, bullying, and racism. What is compelling from the findings is that no male participants spoke of the discrimination mentioned above; however, the female participants shared encounters with microaggressions, bullying, and racism. These incidents occurred in various forms: hurtful and racist references used by teachers and peers to refer to Micronesians, teachers who singled out and ignored Micronesian students, and mistreatments committed by those of a different race.

The American Psychological Association defines racism as follows:

a form of prejudice that assumes that the members of racial categories have distinctive characteristics and that these differences result in some racial groups being inferior to others. Racism generally includes negative emotional reactions to members of the group, acceptance of negative stereotypes, and racial discrimination against individuals; in some cases it leads to violence. (American Psychological Association, 2023a)

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Huber and Cueva (2012) define racial microaggressions as "systemic everyday racism that are subtle, layered, and cumulative verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward people of color that are committed automatically and unconsciously." These microaggressions can be about "race, gender, class, language, sexuality, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 394). Microaggression is destructive as it demeans and is hurtful. It is multi-layered, sometimes invisible, and subtle, and is most likely perpetuated due to the perpetrators refusing to admit fault. Huber and Cueva (2012) add that microaggression includes positive remarks about people of certain races without knowing it is unwelcome. An example of a positive remark seen as a microaggression would be telling an EL person their English sounds really good or asking them when and where they started learning English. While I did not ask specifically if the participants experienced bullying, microaggression, and racism at school, the ten female participants explicitly mentioned experiencing these issues when responding to the interview question regarding things that were not so good in their school experience. These findings concur with results in studies conducted by Iding et al. (2007), Fujimori-Kaina et al. (2019), Okimoto et al. (2008), and the research brief on Racism and Discrimination against Micronesians in Hawaiʻi: Issues of Educational Inequity by the Hawaiʻi Scholars for Education and Social Justice group (Chapman de Sousa et al., 2022). While some alumni and participants from the Republic of the Marshall Islands are not Micronesian by race, language, and ethnicity, they were seen and treated as Micronesians. They were included in the racist references as well. It appeared the discrimination was hurtful. The female EL alumni did not speak of taking any real action to end the racist situations except for verbalizing what they encountered; however, the elders practiced their Christian beliefs (Foster & Hezel, n.d.) and relied on their wisdom and life-long experiences in dealing with discrimination. They taught their children to ignore the hurtful

comments and prove the offender wrong by living good lives and doing well in school to show

that Micronesians are good people and are just as creative, intelligent, and innovative as anyone

(Heine & Hezel, 2002; Heine, 2002). The elders also hoped that their children were good people.

These beliefs were crucial in befriending the bullies and forming friendships where their children

could help the perpetrators turn their lives around.

Policy Inequities

The Hawaiʻi Department of Education compulsory education law dictates:

All children who will have arrived at the age of at least five years on or before July 31 of

the school year, and who will not have arrived at the age of eighteen years, by January 1

of any school year, shall attend either a public or private school for, and during, the

school year, and any parent, guardian, or other person having the responsibility for, or

care of, a child whose attendance at school is obligatory shall send the child to either a

public or private school. (Hawaiʻi State Legislature Revised Statutes 302A-1132, n.d.,

para. 1)

The law clearly states that students must graduate high school before or on their 18th birthday.

However, this policy did not provide adequate opportunities for EL alumni such as BigT and

Tipo from the FSM and RMI, who entered the U.S. school system and had to repeat ninth and

tenth-grade levels when they were closer to turning 18. Only students with IEPs can stay in high

school until they are 22 years old (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, n.d.-a). The policies

have no accommodation for EL students with little to no English proficiency and who may need

to repeat a high school grade level due to the lack of academic progress and credits to qualify for

graduation. Other policy limitations include eligibility stipulations that exclude specific

individuals from riding the school bus (Hawaiʻi State Department of Education, n.d.-b). One EL

alumnus was not qualified to ride the school bus because current ridership eligibility dictated that he was not qualified for the school bus service since he lived less than a mile from the school. He was not in a Special Education program, so he had no IEP. An IEP specifies a student's disability that would qualify him for school bus ridership. He then went to apply to ride The HandiVan. The HandiVan eligibility requirements also turned him away since, according to the HandiVan eligibility criteria, he was perfectly mobile.

On the other hand, he could use Thebus, the public transit system (City and County of Honolulu, n.d.). This alumnus shared that he did not have the money to pay for the bus fare. He expressed that when he shared his story of having difficulty breathing and feeling pain all over his body whenever he walked to school with personnel at the Handi-Van office, he was told he could rest along the way. His doctor was not helpful either. The invisibility of his pain and disability was not considered by the decision-makers when he was seeking transportation help so he could attend school.

Strength of Character

EL students and their families are often examined from a deficit-based lens as if these folks had no positive traits (Olivo, 2006). Educators focus so much on what EL students and their families lack instead of illuminating the strengths they possess (Lander, 2018; Olivo, 2006). In the case of Micronesian and Marshallese COFA migrants in Hawaiʻi, they are seen as a burden to the state (Fujimori-Kaina et al., 2019). Nonetheless, this study revealed something to the contrary. The participants' experiences in this study disclosed individuals who possessed great power to make decisions that suited their needs and contributed positively to their well-being and human development. The EL alumni completed high school due to their resilience and willpower to resist negative peer pressure, stay grounded in their desire to graduate, process, and

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manage discrimination issues, insufficient English proficiency, and lack of motivation. Most EL alumni who chose not to continue with high school exercised the power of their agency and found employment to support their families with the hope of continuing their education later. These migrants are contributory citizens of the ecosystems that Dr. Hattori spoke of. They have made financial contributions to the city and state through taxation, which supported the state's financial goals. For example, in 2017, COFA migrants added $336.2 million to Hawai'i's total Gross Domestic Product (Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, 2020). The elders were role models for their children; they showed great humility in restraining themselves from getting involved and making matters worse in their reactions to the discrimination against their children. Instead, they exercised non-violent ways by praying for their children and teaching them to be kind, show forth good examples, and work hard in school to disprove the critics and stereotypes against them. Dr. Raatior (2017) shares the same stories of humility, being role models, and respect as positive deviants common in the Micronesian community that allowed undergrad college students to navigate their new spaces and challenges.

Poverty and Transience

There is a common belief that migrants such as Micronesians and Marshallese are transient and homeless due to poverty and overcrowded residence. While this may be true due to an influx of migrants from the regions over the years who struggled with finding employment that paid a living wage, grappled with locating an affordable place to live, as well as moving from relative to relative for a roof over their heads (Hezel, 2013), this study uncovered a different reality. Most participants in this study lived in public housing but did not describe themselves as poor or in multi-family living situations. A few participants have lived in the community for five years, but most have been there for ten or more years. A couple of

participants were born and raised in the community and considered themselves locals. This

permanency of residency indicated financial stability due to the participants' purposeful work to

provide permanency for their families through employment and the support of the state

government in providing housing where the participants could settle, raise their families, and

move forward with their lives. While there may be continued struggles in various areas for

Micronesian and Marshallese migrants settling in Hawaiʻi, the encouraging reality and stability

among the participants in this study coincide with Hezel's (2013) report on the upward

movement of Micronesians living in Hawaiʻi. Given all the other findings of this study, one has

to wonder if the misconception that Micronesians are transient, and poor is rooted in the racism

and negative stereotypes of this community. If true, this becomes another layer through which

the students must battle in order to survive and thrive in school.

Implications for Practice

Dr. Lynette Lokelani Wakinekona (2017) shared the profound words of Native Hawaiʻian

scholar and fellow Pacific Islander, Dr. Kanaʻiaupuni (2005), who calls on the native people,

even those from the FSM and RMI to effectively carry out our responsibility and using our

voices and knowledge in research:

> Native peoples must have a voice; we must ask the questions and critique existing
>
> knowledge. We must not only be evaluated, we must evaluate. We must not be
>
> researched, but research. By cementing our presence in the production of knowledge, we
>
> can be vigilant over how it is used and the power that knowledge confers. (Kanaʻiaupuni,
>
> 2005, p. 34)

As indicated earlier, there is a paucity of literature on the Micronesian and Marshallese

EL student populations and how to support them. In this study, the natives of Micronesia and the

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Marshall Islands speak and critique the current school systems they and their children experience. This study hopes that from the participants' experiences and stories, the findings could provide ways to better support EL students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands and their families. The findings of this study propose the following considerations for schools that serve students and families from these regions: engage, not involve, Micronesian and Marshallese own-race teacher representation, establish a student cultural club, and culturally sustaining and translanguaging support.

Engage, Not Involve

Parsons and Shim (2019) convey that education aims to improve lives now and in the future, and parent involvement positively affects their children's education. A search in ERIC for peer-reviewed studies on EL parent engagement yielded only seven articles published in the last ten years, with no study on engaging parents from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. Despite this lack of dedicated studies on engaging parents from these regions, the principles, and ideas for engaging parents in the limited existing research can be implemented in schools serving students and families from the FMS and RMI. In wanting to retain and prevent students from dropping out, school administrators and teachers tend to place the blame on students and their families instead of examining school offerings, structure, and support given to students (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). For EL students, an extra layer to consider when engaging parents includes building relationships of trust and understanding what is culturally and linguistically viable (Kandel-Cisco et al., 2020).

Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009) argue that involvement and engagement are two different things. Involvement is when the "ideas and energy" (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009, p. 6) that come from "school and government mandates" (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009, p. 6) dictate how

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parents should participate in school initiatives. The effort to get parents involved in school activities can be seen in school-initiated activities such as a school fair, parent night, college night, May Day, Junior and Senior Prom, and the like, where flyers go home with students, posts go up on social media and colorful banners cover school bulletin boards and walls inviting parents to participate. Putting out an email, flyers, and phone messages and hoping for parents to show up to school events has been the status quo for a long time, yet it produces frustrations and dismal results (Kandel-Cisco et al., 2020). Studies postulate that parent engagement improves academic outcomes for students and schools (Ramirez, 2003; Manzo, 2016), yet this continues to be a tremendous challenge for schools to address and resolve. It seems change is hard, and it is much easier to maintain the status quo. With the rise of EL student enrollment throughout the U.S., especially in rural areas (Lambert et al., 2018), such as the area of this study, Micronesian and Marshallese parent engagement in improving schools and student outcomes is not up for debate anymore. Engaging this community in the schools is the business of all of us. It is time for schools to do justice in engaging EL parents from the FSM and RMI in school initiatives that are critical to their children's education.

Parent engagement is when the school asks the parents for their ideas and releases responsibility to the parents for implementing them (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Parsons & Shim, 2019). The parents are solely the leaders and creators of the activities and initiatives, while the school personnel would be on the side to support the parents' efforts. Releasing control and responsibility to the parents recognizes the excellence and intelligence of the community and its people. Doing so is an engagement of the highest level. As a teacher, I have experienced frustration and witnessed the failure of parent nights and the continued struggles to get parents involved in school activities. Teachers and students would prepare presentation materials and

displays; however, only a few parents would show up. If the event is called a parent night, why are parents not in charge of planning and executing plans for this night? With teachers reporting increased workload, burnout, and leaving the teaching profession in large numbers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), why are school administrators not tapping into one of their best resources - the collective wisdom and hearts of the parents? Perhaps school administrators, who influence academic outcomes for EL students, see parent night as an event to meet and greet the parents, showcase students' progress, and service the community. Still, the school is the central figure in all of these decisions. The control and ideas are still limited to school administrators and personnel. It is time for school administrators to address the proverbial "elephant in the room" and move beyond the status quo by learning to intentionally do the difficult work of releasing responsibilities to the parents to lead in crucial school improvement efforts. Many school administrators and teachers strive to do many things to accomplish school improvement goals. They may be reluctant to let parents lead as they may need to learn who the parents are and the stories of the said party's culture, language, education, and English proficiency (Parsons & Shim, 2019). However, school administrators and teachers can engage in the process of critical consciousness (Lowery, 2019) to address this issue. More on critical consciousness later.

School administrators also need to consider that individuals refrain from voluntarily sharing ideas in some Pacific Island cultures like Micronesia and the Marshall Islands (Heine, 2002). Dolphin, an elder in this study, mentioned that Micronesians are shy people and would not voluntarily voice their ideas without trusting relationships. In their work to improve how researchers engage Native Hawai'ians and Pacific Islanders in research, Chung-Do et al. (2016) convey the critical need to build relationships of trust with the community and to solicit their

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ideas in improving processes and lives deemed to be blessed by these ideas. The participants in this study spoke of the need for schools to reach out to them; it reveals that school personnel and administrators need to leave the office cubicle and descend into the community to ask its citizens for ideas and to lead engagements in school improvement efforts and activities. In their book Learning to Improve (Bryk et al., 2017), Dr. Paul LeMahieu and his peers at Carnegie Foundation presented a model for involving stakeholders in resolving problems and making improvements within organizations. The model is called Improvement Science Methodology (ISM). In this framework is an approach called Network Improvement Communities (NICs) that perhaps schools need to consider embracing the excellence of the FSM and RMI community as this method primarily focuses on working collectively; the method lends itself to the communal and mutuality nature that is the essence of the people and culture of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. In NICs, the focus is on the stakeholders affected by an issue working collectively to dissect the problem and have robust conversations to improve lives and address the issue. The FSM and RMI participants wanted the school to reach out to them. In reaching out, the school does not sit at the head of the table but on the side or with the community. Schools should let the community initiate conversations and then co-create solutions to the issues that best serve EL students from the region and their families. Sometimes, the issues are best resolved by those closest to the issues. Speaking of the need for schools to support EL students by letting the parents lead and embrace their cultural gifts, knowledge, and identity in making decisions that best serve their children, Mesina and Martinez (2019) advocate:

> We do not mean to suggest that schools cannot have a seat at the table, but rather that the school should not sit at the head of the table. There are things that schools are not positioned to do and there are respectful and productive ways for schools to join the

conversation and ask for a seat at the table. First and foremost, schools should recognize and learn about the cultural knowledge, resources and expertise that exist in Indigenous [people]. (p. 142)

In sitting with and learning from Indigenous Micronesian and Marshallese people, two of the destructive forces that school administrators should be conscious of in their effort to engage parents are microaggression and racism. EL alumni and elders in this study reported encounters with microaggression and racism from teachers and some students at school. Microaggression is any racist verbal and non-verbal stereotype (negative and positive) that is said about and experienced by people of color either subtly or automatically (Huber & Cueva, 2012). An example would be telling an Indigenous FSM or RMI person their English is very good or asking them where and when they learned English. Telling EL students their English is good and questioning where they learned English is considered a form of microaggression as it singles out the person as someone learning English and questions the ability of the person learning English. Huber and Cueva (2012) refer to microaggression as "assaults on the body" (p. 396), the truth that microaggression hurts, is felt in the flesh, mind, and spirit of the one receiving it.

While the participants in this study did not share whether they reported issues of racism and discrimination to school administrators, finding out whether school administrators and teachers also participate in microaggression and racism and how they address issues of microaggression and racism in the schools may provide insights into whether microaggression and racism play a role in school administrators and teachers engaging parents in efforts to improve the outcome for EL students from Micronesia and Marshall Islands. Microaggression is destructive because it maintains its power in invisibility and unconsciousness and the reluctance of the aggressor to accept doing anything wrong (Sue, 2010). Because microaggression and

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racism are multilayered, sometimes invisible, and subtle, school administrators' and teachers' negative stereotypes of the Micronesians and Marshallese population can be transformed by practicing critical consciousness. According to Lowery (2019), critical consciousness is "the awareness and analysis of historical contexts of schooling, inequities, and activism and skills to disrupt social inequity" (p. 2). Lowery (2019) suggests that in order for leaders to build the courage to do justice, they need to engross in critical self-reflection where they interrogate their privileges, ignorance, and fears and start questioning inequities (Lowery, 2019) within the school systems to see how these aspects of their professional and personal experiences are hurdles in engaging parents at school. The Yale Youth Ministry Institute video (Yale Youth Ministry Institute, 2019) is an interview with Dr. David Anderson Hooker of the University of Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs. Hooker (2019) suggests the critical role of critical consciousness in changing systems and beliefs. To add to Lowery's (2019) explanation of critical consciousness, Hooker (2019) states that critical consciousness is a framework for seeing what can be different in inherited systems because since schools operate on inherited systems, schools also receive the "inequities, hierarchies, and exclusions" prevalent in such systems, resulting in perpetuating the inherited processes and practices that continue to do injustice.

Developing critical consciousness would champion the cause of engaging parents at school through intentionality on the part of school administrators and teachers in embracing the parents' and EL students' cultural and language assets in strengthening the school community instead of seeing EL students and their families as people to be helped without recognizing that these individuals have so much to give to their community (Kandel-Cisco et al., 2020; Mesina & Martinez, 2019; Parsons & Shim, 2019; Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Critical consciousness, then, concerning engaging EL parents in school initiatives takes school administrators and

teachers into their existing beliefs and school systems to analyze and deconstruct viewpoints and injustices such as racism, microaggression, and discrimination that are barriers to engaging parents and doing the critical work of questioning and changing these beliefs and systems. Besides developing critical consciousness, school administrators and teachers must also realize the destructive effects of their own subtle and unacknowledged racist thoughts and attitudes towards the FSM and RMI community, but also the long-lasting negative effects of colonialism that led Micronesians and Marshallese people to the U.S. and the intersectionalities that compound microaggressions and racism against this community. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) (2018) video is a statement by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, civil rights advocate and professor at UCLA School of Law and Columbia Law School. Dr. Crenshaw explains that intersectionality is a way to see how people are discriminated against due to their identities that are not always obvious such as their relationship to history, other people, and schools. Therefore, school administrators and teachers need to assess their lack of asset-based beliefs and negative relationships with Micronesians and Marshallese people to see how their perceptions of this population may be a stumbling block in their efforts to engage these parents in school initiatives and support students from the region. The International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation (2023) is a statement by Dr. Manulani Meyer, Associate Specialist, Student Affairs University of Hawaiʻi, West Oʻahu. Dr. Meyer strongly expressed that instead of adopting the Western view of what you can do for me, the question must be what we can do for others with great love. In that light, some suggestions for schools to reach out and engage EL parents are as follows.

Schools can utilize the Parent Community Networking Centers (PCNC) community liaison (Ramirez, 2003). This person goes to the community, engages parents in conversations to

see their needs and what they can offer, and asks for parent engagement in various initiatives. Should parents have challenges coming up with ideas to engage in school initiatives, one can present to parents the idea of engaging a few EL parents from the Micronesian and Marshallese communities who have been in the school community for a while to mentor new parents and teach workshops to teachers on culturally appropriate ways to teach and support their children. Another initiative is staffing the PCNC office with a Micronesian and Marshallese representative to translate school materials that go home to families and to support the school in teaching students from the regions. Engaging these representatives should not be a one-time effort but a consistent regular practice. School administrators and teachers must not assume parents do not care about their children and their education and count them out of school improvement efforts. The schools need to know the "pedagogies of the home" (Manzo, 2016, p. 55) to understand how parents support their children in unconventional ways at home, as not all parent support is aligned with what the schools think parents should be doing.

Furthermore, school administrators and teachers should ask the parents what they need or do not know about the U.S. school system and then ask parents if they would like informational workshops based on their needs with interpreters present at these presentations. A byproduct of these workshops is the undoing of school administrators' and teachers' deficit views of parents and their children (Ramirez, 2003). These efforts have been successful in rural communities serving EL students and their families (Ramirez, 2003; Manzo, 2016). For instance, a high school in Indiana instituted a parent group called On Your Turf that has gained national recognition for engaging parents in school. A school district in California established a Love, Leadership, and Literacy where parents were consulted on how funds were used, increasing reading and math scores, and an all-male Catholic high school in Chicago began a Proud Parent

Group that significantly increased parent engagement in school activities and academic achievement (Ramirez, 2023). The examples of parent engagements implemented by these school organizations can also be done successfully in rural communities on the Westside of Oʻahu with intentionality and desire to engage parents in the planning and execution of those plans. Schools on the Westside can also benefit by scouting out schools such as Farrington and Waipahu High School to see how they engage the Micronesian and Marshallese communities and collaborate on efforts to increase parent engagement in supporting their children academically, organizing events such as proms, parent nights, Grub Nights, and the like. After all, many heads, hearts, and hands working together dynamically bless the lives of students and the community. The elders in this study shared that they are ready to engage and partner with the school. The schools need to go to the parents and begin the critical work of letting parents lead in efforts that best support their children.

Own-Race Teacher Representation and Student Cultural Club

One of the sub-themes in the data analysis of this study is the invisibility of not only Micronesian and Marshallese teachers in the schools but also the paucity of Micronesian and Marshallese student clubs. It is palpable that the EL alumni and elders in this study yearned for Micronesian and Marshallese teacher representation at school and a space on campus for their culture, language, and people. Having Micronesian and Marshallese teachers in the schools help students from the regions to establish a connection to the school and "improve the performance of minority students directly or indirectly, by serving as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators for those students" (Egalite et al., 2015, p. 44). In the 2021-2022 school year, the Hawaiʻi Department of Education reported 8,888 Micronesian students enrolled with zero Micronesian teachers in the entire school system (State of Hawaiʻi Department of Education

Accountability Resource Center Hawai'i, 2022). To illustrate the transformational power of having Micronesian and Marshallese teachers, Gerber (2022) writes about a study by David Blazar, a researcher at the University of Maryland College Park. Blazar tracked data of fourth and fifth grade students who were randomly assigned to teachers of color to see how having a teacher of color affected student success. Blazar then tracked data of the same students to high school to see if the success in elementary continued to high school. Blazar found that students who had a teacher of color had outstanding achievement in math and reading both in elementary and high school. The same students had remarkable levels of self-efficacy and class engagement and were less likely to be absent when they entered high school. What was surprising from Blazar's research was that white students who had a teacher of color also had satisfactory success in self-efficacy, reading, and math in elementary and high school compared to those with a white teacher. Blazar then investigated what caused such success from teachers of color and found that teachers of color had a greater chance of having positive mindsets, better scaffolding skills, and robust connections with students and their families, things that white teachers could benefit from having. Cherng and Haplin (2016) also found that a teacher of color workforce positively influences student achievement and engagement in school. These teachers may have already weathered discrimination and the challenges of being in underrepresented populations. Therefore, their experience helps build strong relationships with students and assists students in processing and managing their learning in school. Having teachers of color like those from the FSM and RMI is beneficial because they have a cultural understanding and serve as role models who can bring a wealth of culturally sustaining teaching methods that enrich the student experience and the school community.

A 1995 National Center for Education Statistics report cites a positive correlation between extracurricular activities and student involvement in school and academic achievements. Subsequent studies (Gorski, 2021; Albayrak & Şener, 2021) related to the positive impact of various extracurricular activities on teens and EL students show an increase in peer-to-peer connection, cognitive stimulation, and student emotional engagement in their academic courses. In this study, the elder participants Linda, Chine, Dolphin, and EL alumni spoke of having a student club not to segregate students but to create a space where EL students from the region can get together to check in on each other, share stories, and support one another. Kandel-Cisco et al. (2020) speak to this idea of having a space for EL students to share their stories. Given that Micronesian and Marshallese students experience racism, bullying, and microaggressions in the schools, this student cultural club serves as a conduit of healing (Kandel-Cisco et al., 2020; Roy, 2015) through sharing stories and receiving peer support. Telling stories is a critical part of the Pacific Island cultures, such as Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, that connect them to their cultural and multiple identities. What better place for students to express themselves while on school grounds than this student cultural space? Creating this cultural club builds social connections, molds a sense of belonging, especially for shy introverts (Winstone et al., 2022), and helps overcome homesickness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ferrera, 2020; Maslow, 1954). To emphasize the crucial need for the student cultural club to create a sense of belongingness, the American Psychological Association defines belonging as "the feeling of being accepted and approved by a group." (American Psychological Association, n.d.-b, para. 1) Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Maslow (1954) speak to the universal desire for humans to build connections with one another for a happy and fulfilled life; the participants asked for spaces at schools to establish these connections. The EL alumni in this study shared that having friends was a

positive part of their school experience and also asked for a student cultural club in their schools. Besides sustaining the FSM and RMI cultures, this cultural club also serves as a place where students build relationships with those from their own community, race, language, and culture and be their authentic selves without the need to try to fit in (Brown, 2015). This cultural club can be a space where they sing their Indigenous songs, dance their cultural dances, and speak their languages freely without being judged. It can be a place of liberation.

This club also serves as a place to get tutoring, translations, and academic support and learn about the culture of the host school and community. For example, this student cultural club can be where students and families learn about the differences between the U.S. school system and that of their native country. One EL alumni in this study took his time with school because he thought he could stay a high school student beyond 18 years, similar to his uncle back home, who graduated high school at age 26. He had no idea that in the U.S., he had to graduate high school by his 18th birthday or could not continue. Once I told him the truth, he consistently tried to attend school and graduated before turning 18.

Furthermore, this student cultural club should connect and collaborate with the PCNC office, where interpreters are present and can be the facilitators for this cultural club. Besides having a safe space on campus for EL students from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands to share their stories and perpetuate their culture and language, other benefits include having students from this club mentor newcomers. This student club could also be where churches and businesses can do much good by sharing resources and human capital to elevate EL students' lives from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. Through this club, parents and students can physically visit places in the community that offer support to residents; this can be a field trip sponsored by churches, businesses, and schools. We have passed the era of just telling people

where resources are; it is time to show them by taking them there. A student cultural club is also an excellent place for school counselors to share information about college applications, scholarships, and filling out the FAFSA instead of having these students and parents go to a whole school presentation on these matters because there usually are no interpreters in those whole school presentations on these issues. Doing this in the student cultural club would be more effective with an interpreter present, and parents can be supported accordingly. Again, school teachers and administrators do not need to be burdened with staffing this student club but engage the ethnic capitals (Zhou & Lee, 2017) and resources in the community of churches, businesses, and the Micronesian and Marshallese parents in establishing this student club.

Culturally Sustaining and Translanguaging Pedagogies

While the Hawaiʻi Department of Education issues training and workshops on EL teaching methods, the participants' stories revealed what is missing from the training - culturally sustaining and translanguaging pedagogies. It is also crucial to remember that EL students are not on trial here, but the system that educates and supports the learning of EL students needs to be disrupted and critically looked at so that EL students receive equitable resources and access to be successful. Before discussing culturally sustaining and translanguaging support, it is important to briefly mention here that the above-mentioned practices are not the same as code-switching. Code-switching is going from one language to another (García, 2015), as in bilingual translation and interpretation. Before García (2015) elaborated on translanguaging, Heine (2002), a native of Micronesia, had already championed and promoted the idea of culturally sustaining and translanguaging pedagogies as an effective tool for EL students from Micronesia. Heine postulates, "Language learning should build on language skills students already have. In some cases, it may mean integrating first language use and content in lessons" (p. 16).

Regarding cultural values, Heine (2002) also posits that students from the FSM and RMI are "co-operative learners" where "sharing and keeping the interest of the group over the individual are values that are not consistent with the individualistic and competitive values encouraged in American schools" (p. 7). The education and curriculum in U.S. classrooms can be enriched, enhanced, and culturally sustained by engaging translanguaging pedagogies and culturally sustaining practices of the students and families from the FSM and RMI. Imagine learning in a U.S. classroom that does not embrace nor discuss topics and ways of being from your own culture. To provide more information on the importance of translanguaging in the classroom, García (2015) states that translanguaging is a psychological and strategic way for teachers to look at EL students' native languages to see how those language systems apply to different languages, such as English and then model how to use it and invite students to engage all of their language repertoire in the classroom. To further describe translanguaging, the Bell Foundation (n.d.), a charity organization that focuses on addressing issues of language exclusion in education, explains translanguaging as follows:

> The term used to describe practices that allow and encourage EAL [EL] learners to use their full linguistic repertoire in order to empower them and help them to realise their full potential. This means encouraging them to speak, write and/or translate to and from their first language or any language they speak and English, to support their learning. (para. 1)

The EL alumni and elders in this study voiced concerns at the dearth of culturally sustaining methods and translanguaging in Micronesian and Marshallese in the content area and on parent notifications that the schools sent home. The lack of translations and utilizing student cultural lifeways in the classroom made students unable to understand the content area and communicate their ideas. It caused parents bewilderment with what the schools were trying to

communicate. The goal of using EL students' and parents' native language is to reach an understanding, develop human potential, and communicate ideas. Researchers from the University of Minnesota and Drake University studied teachers engaging in professional development on translanguaging pedagogies. They found not only the need for teachers to undergo training in translanguaging but that translanguaging led to robust student engagement and increased teacher understanding of their students (David et al., 2021). Teachers and school administrators must examine their attitudes towards English only, culturally sustaining and translanguaging policy in delivering content to EL students (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Native language is a crucial part of EL students' identity. When teachers and administrators knowingly and unknowingly enforce English-only policies, they "subordinate students' languages, forms of knowledge, social practices, lived experiences, and their cultures" (Huber, 2011, p. 383). EL students and parents from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands cannot reach an understanding and communicate ideas in the presence of language discrimination (Valdez et al., 2016) and the absence of language translations, translanguaging pedagogies, and culturally sustaining practices for the children. To illustrate how culturally sustaining and translanguaging look in the classroom, teachers can be co-learners alongside EL students by giving students opportunities to draw from their funds of knowledge and language repertoire in all languages they know. EL students from the FSM and RMI can write and speak using a mixture of phrases and sentences in their native languages and English. Teachers can take advantage of translation technology, parents, and communities to acquire an understanding of assignments students submit in the various languages teachers may not know. Translanguaging can be a strategic way for teachers who do not speak the student's native language to assess students' understanding instead of the one size fits all approach so common in the Western school system (Wakinekona, 2017). Again,

the purpose of culturally sustaining pedagogies and translanguaging practices is much more than recognizing and understanding that students speak another language; it is changing curriculum and policies to be inclusive of students' histories, stories, cultures, and languages so that students have rich and meaningful connections to what they already know and new concepts (Paris & Alim, 2017). Some may say this type of instructional support and modification does not help students achieve high scores on high stake tests; however, the sole purpose of learning is not to pass mandated tests. High stake tests are for the purpose of seeing where learners are academically, so the data informs instructions and to know what the schools, teachers, and students need (Noguera, 2013). For EL students, culturally sustaining and translanguaging practices are means to access and engage their existing skills enabling them to connect to new ideas across content areas and to inform, transform, and reform their perspectives (Wakinekona, 2017). Parents also will be unable to understand what their school is trying to communicate if they are not provided with translations of English materials into their native language. As an EL coordinator, I found no Google translate options in Micronesian or Marshallese. There are hard copies of dictionaries in Marshallese, but not in the common Micronesian dialect Chuukese or other Micronesian dialects. I submitted feedback to Google asking for the inclusion of Micronesian and Marshallese languages in Google Translate and am still waiting to see this materialize.

While having a dictionary in the native language is a good idea, the paper form is ineffective as it takes longer for students to look up every word and translate them to formulate a response or even to understand materials in the content area. Also, a problematic area is that some English concepts have no literal translation in the native language, making it difficult to understand what EL students are learning. It will be a tall order for teachers to find community

members to help translate materials for them; however, schools can tap into district school home assistants and the PCNC network to locate native Micronesians and Marshallese translators who are well-versed in English and the native language to translate. School administrators, coaches, and teachers who send parent notifications home must not assume parents understand English. The insert that goes home with the parent notification telling parents that if they need translation, they need to call the school is inequitable and a violation of civil rights laws. How can a parent know they can contact the school if they cannot read and understand English? Why tell parents to contact the school if they need translation when the school can translate the material, to begin with, before sending the letter home? These small acts of consciousness need to be a huge part of communication between the schools and the FSM and RMI communities.

Implications for Policy

EL students who enter the U.S. school system with a good command of the English language would fare well in understanding academic content; however, with an English-only policy as the language of instruction, those who are at the entering phase or new to learning English, the English-only policy renders inequitable instructions and service to these students. A 2018 report by the Pew Research Center states that 72% of those aged five to seventeen who did not speak English very well were born in the U.S. (Bialik et al., 2018). With this high rate of non-English proficiency, it begs the question of why and what should be done to help students struggling to learn English. English-only policies hinder not only EL students from using their native language to acquire English proficiency and do better on tests (Cun, 2020) but also a hurdle to teachers not incorporating students' native languages in their lesson delivery and activities. How can EL students complete assignments and pass content and mandated state tests

in English when struggling to build essential skills in English? Would EL students do well if the test was in their native language?

Moreover, if EL students take the test in their native language and pass, would that count as a sign of positive academic progress? Would that data contribute to the school meeting its academic goals? Furthermore, what is concerning about these goals is that they increase every year whether students met them the previous year or not. There is a tendency for school administrators and educators to blame those with little to no English for not attaining positive academic progress without a holistic look at the school system and how it affects the academic achievement of EL students (Rodriguez et al., 2020). The U.S. has established education laws for all elementary and secondary schools (U.S. Department of Education Laws & Guidance, n.d.). Civil rights laws also exist to protect the education of the EL student population and serve their families (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education Frequently Asked Questions About Race, Color, or National Origin Discrimination - English Learner Students, n.d.). These established policies do not explicitly spell out how schools implement the laws; schools have the freedom to choose how to implement these laws based on school demographics and priorities. For example, the Hawai'i EL Guidance manual contains step-by-step processes for identifying and servicing EL students and measuring their English proficiency growth annually (Hawai'i Department of Education, Office of Student Support Services, 2019a). One of the measurements of EL students' growth in English is measured by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA).

I have administered the WIDA initial screener and the WIDA annual assessment for high school EL students for over a decade. The WIDA measures English proficiencies in four domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking for active EL students or those who have not

met the exit criteria of a composite score of 5 in the four areas. WIDA tests in tiers and levels, and the assessment for each tier does not change from year to year. For example, students at Tier A, B, and C this year would take the same test the following year if the results again put them in that category. The questions on this assessment are all in English. The instructions on the listening tests state that the students need to pay close attention because the scenario and questions are only given once. Some of the scenarios are lengthy. The students cannot review the scenarios or the questions. So, by the time the scenario ended, and the questions started, the students would shrug their shoulders and ask me what the scenario and questions were about because they already forgot. I could not help them because it is, after all, an assessment of their English skills. Imagine being in a foreign country as a beginning learner of the country's language, and on a language assessment, you were not allowed to review lengthy test items. How would it feel? How equitable would such an assessment be? What would you do about the inequities? While I understand the rationale behind using WIDA to collect data to inform instructions, improve programs, and make school financial decisions, I cannot bear seeing EL students discriminated against and mistreated. The emotional pain they felt when they could not respond in English or review a question due to a test given in a language they do not know is unjustified, a form of oppression, and a cause of shame. No EL student should be made to experience the devastating mental and emotional effects that result from the lack of foresight in educational assessment designs and the complete removal of their native language from mandated tests.

The late Dr. Ronald Heck, a prolific scholar on policy analysis, stated that policymaking is complex, and it takes ten years to see the results of any established policy (R. Heck, personal communication, June 14, 2022). I have great empathy for policymakers because they deal with

complexities the general public does not. However, policy changes are necessary, especially

when discrimination occurs due to existing policies. Its article, 13 Major Issues in Education at

the K-12 Level, Trade Schools, Colleges and Universities (2022), indicates standardized testing

as one of those significant issues which not only hold schools accountable but do not portray a

holistic view of student learning. In that light, an idea for consideration is for policymakers to

uncover the invisible stories of EL students and make changes in current policies to promote the

use of EL students' languages in the classroom and assessments (Cun, 2020). The literature

advocates for using students' native language in classrooms and tests for authentic learning and

to harness the power of students' funds of knowledge and cultural and language capital to learn

and thrive at school. An abundance of research points to positive outcomes of using EL students'

native languages in learning, such as increased English proficiency for those at the beginning

level of English learning (Cole, 2019). There should be statewide provisions and training for

teachers to be equitable in using unconventional methods of assessing EL students instead of the

usual one-size fits all approach. For example, the Hawaiʻi Common Core Speaking and Listening

Standard for Language Arts call for students to present information in a way that the audience

can follow (Department of Education State of Hawaiʻi Standards Toolkit, n.d.), which requires

students to deliver a presentation in front of the whole class and for the students to answer

questions from the audience. While this standard does not provide a way to assess EL students

on their speaking and listening skills, a tip I shared with faculty members is to allow the students

to present to a peer in their native language or to a teacher instead of forcing EL students to

present in front of the whole class when there is discomfort in presenting in English. The teacher

can still assess, get data, and ask clarifying questions without making the EL student

uncomfortable. Linda and Tony, the elder participants in this study, shared the story of their child

who stayed home from school crying because he did not want to present in front of the whole class. It was only one class, but the child missed a whole day of classes and the saga continued because the teachers did not have unconventional ways of assessing EL students. Also, the Smarter Balanced writing rubric for the English Language Arts Common Core argumentative writing standard (Hawaiʻi Statewide Assessments, 2001) that awards the Non-scorable (NS) score for compositions written in a language that is not English needs to change to allow EL students to write in their native languages and to be assessed equitably. An area that may need some policymakers to explore is looking at college admission to inform how U.S. high schools admit students into their programs. For international students applying to U.S. colleges and universities, one requirement is to pass an English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Test System (IELTS) assessment (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2016) before applying. The administration of the TOEFL and IELTS may seem like discrimination; however, it can be a way to help EL students prepare to be successful in the next phase of their schooling when they immigrate to the host country. While immigrant high school EL students new to learning English can learn English in U.S. classrooms, it seems quite an overwhelming and difficult feat when school EL programs are not equitable and are not set up to support this population of students. There is no law for high school immigrants to pass a TOEFL or IELTS before being accepted into a high school of their choice. WIDA is currently the screener for English language proficiency and program placement when EL students indicate on their enrollment form that they speak a language other than English at home. Schools receive large amounts of money, which should be allotted appropriately to correct the wrongs in school and district EL programs. Hence, EL students at the lowest level of English proficiency get robust support that enable them to engage meaningfully in school offerings (U.S. Department of

Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2020). There are paraprofessionals and educational assistants provided to help EL students; however, these funds and human resources do not always mean satisfactory outcomes. While EL students must learn from highly qualified content teachers and staff, our teachers, paraprofessionals, and educational assistants do not always speak the language of EL students and are not trained in EL language acquisition and learning. Having students pass an English proficiency test before immigrating to the United States can alleviate this situation, and the teachers would focus on what they do best instead of worrying about taking on more training on EL teaching and learning. Teachers taking on EL scholarship training, learning, applying, and refining these methods take time. The problem is that EL students do not halt schooling to wait for teachers to gain skills to teach them. EL scholarship is one less thing for over-scheduled teachers to consider, as EL students would already be equipped with English skills from their native countries to navigate the U.S. curriculum and succeed in it.

The registration process is the other area for schools to closely examine and improve. When EL students register, the registrars and counselors need to be critical in their placement of students, especially when they enter U.S. high schools closer to their 18th birthday and need to repeat a grade level to earn credits towards graduation. There has to be transparency between the registrars, parents, and the students if students cannot graduate due to repeating a grade. The counselors and registrars could foresee these EL students' academic trajectories by looking at their grade reports from their home countries. They can then evaluate where the challenges are and whether these EL students would progress toward graduation and then discuss these with students and parents accordingly. Registrars and counselors need to inform EL students and parents of available programs that can support continuing students' education if enrollment would mean not graduating due to the 18-age limit policy. It is unpleasant that due to this age

limit policy, EL students would be labeled as dropping out when they do not graduate on time (age 18). Policymakers should consider adding a fifth or even a sixth year for EL students learning both English and content areas in English. A study on EL students in New York public schools shows that providing additional years benefits EL students (Rodriquez et al., 2020) and significantly increases their graduation rate. Some may say these students can benefit from night schools that offer a general education development (GED); however, EL students at the entering or lowest level of English proficiency would face the same academic and second language challenges. Adding a fifth and sixth year to EL education improves the chances of EL students developing English skills and graduating, and while there may be only a handful of EL students in this category, one EL student not graduating could impact this person's life economically (Rodriguez et al., 2020), who could have been blessed should equitable policies and resources have been created and shared openly without reservation.

Implications for Future Research

In this study, the research question was: What factors contributed to the "dropping out" of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI in this study who live on the Westside of Oʻahu? The EL alumni and elders answered scripted and structural (Bevan, 2014) interview questions about their experiences with the schools. As an EL coordinator, I have witnessed EL students from the FSM and RMI attend school and work hard to achieve their academic goals. However, I also observed the consistent absences of these students and the eventual discontinuation of their high school education. It was integral to my professional responsibility as an educational practitioner to work with EL students and their families to support their success. I also needed to understand this community's experiences with the schools. There is a greater need to illuminate the positive aspects of the humanity and multiple identities of the Micronesian and Marshallese EL student

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population and their families; however, there is limited national literature on EL students from these regions (Kaneshiro & Black, 2012; Floyd-Fraught, 2019; Raatior, 2017; Twomey et al., 2017).

Consequently, I chose to conduct a phenomenological study to describe and understand the experiences of EL alumni and elders from the community. I also aimed to illuminate their stories of strengths and challenges for schools to see what the participants shared so the schools provide critical ways to support this community better. Besides understanding and describing the experiences of EL students from the FSM and RMI to offer critical ways to improve services to the students and their families, this study also sought to add to the limited literature on this community and the EL dropout phenomenon.

While the results from this study reaffirm the critical need for schools to engage parents, practice culturally sustaining and translanguaging pedagogies, establish a student cultural club, and hire Micronesian and Marshallese teachers, the findings were due to the limited number of EL alumni and parent participants. One suggestion for further research is to conduct mixed-method research increasing the number of participants in the same categories, especially the elders of EL alumni who chose to discontinue their high school education. Because the elders in this study were primarily those whose children graduated high school, there is so much more to glean from the elders whose children chose to discontinue high school that is not learned in this study. Also, future researchers should consider involving teachers, administrators, and current EL high school students to determine whether current instructional models, school activities, and curricula are culturally sustaining and supportive of the needs of EL students from the FSM and RMI. The other recommendation for further research is to look at the ethnic capitals (Zhou & Lee, 2017) and geographies of opportunities (Hillman, 2016; Iding et al., 2007) outside of school

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for EL students from the FSM and RMI and their families. Zhou and Lee (2017) conducted a study to determine why Chinese American students outperformed their peers and gained upward social mobility. They found that access to ethnic capitals (churches, businesses, tutoring) outside of school had helped these students excel. There is a need for future research in this area for EL students from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands and their families.

Lastly, researchers must stop using, perpetuating, and circulating deficit views and damaging stereotypes of Indigenous people, even EL students and their families. These pessimistic views include labels such as "minority," "minoritized," "disadvantaged," "language minority," "at-risk," "marginalized," "third world," "fourth world," and "fifth world." These do not shine. Perhaps researchers perpetuate these labels to shine the light on the challenges faced by Indigenous people; however, these labels "make assumptive determinations," "viewed through the straitjacketing lens of the deficit," "define what we [Indigenous] cannot be" and "excluded…the lifeworld of…Indigenous peoples" (Walter & Suina, 2021, p. 236). Dr. Manulani Meyers sternly added, "You don't tell kids they are underprivileged. You challenge their [behind] off and work with them. That's how you do privilege" (M. Meyers, personal communication, March 4, 2023).

Moreover, Ralph Waldo Emerson is credited with saying, "Treat a man as he is, and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he could be, and he will become what he should be" (Goodreads, n.d., p. 1). The deficit views perpetuated by researchers continue to view Indigenous people in those labels and diminish the excellence and intelligence of Indigenous people. It creates the sense that Indigenous people, even EL students and their families, exist to be helped instead of people with gifts and talents to contribute to the betterment of their society (Cun, 2020). These deficit labels bring to mind a 1995 popular study by Hart and Risley, which

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reported the vocabulary attainment gap between higher socioeconomic children and those from low-income families. The researchers hypothesized that one of the primary reasons poverty persists is due to the language deficiencies of poor children and their families. The researchers then set out to record conversations between parents and children from high and low socioeconomic families beginning when children were seven to nine months old and followed them for two and a half years. Hart and Risley (1995) found that average three-year-old children from low-income families had a vocabulary of 500 words compared to 1000 words among three-year-old children from professional families. This study was published widely in over 600 scholarly journals (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). It perpetuated the idea that poor parents pass on less sophisticated language to their children, affecting their linguistic and cognitive abilities. As someone who grew up in a financially destitute family, I find this study irresponsible. Besides the study having methodological flaws such as "ethnocentric bias" and a "small sample" (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009, p. 364), the study negates the pedagogies of the home (Manzo, 2016) - the differences and varieties of substantial linguistic and rich cultural experiences of children and families within their respective family, community, and culture contexts. The study perpetuates damaging stereotypes and criticisms of people experiencing poverty and the gloomy academic outcomes that result from being poor without a holistic look at all of the systems that serve and impact children and their families. By the time Dudley-Marlin and Lucas (2009) completed their critical review of Hart and Risley's (1995) study, the findings of the 1995 study and views of poor children without regard to their culture and language lifeways had been widespread, affecting both policies and teacher deficit views of children that led to initiatives on closing the achievement gap. I am annoyed every time I read studies that refer to us, Indigenous people, even EL students, and families, as people who lack and who are

less than the so-called dominant cultures. Researchers need to do better and know that they can oppress Indigenous children and families, even EL children and their communities, in how they negatively describe them and perpetuate deficit labels. Instead, researchers need to take a holistic approach to illuminating the whole of every child and community.

Just because a student is learning English does not mean they are cognitively deficient. On the other hand, western cultures have been seen through strength-based lenses such as "language majority" and "dominant culture." What makes a language a minority language? While minority refers to the number of people speaking such a language, the label minority still carries the tone that this language is less than that. On the contrary, the label dominant culture conveys that this culture is more powerful than the other. Just because a language or culture is not spoken or practiced by the majority does not mean it is not dominant and less than. All languages and cultures are equal, are majority and dominant because the keepers and holders of such live, practice, and uphold these identities. It is time to stop the inequality, deficit, and negative labels on Indigenous people and give their lifeworlds equal footing, power, and due credit.

Conclusion

It is estimated that by 2030, the number of EL students in the U.S. will increase by 40% (Lambert et al., 2018). It is fair to assume that more and more families from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands will settle in Hawaiʻi and other U.S. states to live, work, and study. Therefore, schools on the Westside of Oʻahu have an urgent and critical need to ramp up preparation and implement systems to serve EL students from the regions. This study used a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of EL alumni from the Federated States of Micronesia and Marshall Islands who chose to discontinue their high school education on the

Westside of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi. Data collected from the semi-structured interviews with participants revealed that while the school experiences of the participants in this study were positive primarily because of friends and encounters with counselors and a few teachers, the wishes for change had to do with discrimination, the impact of school personnel, disengaging parents, lack of culturally sustaining and translanguaging pedagogies, no student culture club, and no Micronesian and Marshallese teacher presence. The high school EL alumni graduates and the elders from the FSM and RMI also shared their experiences to understand better the schools the EL alumni attended on the Westside.

While colonization has sowed injustice by dismantling the cultures and the traditional ways of learning for many indigenous nations, it is essential to note that despite its past sins, the U.S. has shown actions of good faith in advancing the interests of the Greater Micronesia and its people. The U.S. continues to fund schools, government, and education in Micronesia. While there have been damaging inequities in the colonized inherited school systems, natives have personal choices regarding the power of their Indigenous scholarship and responsibility in education systems wherever they may be (Kanaʻiaupuni, 2005). There is no denying that colonization has had damaging ripple effects on Indigenous people. However, at some point, we, the natives, need to seize our opportunities in non-Indigenous systems and communities we find ourselves. We use our gifts, talents, and training to revive and strengthen our culture, way of life, and languages. We can prepare by using our Indigenous knowledge and the tools in Western systems placed in our way to make changes, bring justice, advance our cause, and improve our lives as a diaspora within the non-Indigenous system. We can tell and write our stories, legitimize them, and educate others about the damaging effects of human nature to control and see others as inferior. We seek to put a stop to inequality and inequities that are still prevalent in

our communities, so our Indigenous people have pathways to thrive. We can pursue a "geography of opportunities" (Hillman, 2016; Iding et al., 2007) to highlight the need for spaces for Indigenous people to practice their cultures and thrive in non-Indigenous systems. Our critical choices and actions to advance our causes cannot wait until someone, a politician, a famous Hollywood idol, and the like notice and help us. Though these people can help, the Indigenous can navigate and advance their cause with aloha (M. Meyers, personal communication, June 13, 2022) while working closely with those of culture where they are diaspora. To this, I reiterate the call of the late Dr. Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, an I-Kiribati and African American South Pacific Studies scholar and poet, "the paradox of colonialism is that it offers us tools for our liberation even as it attempts to dominate us. Education is the perfect example of this colonial paradox. I value my "colonial" or "Western" education, even as I attempt to use it to help myself and others discover more about our pre-colonial heritage, and fashion futures for ourselves that are liberating" (Teaiwa, 2005, p. 2).

The sustained dropout of EL students from the Federated States of Micronesia and Marshall Islands on the Westside of Oʻahu Hawaiʻi needs an unconventional *lou* (harvesting pole/solution), more *sulu* (lights/holistic collaboration), and *angang chok aromas* (the power and unity of the Indigenous FSM and RMI people). The voices of EL students from the FSM and RMI are absent from the existing literature. The findings from this study add to the limited information on this newest group of migrants and illuminate their lifeways. It is my sincere desire that the voices of the FSM and RMI participants in the findings and recommendations from this study will be taken into serious and urgent actions and consideration to support policy-making and actively engage the Micronesian and Marshallese communities. In the words of Jino, an elder participant in this project, this study is to "help someone…coming up"; it is also my

greatest call to improve processes that support EL students from the FSM, RMI, their peers, and

families. The improvement of these processes supports the educational liberation and the

achievement of the "better life" that EL students from the FSM and RMI and their families seek

in the U.S. The issue facing EL students and families from the FSM and RMI is not only a

burden for this study but also an issue for all of us. Every EL student is ours to elevate, and every

EL student retained and graduated is a win for us all.

Epilogue/Afterword

When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less

and less important whether I am afraid. -Audre Lorde

I was ignorant of social justice issues and systemic inequities; I carried that for most of

my education and career. When I entered the doctoral program, I was unaware of white privilege

and supremacy - ideas that I thought were absurd because I felt everyone had a fair shot at

upward mobility and success. I felt everyone had everyone else's best interest in mind. I thought

anyone could succeed if they just worked hard and pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, but

how wrong, naive, and ignorant I was. I was wrong to assume that there was equal access to

resources, systems, and success when systems and policies kept certain people out and

squandered equity. I was amiss in believing that people were poor because they did not work

hard enough when the participants in this study had jobs and contributed positively to society,

even amid discrimination, health issues, and barriers to education. It was not until I embarked on

the doctoral program that I was trained in methods of looking critically at systems to identify the

good and the problems, barriers, and injustices faced by EL students, even those from the FSM

and RMI and their families.

During my doctoral training, I received the impression of moving to Utah. I fought it off

because I was a year from finishing my studies. My husband told me he received the same

impression. We had no idea why we got such impression to move. We made it a matter of prayer

for some time. We eventually felt we should follow the prompting. We moved to a place where

my family and I are not of the same racial makeup as most of the population. There, I taught a

college class of prospective teachers minoring in Teaching English to Students of Other

Languages (TESOL). There was not one person of color in the class. The readings and modules

for the class focused on issues of power faced by EL students and their families. Each student mentioned not having experienced issues faced by people of color and EL students. They recognized their privileges as white-identified individuals who have a superior mindset; however, they were committed to doing critical self-reflection and consciousness. They learned that transforming systems is multifaceted, yet it begins with changing themselves and eliminating deficit beliefs about people they serve.

At another time, the microaggression came while I was sitting at church, and a white lady asked me where I was from and when I came to the U.S. After mentioning where I went to college, she asked me if that was where I learned English. Of all things to ask me, my English was singled out. I could not believe it. On another occasion, my African American husband applied for a teaching position at one of the private schools sponsored by our church. He went through the lesson demonstration for the position and the debrief. The feedback he got was that he was excellent, managed the pace of the lesson, had the attention of the learners, and "We need more teachers like you." He was told he would know in two weeks about the decision. He never heard back for two months; he had to call to find out he did not make the cut. He applied again for a different position at the same school because he wanted to work there, only to hop on Zoom for an interview to find out the principal never showed up. He called the principal. The principal nonchalantly asked if they could interview on the phone. He did not even apologize for not showing up on Zoom. They interviewed, and my husband did not make the cut again. What did all that feedback mean about his excellence, intelligence, and more teachers like him are needed in the school? By the way, the population of the school faculty consists of only one person of color. You decide what that means. Was that one person of color a token of diversity and inclusion? Was the treatment of my husband's application a result of an inherited racist system

and unexpressed discriminatory consciousness? It was not because he was not qualified. He walked into that lesson demonstration with over 20 years of effective classroom experience and successfully building musical programs from scratch. Not only that, but he trained young people who won not only lead roles in musical productions but the coveted prestigious opportunities to perform at the renowned Carnegie Hall. All these experiences caused me to finally realize that the literature about microaggression, systemic racism, white privilege, and supremacy that I was screaming and kicking against because I did not believe those things existed, were true. I came to the realization that the social justice tenet of my doctoral program was a critical component in not only developing leaders needed to address issues of social justice, but opening my eyes to the fact that issues of social justice discussed in the doctoral program were absolutely real. I felt responsible in a way for perpetuating the mindset that everyone was treated equally and that racism was a thing of the past. It is not. These social issues are well and alive today. When you work in a system for years doing what the system is set up to do, it is not always easy to see systemic racism and inequities until one critically sees the system and starts a serious study of it to see who is kept out of and discriminated against in such system. Many people of color who work in inherited racist systems are complicit in perpetuating such injustices. It is not that people of color are any less qualified. There is a multitude of excellent leaders and a talented population of us. There are unacknowledged biases held by some in systems that keep people of color out. The epiphany resulting from the move to Utah was that I needed to learn what I could not learn while living in Hawai'i. I would not have known about racism, microaggression, and obvious, subtle, and multilayered discrimination in our society without going to where these things are happening. Moreover, I cannot address these issues in my personal and professional responsibilities without having experienced and known about them. My doctoral pursuit has

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awakened me to greater responsibility for educational justice and mercy work. I have been transformed from doing what the systems says to do into critically looking at systems in their entirety to understand issues of power faced by individuals and communities and pinpoint areas of access to systems for those outside trying to get in. I call on the afraid, the unafraid, believers, and non-believers of justice, mercy, equality, equity, belonging, diversity, and inclusion to be awake, do critical self-reflection, build critical consciousness, and courageously interrogate biases and unexpressed discriminatory thoughts and behavior to end racism and discrimination, build a bigger table and extend the stake of our tent for a truly diverse, inclusive, and just society.

Appendix A: Figure, 1. Map of Micronesia
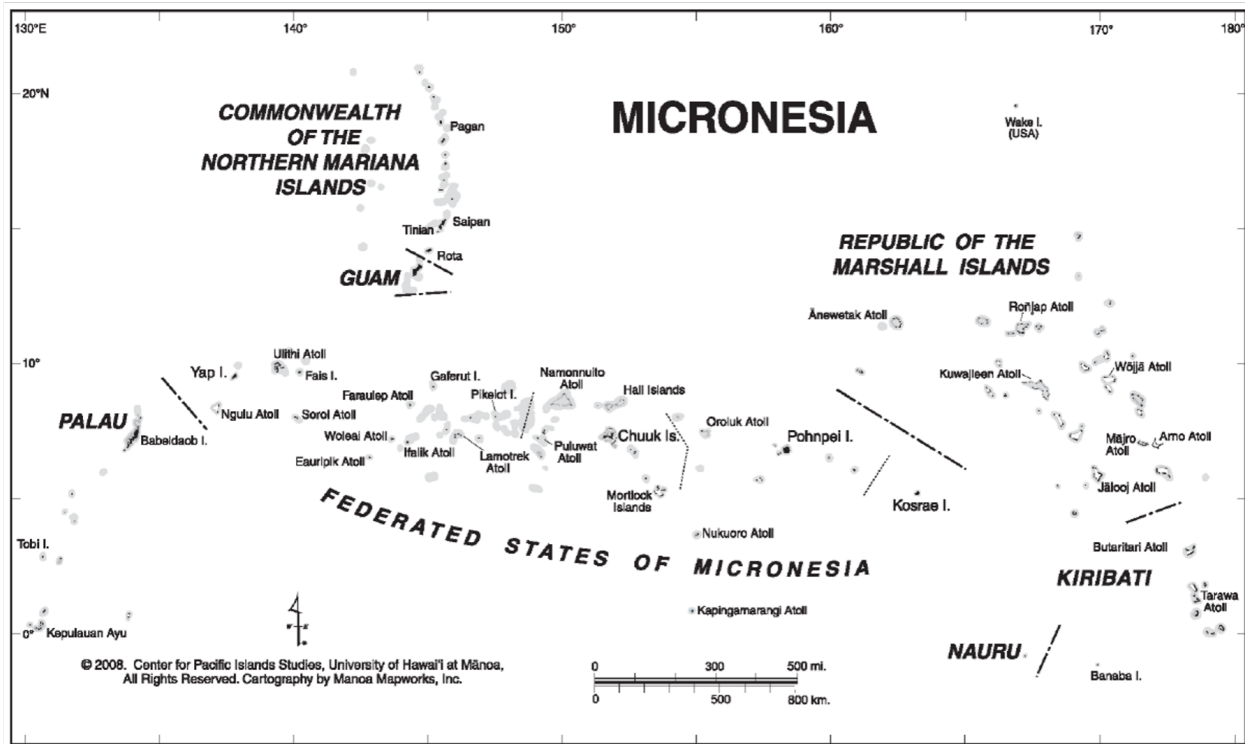
Figure 1 Micronesia

Appendix B: Figure, 2. Map of Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia
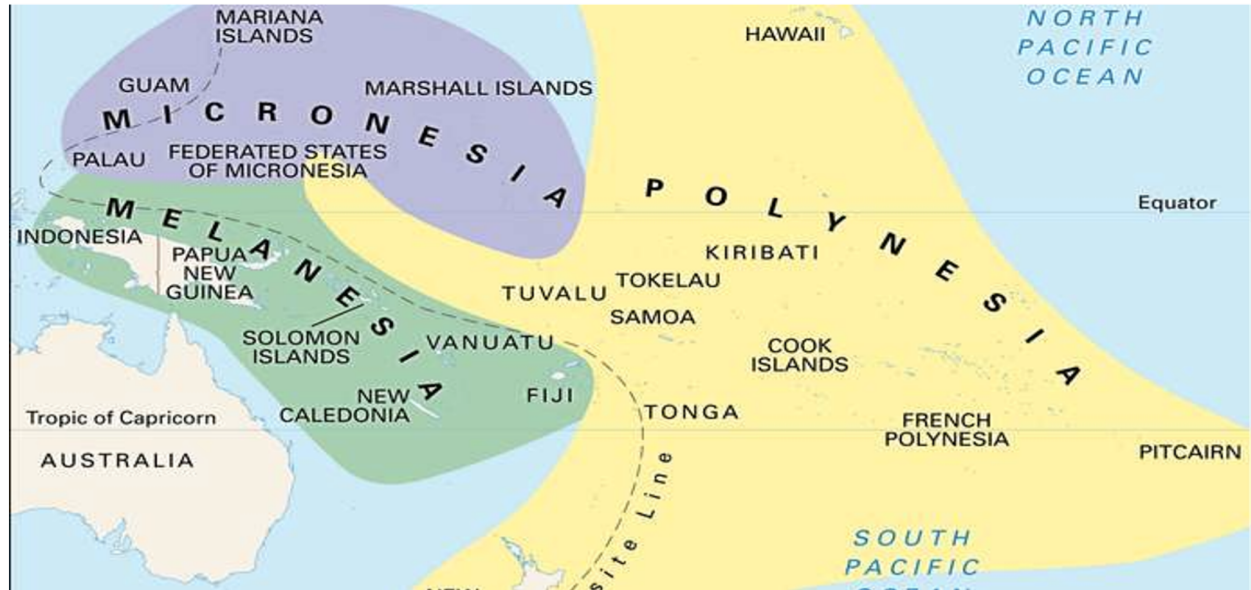
Figure 2 Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia

Appendix C: Table, 1. Linguistic Parallel between Indigenous Pasefika People

Linguistic Parallel

Concept	Samoa & Tahiti	Fiji	Tokelau, Niue & Cook Island	Marshall Island & Kiribati	Chuuk	New Zealand
canoe or boat	va'a	waqa	vaka	wa	waa	waka

Table 1 Linguistic parallel among Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia

Appendix D: Table, 2. Data Overview

Data Overview

Research Question	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data	Analysis Approach
What factors contributed to the "dropping out" of EL alumni from the FSM and RMI in this study who live on the Westside of Oʻahu?	One-on-one semi-structured Interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015; Bevan, 2014)	Gender, Ethnicity	Themes or interrelated themes - Looking at common essential and critical expressions of experience (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Sundler et al., 2019)

Table 2 Data Overview

Appendix E: Table, 3. Participant Demographics

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	8	44%
Female	10	56%
Other	0	0%
Ethnicity		
Chuukese	6	33%
Marshallese	11	61%
Pohnpeian	1	6%
Yapese	0	0%
Kosraean	0	0%

Table 3 Participant Demographics

Appendix F: Table, 4. Thematic Array

Thematic Array

	Teachers	Counselor	Security Guard	Cafeteria Workers
Impact of School Personnel Care	Did their best to teach and help students with whatever is needed such as passing classes	Helped students apply for college and scholarships	Checked on kids to make sure they adhere to school policies	Good at serving food to the students

Table 4 Thematic Array

Appendix G: Figure, 3. Analytic Memo

Analytic Memo

"Oh, well, I think it had to do with my family because
the whole reason why we came out here is for my sister. She's the third
youngest. She's disabled and my mom brought her for medical care. Because
back home, we have poor medical care and education. So I just think about my
family and what I can do when I finish high school, what it can benefit me to
provide for them, especially with my sister, and like, I just think about
when my parents you know, when they're gone. I had to take care of her. Get a
good job in order to take care of her because it's really a really hard job
to do. My dad is the only one who is working right now. He's like in Alaska.
I don't want to do that, in my future to be separated from my family. I
wanted to be closer to them all the time. So I just keep that in mind. You
know, just to help my family and for myself if I want a better life in the
future. So I put myself that I had to do school first then college, and then
find a better job in the future."

"Yeah, it is the fact that he's not here for my
graduation. that's why so I just, you know."

"He comes down every year. So like this October I think
he will stay till like."

"Yeah. I mean, there are some times where I go. You know,
I do a lot of bad things. But I always come back and I'm very religious. And
I think like that's one of the biggest things that helps us a lot in our
family. As my mom is very religious. So she believes in God. And we always
pray and just do things within God stuff. Yeah."

Figure 3 Analytic Memo

Appendix H: Committee on Human Studies Consent Form

University of Hawaiʻi
Consent to Participate in a Research Project
Saofaʻi Lowe, Doctoral Student
Dr. Lori Ideta, Advisor, Principal Investigator
Project title: "Drop Out" Factors of Micronesian and Marshallese Alumni
The Stories That Have Not Been Told

Aloha! My name is Saofai Lowe and I am excited to invite you to take part in a research study. I am a doctoral student at the College of Education, University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation.

What am I being asked to do?
If you choose to participate in this project, I will meet with you for an interview that will be 90-120 minutes in duration at a location and time convenient for you. We can also meet via an online platform if you prefer.

Taking part in this study is your choice.
Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You can choose not to answer an interview question. You can choose how much you share in your answer. You may stop participating in the interview or the overall study at any time without question. If you stop participating in any or all portions of this research project, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences and factors that had an impact on the English Learner (EL) high school alumni from Truk (Chuuk), Kusaie (Kosrae), and Yap of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and those from the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) on the Westside of Oʻahu.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?
The interview will consist of five to seven open-ended questions with some follow up questions. The interview is estimated to take 90 - 120 minutes. The interview questions will ask about your experience at the school you attended (if alumni) or your experience as a parent at the high school your child/ren attend(ed) in the Westside community in which you live(d).

If you prefer an individual interview, only you and I will be present during the interview. If you would like to be interviewed with a group, you, the group and I will be present during the interview. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. I expect to interview a total of 20 people for this study.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?
I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether without question.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may help improve educational policies and support services governing the education of students from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands and their families on the Westside of Oʻahu.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
I will keep all study data secure on a password-protected computer. Only my faculty advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawaiʻi Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study.

After I transcribe your interview, you will have an opportunity to review and revise it without question. Once this dissertation project is completed, I will destroy the audio-recordings and the transcripts. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal information that can identify you. I will ask you to choose a pseudonym (fake name) that the study will use to refer to you in the report of my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Compensation:
There will no compensation for participating in this research.

Future Research Studies: (Insert one of the following statements:)
Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Questions:
If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at [phone: 808-627-2896 & email: saofai@hawaii.edu]. You may also contact my Advisor and Principal Investigator, Dr. Lori Ideta, at [phone: (808) 956-3290 & email ideta@hawaii.edu]. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu. to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd for more information on your rights as a research participant.

If you agree to participate in this project, you can take a picture of this form and either text it to me at 808-627-2896 or email it to saofai@hawaii.edu. You can also call or text me to come pick it up. Please sign and date this signature page before returning the form to me.

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I give permission to join the research project entitled, "Drop Out" Factors of Micronesian and Marshallese Alumni – The Stories That Have Not Been Told

Please initial next to either "Yes" or "No" to the following: (note to researcher - include these options only as appropriate to the study design described on page 1)

_____ Yes   _____ No   I consent to be audio-recorded for the interview portion of this research.

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____   Mahalo for your help!

Appendix I: Recruitment Script

Alumni

Aloha _____. How are you? How is your family? What have you been up to? So great to talk with you today.

The reason I wanted to speak with you is because you are an alumni (graduated or did not) of a high school on the Westside of Oʻahu.. _____ told me you'd be able to help me. I wanted to ask if you would be willing to participate in my doctoral research project I am doing to understand your experience with the school and the community. My project wants to understand the reasons Micronesians and Marshallese dropped out of school. I also want to understand the successes of the Micronesians and Marshallese people as well as their challenges in the school system and the community to help me find ways to help the Micronesian and Marshallese EL students and their families. Do you think this is something you can help me with?

Thank you for your help with my project. This study is important because your voice will help your peers and people from your community and future generations. My project involves interviewing five elders/parents from the community, and about 15 alumni in your age group who graduated and also did not finish school. Is it ok for me to interview you?_____ Would you like to be interviewed alone (just you and me) or with a small group (other Micronesians or Marshallese)_____? I will be holding interviews from _____ to _____. Which date and time would work best for you? _____ Would you like me to talk story with you in person or on Zoom? _____

Thank you for that!

I'm trying to find people from Chuuk, Kosrae, and the Marshall Islands who attended _____. Who do you know that I can speak with? Do you mind giving me their names and contact information? Or, would you be willing to share my information with them to contact me about this study? _____

Thank you so much for your time. I want to confirm that we are meeting on
Date: _____ Time: _____ Venue: _____

I will give you a reminder call the day before our meeting. I appreciate your help so much! Have a great one! Good-bye.

Elders

Aloha _____! How are you? How is your family? So great to talk with you today.

The reason I wanted to speak with you is because you are an elder/parent in the community. Your daughter told me you'd be able to help me. I wanted to ask if you would be willing to help me with my doctoral research. I am trying to understand your experience with the school and the community where you live. My project wants to understand the reasons Micronesians and Marshallese students dropped out of school. I also want to understand the successes of the Micronesians and Marshallese people as well as their challenges in the school system and the community to help me find ways to help the Micronesian and Marshallese EL students and their families. Do you think this is something you can help me with?

Thank you for your help with my project. This study is important because you live in the community and/or have children that attend school in the community. Your voice will help people from Micronesia and Marshall Islands as well as future generations. My project involves interviewing five elders/parents from the community. Is it ok for me to interview you? _____. Would you like to be interviewed alone (just you and me) or with a small group (other Micronesians or Marshallese) _____? I will be holding interviews from _____ to _____. Which date and time would work best for you? _____ Would you like me to talk story with you in person or on Zoom? _____. What is your email address to send the Zoom link to? _____

Thank you for that!

I'm trying to find parents who are Chuukese, Kosraean, and Marshallese whose children attend/ed _____ school and live/d on the Westside of Oʻahu. Who do you know that I can speak with? Do you mind giving me their names and contact information? _____ Or, would you be willing to share my information with them to contact me about this study?

Thank you so much for your time. I want to confirm that we are meeting on
Date: _____ Time: _____ Venue: _____. I will give you a reminder call the day before our meeting. I appreciate your help so much! Have a great one! Good-bye.

Appendix J: Interview Questions

<u>Alumni "DropOuts"</u>
Interview Introduction
Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate the trust you have given by your participation in this project as I am asking you to share your lived experiences with me. I want to assure you that everything you will share will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Your true identity will be protected with a pseudonym of your choosing. This interview will be audio recorded only so I can listen to it again and transcribe or write out everything we talked about. I will then share the transcript or writing with you and you are free to remove, add anything you feel is important to add, and revise anything you want. This is your lived experience and I want you to choose what needs to be shared and kept private.

I am interested in your experience with the high school and what can be done to support students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands and their families now and in the future. I feel today's interview is more of a "talk story" conversation. Please feel free to share what you want when I ask you a question. If you do not feel comfortable answering, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Thank you again for your time, your honesty, and your sharing. Before we begin, what questions do you have for me?

Demographic Questions:
     Which gender do you identify with Male   Female   Other: _____
     Where were you born?
     Do you identify as a Chuukese   Kosraean Yapese   Ponpheian Marshallese
     Other:_____
     What grade/age did you start school back home?
     What grade/age did you stop attending school back home?
     What year did you come to Hawaiʻi? What grade/age did you start school in Hawaiʻi?
     What grade/age did you stop attending school in Hawaiʻi?
     Where in Hawaiʻi do you live now?

Contextual Interview Questions
1. I am wondering about your high school experience in this community. What were some good things about it? What was not so good about it?

2. I would like to hear your story about why you stopped out or chose not to finish high school. What made you drop out? What would have helped you stay and graduate?

3. What do you want the school to do so that students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands stay in school and graduate?

Pseudonym Questions
1. A pseudonym is a fake name someone uses instead of their real name. I would like to give you the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to refer to you in this study. What pseudonym would you like to use?

Interview Introduction

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate the trust you have given by your participation in this project as I am asking you to share your lived experiences with me. I want to assure you that everything you will share will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Your true identity will be protected with a pseudonym of your choosing. This interview will be audio recorded only so I can listen to it again and transcribe or write out everything we talked about. I will then share the transcript or writing with you and you are free to remove, add anything you feel is important to add, and revise anything you want. This is your lived experience and I want you to choose what needs to be shared and kept private.

I am interested in your experience with the high school and what can be done to support students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands and their families now and in the future. I feel today's interview is more of a "talk story" conversation. Please feel free to share what you want when I ask you a question. If you do not feel comfortable answering, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Thank you again for your time, your honesty, and your sharing. Before we begin, what questions do you have for me?

Demographic Questions:
      Which gender do you identify with   Male   Female   Other: _____
      Where were you born?
      Do you identify as a Chuukese   Kosraean Yapese Ponpheian Marshallese
      Other:_____
      What grade/age did you start school back home?
      What grade/age did you stop attending school back home?
      What year did you come to Hawai'i? What grade/age did you start school in Hawai'i?
      What grade/age did you stop attending school in Hawai'i?
      Where in Hawai'i do you live now?

Contextual Interview Questions
1. I am wondering about your high school experience in this community. What were some good things about it? What was not so good about it?

2. What things did you do to help you stay in school and graduate?

3. What do you want the school to do so that students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands stay in school and graduate instead of dropping out?

Pseudonym Questions
1. A pseudonym is a fake name someone uses instead of their real name. I would like to give you the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to refer to you in this study. What pseudonym would you like to use?

<u>Elders</u>
Interview Introduction

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I appreciate the trust you have given by your participation in this project as I am asking you to share your lived experiences with me. I want to assure you that everything you will share will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Your true identity will be protected with a pseudonym of your choosing. This interview will be audio recorded only so I can listen to it again and transcribe or write out everything we talked about. I will then share the transcript or writing with you and you are free to remove, add anything you feel is important to add, and revise anything you want. This is your lived experience and I want you to choose what needs to be shared and kept private.

I am interested in your experience with the high school and what can be done to support students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands and their families now and in the future. I feel today's interview is more of a "talk story" conversation. Please feel free to share what you want when I ask you a question. If you do not feel comfortable answering, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

Thank you again for your time, your honesty, and your sharing. Before we begin, what questions do you have for me?

Demographic Questions:
Which gender do you identify with   Male   Female   Other: _____
Do you identify as a Chuukese   Kosraean   Yapese   Ponpheian   Marshallese   Other:
When did you come to Hawaiʻi? 2011
Where in Hawaiʻi do you live?
What school did/do your children attend in Hawaiʻi?

Contextual Interview Questions
1. I am wondering about your experience with the high school here in the community where your children attended/attend. What are the good things about it?

2. What are the challenges or problems your children experience at the school?

3. What do you want the school to do so that students from the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands stay in school and graduate instead of dropping out?

Pseudonym Questions
1. A pseudonym is a fake name someone uses instead of their real name. I would like to give you the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to refer to you in this study. What pseudonym would you like to use? Dolphin

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