

SETTING THE STAGE FOR MASTER'S LEVEL SUCCESS

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Cecil and Geneva Roberts, my beloved parents, who have unconditionally believed in me my entire life. I love them dearly for all they have given me to become the person I am today.

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ABSTRACT

Comprehensive reading, writing, research, and study skills play a critical role in a graduate student's success and ability to contribute to a field of study effectively. The literature indicated a need to support graduate student success in the areas of mentoring, navigation, as well as research and writing. The purpose of this two-phased mixed methods explanatory study was to examine factors that characterize student success at the Master's level in the fields of education, sociology and social work. The study was grounded in a transformational learning framework which focused on three levels of learning: technical knowledge, practical or communicative knowledge, and emancipatory knowledge. The study included two data collection points. Phase one consisted of a Master's Level Success questionnaire that was sent via Qualtrics to graduate level students at three colleges and universities in the Central Valley of California: a California State University campus, a University of California campus, and a private college campus. The results of the chi-square indicated that seven questionnaire items were significant with p values less than .05. Phase two in the data collection included semi-structured interview questions that resulted in three themes emerged using Dedoose software: (1) the need for more language and writing support at the Master's level, (2) the need for mentoring, especially for second-language learners, and (3) utilizing the strong influence of faculty in student success. It is recommended that institutions continually assess and strengthen their programs to meet the full range of learners and to support students to degree completion.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This is a mixed methods study of Master's level graduate education focusing on supporting student success, including that of second-language learners. An Explanatory Sequential Design was utilized which included two phases: (1) a collection of quantitative data using a questionnaire and SPSS analysis; and (2) a second collection of qualitative data using interviews, which was informed by the results of the first quantitative phase. Based on the results of the quantitative analysis, interview questions were developed and a subset of those Master's students, including those who are English learners, participated in interviews to describe their perceptions of preparation and experiences in graduate studies. The results of this study identified key factors that support students' preparation and support in an effort to expand their educational experiences and achieve success in graduate studies.

Background

Comprehensive reading, writing, research, and study skills play a critical role in a graduate student's success and ability to contribute to a field of study effectively. How well are students being prepared to transition from baccalaureate to Master's level programs? *Summer Bridge* programs are often found in place and well supported in college institutions to transition high school students successfully to the college world. However, it is rare to see a program in place that bridges baccalaureate students to graduate studies. Many assume that after four or more years of study for a

baccalaureate degree, a student is fully prepared and skilled to handle a graduate world filled with research, time-management, and the ability to be an analytic thinker and proficient writer.

The landscape of graduate education continues to become increasingly diverse. This creates a challenge for instructors to support a diverse population of students effectively in graduate courses that maximize student performance and contribute towards fostering a positive outlook and equitable learning experience for each student. For instance, Hoffer, Sederstrom, Selfa, Welch, Hess, Brown, and Guzman-Barron (2003) noted that first-generation graduate students are more likely to be female, individuals of color, report debt upon degree completion, and have attended a community college at some point during their academic career. Furthermore, ethnic diversity is also increasing in graduate education. Research indicated that the number of first-generation Hispanic graduate level students is growing; however, Hispanic students earned only 5.9% of the total 625,023 Master's degrees awarded in the United States in the academic year 2007-2008 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Are needs being met for the full range of learners at the Master's level including those who are native English speakers and those who are second-language learners?

With a significant amount of students dropping out and never finishing their degrees in the United States, there have to be measures that can be put in place to set the stage for success. Within postbaccalaureate education, there has been some success in graduation rates, but it is far from ideal. The National Center for Statistics

(2010) stated, “Overall, 693,000 Master’s degrees and 159,000 doctor's degrees were awarded in 2009–10; these numbers represent increases of 50 and 34 percent, respectively, over the numbers awarded in 1999–2000” (p. 96). Additionally, it was noted that in 2009–2010, females earned 60% of the Master’s degrees and 52% of doctoral degrees awarded (The National Center for Statistics, 2010). These statistics appear respectable at first glance but do not reflect the difficult path of graduate studies that students face, especially for those who are considered nontraditional. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), over 60% of the U.S. population between the ages of 25 and 64 in 2004 had no postsecondary education. Additionally, with respect to college completion and the prospect of postbaccalaureate education, Gándara and Contreras (2011) affirmed that ethnic disparities exist in degree completion. For example, they reported that 11% of Latinos and 17.5 % of African Americans 25 to 29 years of age had a BA or higher compared with 34 % of Whites in the United States (Gándara & Contreras, 2011).

Berker, Horn, and Carroll (2003) noted that nontraditional students which include low income, full-time workers, or students who are second-language learners encounter even more barriers to complete their degrees. This puts them at a high risk for not completing their graduate programs.

Supporting English learner success in higher education results in more educated and qualified individuals who can contribute to the greater good of society. This will have a positive long-term fiscal impact on society fostering more productive members who give back to society at all levels (Pérez, 2012). Cohen and Brawer

(1987) noted that second-language learner college students are at a higher risk along with other nontraditional students for failing to attain academic success and completion due to extensive barriers. These barriers can include language issues, not having a network of support within or outside the college, or being a first generation college student unsure of how to navigate the system (Cohen & Brawer, 1987).

Furthermore, nontraditional adult learners, many of whom may be second-language learners, often experience three major challenges: role conflicts, lack of confidence, and previous life experiences that result in fixed belief structures (Belzer, 2004). This can create even more challenges and frustrations to achieving academic success.

To prevent burnout and dropping out for students at all college levels, including second-language learners, institutional programs and efforts must be put into place. Gándara and Bial (2001) noted that effective retention programs tend to share five components: (1) provide at least one key advocate whose job it is to know, build a strong rapport with, and monitor the progress of each student on an ongoing basis; (2) structure a supportive peer group that reinforces program goals; (3) provide access to strong curriculum and the development of study skills that leads to college success; (4) attend to students' cultural backgrounds; and (5) help students develop an educational plan that includes how they can finance their education, providing information about scholarships when possible.

Additionally, over the past decade, the number of nonnative English speakers matriculating in higher education continues to climb along with students from a diverse variety of backgrounds. In an ever-changing and diverse landscape of higher-

education, it is imperative to examine how instructors and institutions can provide continued support in academics as well as from the social-emotional perspective, which ensures the success and promotes the development of the *whole* student.

Statement of the Problem

Examining the goals of graduate courses is critical to understanding what qualities are needed to be proficient in graduate programs. However, students often waiver with the perception that Master's level research courses are going to be extremely difficult; they can trigger feelings of anxiety, negativity, or avoidance. These perceptions may persist throughout a graduate student's career. As a result, this may impact the amount of research one contributes to his or her field in a lifetime.

English learners face even more complex challenges with limited language support at the graduate level. Cazden (1988) noted that classrooms are complex social systems and that there are "multiple agendas within any single classroom shifting from hour to hour and even minute to minute" (p. 54). What counts as knowledge and what counts as learning for a second-language learner? Are English learners equitably supported in language development as well as course mastery in higher education?

Just as in undergraduate education, colleges and universities do not want students falling through the cracks. Preparing all students, including English learners, for proficiency in contributing to educational research as well as academic achievement through carefully articulated preparation and ongoing support can help ensure that a university's or college's mission is met.

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs for all students, including second-language learners, in an effort to expand their educational experiences and achieve success in graduate level education.

Significance of the Study

Due to the rigorous reading, writing, and research competencies demanded in graduate programs, one must ask if students are adequately prepared during their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree with skills that will allow them to be successful in a Master's level field of study. Study skills and good time management are hallmark traits of successful students. Instructors work to foster proficiency in these traits throughout the students' college experience. However, Karpicke (2012) found that after studying 120 college students at all levels and their exam preparation habits, results revealed that many were not savvy about study strategies. When given a list of strategies to prepare for an exam, 84% chose to simply read a book repeatedly to memorize key concepts which is reported less effective than giving self-quizzes on the material or drawing a map of concept relationships (Karpicke, 2012). Attitudes towards feelings of preparedness, confidence levels on skill proficiency, and anxiety levels regarding advanced programs of study must be assessed for a holistic picture on the needs of equipping all students for success in graduate programs.

Research has supported a positive relationship between academic success and study skills at both high school and college levels. The field needs more research in this area pertaining to graduate level success to support optimal student achievement

in postsecondary education. It is critical to determine if the perceived anxieties about graduate work and actual performance reflect student uncertainty about their study skill preparation, lack of mentoring and support in their programs, or if there are other factors that would better prepare them for the rigors of Master's level studies. The value and impact of mentoring as a form of graduate level support must be examined. If negative attitudes result from graduate program experiences, particularly in the area of research, this may impact and persist through the students' lives in which they decline further opportunities to contribute to their respective fields to the extent to which they are capable.

Additionally, what practices are in place to adequately support second-language learners who with all the demands of graduate level study must also work with language development? Mezirow (1997) noted that new information is only a resource and must be incorporated into a meaningful and "already well-developed symbolic frame of reference, an active process involving thought, feelings, and disposition" (p. 10). It is important to gauge if English learners are frontloaded and immersed in meaningful content-rich vocabulary learning experiences in Master's level work as well as rich reflective discussion that help a student make meaningful connections, further develop language acquisition, and organize new learning and information from a course.

Finally, achieving success is often simply defined as degree completion but can also encompass an array of factors such as perceived levels of support, mentoring, levels of confidence, and feelings of connectedness within a graduate

level experience. These many facets must be explored to better understand what contributes to the success of a Master's level student.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The following research questions emerged as a result of reflecting on previous research.

1. What factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs?
 - 1a. What is the impact of mentoring on native English speakers and second-language learners regarding perceptions of confidence and academic performance in Master's level programs?
 - 1b. How do second-language learner (EL) experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs?

One main hypothesis emerged as a result of reflecting on this previous research:

- H1. There is no significant difference between second-language (EL) students' and native speakers' experiences in Master's level programs.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of transformational learning serves as a foundation to this study. Transformative learning is defined as "the process by which people examine problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Cranton, 2006, p. 36). These experiences are the keys to fostering social justice, equity, and change in the educational system. Only through collaborative dialogue and critical reflection, in the setting of problem-

posed learning, can one come to put meaning to his or her words through this organic process. This can only happen through dialogue and without this present, there is no communication or education. For dialogue, Freire (2012) noted that there must be love, humility, intense faith in humankind, hope, and critical thinking. It is essential that an instructor not present his or her perceptions of reality and instead let students investigate their own “thematic universe- the complex of their generative themes- inaugurates the dialogues of education as the practice of freedom” (Freire, 2012, p. 96).

As humans, our brains seek to understand the meaning of our experience. This is what differentiates us from animals that only exist in the present moment. Mezirow (1997) noted, “transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience- associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses- frames of references that define their life world” (p. 5). How do adults learn and process information? There are four processes of learning which include: (1) elaborating on a point of view, (2) establishing new points of view, (3) transforming our point of view, and (4) becoming aware and critically reflective of our generalized bias in the way we view things, including groups other than our own (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). An instructor at the graduate level must engage learners through meaningful learning experiences that are carefully articulated and planned. Methods include “critical incidents, metaphor analysis, concept mapping, consciousness raising, life histories, repertory grids, and participation in social action” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10).

Limitations of the Study

The following limitations to this research study on graduate level success for all students, including second-language learners should be noted:

1. The questionnaire was sent out only to three colleges and universities located in the North Central Valley area of California in which findings were not generalizable beyond that setting.
2. The interview portion of the study was conducted on six graduate level students in the North Central Valley area of California in which the findings were not be generalizable to the general Master's level student population.
3. The study surveyed only Master's level students in the fields of education or the social sciences.
4. The study's survey included both privates and public colleges and universities. Differences between the two were not addressed.
5. Differences in matriculation patterns or philosophies of various graduate studies departments which the sample represented were not accounted for in the study.
6. Interviews were derived from a convenience sample rather than a random sample.
7. The study took place over a period of a few months. Though intensive, such a short time frame may have created a limited application.

Definition of Terms

The following are key terms which reoccur frequently throughout this study on supporting graduate level success:

First Generation College Student. A student's parent or immediate family member obtained a high school diploma or less as the highest level of educational attainment; as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics.

First Generation Immigrant. An individual or family who moves themselves to settle and live in another country not of his or her origin.

Graduate level programs. The complete set and sequence of courses, combinations of courses and/or other units of study, research and practice prescribed by an institution for the fulfillment of the requirements of a Master's degree in the field of education or the social sciences.

Graduate level success. The fulfillment of requirements that leads to a Master's degree in the field of education or the social sciences.

Mentoring. The act of a person taking on the role of coaching, giving advice, or serving as a guide to someone who is less experienced.

Nontraditional student. Students that include low income, full-time workers, are over the age of 25, and/or students who are second-language learners.

Perceived Graduate level success. Student perceptions of a myriad of factors including but not limited to support, mentoring, levels of confidence, and feelings of connectedness within a graduate level experience.

Second-Generation College Student. A student's parent and or immediate family member who obtained an associate or bachelor's degree as the highest level of educational attainment; as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Second-Generation Immigrant. An individual born in the host country who has at least one foreign born parent.

Second-Language Learner. A Master's level student who receives instruction in English but is still in the process of fine-tuning his or her reading, writing, speaking, listening, or other communication skills in English. He or she may or may not be fluent in reading, writing, and speaking in the primary language.

Social capital. A "form of capital that resides in relationships among individuals that facilitate transaction and the transmission of different resources" (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak and Terenzine, 2004, p. 252).

Third-Generation Immigrant. An individual who was born in the host country along with his or her parents but who has one grandparent that was foreign-born.

Summary

The climate for reform in higher education has reintroduced the topic of supporting student success for all students at postbaccalaureate levels seeking knowledge, skill development, and advancement in a professional career. Emphasis on supporting second-language learners in collegial pursuits has also raised awareness at all levels of education. Current research studies examine what factors contribute to success in postbaccalaureate education for all students, including second-language learners. For this study, three research questions were presented and operational

definitions were provided for clarification. In the following chapters, a review of the literature is conducted in Chapter II and a method of procedure is defined for the study in Chapter III. The findings and data analysis for the quantitative portion of the study are presented in Chapter IV and the findings and data analysis for the qualitative portion are presented in Chapter V. Finally, conclusions, implications, and recommendations are presented in Chapter VI based on the data.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Preparing students for proficiency in contributing to educational research as well as academic achievement through carefully articulated preparation and ongoing support can help ensure that a college's goals of student successful performance are met. Additionally, over the past decade, the number of nonnative English speakers enrolled in higher education continues to climb in all levels of education. In an ever-changing and diverse educational field, including that of higher-education, it is imperative to examine how instructors and institutions can provide continued support in academics as well as from the social-emotional perspective, which ensures the success of all students. Categories of information presented in this chapter include the following: (1) Current Practices and Trends in Postbaccalaureate Education, (2) Preparedness and Support for Academic Performance, (3) Role of Mentoring, (4) Second-Language Learners and Higher Education, and (5) Transformative Learning Experiences and Student Success.

Current Practices and Trends in Baccalaureate Education

The Association of American Universities (AAU) Committee on Graduate Education reported that “graduate education in the United States is widely recognized as the best in the world, yet it is far from perfect and will remain in a leadership position only by continual self-examination and improvement” (1998, p. 2). Criticisms reported include the following: overproduction of degrees, narrow training, emphasis on research over teaching, use of students to meet institutional

needs at the expense of sound education, and insufficient mentoring, career advising, and job placement assistance (AAU Committee on Graduate Education, 1998). How much has changed in today's American colleges and universities that offer graduate programs? Unlike graduate level education in many countries which often embody loosely woven designs, the United States graduate education model is highly structured and contains its own curriculum that is "designed around a learning process based on developmental learning theory and sequencing of how students best acquire the necessary research skills and expert knowledge in their particular fields" (Nerad, 2009, p. 3).

Top colleges and universities around the nation often display websites that affirm that the primary function of graduate education is to prepare scholars and researchers for contributions to their respective fields and society at large. For example, Princeton (2014) noted that graduate education should encompass:

the mastery of content and methods of their special subjects, especially for those who give promise of continuing development because they want to create knowledge and communicate it widely. After completing an intensive program of study, graduates should be able to claim professional standing in their chosen fields. (p. 1)

As a result, this fosters an individual's permanent relationship to learning and a field of study for life. Interdisciplinary opportunities, preparation for leadership, developing a deep understanding of the complexities of societies and cultures in relation to one's discipline, and becoming a steward of one's profession who contributes to the betterment of society and the world are natural results of graduate

level education (Princeton, 2014). Whether as a researcher or highly skilled practitioner in one's field, expertise and quality in one's work are paramount.

Knowledge is dynamic in the twenty-first century. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) affirmed that students need robust skills and training that allow college students at all levels to become empowered through the development of a wide array of academic and practical skills, responsible for their own learning and participation in civic interactions within their communities, and informed about the conditions that impact their lives as members of society (2004). These become necessary competencies for a well-rounded student in today's global society. Furthermore, a "truly transformative education repeatedly exposes students to multiple opportunities for intentional learning through the formal academic curriculum, student life, collaborative cocurricular programming, community-based, and global experiences" (ACPA/NASPA, 2004, p. 3).

Today, college experiences, including those of graduate studies, focus both on educational and developmental outcomes. King and Baxter Magolda (1996) noted that a "successful educational experience simultaneously increases cognitive understanding and a sense of personal maturity and interpersonal effectiveness" (p. 163). As a result, a shift has occurred from simply information transfer and deposit in higher education to identity development where the aim is to foster "intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources and continue learning throughout their lives (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. xi). Furthermore, instructors can no longer afford

to view student learning as a passive and receptive process in which students gain new information through rote learning techniques and lecture. Instead, NASPA/ACPA (2004) affirmed that “ the concept of learning recognizes the essential integration of personal development with learning; it reflects the diverse ways through which students may engage, as whole people with multiple dimensions and unique personal histories, with the tasks and content of learning” (p. 3). Therefore, students need to be actively engaged and making meaning from their learning experiences to personally develop on a myriad of levels.

Equity and accountability are critical concerns for higher education in the United States. Criticism and articulation disagreements have resulted from a lack of consistency in establishing the same academic norms in programs across colleges and universities. Examining the goals of graduate coursework are critical to understanding what qualities are needed to be proficient in a graduate program. Ravid and Leon (1995) found that students need to become either consumers (being able to read, interpret, synthesize, and use research) or producers (being able to design and implement original research studies). However, students often perceive that graduate research courses are going to be extremely difficult; courses can trigger feelings of anxiety, negativity, or avoidance. These perceptions may persist throughout a graduate’s career. These perceptions of negativity towards research, in turn, may impact the degree to which one contributes to his/her field in a lifetime.

The lack of uniform expectations and grading procedures in postbaccalaureate education was addressed by Saddler (2009) whose study noted four threats to grade integrity: random error, bias, contamination of the object to be

graded, and an inappropriate grading principle which included grading policies, grading by aggregate score ranges, and grading by proportions. Grading bias is a key issue that gives certain students advantages based on other grounds than achievement such as cooperativeness, reputation, past achievements, or expressed viewpoints that match the instructor's personal opinions. Other bias can also take place, based on particular ethnic, religious, cultural, or socioeconomic groups. Bias combined with grade inflation gives colleges and universities caution and demands investigation (Saddler, 2009).

Beyond bias and grade inflation, there is also concern, especially at the graduate level, of students not finishing their advanced programs. Janice, Cameron, Glass, Kosko, March, Abdelmagid, and Burge (2009) engaged in a phenomenological study that was dedicated to examining the experiences of full-time graduate students transitioning from professional employment. Interviews with the sample population ($N = 17$), between 30-45 minutes in length, were audio recorded. Each transcript was coded and reviewed seven times. Once the data were coded and critical statements identified, the data were classified into meaningful clusters. Field notes were also used in addition to the review process. "Invariant themes" that encompassed the essence of the lived experience were identified. Interview data were interpreted through a student transition and socialization conceptual framework. Five themes emerged from in-depth interviews: (1) identity; (2) integration; (3) support systems; (4) perseverance; and (5) success vs. challenges. Time management and social responsibility were contributing factors to graduate students not completing their degree. The interviews were able to provide a portrait

of the lived experiences of professionals transitioning into first semester postbaccalaureate students.

The need for support services has taken precedence in higher education to boost proficiency in reading, writing, research, and study skills. NASPA/ACPA (2004) noted that “more women, students of color, students from diverse cultural origins, and economically disadvantaged students are able to attend colleges and universities” (p. 2). Thus, the college experience is no longer reserved for the elite as in centuries past. With such diversity and variability in preparedness for academic work, supports must be put in place to foster student success. To illustrate, after examining students’ study skill strengths and weaknesses, Onwuegbuzie, Slate, and Schwartz (2001) reported that 57.8% responded positively about the benefits of study skill success. Although the proportion was significantly higher for graduate students as opposed to baccalaureate students, the study concluded that graduate students could benefit from study skills training, particularly in the areas of note taking and reading skills.

Creating robust support services in graduate studies continues to be a challenge for many institutions. For instance, to strengthen graduate support, Plakhotnik and Rocco (2012) implemented a new writing service known as Writing Support Circles (WSCs). Many students, especially second-language learners, come to their graduate programs with insufficient academic writing skills. Their research project aimed to build writing skills and self-efficacy, was measured through pre- and postquestionnaires, and was implemented for a group of Latina students supported by a grant as a pilot program. The pilot project found some success but

students experienced frustrations when the college did not offer units for participation or link writing practice with current graduate course writing assignments. Survey results indicated that students were often frustrated with the lack of uniform expectations and grading procedures as well as clarity on assignments. The goal was to create a collaborative atmosphere where “graduate students could learn with each other and from each other how to craft their papers with the guidance of a facilitator” (Plakhotnik & Rocco, 2012, p. 76). Specific academic learning objectives, access to the syllabi of graduate instructors, writing assignments that directly related to current class research papers, and creating a collaborative learning atmosphere were highly recommended. Preparing students for proficiency in contributing to educational research as well as academic achievement through carefully articulated preparation and ongoing support can help ensure that institution’s goals of postbaccalaureate student performance and success are met.

Furthermore, when academic support services are not coordinated at the graduate level, students can become confused at various approaches used by instructors as compared to academic support services. Demystifying services that are available is critical in supporting student success. West, Shulock, and Moore (2012) noted the importance of faculty-staff collaboration in the development of academic support and recommended that tutoring services and academic support be designed “as integral parts of course offerings, with complementary curricula and pedagogy” (p. 11). Often students associate support services negatively with shame in needing support, fear of failure, and academic stigma. If student-friendly services are made readily accessible in a designated part of the campus and are integrated into the

course for promotion, then students can develop comfort and familiarity and begin to erase negative associations (West, Shulock, & Moore, 2012).

The conditions for equity in institutions serving graduate students in the United States must also be examined to ensure robust policies, practices, and programs that embody fairness and the inclusion of all students, including second-language learners. Oakes (2003) noted five critical conditions for institutions offering graduate level programs that are paramount to supporting student success: (1) college or university commitment to ensure student success; (2) high quality instruction and curriculum; (3) quality advising and ongoing monitoring; (4) integration to support services and resources; and (5) streamlined educational pathways to completion. Increasing graduation rates for both baccalaureate and graduate students is paramount to a college's success.

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) noted that based on the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project from the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University, keys to promoting high levels of achievement in all levels of college are fostered by setting high expectations and emphasizing the importance of academic effort. Kuh, et al. (2005) affirmed that :

colleges and universities have demonstrated high rates of student success by emphasizing the following: informing students of high expectations from the beginning, expecting significant time-on-task for writing, reading and class preparation, collaborative learning opportunities, and encouraging student to share the results of their work through various forms of scholarship

celebration activities, capstone assignments, and rigorous summative experiences such as a comprehensive examination. (p. 192-193)

Graduate level instructors are then challenged to develop courses in a manner which excel student performance while fostering deep motivation and engagement.

Additionally, student success at the graduate level must be seen as entire institutional effort. West, Shulock, and Moore (2012) noted that faculty can contribute on a larger scale by (1) coordinating with support services in an effort to help students see meaningful pathways to their goals; (2) engaging in collaborative professional development that promotes effective teaching practices; (3) fusing teaching learning strategies, metacognition, and the process of learning into the curriculum, (4) having high expectations for all students, and (5) focusing on skills that are needed in preparation for employment or advancement.

What makes a student feel connected and supported in a college experience? The RG Group (2013) found that in a three year study surveying nearly 900 college students on perceptions of factors most critical in their success, results indicated that feeling nurtured was critical. The researchers found that when someone actively showed care and concern about a student participant, they noted that this “kind of support led them to develop a direction, maintain focus, be engaged and/or feel connected” (RG Group, 2013, p. 19). Other themes emerged from the research that need to be integrated into the daily experience and overall curriculum which include: (a) colleges need to foster students’ motivation; (b) colleges must teach students how to succeed in the postsecondary environment; (c) colleges need to structure support to ensure a student are directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued;

(d) colleges need to provide comprehensive support to historically underserved students to prevent the equity gap from growing; and (e) everyone has a role to play in supporting student achievement but faculty must take the lead (RG Group, 2013). The need for connectedness to one's campus is relevant at all levels of the college experience which in turn fosters student agency and confidence.

Preparedness and Support for Academic Performance

In a graduate level world of complex text, research, and writing experiences, how can second-language learners be ensured support towards reaching their goals? “The ability to perform well on multiple choice tests, to extract meaning from written text, and to argue a point both verbally and in writing are essential skills for high levels of academic attainment” (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Torodova, 2008, p. 41). The stronger the mastery over the dominant language, the better the college student at all levels is going to be in articulating ideas and grappling with complex course material. Students must have words, a *working vocabulary*, in which to draw from to make meaning, critically reason, and convey ideas. Adult college students often have more prior knowledge, language mastery in their native language, and academic experiences from which to draw from so that they can use as a foundation to build upon their constructs of the world.

Graduate level instructors who advocate for all students and who provide effective instruction that scaffolds learning to build language fluency while advancing students in course mastery are critical. Marzano (2001) noted that his research results supported the following instructional strategies in learning achievement for all students at any level, including English learners: (1) identifying

similarities and differences; (2) summarizing and note-taking; (3) reinforcing effort and providing recognition; (4) extended practice; (5) nonlinguistic representations; (6) cooperative learning; (7) setting objectives and providing feedback; (8) generating and testing hypotheses; and (9) questions, cues, and advance organizers to map thinking. Additionally, tapping multiple learning modalities is crucial in graduate level success. For example, Wenhua (2014) conducted a study in her college course that integrated multiple exposures to English before writing experiences using an online video format. After exposing selected groups to a variety of audio visual modes including the use of captions, she found that the English learner group's production of higher level vocabulary in their writing increased after these exposures (Wenhua, 2014). Methods other than traditional lecture and rote learning can support student achievement when used by instructors.

First- and Second-Generation Graduate Level Students

The lens of social capital is often used to examine the first- and second-generation student experience (Mullen, et. al., 2003; Pacarella et. al., 2004). Social capital refers to a “form of capital that resides in relationships among individuals that facilitate transaction and the transmission of different resources” (Pascarella et. al., 2004, p. 252). The focus centers on belonging to a secure group and gathering resources for utilization. Gardner and Holly (2011) also noted that “social capital as structure highlights the frequency, duration, and opportunities for interaction between individuals while social capital as a process emphasizes the quality and content of individual interactions” (p. 79). For instance, an individual who has family members that have attended college and regularly provide advice on the

matter is a form of social capital as structure. The quality of advice and conversation between the individual and family member on the topic is social capital as process.

First- and second-generation students are often still dealing with language issues and are considered an at-risk population in higher education, where a third-generation student is not (Ishitani 2006; Terenzini, et. al., 1996). Thus, social capital is often more limited with first- or second-generation students. Students from this demographic are more likely to experience (1) growing up in a low-income family, (2) receive less support from their family related to college enrollment, (3) work during college, (4) spend less time interacting with faculty, and (5) take longer to degree completion when compared with peers (Ishitani, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini, et. al., 1996). Furthermore, first-generation students are also less likely to attend institutions of higher education that are known to produce more individuals with graduate school aspirations (Hoffer, et. al.; Mullen, et. al.)

Students who are enrolled in graduate level programs have been found to experience barriers and challenges such as marginalization and prejudice based on personal identities including gender and racial/ethnic identity; (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Leyva, 2011; Wilson & Gibson, 2011), financial difficulties (Seay et al., 2008; Wilson & Gibson, 2011), and lack of support from social networks (Leyva, 2011; Seay et al., 2008; Wilson & Gibson, 2011). After interviewing 20 first-generation students regarding the pipeline to graduate education, Gardner and Holley (2011) found that participants' knowledge about higher education and the pathway to graduate level degrees was initially elusive until they finally found guidance from a counselor, a teacher, or a peer who held meaningful social capital to him or her.

Recommendations were made for policy and practice reform that included having administrators, instructors, and counselors trained and made aware of the specific needs of first-generation students through professional developments. Using hierarchical regression analysis, Tate, Fouad, Marks, Young, Guzman, and Williams (2014) surveyed 170 low-income, first-generation college students in graduate education with five assessment instruments (Graduate Education Self-Efficacy Scale, Family Influence Scale, Perceptions of Barriers Scale, Coping with Barriers, and Indicators of Intent to Attend Graduate School) which resulted in one sub-construct of graduate school self-efficacy (research self-efficacy) and family influences (family values) to be predictive of students' pursuit of graduate education. The researchers explained,

When family influence was introduced in the second step, an additional 8% of the variance was accounted for, with a significant change in variance ($p = .30$). A large, statistically significant jump in variance accounted for was found when graduate school self-efficacy was entered in the third step (additional 14% variance explained), where there was significant change in variance ($p = .00$), and the model was significant overall ($p = .00$). (Tate, et. al., p. 9)

As a result, when students' self-efficacy for conducting graduate-level research increased, so did his or her active pursuit of graduate school.

Fostering Networks to Support Success

Graduate programs must set up networks of support to foster success for all students, including second-language learners. With all the dynamic changes and

expectations in higher education, English learners have an additional challenge of mastering language proficiency in order to communicate effectively when engaged in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Not only do English learners often experience struggles in their classroom learning experiences, but they also contend with navigating the college system for support (Pérez, 2012). For instance, Pérez (2012) noted that if tutoring in a discipline is only offered in English, communication gaps and frustration may result if a student is limited in their English-language ability to communicate and understand ideas. Therefore, research has affirmed how critical it is to provide bilingual counselors, tutors, and other resources that can support second-language learners (Berker, Horn, & Carroll, 2003; Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009; Pérez, 2012).

Zhao and Kuh (2004) also affirmed that learning communities in college settings need to integrate constructivist-developmental principals which focus on “active and collaborate learning activities that promote student involvement in complementary academic and social activities” (p. 16). As a result, all students, including those who are second-language learners, collaborate with faculty and peers which in turn promotes: (a) academic and social integration; (b) further development of cognitive and language skills; and (c) increased self-confidence (Maxwell, 1998). This is especially critical at the graduate level where instructors serve as mentors and help students build professional networks. Maxwell (1998) also found that the use of small study groups that provide formative individual feedback and interactive learning were keys to positive student outcomes. This supplemental approach removes the psychological barriers and stigma associated with seeking out tutoring

and support and builds the overall community bond. A student can increasingly build his or her sense of self-agency, identity, and independent decision-making skills from such resources and interactions.

A system of support can create a safety net in which a graduate level student can cope with language demands, academics, and social expectations. Multiple life demands such as work, marriage or family relationships, and/or supporting dependents other than their spouse, can cause stress and pull on a student's ability to dedicate time to school and learning (Kasworm, 2003). Balancing demands and responsibilities of home, work, and school thus impact academic achievement and often exhaust a student's energy. The need for support compounds further when the student is also an English learner trying to master a language as well as course content.

Research has supported the positive relationship between academic success and study skills at both the high school and college levels. However, it is critical to determine whether the perceived anxieties about graduate work and actual performance reflect student uncertainty about their study skill preparation or if indeed the baccalaureate programs do not adequately prepare them for the rigors of a graduate program. For instance, Wellington (2010) found that postbaccalaureate students from all backgrounds experienced a wide range of negative anticipations when it came to oral examinations even after extensive preparation. Significant perceptions of students included: fears regarding the outcomes, worries about their ability to communicate effectively, along with apprehensions about the examiners' personal agendas and perceived power struggles. Some were able to surpass this

pressure, while others succumbed to the anxiety and failed. Second-language learners had even greater anxiety regarding the ability to engage in effective communication. Furthermore, Wellington's study affirmed that graduate students do want an oral exam experience in which feedback is given and where "they will be challenged, be asked to articulate their work, to justify and clarify, to 'tell their story,' and to engage in deep discussion with experts in their field" (2010, p. 80).

Onwuegbuzie, Slate, and Schwartz (2001) noted that the "documented link between study skills and academic achievement can be interpreted with respect to theories of anxiety, social cognition, and self-regulated learning" (p. 238). Wine's (1980) cognitive-attentional-inferential theory may explain a significant factor in the relationship between study skills and cognitive performance. Extreme anxiety can elicit a cognitive interference that forces a student to shift focus onto task irrelevant thoughts and become engulfed in the overwhelming feelings of critical evaluation. Thus, student performance is hindered from its full potential. The impact is even more significant when a student is additionally struggling with second-language learner issues and/or special needs.

Role of Counseling and Mentoring

Understanding the impact of mentoring on all graduate students is significant given the matriculation of students from diverse backgrounds. Counseling and mentoring grounded in the student development model must come from multiple facets of the institution including faculty as well as support services. Additionally students need to feel valued, confident, and heard in their classrooms and at the college or university (Graham & Donaldson, 1998).

Great care must be taken to ensure equal access and quality support on advising matters when it comes to underrepresented populations. Young and Brooks (2008) conducted a qualitative study whose purpose was to determine strategies that colleges and universities could employ to support graduate students of underrepresented groups. They found that after collecting data for a three year period through focus group sessions and individual interviews in administrative programs that “effective and race-sensitive mentorship and the sustenance of multitiered and multipurpose support networks” were keys to ensuring success (p. 391). In addition to mentoring, recognizing and examining issues of race in educational preparation programs were found to be important for graduate students of underrepresented groups. Many racial/ethnic minority students are first-generation college students who need to be informed of a wide-range of options with complete and accurate information to engage in decision-making matters such as college goals and career pathways. They need to be directly connected to a counselor and then also receive ongoing follow-up with familiar faculty who serves as mentors. If the student to counselor ratio is large in a college or university setting, needs are not going to be met.

The relationship between students and faculty members has been identified as a key component of a successful experience (Holley & Caldwell, 2012). Faculty must step up to support all students to completion. Levin and Montero-Hernandez (2009) noted that students at all levels reported greater completion rates, self-agency, and increased social and cognitive abilities when they received ongoing guidance from counselors, tutors, and faculty. Therefore, the role of counselors and faculty

when supporting students through advisement and mentoring is not to just select classes or give generic information, but to help them make meaning of their educational experience (Levin & Montero-Hernandez, 2009).

Mentoring can take on many forms: role-model, teacher, sponsor, counselor, friend, advocate, and connection. Who is to say that only advising can come from a certified counselor or that learning can only come from faculty? The lines in today's college experience are blurring as integrated efforts become necessary to foster student achievement at the postbaccalaureate level. Using the Ideal Mentor Scale (IMS), Rose (2005) examined the relationship between graduate students' demographic and academic characteristics and their preference of three types of mentoring: Integrity-, Guidance-, and Relationship-oriented styles. She found that demographic attributes (age, gender, citizenship, academic discipline, and stage of persistence) more so than academic characteristics account for a student's notions in seeking out a mentor to support his/her professional and personal goals and aspirations. With a sample size of 537 students from postbaccalaureate programs at two midwestern universities, the IMS was completed, rating 34 key mentor attributes on a 5-point Likert scale. A MANCOVA was utilized which resulted in significant differences for demographic but not academic variables. The IMS Scale I (Integrity) revealed a significant main effect for gender, $F(1,516) = 8.87; p < 0.01$. Female doctoral students rated Integrity higher than males. The IMS Scale 2 (Guidance) revealed "no significant main, interaction, or covariate effects" (Rose, p. 71). The IMS Scale 3 (Relationship) revealed significance with citizenship, $F(1,516) = 20.43; p < 0.01$. International graduate students rated Relationship-oriented mentoring even

higher than graduate students who were United States citizens. Findings indicated that individual differences played a larger role in mentoring preferences than sociocultural factors.

Research supports fostering a personal and supportive relationship between graduate level students and faculty. Holley and Caldwell (2012) created a *team-based platform* in their study in which graduate level students were assigned both peer mentors and faculty mentors to build a supportive network as well as open channels of communication where information could be deployed. They recommended scaling this mentoring project up across the entire university.

Counseling and mentoring provide a safety net of support for graduate students to adapt and adjust on their own individual continuum. Sinacore, Park-Saltzman, Mikhail, and Wada (2011) conducted a qualitative study in an effort to document immigrant graduate students' experiences in higher education and how these influence cultural transitioning and social integration. Additionally, it examined career counseling and mentoring needs of immigrant graduate students while attending a university. They used the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development and Kram's Developmental Model of Mentoring (KDMM) as a guide and as a way of focusing in on cultural and contextual factors. Following a phenomenological tradition of inquiry, an interview protocol was created to assess the participants' cultural transitioning, career counseling, and mentor experiences within the university community and society at large. Data collection resulted in 600 pages of interview data where major and minor themes were determined and peer reviewed. Multiple demographic data were collected and presented on these 20

participants who participated in in-depth one-on-one interviews including but not limited to country of origin, occupation, and educational levels. Results indicated that mentoring and securing a trusted advisor were extremely important to these students' success in graduate school.

Sinacore, et al. (2011) also affirmed that a strong mentor fosters success in graduate programs and indicated the extreme importance that a mentor plays for supporting second-language and immigrant graduate students. When a good mentor could not be found, second-language learner students in the study, including international students, would often rely on colleagues for support. Those who received no mentoring were extremely frustrated with their academic experience. They were found to be academically struggling with how to succeed. The interviews also identified that there was a general lack of supportive individuals on campus to help learn the "unwritten rules." Therefore, negotiating the university system became the greatest challenge (Sinacore, et al., 2011).

Too many English learners are left to navigate the system in a sink or swim situation. To support the whole student, multicultural counseling must be integral in the college experience for all students, including the postbaccalaureate level. Lee and Ramsey (2006) noted, "multicultural counseling takes into consideration the cultural backgrounds and individual experiences of diverse clients and how their psychosocial needs might be identified and met through counseling" (p. 6). Additionally, mentoring is critical to support English learner success. Mentors create a support network and can include counselors, faculty, administrators, coaches, community leaders, and alumni (Cohen & Brawer, 2013). It was further affirmed

that effective mentorships occurred when “mentors are matched with students based on their similar interests or backgrounds and take into account students’ personal experiences in order to best guide them throughout the educational and developmental processes” (Cohen & Brawer, 2013, p. 231).

Summer Bridge Programs are firmly grounded in the college institutions to transition high school students successfully to the college world. However, research suggests that a bridge program into postbaccalaureate education could further support graduate level success. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) supported the idea of transition programs that welcome and affirm newcomers from all levels and backgrounds. They urged college programs, including graduate studies, to “provide multiple safety nets such as peer support, integrate early warning systems that identify and respond to students who begin to slip through the cracks, implement learning support resources, and make sure that faculty and staff members are accessible mentors” (p. 260-261).

Second-Language Learners and Higher Education

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Supporting English learner success in higher education results in more educated and qualified individuals who can contribute to their communities. This will have positive long-term fiscal impact on society fostering more productive members of the labor force as well as contributors on local, state, and national levels (Pérez, 2012).

Graduate level education must commit to supporting language development as well as content mastery, research skills, and analytic thinking. Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Torodova (2008) noted that conversational proficiency can be

developed rapidly within a few years but that “it takes for most nonnative English speakers, five to seven years under optimal conditions to achieve the level of academic language skills necessary to compete with native-born peers in the classroom” (p. 42). The key word is *optimal*.

Code-switching, or the ability to alter between two or more different languages and/or expected behaviors, is a critical necessity for survival at all levels of the college system. It is compounded for English learners as they must not only regularly switch behavioral codes to interact successfully in the college-setting but with language codes as well. This must occur regularly on both academic or cognitive levels as well as social levels. Language demands and expectations further escalate at the graduate level in education. Flexibility, adaptability, and networking become keys to success.

Intercultural interactions and diversity initiatives are popular at institutions of higher education. The celebration of diversity and embracing of multicultural heritages helps validate and boost a student’s identity. Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2010) found that intercultural interactions at the social level are often lacking in colleges and universities while the need for students to feel connected to their campus is strong. Part of the institution’s responsibility is to cultivate relationships that contribute to academic and personal student success both inside and outside the classroom for all students including those of graduate level programs.

Selective acculturation, a pathway to true bilingualism, promotes high achievement in education for many second-language learner students at all levels. It is further enhanced when expectations and aspirations are upheld by others in the

community (Portes & Rubaut, 2001). Pride in one's community, cultural and linguistic heritage, as well as family tradition foster a stable support structure for the entire student. Ethnic role models and mentors can inspire college students to achieve. They also can promote productive involvement in the community to better the environment, to support the preservation and pride of one's cultural heritage and language, and to provide students with information and resources to guide them along the path towards success (Portes & Rubaut, 2001). Therefore, colleges and universities must support these efforts by bridging student learning with the community and making the presence of inspiring advocates known to college students. Self-esteem and student agency are promoted when the student feels valued and cared for by the community.

When it comes to education, not all educators are prepared to teach English Learners and, therefore, may not effectively maximize student learning even at the graduate level. Nonnative English speaking students in college graduate programs often face academic struggle. Todd, Stinson, Sivakumaran and Thillainatarajan (2011) recommended restructuring instructional approaches to include sheltered instruction in graduate programs with a focus on cooperative hands-on learning experiences, academic key content vocabulary, and wise use of the student's first language and cultural background in lessons. Their research also advocated supporting college instructors by teaching them how to provide discipline specific vocabulary lists, writing skills support, and oral communication skills practice for at-risk English Learner students in graduate programs who are simultaneously advancing their language and discipline. Additionally, a focus on English Learner

techniques in professional development activities for college instructors is critical for student success. As content experts, they may lack the necessary training to integrate learning strategies and multicultural sensitivity into the curriculum and need this training to provide more equitable learning conditions. The researchers recommend that educators in graduate programs seek ways of replicating effective strategies found in K-12 educational research.

Transformational Learning and Student Success

Learning in Western culture has long been viewed as an individual process even though discussion and group work have been emphasized throughout education. Cranton (2006) noted that “evaluation of learning is an individual thing in education from the first grade through to doctoral studies” (p. 41). However, social reform has been the focus in higher education and that “educators go about making a difference in the world by helping learners learn how to make a difference in the world” (Cranton, 2006, p. 45). It is essential that an instructor not deposit information and instead let students investigate and make meaning out of their own thematic universe.

Humans construct, deconstruct, and then reconstruct their own reality (Freire, 2012). Setting the stage for transformative learning experiences may encompass, but is not limited to, the integration of the following approaches: (1) dialogue and reflective discussion, (2) written reflection, (3) problem-posed learning situations, (4) focus on generative themes, and/or (5) focus on preparing students to handle day-to-day issues regarding multiculturalism, diversity, and race within the course curricula.

Drawing on Freire, Akkari (2001) further advocates for problem-posing education that engages the student in dialogue to foster change in society rather than reliance on rote learning and the banking method. He pushes for critical multicultural education which is accessible by direct experience rather than just structured learning. Critical multiculturalism encompasses the following: (1) the resistance of educational inequalities in formal and informal education, (2) situates curriculum and the learners in a sociocultural context, (3) utilizes multicultural generative themes to emphasize the political power of language, and where (4) ethnicity is a central focus (Akkari, 2001, p. 290). Power is shared, the education is political, and the purpose becomes a common vision.

Adults have “acquired a coherent body of experience- associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses- frames of references that define their life world” (Mezirow, 1997 p. 5). Students move through stages as they seek three types of knowledge which result from learning: (1) technical knowledge or instrumental learning which allows people to manipulate and control their environment through principles and skills, (2) practical or communicative knowledge which allows people to understand and interact through language, and (3) emancipatory knowledge in which people are seeking self-knowledge, growth, personal development, and freedom (Cranton, 2006). Additionally, Cranton (2006) noted that,

Emancipatory learning occurs in informal and formal educational settings, including community development groups, self-help groups, professional development programs, literacy education, union education, and political and environmental movements, to name a few. Perhaps most important,

emancipatory learning can occur in any setting where learning occurs. A person acquiring a technical skill can gain new self-confidence and begin to see to see his or her place in the world in a new light. (p. 14)

Drago-Severson (2004) also affirmed that adult students with “different ways of knowing construct knowledge and the meaning of education in qualitatively different ways” (p. 12). Therefore, their orientation to knowledge and knowledge construction is consistent with their way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004). For instance, an adult who is more of an *instrumental knower* will aim to understand its usefulness and value because his or her belief on education relies more on the premise that education is pursued to acquire something. The importance of the social, emotional, and affective contexts of such learning must always be contemplated when looking at this unique form of adult learning.

Furthermore, Kasworm (2003) noted five belief structures called “knowledge voices” that influence the adult students’ learning world and understandings of relationships which were gleaned from over 90 interviews with community college students. The voices include the *entry voice*, *outside voice*, *cynical voice*, *straddling voice*, and the *inclusion voice* (Kasworm, 2003). Adult learners develop their student identity through the following: (a) their other life roles and experiences; (b) their understanding of how they learn as adults and the expectations they set as a result; (c) perceptions regarding access at an educational institution; and (d) their interactions with faculty and other students within the learning setting (Kasworm, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to create meaningful and holistic learning experiences that help students grow at all levels of college.

A graduate level instructor must serve as a facilitator and engage learners through meaningful learning experiences that are carefully articulated and planned. Mezirow (1997) noted that methods include “critical incidents, metaphor analysis, concept mapping, consciousness raising, life histories, repertory grids, and participation in social action” (p. 10). Additionally, he noted that new information is only a resource and must be incorporated into an “already well-developed symbolic frame of reference, an active process involving thought, feelings, and disposition” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). This transformative learning approach sets the stage to empower student learning and success.

The transformational framework also affirms that instructors must build off of students’ prior knowledge and academic experiences rather than just depositing content. Mezirow and Taylor (2009) emphasized that “building on the importance of critical reflection is the engagement in dialogue with the self and others” (p. 9). All students come to the class with strengths and unique background experiences. The aim is to work through students’ strengths to meet their needs. Scaffolding must take place where prior knowledge is gauged and built off to create learning experiences along one’s continuum of development. Additionally students must be allowed time to process and transform perspectives through three forms of reflection which include: (1) content where one reflects on what he or she perceives, thinks, feels, or behaves; (2) process where one reflects on how he or she performs the functions of perceiving; and (3) premise where one gains an awareness of why humans perceive (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). As a result, this process is often slow and takes place over time as students explore issues and ideas.

Given this, how can faculty and support services best foster success to completion for graduate level learners? The recommendation consists of using an agentic approach which pairs with transformative learning and focuses on the building up of behaviors, skills, and attitudes that foster self-monitoring, metacognition, self-directed learning, and educational goal selection to bolster student agency (Graham & Donaldson, 1999). This framework focuses on the development of cognitive, social, and interpersonal dimensions as well as self-directed behaviors. Adult students must cope with major challenges which include role conflicts, lack of confidence, and previous life experiences which often result in fixed belief structures (Belzer, 2004; Crossan, Field, Gallacher, & Merrill 2003; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). Additionally, meeting the multiple demands of family, work, course expectations, and community expectations can present a significant challenge for all types of adult learners, including graduate students (Kasworm, 2010). Both counselors and faculty need to work with adult learners on how to be active learners at all levels that are making their own meaning from learning and interactions as well as monitoring their educational paths to completion. Students must be empowered with the knowledge, skill application, and collaborative learning experiences they receive in their preparation. This process sets the stage for transformational learning experiences to occur in higher education, supports student achievement, and degree completion.

Summary

Chapter II provided several previous studies that have cited and documented issues and major topics that intercept the overall theme of supporting student success

at the graduate level. Prevailing and reoccurring themes impacting graduate level success include but are not limited to: (1) a focus on both educational and developmental outcomes, (2) equitable learning experiences, (3) the critical importance of appropriate preparation and support for academic achievement in advanced studies, (4) the role of mentoring from both counselors and faculty (5) supporting second-language learners with academic support that empowers students to achieve both language and discipline mastery, and (6) the use of transformative learning approaches to set the stage for graduate level success. Chapter III examines the research methodology, data collection, and analysis. Procedures for this study include a questionnaire that examines factors that promote success at the Master's level for native English speakers and second-language learners as well as semi-structured interviews and the identification of themes that emerge from the transcribed interview data.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Mixed Methods design in this study yielded both robust statistical analyses on graduate student perceptions while presenting a humanistic view of the struggles and experiences of both native and second-language learners at the Master's level.

Research Design

An Explanatory Sequential Design was utilized which included two phases: (1) a collection of quantitative data using a questionnaire and SPSS analysis; and (2) a second collection of qualitative data using interviews which were informed by the results of the first, quantitative phase (Creswell, 2011). This sequential timing approach occurred in two distinct phases and allowed for the researcher to use the results of one phase to inform the next. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was sent out to Master's students from programs in education and the social sciences fields at three colleges and universities in the Central Valley of California. After SPSS data analysis, semi-structured interview questions were developed and a subset of those Master's students, including those who are English learners, participated in interviews to describe their perceptions of preparation and experiences in graduate studies. Interviews were then coded for themes using Dedoose software to yield a rich study that can contribute to identifying the factors that characterize adequate preparation and support at the Master's level. The results of this study identified key

factors that foster students' preparation and support in an effort to expand their educational experiences and achieve success when working toward a Master's degree.

Research Focus

Research has identified that quality graduate level programs prepare students for a lifetime of contribution to society and their field of study through research and application (Kuh, et. al., 2005; Onwuegbuzie, et. al, 2001; Rose, 2005; Sinacore, et. al., 2011; Tate, et. al., 2014). Degrees from such Master's level programs propel professional advancement in one's career, economic mobility, and a sense of self-agency and expertise. Little research has been conducted that examines how to best support Master's level students in their pursuit of an advanced degree. Graduate studies are intense; requiring high level focus and commitment. It is critical to analyze contributing factors to student success, including the role of mentoring, to determine how to best support degree attainment. The framework of this study was to determine what themes were dominant for both native English speakers as well as second-language learners when it comes to supporting Master's level success in the fields of education or the social sciences in colleges and universities located in the Central Valley of California.

The main research question in this study focused on factors that characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs. Furthermore, the two subquestions emphasized the following: (1) the impact of mentoring in Master's level studies regarding student perceptions of confidence and academic performance for native English speakers and second-language learners, and

(2) how second-language learner student experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs. This two phase Explanatory Design approach allowed for a more complete understanding of the research problem. Creswell (2011) noted that "quantitative results can net general explanations for the relationships among variables, but the more detailed understanding of what the statistical tests or effect sizes actually mean is lacking" (p. 9). He affirmed that qualitative data and results can bridge this understanding (Creswell, 2011).

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The researcher has identified one main research question and two subquestions to be addressed during this study:

1. What factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs?

1a. What is the impact of mentoring on native English speakers and second-language learners regarding perceptions of confidence and academic performance in Master's level programs?

1b. How do second-language learner (EL) experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs?

The researcher has identified one main hypothesis for the quantitative portion of this study:

H1. There is no significant difference between second-language (EL) students' and native speakers' experiences in Master's level programs.

Sample and Participant Selection

The participants for the quantitative portion of this study included Master's level students studying education or the social sciences who attend colleges and universities in the Central Valley of California. The fields of education and the social sciences were selected because they both prepare students for an array of service professions that contribute to the well-being of society and work with a diverse range of people. Students may be at any phase of their respective Master's level program. This study used convenience sampling and included three institutions that offer graduate education including a California State University campus, a University of California campus, and a private college campus. Once approved by each institution's IRB, the respective offices of Institutional Research assisted in providing a list of Master's level student email addresses to send the questionnaire out to those who are enrolled in graduate programs in education as well as social science programs. Two fields were set up at the beginning of the Qualtrics questionnaire in which the participant selected his or her institution as well as declared program. Once the questionnaires were complete, three separate reports with individual descriptive data from each institution were generated and data were entered into SPSS for further analysis.

Participants in the Quantitative Portion of the Study

Over 135 participants from universities or colleges in the Central Valley area of California completed the Master's Level Success questionnaire resulting in a 26% response rate. The participants for the quantitative portion of this study included

Master's level students studying education or the social sciences (i.e., sociology or social work). Students were permitted to be at any phase of their respective Master's level program. This study used convenience sampling and included three institutions that offer graduate education including a California State University campus, a University of California campus, and a private college campus. Once approved by each institution's IRB, the respective offices of Institutional Research assisted in providing a list of Master's level student email addresses to send the questionnaire out to those who are enrolled in graduate programs in education as well as social science programs. Table 1 and Table 2 summarize demographic data on the participants who completed the Master's Level Success questionnaire.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics Regarding Type of Institution, Program, and Units Completed

Demographics	Native English Speakers	Second-Language Learners
Type of Institution		
Attend a U.C.	2 (2%)	3 (6%)
Attend a CSU	51 (59%)	31 (63%)
Attend a Private	33 (38%)	15 (31%)
Type of Program		
Master's in Education Program	64 (77%)	31 (69%)
Master's in Social Sciences Program	19 (23%)	14 (31%)
Units Completed in the Program		
0-15 units	28 (32%)	19 (41%)
16-30 units	24 (27%)	13 (29%)
31 or more units	36 (41%)	14 (30%)

Participants who filled out the questionnaire on Master's level success also reported on their gender and student workload.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Demographics Regarding Gender and Student Workload

Demographics	Native English Speakers	Second-Language Learners
Gender		
Male	22 (25%)	4 (8%)
Female	65 (74%)	46 (92%)
Decline to State	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Student Workload		
Works full-time (25 hours or more)	57 (66%)	30 (60%)
Works part-time (24 hours or less)	18 (20%)	9 (18%)
Does not work	12 (14%)	11 (22%)

Finally, the questionnaire also reported on generational status as well as student status in relation to family members. Table 3 summarizes this data.

Table 3

Summary of Participant Generational Status and Student Status in Relation to Family Members

	Native English Speakers	Second-Language Learners
Generational Status		
Both myself and my parents were born in the United States.	72 (84%)	4 (13%)
I was born in the United States and at least one of my parents was born in another country.	14 (16%)	23 (74%)

Table 3 Continued

	Native English Speakers	Second-Language Learners
Both myself and my parents were born in another country and moved to the United States.	0 (0%)	4 (13%)
I was born in another country even though both of my parents were born in the United States.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Student Status in Relation to Family Members		
I am the first in my family to receive a college degree.	36 (41%)	25 (51%)
Another member in my family has received a college degree.	52 (59%)	24 (49%)

The following figures illustrate the demographic data found in Table 3 on Generational Status and Student Status in Relation to Family Members using bar charts.

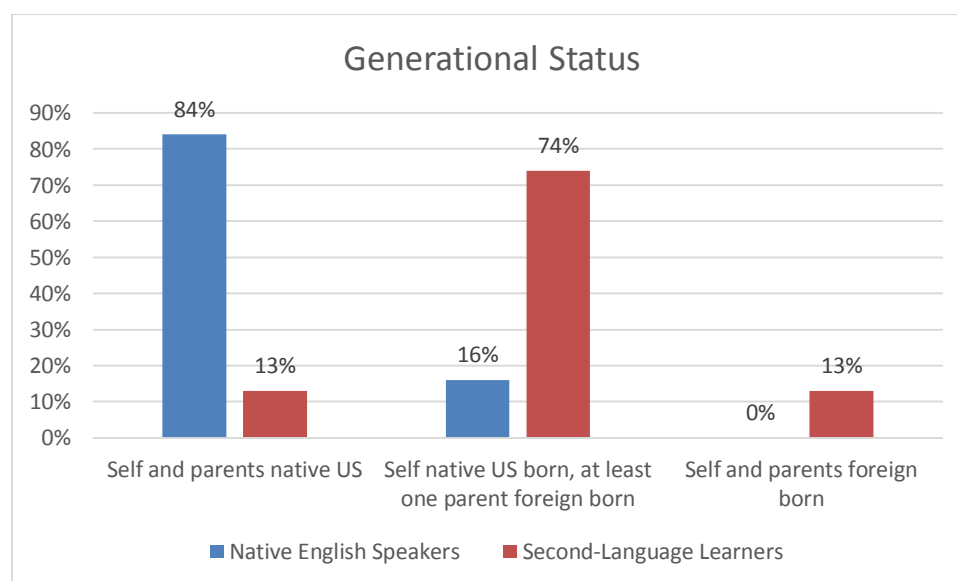


Figure 1. Generational status of participants.

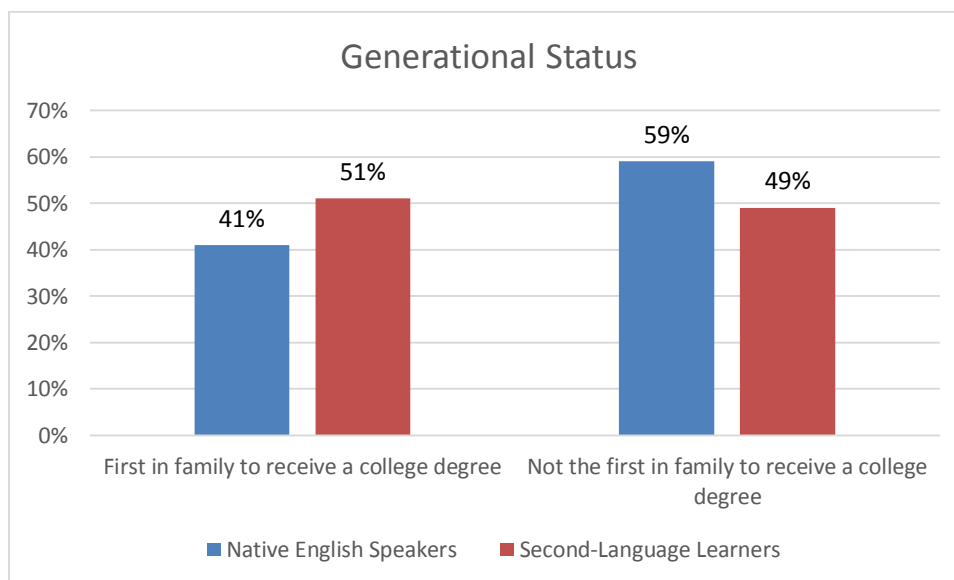


Figure 2. Student status in relation to family members.

Participants in the Qualitative Portion of the Study

The participants for the interview portion of the study included three Master's level students who were native English speakers and three Master's level students who were second-language learners. Two participants who completed the questionnaire were selected from each institution in order to provide a representative sample of Master's level programs in the Central Valley of California. Criterion for selection included: (1) the participant marked the box that indicated he or she was willing to participate in an additional interview regarding perceptions of graduate level success and (2) contact information was provided. If there were more than two students willing to participate from each institution, then the possible participants were numbered separately by college or university and randomly drawn from a box for the opportunity to interview. These students participated in semi-structured

interviews that indicated their perceptions of support and the role of mentoring in their graduate level experiences.

Table 4 describes the demographics of the participants using pseudonyms in relation to gender, ethnicity, institution type, program, and program status. Four females and two males participated in the interview portion of the study and all were near the middle or end of their program. There was an array of ethnicities represented in the interview portion. All participants were either from the programs in education or social work.

Table 4

Demographics of the Participants in Relation to Gender, Ethnicity, Institution Type, Program, and Program Status

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Institution Type	Program	Program Status
Ana	Female	Hispanic	Private	Education	Middle of Program
Beta	Female	African American	Private	Education	End of Program
Carly	Female	Asian American	CSU	Social Work	End of Program
Don	Male	Caucasian	CSU	Social Work	End of Program
Ella	Female	Hispanic	UC	Education	End of Program
Frank	Male	Caucasian	UC	Education	End of Program

Data Collection and Analysis

Expert Review

An Expert Review form was designed and administered to a group of Master's level students, including second-language learners at a local four-year university in the Central Valley of California for feedback on question design and clarity (see Appendix A). Participants in the review were asked the following: (1) if he or she is a second-language learner and (2) if he or she is or has been a graduate level student in the field of education or the social sciences. The purpose of these questions was to help ensure that reviewers of the questionnaire were familiar with graduate level experiences as well as experiences of second-language learners. Then, reviewers provided feedback on the following areas regarding the questionnaire: (1) to what degree each item on the questionnaire is understandable and clear; (2) to what degree each questionnaire item merits only one true response; (3) to what degree each questionnaire item is nonbiased and neutral; and (4) general feedback. Revisions were made based on feedback and then a finalized questionnaire was sent via Qualtrics to Master's students at the three selected colleges and universities in the Central Valley of California.

Phase One of the Study

After the questionnaire was refined based on the Expert Review feedback to comprehensively assess perceptions of Master's level support that leads to program completion and success, it was sent electronically using Qualtrics to Master's level students in the fields of education and the social sciences. The questionnaire took

approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Participants were asked to report on the following demographics: (1) gender, (2) age range, (3) area of study, (4) the type of degree that they are seeking, (5) area in which the Bachelor's degree was awarded, (6) how long they have been in the graduate level program, and (7) whether they are a second-language learner. The questionnaire measured perceptions of graduate level success in the areas of support, study and research skills, levels of preparation from the Bachelor's degree work, the role of mentoring and advising, and overall perceptions of student success (see Appendix B). SPSS software was then utilized to conduct a Factor Analysis to determine possible clusters or patterns and then followed up with a Chi-square test of independence to determine if the distribution was different among native English speakers and second-language learners.

Phase Two of the Study

Semi-structured interview questions were developed as a result of the data analysis from Phase One (see Appendix C). The focus of the interview questions for the three native English speakers and three second-language learners in Master's level programs was to describe their perceptions of preparation and levels of support during their graduate studies experience from faculty, staff, peers, and families. They furthered explained the degree to which they have been mentored throughout their Master's level experience and how that has impacted their perceived success. Additionally, they detailed their study skills preparation, perceived successes and obstacles throughout the program, and provided feedback on what they believe needs to be added to strengthen the graduate studies experience for future students.

These semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each in duration and were audio-recorded. They were then transcribed by the researcher for coding. Interviews took place at the convenience of the participant in time and location. The college or university that the participant attended was suggested as the location for the interview.

Once data were gathered from all participants, the information was analyzed and transcribed using the computer software program called Dedoose. Dedoose is a qualitative software program that is used to code data and make possible chart summaries of code application and code co-occurrence. The researcher used a process to sift through data, noting recurring themes, patterns, or concepts, and labeled pieces of data to indicate what theme, pattern, or concept they reflected. The coding procedure included a review of notes recorded from the semi-structured interviews.

More specifically, once all the data were collected, the researcher used the data-reduction steps suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The first step was *open coding*. This included going through all the transcripts, field notes, documents and analytic memos to identify general codes. The second step included *axial coding*. This is where the researcher sought patterns and themes that emerged from the codes that were identified in the open coding process. The third and final stage was *selective coding* where data was analyzed for the most prevalent and important themes and subthemes. This allowed for conclusions to be drawn that recommended ways to expand Master's level support systems and improve student success.

Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Validity refers to whether the findings of a study are true in the sense that research findings accurately reflect the situation and rely on multiple strategies to check for the accuracy and evidence of the findings (Creswell, 2003).

During the quantitative portion of the study, content validity was assured by having had experts examine the questionnaire items and making changes based on their feedback. To increase reliability, students were assured that their answers would be anonymous so that they would answer honestly.

The utilization of the Master's level student interviews, analyzing the descriptive results of the questionnaire responses in relation to the interviews, and reviewing pertinent materials strengthened the triangulation of data in this study. A form of data triangulation that integrates different sources of information to check and establish validity by analyzing the research questions from multiple perspectives was selected for this study. This helped to ensure consistency across the collected data (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002).

To address reliability, the researcher took careful notes during the interview along with reactions that were closely shared with her advisor who is an expert in the field. Additionally, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing with another doctoral student who actively works in the field as well as went through the Master's level experience herself. Member checking was utilized by sending transcribed interviews to the participants for feedback. Interview questions for the Master's level students were reviewed by experts and adjusted as necessary.

To establish reliability and trustworthiness of the coding process, intercoder reliability checking was used to demonstrate the goodness of fit of the code tree to say that there was a reasonable selection of topics that could be applied by people with similar backgrounds. The following steps were taken and applied using Dedoose software: 1) Another individual who is knowledgeable about Master's level experiences was selected that was not a part of the study; 2) The researcher and the other individual coded sections of five interviews separately using the Dedoose Testing Center; 3) The pair then compared codes and themes that each person identified and came to an agreement on the appropriate codes and themes; and 4) Each person shared his or her rationale for the codes and themes they chose. This resulted in confidence in the soundness with a score of 0.80 or above on the Cohen's Kappa.

Table 5 was adapted from work of Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) to help identify quality and rigor in this study:

Table 5

Controls and Strategies Employed for Quality and Rigor in This Study

Controls for:	Strategy Employed:
Internal validity and credibility	Prolonged engagement in the field Use of debriefing with dissertation advisor Data triangulation Member checking Steps to control for insider bias
External validity and transferability	Thorough field notes Purposive sampling and participant selection
Reliability and dependability	Creating audit trail through journaling and analytic memos Intercoder reliability and coding/recoding strategies

Table 5 Continued

Controls for:	Strategy Employed:
Reliability and dependability	Data triangulation Debriefing with dissertation advisor Member checking
Objectivity and Confirmability	Data triangulation Analytic memos and journaling

Adapted from Anfara, V., Brown, K., & Mangione, T. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31, p. 30.

In order to establish trustworthiness through the interview process, the following steps were used: triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, analytic memos and expert review. Regular meetings with the faculty advisor also took place to review the research process as it unfolded.

Methodological Limitations and Assumptions

This study took place with California colleges and universities in the Central Valley area and findings were not generalizable beyond that setting. Additionally, the study was restricted to Master's students in the fields of education or the social sciences. It was assumed that participants were typical Master's level students who were experiencing similar courses of study. Differences between the type of college as well as the field were not addressed. This included differences in matriculation patterns or philosophies of various graduate studies departments represented in the sample. It was assumed again that these institutions have similar philosophies and pedagogies that are reflected across graduate studies experiences. The questionnaire involved participants from a convenience sample based on three colleges and universities in a local region and the interviews were drawn from those Master's level

participants who completed the questionnaire and who were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Finally, the study took place over a period of a few months. Though intensive, such a short time frame may have created a limited application.

Ethical Considerations

The identities of the universities and colleges were treated with strict confidentiality. A coding system was used to protect the confidentiality of all information. All interview transcripts, tapes and questionnaires provided were kept in a locked file cabinet. Any information which was stored electronically was secured in a password protected data file. All data obtained for this study will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.

There were no known costs to any of the colleges, faculty or students who participate in this study. All publications, public distribution or presentations of the findings from this study including but not limited to the researcher's dissertation have not revealed the identity of any students, faculty, administrators or others involved with this study. In addition, the identity of colleges who were a part of this project has also been protected. Pseudonyms were assigned as the names for all institutions and to anyone who was mentioned in the study.

All data was maintained for a period of one year from the completion of the study and was destroyed afterwards. Only the researcher had access to the data which can be linked to individual subjects. Furthermore, the quantitative portion of this study included a questionnaire that did not ask for the participant's name or any other identifying information that could cause a link to the person. The participants in both

phases of this study only included adult graduate level students. Additionally, participants' personal identification information and responses during the qualitative portion were restricted to the researcher only for the intent of data collections. Data analysis and reported findings have been based on the participants' characteristics, responses, and behaviors during the time of the interview. Again, a coding system was utilized to maintain confidentiality of all information during both phases of the study. All research protocols involving human subjects was reviewed and approved by the CSU Stanislaus Institutional Review Board as well as to the Institutional Review Boards of the other participating institutions to meet required compliance with all college and university regulations and applicable laws with all data collection for this study.

Summary

Chapter III provided details about the research design, research focus, research questions, hypotheses, sample, data collection and analysis, methodological limitations and assumptions, and ethical considerations. Chapter IV and Chapter V present the study's findings on a two phase Explanatory Sequential Design study. Chapter IV includes quantitative data from a questionnaire regarding perceptions of adequate preparation and support for success in graduate studies. Chapter V focuses on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews that reveals perceptions of both native and second-language learners in Master's level studies.

CHAPTER IV

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

The first phase of this mixed-methods study of Master's level graduate education focused on the questionnaire portion of the study. An Explanatory Sequential Design which included two phases was utilized: (1) a collection of quantitative data using a questionnaire and SPSS analysis; and (2) a second collection of qualitative data using interviews which was informed by the results of the first, quantitative phase (Creswell, 2011). The purpose of this study was to determine what factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs for all students, including second-language learners, in an effort to expand their educational experiences and achieve success in graduate level education.

A Master's Level Success questionnaire was refined based on the Expert Review feedback to comprehensively assess perceptions of Master's level support that leads to program completion and success. It was sent electronically using Qualtrics to Master's level students in the fields of education or the social sciences who attend universities or colleges in the Central Valley of California. This questionnaire measured perceptions of graduate level success in the areas of support, study and research skills, levels of preparation from the Bachelor's degree work, the role of mentoring and advising, and overall perceptions of student success (see Appendix B). SPSS software was then utilized to conduct a Factor Analysis to determine possible clusters or patterns and then followed up with a chi-square test of

independence to determine whether the distribution is different among native English speakers and second-language learners.

Over 135 participants from universities or colleges in the Central Valley area of California completed the survey on Master's level success. The participants for the quantitative portion of this study included Master's level students of education or the social sciences (i.e., sociology or social work). Students were permitted to be at any phase of their respective Master's level program. This study used convenience sampling and included three institutions that offer graduate education including a California State University, a University of California, and a private college.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The researcher identified one main research question and two subquestions to be addressed during this study:

1. What factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs?
 - 1a. What is the impact of mentoring on native English speakers and second-language learners regarding perceptions of confidence and academic performance in Master's level programs?
 - 1b. How do second-language learner (EL) experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs?

The researcher has identified one hypothesis for the quantitative portion of this study:

H1. There is no significant difference between second-language (EL) students' and native English speakers' experiences in Master's level programs.

Factor Analysis Findings

Table G1 reported overall means with standard deviations across all questionnaire items to examine the distribution of responses (see Appendix G). The belief of one contributing positively to society with his or her newly learned knowledge and skills was reported as the highest mean while being fearful to ask an instructor for help resulted with the lowest mean.

In order to address the first research question, Confirmatory Factor analysis with principal axis factoring was used to find patterns in correlations among the 30 questionnaire items related to adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs. The scree plot suggested that three factors should be analyzed. There were four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. Three factors were rotated since the fourth eigenvalue was close to 1.0. The first factor, The Need for Sustained Support, accounted for 25% of the item variance. The second factor, Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring, contributed an additional 11%. The third factor, Importance of Strong Undergraduate Preparation in Master's Level Success, contributed an additional 8%. Values for which factor loads were greater than .40 were included in the determination of factors. Table 6 shows the factors.

Table 6

Principal Axis Factoring Loads

Items	Factors		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with writing during my graduate program.	-.80		
I would benefit from more writing support in my graduate program.	-.76		
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension.	-.75		
I would like my instructors to provide more study and research skills training within the program courses.	-.63		
I would benefit from more research skill support in my graduate program.	-.57		
I have excellent reading and writing skills.	.56		
I have excellent speaking and communication skills.	.56		
I have excellent research skills.	.42		
I have received adequate or better advising and support from my graduate program.		.80	
I have a program advisor who has helped me with an educational plan and has told me what to expect each step of the way.		.80	
I feel pleased with the support services of my graduate level program including advising, counseling, and any available academic tutoring.		.72	
I feel that my graduate program needs a stronger advising component.		-.64	

Table 6 Continued

Items	Factors	
	Factor 1	Factor 1
My instructors have provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience.		.63
I feel intimidated to ask my instructors for help.		-.47
I often feel frustrated understanding and navigating the graduate school program.		-.47
If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me.		.44
My program informs me of graduate level workshops to help strengthen my study and research skills.		.44
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of speaking and communication skills.		.70
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of reading and writing skills.		.68
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of study and research skills.		.59

Note. Key: Factor 1: The Need for Sustained Support; Factor 2: Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring; Factor 3: Importance of Strong Undergraduate Preparation in Master's Level Success

Chi-Square Test of Independence Results

A 2 X 5 contingency table was run on each Master's Level Success questionnaire item that was a significant contributor according to the Factor Analysis. The chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the level of agreeability (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) varied based on

whether the Master's level student was a native English speaker or second-language learner. The results of the analysis displayed in Table 7 indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the observed proportions of seven responses based on being a native English speaker or a second-language learner in a Master's level program in the areas of education, sociology, or social work. Six items from the category, Need for Sustained Support, were significant: (1) Having instructors provide more language support with writing, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 16.59, p = .02$, Cramer's $V = .35$, (2) Benefiting from more writing support in one's graduate program, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 10.97, p = .03$, Cramer's $V = .28$, (3) Providing more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 16.60, p = .00$, Cramer's $V = .35$, (4) Benefitting from more research skill support in the program, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 13.64, p = .01$, Cramer's $V = .31$, (5) Perceptions of excellent reading and writing skills, Pearson $\chi^2(3, N = 138) = 24.85, p = .00$, Cramer's $V = .42$, and (6) Perceptions of excellent speaking and communication skills, Pearson $\chi^2(3, N = 138) = 21.46, p = .00$, Cramer's $V = .39$. One item was significant from the category, Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring: If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 10.42, p = .03$, Cramer's $V = .28$.

Table 7

Chi-Square Analysis of Master's Level Success Questionnaire Items that Were Significant in the Factor Analysis

	M_{NE}	M_{ELs}	χ^2	p	CV
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with writing during my graduate program.	2.65	3.34	16.59	.02*	.35
I would benefit from more writing support in my graduate program.	3.08	3.62	10.97	.03*	.28
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension.	2.65	3.34	16.60	< .001**	.35
I would like my instructors to provide more study and research skills training within the program courses.	3.25	3.74	9.49	.05	.26
I would benefit from more research skill support in my graduate program.	3.31	3.80	13.64	.01*	.31
I have excellent reading and writing skills.	4.17	3.42	24.85	< .001**	.42
I have excellent speaking and communication skills.	4.06	3.36	21.46	< .001**	.39
I have excellent research skills.	3.60	3.26	8.45	.08	.25
I have received adequate or better advising and support from my graduate program.	3.76	3.52	6.35	.17	.22

Table 7 Continued

	M_{NE}	M_{ELs}	χ^2	p	CV
I have a program advisor who has helped me with an educational plan and has told me what to expect each step of the way.	3.70	3.46	4.93	.30	.19
I feel pleased with the support services of my graduate level program including advising, counseling, and any available academic tutoring.	4.03	3.82	4.77	.31	.19
I feel that my graduate program needs a stronger advising component.	2.79	3.06	3.35	.50	.16
My instructors have provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience.	4.08	3.58	3.58	.47	.16
I feel intimidated to ask my instructors for help.	1.84	2.20	3.76	.44	.17
I often feel frustrated understanding and navigating the graduate school program.	2.47	2.42	3.72	.45	.17
If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me.	4.00	3.58	10.42	.03*	.28
My program informs me of graduate level workshops to help strengthen my study and research skills.	3.83	3.58	8.00	.09	.24
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of speaking and communication skills.	4.00	3.78	4.13	.39	.17

Table 7 Continued

	M_{NE}	M_{ELs}	χ^2	p	CV
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of reading and writing skills.	4.10	3.66	8.94	.06	.26
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of study and research skills.	3.86	3.72	1.02	.91	.09

Note. $N = 138$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 7 displayed the overall means for significant items in the first factor, Need for Sustained Support, which were higher for second-language learners at the Master's level with a range of 3.34 to 3.80 on the following: (1) Having instructors provide more language support with writing ($M_{NativeEng} = 2.65$, $M_{ELs} = 3.34$), (2) Benefiting from more writing support in one's graduate program ($M_{NativeEng} = 3.08$, $M_{ELs} = 3.62$), (3) Providing more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension ($M_{NativeEng} = 2.65$, $M_{ELs} = 3.34$), and (4) Benefitting from more research skill support in the program, ($M_{NativeEng} = 3.31$, $M_{ELs} = 3.80$). In contrast, native English speakers had higher perceptions than second-language learners on overall means for the following significant items in the first factor, The Need for Sustained Support: (1) Perceptions of excellent reading and writing skills ($M_{NativeEng} = 4.17$, $M_{ELs} = 3.42$) and (2) Perceptions of excellent speaking and communication skills ($M_{NativeEng} = 4.06$, $M_{ELs} = 3.36$).

The overall mean for the significant item in the third factor, Importance of Strong Undergraduate Preparation in Master's Level Success, was stronger for

native English speakers at the Master's level on the following: If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me ($M_{\text{NativeEng}} = 4.0$, $M_{\text{ELs}} = 3.58$).

Summary

Chapter IV presented the study's quantitative findings on a two phase Explanatory Sequential Design study. Demographics of participants who completed the Master's Level Success Questionnaire were presented. Additionally, a summary table and bar graphs of generational status and student status in relation to other family members were included. Quantitative data from a questionnaire regarding perceptions of adequate preparation and support for success in graduate studies showed significance on seven items after Factor Analysis and a chi-square test of independence. The null hypothesis was rejected. Chapter V focuses on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews that reveals perceptions of both native English and second-language learners in Master's level studies. Chapter VI provides discussion, implications, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER V

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The second phase of this mixed methods study of Master's level graduate education focused on the interview portion of the study. An Explanatory Sequential Design was utilized which included two phases: (1) a collection of quantitative data using a questionnaire and SPSS analysis; and (2) a second collection of qualitative data using interviews, which was informed by the results of the first, quantitative phase (Creswell, 2011). Based on the results of the quantitative analysis reported in Chapter IV, interview questions were developed and a subset of those Master's students, including those who are English learners, participated in interviews to describe their perceptions of preparation and experiences in graduate studies.

Brief Overview of the Interview Process

Semi-structured interview questions were developed as a result of the data analysis from phase one of the study (see Appendix C). The purpose of the interview questions for the three native English speakers and three second-language learners in Master's level programs was to describe their perceptions of preparation and levels of support during their graduate studies experience regarding faculty, staff, peers, and families. They further explained the degree to which they have been mentored throughout their Master's level experience and how that has impacted their perceived success. Additionally, they detailed their study skills preparation, perceived successes and obstacles throughout the program, and provided feedback on what they believe

needs to be added to strengthen the graduate studies experience for future students. Most participants also offered advice to new students in Master's level programs.

Lasting for approximately 30 minutes each in duration, these interviews were audio-recorded after each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D). The interviews took place at the convenience of the participant in time and location. Half were conducted in person while the others were conducted by phone.

In order to establish trustworthiness through the interview process, the following steps were used: triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, analytic memos, and expert review. Regular meetings with the faculty advisor also took place to review the research process as it unfolded (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Once data were gathered from all participants, the information was analyzed and transcribed using the Dedoose software program. The participants' personal identification information and responses during the interview portion were restricted to the researcher only for data collections.

Participants and the Selection Process

Creswell (2003) noted that "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185). Using convenience sampling, the researcher selected two Master's level students from each participating college or university in the Central Valley of California to engage in a semi-structured interview. The participants constituted three Master's level students who were native English speakers and three Master's level students who were second-language

learners. Criterion for this sample included: (1) the participant marked the box on the questionnaire that indicated that he or she was willing to participate in an additional interview and (2) contact information. If there were more than two students who were willing to participate from each institution, then the possible participants were numbered separately by college or university and randomly drawn from a box for the opportunity to interview. This occurred with both the private and state university participants. Both groups had over five Master's level students volunteer for the follow-up interview. As a result, they were numbered by type of institution and drawn from a box as part of the selection process. The randomly chosen participants all agreed to participate in the study.

These students participated in semi-structured interviews that described their perceptions of preparation, support, and the role of mentoring in their graduate level experiences. The findings in these interviews provided insight to the varied experiences between native English and second-language learners who have been working at the Master's level in the fields of education, sociology, or social work. Three overarching themes emerged from the data as a result of these interviews. The narrative responses of successes and struggles in graduate education surfaced through the voices of the participants in this study.

Demographics

The participants' demographics highlight the diversity in gender, ethnicity, and program. Five out of the six students were at the end of their program located in the Central Valley of California. The majority felt as though they had valuable advice

to contribute to students earlier in the programs. All valued education and had successfully completed the majority of their degree requirements.

Table 8

Demographics of the Participants in Relation to Age, Type of Bachelor's Degree Earned, Work Status, Language Status, and ELD Experiences in the P-12 System

Participant	Age Range	BA Degree	Work Status	Language Status	ELD Experiences in P-12
Ana	20s	Early Care Education	Works part-time	Second-language learner	Primarily in ELD classes P-12
Beta	40s	Paralegal Studies	Works full-time	English-only	N/A
Carly	20s	Sociology	Works full-time	Second-language learner	Primarily in mainstream classes P-12
Don	30s	History	Works full-time	English-only	N/A
Ella	40s	Psychology	Works full-time	Second-language learner	Primarily in mainstream classes P-12
Frank	30s	French and Linguistics	Works full-time	English-only	N/A

Both the native English speakers and second-language learners shared several common characteristics even though they attended colleges and universities that varied from private colleges to state colleges to the University of California (UC) system. They ranged from their midtwenties to late-forties in age. Most of them

worked full time. All attended public schools in California during their P-12 experience and received diplomas. The variety of majors that resulted from their Bachelor's degree preparation did not match the area of study that they applied for and were admitted to their Master's degree program. The array of disciplines varied from social sciences to paralegal studies. Half the participants enrolled in Master's level work at their undergraduate alma mater while the other half attended various colleges and universities across California. All except one participant was working on his or her first Master's level degree in the field of education or social work.

Only one second-language learner and one native English speaking student reported that they were first generation college students. For purposes of this study, a first generation college student refers to a student whose parent or immediate family member has earned a high school diploma or less as the highest level of educational attainment.

Two of the second-language learners who participated in this study noted that they were second-generation immigrants who were born in the United States but who have at least one foreign-born parent. The remaining second-language learner reported to be a third-generation immigrant whose parents were both born in the United States. Interestingly, only one second-language learner participant was designated in primarily English Language Development (ELD) courses throughout his or her P-12 experience in the California public education system. The other two experienced primarily mainstreamed classes in the P-12 system by request of their family.

Code Development and Application Process

Qualitative data requires making sense of massive amounts of data (Creswell, 2003). The researcher approached the coding process by creating a spreadsheet of descriptors that signified key demographics among the participants such as educational background, work status, English Language Development experiences (ELD), among others. Next, the researcher worked to identify codes that were designated as a topic from the interview transcription text and that appeared more than once throughout the data set. The coded excerpts produced a categorization of the shared topics that contributed to the development of the thematic framework (Lonn-Nichols, 2013).

The next phase of the process focused on the development of a code tree (see Appendix F). The researcher worked with her advisor to make sure that each code represented a topic or idea evidenced by careful review of the transcripts. Some codes were designated as singletons, some were codes with children, while others were weighted on a scale of 0 to 2 to indicate the degree in which a code had a negative (0), neutral (1), or positive (2) impact on the participant. The goal was to have each code contribute to the creation of an overarching thematic framework.

Once the code tree was uploaded to Dedoose, an intercoder reliability test was applied using over 10 excerpts from the data. The purpose was to establish reliability and trustworthiness of the coding process by demonstrating the goodness of fit of the code tree to say that there was a reasonable selection of topics that could be applied by people with similar backgrounds. The following steps were taken and applied

using Dedoose software: 1) Another individual who is knowledgeable about Master's level experiences was selected that was not a part of the study; 2) The researcher and the individual coded sections of five interviews separately using the Dedoose Testing Center; 3) The researcher and other expert in the field then compared codes and themes that each person identified and came to an agreement on the appropriate codes and themes; and 4) Each person shared his or her rationale for the codes and themes he or she chose. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that interrater reliability should approach .90. While the individual researcher must determine the most appropriate standards for the particular research project, Dedoose visual indicators use the following criteria for interpreting kappa values: $<.50$ = poor agreement, $.51-.64$ = fair agreement, $.65-.80$ = good agreement, and $>.80$ = excellent agreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, for this research project, an acceptable score was determined to be 0.80 or above on the Cohen's Kappa. Completing this process resulted in confidence in the soundness with a score of 0.90 on the Cohen's Kappa.

The development of the thematic framework included analyzing each code and applying weights as appropriate to bring to light relevant and meaningful responses. Each code represented a topic or idea evidenced by the grouped excerpts that the researcher labeled (Lonn-Nichols, 2013). The code list, which also integrates a code dictionary for the reader to reference (see Appendix F), included topics about (a) perceived keys to success, (b) academic accomplishments and challenges throughout one's Master's program, (c) the role of mentoring from faculty, administrative staff, family, and peers on social and academic support, (d) perceived

levels of preparation from Bachelor's degree work, (e) writing and language support resources, and (f) recommendations for improving Master's level programs for future students based on their personal experiences and reflections.

Dedoose makes possible detailed chart summaries of data. The main focus for analyzing the interview portion was to rank order code application and code co-occurrence which would result in the emergence of themes and patterns from the interview data. Code application examined the rank order of the number of codes that have been applied. Code co-occurrences resulted when a code appeared in an excerpt with another code. Additionally, the code weight frequency and field results were analyzed to produce a deeper comparison between native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level.

Presentation of Code Occurrences

The process of identifying themes evolved with the initial use of code application with Dedoose software. In order to identify the highest frequency of codes, a graph was created after the coding process had been applied to the six transcribed interviews. The process revealed similar key points of focus and concern in the transcribed data for Master's Level students, both native English speakers and second-language learners, throughout their graduate experience.

The researcher identified the top six codes or factors that influenced Master's Level students in this study: adjusting to Master's level expectations, areas of frustration and struggle, perceived keys to success, faculty influence, areas of accomplishment, and peer support (see Table 9).

Table 9

Influences on Master's Level Students that Impact Success Rank Order of Code Applications

Code Application Rank Order	Influences on Master's level students that impact success
1	Adjusting to Master's level expectations
2	Areas of frustration and struggle
3	Perceived keys to success
4	Faculty influence
5	Areas of accomplishment
6	Peer support

Native English and Second-Language Learner Master's Level Students Highest Ranked Topic: Adjusting to Master's Level Expectations

Both native English speakers and second-language learners who were graduate level participants in this study ranked the adjustment to Master's level expectations as the most significant factor to influence their success. Again, success in this study is defined as the attainment of the Master's degree in education, social work, or sociology. It is also important to consider perceived graduate level success which encompasses student perceptions of a variety of factors including but not limited to support, mentoring, levels of confidence, and feelings of connectedness within a graduate level experience. Participants reported the critical need to adjust to the academics, cultural norms and expectations, learn how to navigate the program and institution, and social and emotional adjustments related to demands of graduate level study. Beta, a Master's level student at a private college in the Central Valley of California commented on the academic demands of graduate level work:

In the Master's program, there is a lot more demanding reading, conversation, and giving of feedback to the students. Students have to participate in the class through class discussion. I think this is good. You have to do a lot more revisions on your work. (Beta, native English speaker at the Master's level)

It was clear from this excerpt and several others that students perceived a significant difference regarding the expectations between undergraduate and graduate work.

The pressure of academic demands and adjustments were prevalent across the board. Ella, a Master's level student at the UC reflected on the significant increase in academic workload and expectations from Bachelor's level to Master's level work. She noted, "It's completely different! Bachelor's work is about studying, listening, and regurgitating information on a midterm or final. Graduate work is discussion-oriented; taking the information and critiquing it." Another CSU student also commented on the topic,

Absolutely, there is a huge difference! Sometimes I would have questions during my Bachelor's level courses, but I would think that I should have been able to already answer them based on what the teacher covered. As a result, I did not ask many questions. I would ask a classmate. For the Master's program, you have to be a very good listener, filter out important details during the instructor's lecture, and pay attention to key facts. Asking questions is the key to your success! (Don, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level frequently referred to what they perceived as the keys to being a successful student in relation to meeting program expectations.

Though academic demands permeated participant comments, cultural norms, navigation, and social and emotional factors also played a large role. For example, Frank, a native English speaker at the UC, reflected on the topic of adjusting to cultural norms at the Master's level and noted, "The top levels across the different universities and even departments are very different. This is also the case for graduate and undergraduate in expectations. There is much more of a culture of *you better take care of it yourself*." Additionally, Frank noted the culture of technology found at the Master's level and that there is an expectation to learn it to be successful in the program. He commented,

Often, graduate students are just expected to know certain technologies. I had to study and learn it to survive in the program. Many of the younger students already get technology before they ever enter in graduate studies and they have the advantage. (Frank, native English speaker at the Master's level)

These hidden expectations often take incoming Master's level by surprise and cause an alarmed and stressful response.

It is also critical to note the emotional toll of adjusting to a new set of expectations. Ana, a second-language learner at a private college, explained that she has worked hard to build her language and writing skills in English while learning content. She explained,

Before the graduate program, I didn't have a lot of presentations. Coming here, it was a big difference. One instructor told me that I had to speak more and get out of my shell. I have really been trying lately. I am a really shy person! I know that I have to get out of my shell and be more confident. (Ana, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Furthermore, another second-language learner at the state university shared similar emotional anxiety adjusting to the demands of Master's level expectations:

I feel confident sometimes but then compare myself with some of my peers who are older and speak fluent English. Sometimes I feel intimidated because English isn't my first language. From high school to now, I have greatly improved with my reading and writing. With presentations, I still feel nervous at times. I have to really think about what I am going to say first to make sure everything flows. I make sure it's in my head. Other times, I just go for it depending on how I feel that day! (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Awareness of the many psychological experiences and adjustments that occur for a student adapting to a new set of expectations in his or her academic pursuits is critical to understanding what supports need to put in place to ensure success on multiple levels.

Areas of Frustration and Challenge: How Native English Speakers and Second-Language Learners Persevere in Master's Level Programs

Often Master's level expectations quickly turned into challenges and frustrations for the participants. Areas of finance, convenient access to resources, commuting, quality advisement on writing a thesis, and support with general language and writing skills at the graduate level resulted across the board for both native English speakers and second-learners in Master's level programs. For instance, Carly, a second-language learner at the state university explained that she lacked home support due to being a first-generation college student. She noted, "I don't just have full fluent English skills to navigate through the educational system. My parents did not go to college." Furthermore, as she tried to seek out resources, she would often hit roadblocks. She commented on her need for language and writing support. However, the hours of operation of campus support resources were not conducive to her schedule. She explained,

I think it's hard for me because I live almost a hundred miles away and have to commute. I don't want to try to commute all the way here and not be able to make it in time to a writing support service due to traffic or such. (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Convenience and access are issues for many. Another second-language learner at a private college commented that she would use language and writing support services but they are not readily available at the extension campus located in her local area:

No, I haven't done any workshops or received any other support from instructors except from those who I've mentioned. At the extension campus, I would mainly just attend classes. They didn't have any workshops available. They were always at the main campus and I didn't want to drive all that way.
(Ana, second-language learner at the Master's level)

As a result, many participants took matters into their own hands to ensure their success.

Don, a native English speaker at the state university, revealed, "Challenges included new technology. I had to figure a lot of it out on my own." Carly, a second-language learner at the state university, admitted that "the majority of the time, I just rely on myself." Furthermore, Ana, a second-language learner at a private college stated matter-of-factly, "I really haven't had any support. It's been all me and an independent thing." As the interviews reveal, instances of self-reliance and persistence to overcome challenges are strong at the Master's level.

Even with demanding academic requirements, students persevere in their own ways. Ana, a student at the private college, noted,

With academic reading, I have been challenging myself regularly. I go home and I read articles online and if I cannot pronounce a word, I just google it or I check *youtube* on how to pronounce it. So I've been trying to get better at that.
(Ana, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Some students used the Internet, while others bought software programs or relied on family and peers for help.

Reaching Out for Help and Support: The Influence of Faculty and Peers on Student Success

Faculty influence and peer support rated the fourth and sixth most frequent in code application. Repeated occurrences of the one faculty member who made all the difference for them and the warmth and support of peers abounded throughout the interviews. Peer support was prevalent for both native English speakers and second-language learners during the interviews but faculty support was much more frequent for native English speakers.

Frank, a student at the UC, explained the levels of peer support and new learning from his Master's level experience:

In the school of education, we have a cohort. Many are younger than me. We have camaraderie and are always on each other's cases about succeeding. There is a student lounge that we hang out in and we try to get work done. There's a computer lab right across the hall, but no one hangs out in there. Instead, they're in the lounge and you have like six sets of songs going and computers tapping away (laughing). Not much work really gets done, but everyone talks. That in itself is very supportive. We all have very different interests even though we are in the same program. That can be a loss of traction at times but it can be a gain to learn new things. (Frank, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Likewise, Beta, another native English speaker but at the private college, abounded with smiles as she noted,

What I love is that I have met a group of women of various ages from their 20s to 40s. We have been following each other through the program. We've become friends on Facebook and we communicate with each other regularly. They are at the same level as me and they have the same goals that I do. We motivate each other. We talk about things or if one of us has to present and is feeling nervous, we support and cheer each other on. I like the diverse group—different racial backgrounds, different personalities, and different age groups. I love it! Everyone is so nice and supportive. (Beta, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Without a doubt, peers have provided social and emotional comfort, networking, comradery, and serve as advocates for one another as participants have worked their way through their Master's level experience. Repeatedly, they explained that they have shared joy, laughter, and tears; as a result, they bonded throughout their Master's level experience together.

The influence of faculty, as demonstrated in the Code Application table (see Table 9), stood out as the fourth key factor that influenced Master's level success. For instance, Don, a student at the state university explained,

I got a lot of support from faculty. Professors would gladly stay after class to support you and would often provide personal cell numbers if you have questions on research projects or such. I don't remember that ever happening in my Bachelor's level work. They are much more there for you on a personal level. Additionally, they helped me flourish and develop as a student. There

was a big emphasis on writing skills and perfecting those as well as learning APA format for papers. The instructors taught me this and I did not use the writing center. The instructors were always willing to provide you feedback and help you with revisions. That really helped. There was also a lot of emphasis on problem solving and being able to pay attention to detail as well as look at the bigger picture of things. I appreciate what they have done for me as a student and as a person. (Don, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Likewise, Carly, a second-language learner at the state university, noted, "When I need something, I email them and they respond right away. I feel assured that they are there for me. They have helped during times of great stress." Faculty served not only as instructors and discipline experts, but fulfilled an unspoken role of mentoring and care for students on multiple levels.

Both native English speakers and second-language learners have similar influences that impact their success as a Master's level student. According to the Code Application table (see Table 9), adjusting to Master's level expectations proved most challenging and frustrating, but was mediated by the support and influence of faculty and peers. Also, a well-kept alignment between perceived keys to success and reflecting on areas of accomplishment helped to motivate Master's level students to persevere.

Presentation of Code Co-Occurrences

Utilizing Dedoose software, six code co-occurrences resulted based on the participants' responses during the interview portion of the study. Code co-occurrence transpires when two or more codes were applied in the same excerpt. The researcher also examined all the excerpts to identify themes that apply to both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level in the areas of education, social work, and sociology.

The six code co-occurrences were (1) adjusting to Master's level expectations and cultural norms, (2) adjusting to Master's level expectations and navigation, (3) peer support and perceptions of social support, (4) areas of frustration and struggle and Master's level expectations, (5) areas of accomplishment and perceived keys to success, and (6) adjusting to Master's level expectations and academics.

Table 10

Rank Order of the Most Frequent Code Co-Occurrences

Rank Order	Code Co-Occurrence
1	Adjusting to MA Expectations & Cultural Norms
2	Adjusting to MA Expectations & Navigation
3	Peer Support & Perceptions of Social Support
4	Areas of Frustration and Struggle & Adjusting to MA Expectations
5	Areas of Accomplishment & Perceived Keys to Success
6	Adjusting to MA Expectations & Academics

Adjusting to Master's Level Expectations on Multiple Levels: A Challenge for Native English Speakers and Second-language Learners

Both native English speakers and second-language learners struggled with adjustments to Master's level expectations on multiple levels: cultural norms, navigation, and academics. Master's level expectations co-occurred with cultural norms most often, followed by navigation second, and then with academics sixth in the rank order. Interestingly, Master's level expectations co-occurred with areas of frustration and struggle regularly (see Table 10). The range of challenges on these levels spanned not only academic work, but thesis pursuits as well as well as program navigation.

Adjusting to Master's level expectations and cultural norms. Multiple participants pointed out the importance of taking care of oneself while dealing with a new set of cultural norms at the Master's level. For example, Frank, a student at the UC level, explained,

However, for various graduate programs here, it is less clear, especially when setting up your thesis committees, your Written Qualifying Exams, and your reading lists. There is no manual that can tell you who gets along with who on committees or if these people are all in the same boat academically. It would be nice to know who would work well together on your committee. I have seen committee members fighting across the table. No one can prepare you for that as a student. If you walk into your potential advisor's office and they are not someone you wouldn't want to be *married to or a roommate with*

figuratively, then you should pivot on your heel and walk out of that place.

These are unspoken rules. They just say, "Our program has fine professors."

They don't reveal the truth about some of them. You must protect yourself.

(Frank, native English speaker at the Master's level)

In addition, the cultural expectation to be proficient in the latest technology was a struggle for over half the participants, both native English speakers and second-language learners, at the Master's level. To illustrate, Ella noted,

It was really new technology that I was not prepared for in my program. With reading and writing, everything has been fine. In my work setting, I do so much reading and writing anyway. It was really the new technology that I was not prepared for in my program. (Ella, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Additionally, Don, a native English learner, commented, "One of my greatest challenges at this level included new technology where I just had to figure a lot of it out on my own and survive." Based on the interviews, technology remains one of those expectations that can cause a student to sink or swim in a Master's level program.

Adjusting to Master's level expectations and navigation. Knowing whom to seek out for help, what to expect throughout one's program, and where to find available resources were frequent frustrations for several participants. For instance, one Master's level student who is a second-language learner at the state university commented,

However, it was difficult with some miscommunications around my project. My chair was new to the faculty and this was a new experience for me. It was stressful for me to not know how my project was to unfold and her not being certain about things. She was helpful but since she wasn't fully informed, I had to go ask other faculty to make sure that I was on track. (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Levels of confidence were not always strong when it came to understanding how to navigate the Master's level system. Another student from the state university also experienced frustration in understanding and navigating his educational plan due to inconsistent advising:

Yes, sometimes I struggled getting a hold of my counselor to know what classes to take at which level. I don't know if they are always honest about hours needed for licensure. They were not very clear on it or provide me details so that I was informed. I felt frustrated. I overcame it by realizing that I was half way through my program and I had to go forward. (Don, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Adjusting to Master's level expectations and academics. Another participant at the state university noted that taking care of oneself in the classroom while adjusting to academics at the Master's level was just as critical:

With reading at the Master's level, there is a huge emphasis on examining research material for the social work that I do as well as being up to date on statistics and research methods and techniques. With writing, I had a good

preparation at the Bachelor's level with the APA formats, but they are even pickier at the MA level. You have to be absolutely perfect! It's not about the revisions, but the embarrassment when they point it out. You must take great care to triple check your work to maintain your reputation as a strong Master's level student while getting used to your program. (Don, native-English speaker at the Master's level)

It is evident that expectations in rigor and performance make strong leaps from the Bachelor's level to the Master's level.

Additionally, part of the struggle, particularly for second-language learners, is strong language and writing skills in one's academics. Ana, a student at a private college, explained,

I'm not confident with writing. I bought an online program called "White Smoke Writing Tool" to help me. At the graduate level, we are supposed to be good writers with the research. Yes, I still struggle and it goes all the way back to junior high. I will not give up. I made a choice to be different and I am going to do it, even if it's hard. It's a challenge for me to take. (Ana, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Carly, a student at the state university, had similar response in regards to language barriers in academics in graduate work. She noted,

Language can be challenging because I cannot always comprehend things as fast as others who just speak English. I have to process it so that I can voice

my opinion. I want to perform well and will use whatever resources I can find to support my success. (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

All Master's level students struggled with academic performance in relation reading, writing, or technology expectations.

Coping With it All: Utilizing Peers for Social Support

Participants relied on peers for social and emotional support throughout their Master's level program. The code co-occurrence of peer support and perceptions of social support ranked third in code co-occurrence. Don, a student from the state university noted, "Peers have been highly supportive and we learn from each other. They always have us buddy up with someone we could call or email. We work together closely." Likewise, a second-language learner from the state university explained,

My cohort has been great and we have a shared experience. They are my colleagues and we can share thoughts and ideas. It's nice to know that you are not by yourself in the program. They help pull you through problems. (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

The cohort model was significant in fostering peer support. However, with or without a cohort, feelings of support and encouragement from peers abounded from every participant in the study.

Never Forgetting: Remembering Areas of Accomplishment and Perceived Keys to Success to Push Forward towards Completion

Areas of accomplishment and perceived keys to success ranked fifth highest on the code co-occurrence table (see Table 11). Participants readily commented on the need to validate oneself in terms of accomplishments to mentally push forward in a challenging program. They also found it important to keep in mind their perceptions of a successful student. For example, Don mentioned his struggles with organization and technology and his victory in overcoming those obstacles:

Learning to prioritize everything from assignments to when to study for an exam was critical. It took concentration, practice, and effort but now I can multitask and be successful! Time management has been the key skill. I have also gained the skill of how to use search engines for research effectively.

(Don, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Likewise, Beta, a student at the private college, listed her accomplishments as a multitasker as a parent, a full-time worker, and a full-time Master's level student. She explained,

Successes include that I learned how to juggle all of this: time management! I've only ever missed class if there was a child-event which hardly ever happens. I've become a strong multitasker and can get the job done! I am super-mom, work full time, and go to school full time. It's quite a feat! (Beta, native English speaker at the Master's level)

Feelings of accomplishment strongly encouraged students to persevere.

Growth and personal accomplishment were apparent among all participants in the study while completing their Master's level program. For instance, Ana commented,

For me, it is something personal. You actually took the time to go to school and to do all the work. You finally graduate and say, "I actually did it!" Being a Hispanic, not a lot of people can say that, especially in this area, where many people work in canneries. Even though they were born here, they made that choice. I made a choice to be different and I am going to do it, even if it's hard. It's a challenge for me to take. (Ana, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Success with skill development also played a significant role for several participants.

For example, Carly, a student at the state university noted,

My reading and writing preparation have really developed my skills. I am able to better apply those skills in my MA program. We have so many reading and writing requirements. When I am reading something complex, I am able to comprehend and apply it to my analysis. This whole experience is really about going in and learning something valuable that you can apply to the real world. It allows you to make yourself valuable as a person and increase your human capital. (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Success in academics, time management, and personal growth were repeatedly identified as significant experiences at the Master's level. The six code co-occurrences provided evidence as to how students viewed their interactions with their

Master's level experience in the areas of education, social work, or sociology in the Central Valley of California.

Overarching Themes

The researcher analyzed the interview data of six Master's level students in overall code application and thematic findings. Three themes that applied to both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level resulted: (1) more graduate level language and writing support, (2) the need for mentoring, and (3) utilizing the influence of faculty on Master's level student success.

Table 11

Overarching Themes for Both Native English Speakers and Second-Language Learners at the Master's Level

Rank Order	Overarching Themes
1	More Graduate Level Language and Writing Support
2	Need for Mentoring
3	Utilizing the Influence of Faculty on Master's level Student Success

Theme One: More Graduate Level Language and Writing Support for both Native English Speakers and Second-language Learners at the Master's Level

Both native English speakers and second-language learners reported a strong need for language and writing support at the graduate level. Adjusting to Master's level expectations, which included academic performance with reading and writing, ranked number one for all participants on the Code Application table (see Table 9). Additionally, adjusting to Master's level expectations and academic performance ranked sixth in most frequent code co-occurrences for graduate students in the study

(see Table 10). Additionally, when code weight frequency and field results were applied, both English only students and second-language learners reported a lack of language support. This theme was strongly noted by all participants in the study. For example, Ana, a student at the private college noted, "Yes, I think more writing workshops that are provided by highly qualified staff are needed, especially for ELD students. Also, all students would benefit as well because they still struggle with that area, especially in research." Likewise, Beta, a student also from the private college, explained,

We might want to add more library resources and more people who can assist with writing papers at the graduate level. The support person must be at that same level as the student or higher. Support for reading and writing are keys! To me, older people are good, but a peer support person at our level would be even better. (Beta, a native English speaker at the Master's level)

Carly further explained the importance of convenient, customized, and year-round services for writing. She commented,

I would recommend more writing services tailored to each program. My cohort is very diverse and all of us have had struggles of some kind. Some are struggling a lot more with writing and language than others. It needs to be a year-round service. On our campus, it is only offered on certain months. (Carly, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Language and writing needs still persevered at the Master's level as reading, writing, and research expectations became more demanding in students' programs.

Theme Two: The Need for Mentoring

Mentoring emerged as a significant theme for both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level. Mentoring in this study refers to the act of a person taking on the role of coaching, giving advice, or serving as a guide to someone who is less experienced. It can include faculty, administrative staff, peers progressing further along in the program, and family. To illustrate, Don, a student at the state university, discussed the important influence of community help. He noted,

For my degree doing social work, you have a lot of fieldwork and internships to complete. I knew a psychologist whose career is strongly related to social work help me. She saw a lot in me that could be mentored. That link was made through the expectation of the program of finding someone in the community to work with during your fieldwork. A person new in the field must have this mentorship to ground themselves, understand the dynamics of the field, and to flourish. (Don, a native English speaker at the Master's level)

Furthermore, one participant referred to the potential effect of a new Master's level mentoring program could have on supporting student success. She commented,

I'm so excited! I just applied to the "Graduate Diversity Mentoring" program on our campus. It's just getting started. We will each be assigned to a faculty member. My advisor is good but my codirector has been outstanding with his coaching and mentoring. This could really impact the overall success of our cohort. (Ella, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Mentoring, according to several study participants supports student success on numerous levels and holds sustainable value throughout the graduate level work.

Theme Three: Utilizing the Influence of Faculty on Master's level Student Success

Who is best equipped to provide quality mentoring to Master's level students? As seen in the Code Application table, the participants repeatedly referred to faculty; it ranked fourth in importance to influencing graduate success (see Table 9). Additionally, when the Code Weight Frequency and Field Descriptors were analyzed, native English speaking students at the Master's level reported more instances of influence from faculty. Furthermore, during the same process of Code Weight Frequency and Field Descriptors analysis, second-language learners often had more negative perceptions of themselves as students.

Would an increase in mentoring by faculty change this finding? Often, participants remarked that there was one faculty member who was their advocate and who made all the difference for them in succeeding at the Master's level. For instance, Ana explained,

The language and literacy instructor has been the best support, especially the way that she teaches the class and supports me as an individual. She makes us learn a lot by example, modeling, and lets us know what is really going on in schools. She is an inspiration and my advocate in this program (Ana, second-language learner at the Master's level)

Additionally, Frank discussed how faculty can shape a student and promote his or her growth in the discipline. He noted,

One of the respected professors and I have talked a lot about my progress and my process as student and as an instructor. He has given me good advice throughout my program. My advisor also supports me well. I have support from multiple departments. What I find that is really positive is that they are giving me similar advice and not 10 different things. (Frank, native English speaker at the Master's level)

According to the interviews, faculty has continued to play a significant role in Master's level success.

Overarching Themes in Relation to the Research Questions

The research questions in this study sought to examine factors that characterize adequate preparation and support as well as determine the impact of mentoring on both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level. Increased language and writing support, mentoring, and utilizing the influence of faculty on a student's success have resulted as key influences on Master's level student success. Adjustments to Master's level expectations, as evidenced by the Code Application table and the Code Co-Occurrence table, have caused frustrations and challenges on academic, cultural, and navigation levels (see Tables 9 and 10). Additionally, mentoring in the form of providing advice, coaching, and support has been integral to all Master's level study participants. Faculty have

most often provided this important and yet rather informal service to support graduate student success.

Evidence of Quality

Accuracy of data in this research is to validate the information provided by the participants. To ensure the validity and accuracy of the data, the interviews were conducted face to face; when necessary, telephone interviews were an alternative. To ensure that the information provided by the participants would not be misconstrued, the interviews were also audio-taped. The interview questions were open-ended to reduce the possibility researcher's biases. The researcher self-transcribed each interview. Once the transcriptions were completed, they were uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative research data analysis software where the information was coded, analyzed, and extracted into themes. The researcher took several steps to ensure that the collected data were reliable and trustworthy. Confidentiality and honesty were also a concern, and a criteria were followed to protect survey respondents and interview participants. A number of steps were also taken to review institutional and program documents for this research appropriately to reduce insider bias (Vogt, 2007).

Member checking and peer debriefing were techniques used to confirm the interview findings. This is a process by which the interview transcript is provided to each interviewee, giving him or her an opportunity make any corrections. To reduce errors, the interviews were recorded and notes were taken by the researcher. When transcribing, the recording was played for each interview, followed by reading and

rereading to safeguard against inaccuracy. This process was repeated at least three times so that quality of data was secured.

The researcher also used peer debriefing to help analyze the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A journal was maintained with analytic memos when collecting and analyzing the interview data. Also, the researcher regularly met with her dissertation chair during this all-inclusive process. Chapter III detailed the steps mentioned in this section.

Summary

Chapter V presented the findings of the interview portion of the study. The interview process, participant selection process, demographics of the participants, and code development process were described in detail. Additionally, code application and code co-occurrence that were derived from the use of Dedoose software were presented. Three overarching themes emerged as a result of this study: the need for increased language and writing support, mentoring, and utilizing the influence of faculty on a student's success emerged from the data analysis and was explained using direct quotes and narratives. Chapter VI presents the discussion, implications, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Rigorous reading, writing, and research competencies are demanded in graduate programs. Even if a student possesses a baccalaureate degree with a wide repertoire of applicable skills, support mechanisms are often still needed to ensure a successful experience in a Master's level field of study. Study skills, good time management, and focus are essential traits of successful students. Instructors work to foster proficiency in these traits throughout the students' graduate level experience. However, an important dynamic must be considered with the changing landscape of graduate education. Over the past decade, the number of nonnative English speakers matriculating in higher education continues to climb along with students from a diverse variety of backgrounds. Struggles with language proficiency while focusing on discipline mastery and research can create compounded challenges in a second-language learner's success at the Master's level. In an ever-changing and diverse landscape of higher-education, it is imperative to understand how instructors and institutions can provide continued support in academics as well as from the social-emotional perspective, which ensures success and promotes the development of the *whole* student.

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs for all students, including second-language learners, in an effort to expand their educational

experiences and achieve success in graduate level education. As a result, after reflecting on previous research, the following research questions emerged:

1. What factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs?
 - 1a. What is the impact of mentoring on native English speakers and second-language learners regarding perceptions of confidence and academic performance in Master's level programs?
 - 1b. How do second-language learner (EL) experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs?

Additionally, one hypothesis emerged as a result of reflecting on this previous research.

- H1. There is no significant difference between second-language (EL) students' and native speakers' experiences in Master's level programs.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can deepen the understanding of processes, attitudes, and motives (Creswell, 2003). An Explanatory Sequential Design was utilized, which included two phases: (1) a collection of quantitative data using an SPSS analysis; and (2) a second collection of qualitative data using interviews that was informed by the results of the first quantitative phase (Creswell, 2011). The questionnaire was designed to assess Master's level success in the areas of support, study and research skills, levels of preparation from the Bachelor's degree work, the role of mentoring and advising, and overall perceptions of student success. Based on the results of the quantitative analysis, interview

questions were developed and a subset of those Master's students, including those who were English learners, participated in interviews to describe their perceptions of preparation and experiences in graduate studies. The results of this study identified key factors that support students' preparation and support in an effort to expand their educational experiences and achieve success in graduate studies.

Summary of the Findings

Quantitative Findings

Over 135 Master's level students who were admitted to programs in education, social work, or sociology participated in the questionnaire portion of this study. This study used convenience sampling and focused on three institutions that offer Master's level education including a California State University campus, a University of California campus, and a private college campus in the Central Valley of California. After expert review, the questionnaire using Qualtrics was sent to Master's level students to measure their perceived levels of preparation and support for success in their current graduate programs. Data was collected for approximately two months and then imported into SPSS for analysis.

Factor Analysis. In order to address the first research question regarding factors that characterize adequate support and preparation in a Master's level program, Confirmatory Factor analysis with principal axis factoring was used to find patterns in correlations among the 30 questionnaire items related to adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs. Three factors were rotated since the fourth eigenvalue was close to 1.0. The first factor, The Need for

Sustained Support, accounted for 25% of the item variance. The second factor, Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring, contributed an additional 11%. The third factor, Importance of Strong Undergraduate Preparation in Master's Level Success, contributed an additional 8%. Values for which factor loads were greater than .40 were included in the determination of factors.

Chi-Square Test of Independence. A 2 X 5 contingency table was run on each Master's Level Success Questionnaire item that was a significant contributor according to the Factor Analysis. The chi-square test of independence was used to determine if the level of agreeability (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) varied based on whether the Master's level student was a native English speaker or second-language learner. The results of the analysis displayed in Table 8 indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the observed proportions of seven responses based on being a native English speaker or a second-language learner in a Master's level program in the areas of education, sociology, or social work. Six items from the category, Need for Sustained Support, were significant: (1) Having instructors provide more language support with writing, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 16.59, p = .02$, Cramer's $V = .35$, (2) Benefiting from more writing support in one's graduate program, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 10.97, p = .03$, Cramer's $V = .28$, (3) Providing more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 16.60, p = .00$, Cramer's $V = .35$, (4) Benefitting from more research skill support in the program, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 13.64, p = .01$, Cramer's $V = .31$, (5)

Perceptions of excellent reading and writing skills, Pearson $\chi^2(3, N = 138) = 24.85, p = .00$, Cramer's $V = .42$, and (6) Perceptions of excellent speaking and communication skills, Pearson $\chi^2(3, N = 138) = 21.46, p = .00$, Cramer's $V = .39$. One item was significant from the category, Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring: If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me, Pearson $\chi^2(4, N = 138) = 10.42, p = .03$, Cramer's $V = .28$. Additionally, means between native English speakers and second-language learners on all Master's Level Success Questionnaire items that were a significant contributor according to the Factor Analysis were reported.

Qualitative Findings

Semi-structured interview questions were developed as a result of the data analysis from phase one of the study. Using convenience sampling, the researcher selected two Master's level students from each participating college or university in the Central Valley of California to engage in a semi-structured interview. The participants included three Master's level students who were native English speakers and three Master's level students who were second-language learners. These students participated in semi-structured interviews that described their perceptions of preparation, support, and the role of mentoring in their graduate level experiences. The findings in these interviews provided insight to the varied experiences between native English and second-language learners who have been working at the Master's level in the fields of education, sociology or social work.

Once data were gathered from all participants, the information was analyzed and transcribed using the computer software program called Dedoose. The researcher analyzed the interview data of six Master's level students in overall code application and thematic findings.

Code application. The researcher identified the top six codes or factors in rank order that influenced Master's level students in this study: adjusting to Master's level expectations, areas of frustration and struggle, perceived keys to success, faculty influence, areas of accomplishment, and peer support.

Code co-occurrence. Utilizing Dedoose software, six code co-occurrences based on the participants' responses during the interview portion of the study resulted. Code co-occurrence transpired when two or more codes were applied in the same excerpt. The researcher also examined all the excerpts to identify themes that apply to both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level in the areas of education, social work, and sociology.

The six code co-occurrences in rank order were as follows: (1) adjusting to Master's level expectations and cultural norms, (2) adjusting to Master's level expectations and navigation, (3) peer support and perceptions of social support, (4) areas of frustration and struggle and Master's level expectations, (5) areas of accomplishment and perceived keys to success, and (6) adjusting to Master's level expectations and academics.

Resulting themes. The researcher analyzed the interview data of six Master's level students in overall code application and thematic findings. Three themes that

applied to both native English speakers and second-language learners at the Master's level resulted: (1) more graduate level language and writing support, (2) the need for mentoring, and (3) utilizing the influence of faculty on Master's level student success.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of this mixed methods study aligned with the literature review (Cranton, 2006; Cohen & Brawer; 2013, Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Gándara, P., & Bial, D., 2001; Pascarella et. al., 2004; Sinacore, et. al., 2013). Sustained writing and research support, mentoring, and providing a strong foundation during undergraduate preparation were key in supporting student success.

Research Question 1: What factors characterize adequate preparation and support for success in Master's level programs?

Based on the quantitative results, three clusters or factors that supported Master's level success emerged: (1) The Need for Sustained Support, (2) Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring, and (3) Importance of Strong Undergraduate Preparation in Master's Level Success. Both groups needed support in the areas of language and writing as well as study and research skills. This was especially prevalent for the second-language learners. Master's level students indicated that they wanted writing and research services to be available as well as the practice of having instructors embed this training within coursework.

The importance of purposeful advising and mentoring was a strong factor in ensuring graduate level success. Interestingly, native English speakers indicated that they engage in advising, support services, and mentoring from instructors more often

than second-language learners. Both groups reported a need for a stronger advising component ($M_{\text{NativeEng}} = 2.79$, $M_{\text{ELs}} = 3.06$). Additionally, both indicated frustrations understanding and navigating their Master's level program ($M_{\text{NativeEng}} = 2.47$, $M_{\text{ELs}} = 2.42$).

Native English speakers had stronger perceptions of confidence regarding quality undergraduate preparation to support their Master's level success than second-language learners. This indicates less confidence with reading, writing, and presentation skills for second-language learners who are not only faced with language challenges but who are working on discipline mastery. Additionally, second-language learners felt more intimidated to ask instructors for help when confused or unsure ($M_{\text{NativeEng}} = 1.84$, $M_{\text{ELs}} = 2.20$).

Both the quantitative results from the Master's Level Success questionnaire aligned well with the results of the interview portion of the study where three main themes emerged: (1) More graduate level language and writing support, (2) Need for mentoring, especially for second-language learners, and (3) Utilizing the strong influence of faculty on Master's level student success. Additionally, these findings aligned well with Tate, et. al. (2014) study on students' pursuit of a graduate education.

Research Question 1a. What is the impact of mentoring on native English speakers and second-language learners regarding perceptions of confidence and academic performance in Master's level programs?

Master's level students reported strong confidence in their academic abilities. On the questionnaire, perceptions of excellent reading and writing skills ($M_{\text{NativeEng}} = 4.17$, $M_{\text{ELs}} = 3.42$) and (2) perceptions of excellent speaking and communication skills ($M_{\text{NativeEng}} = 4.06$, $M_{\text{ELs}} = 3.36$) were high. However, when the Code Weight Frequency and Field Descriptors were analyzed during the qualitative portion of the study, second-language learners often had more negative perceptions of themselves as students. Such confidence levels at the graduate level in relation with instructor's perceptions and grading merit further research.

Instances of mentoring abounded in the interview portion of the study. Participants repeatedly referred to a particular faculty mentor who coached, advocated on the student's behalf, and who made a key difference in his or her graduate level success. Students reported the mentor who recognized potential in a student and who made the extra effort to support individual student success through extensive discussion and dialogue, being present in his or her experiences, celebrating successes, and helping the student work through challenges and setbacks. Interestingly, when the Code Weight Frequency and Field Descriptors were analyzed during the qualitative portion of the study, native English speaking students at the Master's level reported more instances of influence from faculty. Graduate level mentoring programs and cohort models all contributed to successful experiences among the participants.

Research Question 1b. How do second-language learner (EL) experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs?

The results of the analysis displayed in Table 7 indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the observed proportions of seven responses based on being a native English speaker or a second-language learner in a Master's level program in the areas of education, sociology or social work. Six items were from the category Need for Sustained Support, and one item was from the Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring. Second-language learners needed more language and writing support across the board as well as research and study skills. While significant for the majority of questionnaire participants, language and writing support, especially regarding research, was more urgent for second-language learners who struggle with academic demands of a graduate level program due to language and other barriers.

During the interview portion of the study, participants across the board indicated the need for the following: (1) writing workshops focused on research that are directly tailored to the field of study, (2) informing and educating new Master's level students on what to expect every step of the way rather than just providing a general overview, (3) an accessible advisor who helps the Master's student map out a complete education plan from start to finish upon entering the program, (4) a small personalized program feel where faculty mentors and advisors helping every step of the way to ensure success, and (5) a strong resource base at the institution's library with personnel who are qualified to support students on writing and research at the

graduate level. The one main difference from second-language learners at the Master's level was that they requested separate writing workshops that were directly designed just for them and tailor to their unique needs regarding language support and development.

Study Objectives

The intent of the study was to look at factors that characterize adequate preparation and support in Master's level programs. Additionally, the researcher was interested in how experiences compare between native English speakers in a Master's level program and second-language learners. The examination occurred in this dissertation through the use of an Explanatory Sequential Design which included two phases: (1) a collection of quantitative data using a questionnaire and SPSS analysis; and (2) a second collection of qualitative data using interviews, which were informed by the results of the first, quantitative phase (Creswell, 2011). Based on the results of the quantitative analysis reported in Chapter IV, interview questions were developed and a subset of those Master's students, including those who were English learners, on perceptions regarding preparation and levels of support during their graduate studies experience from faculty, staff, peers, and families. They further explained the degree in which they have been mentored throughout their Master's level experience and how that has impacted their perceived success. Additionally, participants detailed their study skills preparation, perceived successes and obstacles throughout the program, and provided feedback on what they believe needs to be added to strengthen the graduate studies experience for future students.

Limitations of the Study

Clearly, this study is limited in its generalizations because it singles out Master's level students at three colleges and universities in the Central Valley of California. The study's conclusions are available to higher education administrators and instructors in Master's level programs as a way to share research related to fostering graduate level success for students who are both native English speakers and second-language learners. Additional studies comparing native English speakers and second-language learners across multiple colleges and universities at the Master's and Doctoral levels would be beneficial.

The study intentionally focused on Master's level students in education, sociology, and social work programs. While this research was intended to be limited to perceptions of success and experiences at the graduate level, the questionnaire and interview instruments elicited the viewpoints of students who expressed strengths in their particular program, needs to improve graduate level education as a whole, and advice to beginning graduate level students. Similarly, the study's small number of participants – although representing different programs at the Master's level– is limited in scope. As a consequence, these results cannot be viewed as a generalization of all Master's level students. Further, more detailed research and of larger magnitude may be necessary to determine factors that characterize success at the Master's level.

As pointed out earlier in the study, this research did not examine matriculation patterns, differences between institutions or fields or philosophies of various graduate level programs represented in the study. It was assumed that participants were typical

Master's level students who were experiencing similar courses of study. It was assumed again that these institutions had similar philosophies and pedagogies that were reflected across graduate studies experiences. The study's intent was to provide educational leaders with information that may help them understand whether such Master's level programs are helping meet students' educational goals. A more robust examination of factors that characterize graduate level success may be prudent.

In addition, further research regarding the sustainability of programs and services such as language and writing support at the graduate level would be encouraged. Although the data supports such dedicated programs in response to the increasing numbers of students who are both native English speakers and second-language learners enrolling in graduate programs, further research regarding graduate level support and success is needed. While data suggest the need for most robust programs within the coming decade, additional studies are necessary to determine the changing landscape of graduate education and how to support the full range of learners best. Similarly, like the strengths reported by Master's level students on current programs, higher educational institutions must evaluate the sustainability of successful learning communities that focus on all students. As a matter of public policy, educational leaders should evaluate programs with the consideration of student feedback such as seen in this study to determine whether the model of such services and support systems can be made available more broadly – in an effort to meet student success for all Master's level students.

Recommendations and Implications from the Study

As students openly talked about the process through their Master's level program, it became evident that they had changed. As reported by students, they experienced cognitive (i.e., approaches to learning and understanding), social, and psychological changes. This is in alignment with the transformational learning framework where students move through stages as they seek three types of knowledge which result from learning: (1) technical knowledge or instrumental learning which allows people to manipulate and control their environment through principles and skills, (2) practical or communicative knowledge which allows people to understand and interact through language, and (3) emancipatory knowledge in which people are seeking self-knowledge, growth, personal development, and freedom (Cranton, 2006). Cranton (2006) also noted that,

Emancipatory learning occurs in informal and formal educational settings, including community development groups, self-help groups, professional development programs, literacy education, union education, and political and environmental movements, to name a few. Perhaps most important, emancipatory learning can occur in any setting where learning occurs. A person acquiring a technical skill can gain new self-confidence and begin to see to see his or her place in the world in a new light. (p. 14)

Technical knowledge in relation to the Master's level experience occurs when students learn how to conduct and read graduate level writing and research as well as understand roles, expectations, and workload. "Empirical or natural scientific

methodologies produce technically useful knowledge, the knowledge necessary for industry and production in modern society” (Cranton, 2006, p. 11). This includes the technical skills that are needed to be a highly qualified and successful practitioner in one’s field. Students often feel challenged during this period and question if this is a goal in their lives that can be achieved.

Practical or communicative knowledge is constructivist-based and focuses on the deep understanding and meaning to one’s pursuit. In relation to the graduate level experience, students come to terms with why they need to perform at such a high level while meeting rigorous demands and expectations. Time management and study skills often strengthen during this phase and content reading for understanding is pursued. It becomes a time where students often thrive on group consensus and shared interpretation (Cranton, 2006). The same author also noted that “leadership training, interpersonal skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, communication skills, and the new emphasis on emotional intelligence illustrate the importance of communicative learning in work place settings” (2006, p. 12).

Finally, emancipatory learning allows Master’s level students to do something with their learning such as applied project or thesis. There is an emerging openness to ideas as well as the desire to help others through one’s field of study. Students are acting in a different way because they see themselves in a different way from when they started the program experience. They are now contributing to their field, engaging in self-reflection, self-determination, and personal growth. Habermas’s stated,

The goal of adult education is to help adult learners become more critically reflective, participate more fully and freely in rational discourse and action, and advance developmentally by moving toward meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative of experience. (1984, p. 224-225)

Master's level education has the power to be taught in a way as to develop and emancipate an individual. Instructors can engage in deliberate actions to disconnect students from status quo thinking and reformat them to develop new characteristics, attributes, behaviors, and perspectives that become new habits of mind (Cranton, 2006). Additionally, students become critical thinkers and skilled practitioners or researchers in their field who contribute to the positive development of society.

Recommendations for Current Practice

After examining the results of this study, institutions of higher education that offer Master's level programs in education and the social sciences need to reflect on current policy and practice in supporting student success. Are the needs of the full range of learners at the Master's level being met? The informal role of faculty as advocate and mentor needs exploration along with the levels of language and writing support embedded within program courses. Support services should be evaluated for highly qualified personnel, personalized services based on field of study, as well as services that target the specific needs of both native English and second-language learners at the graduate level. The addition of student success seminars at all levels of the program experience need consideration. Additionally, advisors need to work

closely with students to develop clear education plans, to disclose the educational experience to increase transparency and ease of navigation, and to regularly meet with them to support success every step of the way. Finally, it is recommended that students further along in the program be paired up with incoming students to serve as a peer mentors.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is evident from the study that Master's level students move through different stages containing a variety of cognitive, social, and psychological factors that transpire from program onset to completion. What facilitates the movement from one stage to the others? Is it a linear path? More research is needed in the area of Master's level success to understand and support the needs of the full range of learners at the graduate level.

Additionally, there is limited research out there on the experiences of Master's level students. More research is needed at this specific level in postbaccalaureate education that examines the perceptions and experiences of native English speakers and second-language learners in relation to academic achievement and success.

Conclusions

The purpose of this two-phased mixed methods explanatory study was to examine factors that characterize student success at the Master's level in the fields of education and the social sciences. The study was grounded in a transformational learning framework which focused on three levels of learning: technical knowledge, practical or communicative knowledge, and emancipatory knowledge.

The study included two data collection points. Phase one consisted of a Master's Level Success questionnaire that was sent via Qualtrics to Master's level students at three colleges and universities in the Central Valley of California: a California State University campus, a University of California campus, and a private college campus. Students were permitted to be at any phase of their program in education, sociology or social work. The questionnaire measured perceptions of graduate level success in the areas of support, study and research skills, levels of preparation from the Bachelor's degree work, the role of mentoring and advising, and overall perceptions of student success (see Appendix B). SPSS software was then utilized to conduct a Factor Analysis to determine possible clusters or patterns and then followed up with a chi-square test of independence to determine whether the distribution was different among native English speakers and second-language learners. Factor Analysis resulted in three factors or patterns: The first factor, The Need for Sustained Support, accounted for 25% of the item variance. The second factor, Importance of Purposeful Advising and Mentoring, contributed an additional 11%. The third factor, Importance of Strong Undergraduate Preparation in Master's Level Success, contributed an additional 8%. The results of the chi-square indicated that seven questionnaire items were significant with $p < .05$ (see Table 6). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant difference between second-language (EL) students' and native speakers' experiences in Master's level programs.

Phase two in the data collection included semi-structured interview questions that were developed as a result of the data analysis from phase one (see Appendix C).

The focus of the interview questions for the three native English speakers and three second-language learners in Master's level programs was to describe their perceptions of preparation and levels of support during their graduate studies experience from faculty, staff, peers, and families. They further explained the degree in which they have been mentored throughout their Master's level experience and how that has impacted their perceived success. Additionally, they detailed their study skills preparation, perceived successes and obstacles throughout the program, and provided feedback on what they believe needs to be added to strengthen the graduate studies experience for future students. Once data were gathered from all participants, the information was analyzed and transcribed using the qualitative software program called Dedoose that is used to code data and make possible chart summaries of code application and code co-occurrence. Three themes emerged: (1) the need for more language and writing support at the Master's level, (2) the need for mentoring, especially for second-language learners, and (3) utilizing the strong influence of faculty in student success.

The results of this explanatory study are useful on many levels and provide opportunities for future research. Further, policies and practices at institutions that have graduate level programs can be examined to promote student success better. Overwhelmingly, the results indicate the need for more support and mentoring at the Master's level for both native English speakers and second-language learners. It is recommended that the stages that Master's level students move through from program onset to completion be examined along with more studies on factors that support

student success at the Master's level. Student feedback is integral to increasing program quality and support.

Given the disparities in equality and access for an ever diversifying population of postbaccalaureate students, institutions must seek to assess and strengthen their programs continually to meet the full range of learners and to support students to degree completion. It is the hope of the researcher that the findings from this study will be used to help strengthen the Master's level experience for *all* students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EXPERT REVIEWER FEEDBACK FORM

Questionnaire Title: “Master’s Level Student Questionnaire”

Time Required: Approximately 15 minutes

Purpose: As part of a research project to fulfill a doctoral dissertation, I have developed a questionnaire designed to assess Master’s level success in the areas of support, study and research skills, levels of preparation from the Bachelor’s degree work, the role of mentoring and advising, and overall perceptions of student success. I appreciate your willingness to look over the questionnaire and provide some feedback on your understanding and perception of the questionnaire items. Your individual feedback will not be reported to anyone except for myself who is designing the questionnaire.

Please answer the following questions:

Are you a second-language learner? _____

Are you (or have you been) a graduate level student in the field of education or the social sciences? _____

Please provide feedback regarding the questionnaire in the boxes below and return this document via email to the researcher.

- A. **Understandable:** Were the questionnaire items understandable? That is, did you have to read any of the items more than once to understand what it was asking? Was the meaning of each questionnaire item clear and straightforward?

Feedback:

--

- B. **Only one response:** Were any of the questionnaire items written in such a manner that you could have answered it more than one way?

Feedback:

--

C. **Loaded:** In your opinion, were the survey items worded in a non-biased and neutral manner?

Feedback:

D. **General Comments**

Feedback:

I very much appreciate your time. Please email me this completed document and I will use your valuable feedback to improve my questionnaire.

Thank you,

Donna Roberts

APPENDIX B

MASTER'S LEVEL STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done to fulfill requirements for a Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at CSU Stanislaus. We hope to learn what factors characterize adequate preparation and support for student success in Master's level programs. We also hope to learn about the impact of mentoring on student perceptions of confidence and academic performance as well as how second-language learner (EL) student experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs. If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to complete a short electronic survey which should take approximately ten minutes.

There are no known risks to you for your participation in this study. It should take approximately ten minutes to complete. It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study. However, your responses will help contribute to the body of research being conducted on supporting student success in Master's level programs. The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. All data will be kept in a secure location. All identifying features will be removed and answers will remain completely confidential. There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure(s) described above. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. By clicking the link to complete the short survey, you consent to participating in the survey: <http://www.survey.com>. If you have any questions about this research project please contact me, Donna Roberts, at 209-235-2934 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Dennis Sayers at 209-664-6721. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the UIRB Administrator by phone 209-667-3784 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Sincerely,

Donna Roberts

Q1 I am currently a graduate student at a(n):

- UC Campus (1)
- CSU Campus (2)
- Private College Campus (3)

Q2 Type of Program

- I am in a Master's degree program in the field of education. (1)
- I am in a Master's degree program in the field of the social sciences. (2)

Q3 Levels of Support

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I would benefit from more writing support in my graduate program. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would benefit from more research skill support in my graduate program. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with writing during my graduate program. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3 Levels of Support, continued					
I feel intimidated to ask my instructors for help. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I do not understand the content of a graduate level course, I seek help from my peers to help me. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel pleased with the support services of my graduate level program including advising, counseling, and any available academic tutoring. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4 Study and Research Skills

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I have excellent reading and writing skills. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have excellent speaking and communication skills. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have excellent study skills. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4 Study and Research Skills, Continued					
I have excellent research skills. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My program informs me of graduate level workshops to help strengthen my study and research skills. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I attend training or workshops provided by my graduate program to strengthen my study and research skills. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would like my instructors to provide more study and research skills training within the program courses. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident with research that involves qualitative analysis such as interviews and case studies. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident with research that involves quantitative (statistical) analysis. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time management is easy for me during the graduate program. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5 Preparation from Bachelor & Degree Work

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of reading and writing skills. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5 Preparation from Bachelor & Degree Work, Continued					
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of speaking and communication skills. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of study and research skills. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6 The Role of Mentoring and Advising (Note: Mentoring in this research study is defined as “the act of a person taking on the role of coaching, giving advice, or serving as a guide to someone who is less experienced.”)

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
My family has provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My peers have provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My instructors have provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6 The Role of Mentoring and Advising, Continued					
I often feel frustrated understanding and navigating the graduate school program. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a program advisor who has helped me with an educational plan and has told me what to expect each step of the way. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my graduate program needs a stronger advising component. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have received adequate or better advising and support from my graduate program. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I would benefit from a designated mentor or advisor throughout my graduate program. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt welcomed and well supported by the faculty and staff upon entering the program. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Overall Perceptions of Student Success

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I feel positive and successful about my graduate level experience. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel prepared to conduct research. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Overall Perceptions of Student Success, Continued					
I feel knowledgeable and am learning essential skills in my area of expertise. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that I will contribute positively to society with my knowledge and skills learned from my graduate program (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My graduate program has provided me tools to reflect with and deal with societal issues. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My graduate program has taught me how to deal with issues of diversity and equity. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My graduate level program has helped me become a reflective thinker and problem solver. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Language

- I am a native English speaker. (1)
- I am not fluent but can converse in more than one language. (2)
- I am fluent in more than one language. (3)

Q9 Gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- I decline to state. (3)

Q10 Student Workload

- I work full time and attend graduate school. (1)
- I work part time and attend graduate school. (2)
- I do not work but attend graduate school. (3)

Q11 Units Completed in the Program

- I have completed 0 to 15 units in my graduate program. (1)
- I have completed 16 to 30 units in my graduate program. (2)
- I have completed 31 or more units in my graduate program. (3)

Q12 Student Status in Relation to Family Members

- I am the first member in my family to receive a college degree. (1)
- Another member in my family has received a college degree. (2)

Q13 Generational Status

- Both myself and my parents were born in the United States. (1)
- I was born in the United States and at least one of my parents was born in another country. (2)
- Both myself and my parents were born in another country and moved to the United States. (3)
- I was born in another country even though both of my parents were born in the United States. (4)

Q14 Please list the top three factors in ranked order of importance that have contributed to your success in graduate studies.

- _____ First Factor (1)
- _____ Second Factor (2)
- _____ Third Factor (3)

Q15 Are you interested in a follow-up interview regarding your graduate level experiences to support this doctoral research project?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q16 If you are interested in this follow-up interview opportunity, please fill in the contact information below and click "submit". Otherwise, please leave the area blank and click "submit". Thank you for your time.

Name (1)

Email (2)

APPENDIX C

MASTER'S LEVEL STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Please provide a general background of your educational experiences, particularly at the college level.
2. Describe the preparation that you received in your undergraduate experience to support you in your studies with your current Master's program.
3. How have your experiences with graduate level reading, writing, and other communications been during your Master's program? Do you feel that you've had adequate support? Please explain.
- 4A. What languages do you speak? What is the primary language spoken at your home? To what degree are you fluent in the languages that you identified?
- 4B. Please describe your experiences, if any, with language support during your Master's program either at home or at the university/college.
5. Have you ever felt expectations to behave differently while you were attending your Master's courses as compared with that of your undergraduate work? If so, please identify the expectations and what you have done to adjust to it.
6. What have been the most valuable skills that you've learned in your undergraduate work to help you succeed in your Master's program?
7. What does educational success mean to you?
8. Describe your level of support during your master's level program experience from the following people: 1) faculty, 2) administration, 3) peers, and 4) family. Please give examples when possible.
9. Mentoring in this research study is defined as "the act of a person taking on the role of coaching, giving advice, or serving as a guide to someone who is less experienced." What acts of mentoring have you experienced during your Master's level program and how has this impacted your success?
10. How far are you along in your Master's program? What are successes and obstacles that you've encountered so far throughout the program?

11. Have you ever experienced difficulties understanding or navigating your college /university's Master's program? If so, please explain the difficulties and how you managed to overcome it.

12. What do you believe needs to be added to strengthen graduate programs for future students?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done to fulfill requirements for a Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at CSU Stanislaus. We hope to learn what factors characterize adequate preparation and support for student success in Master's level programs. We also hope to learn about the impact of mentoring on student perceptions of confidence and academic performance as well as how second-language learner (EL) student experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs. If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to answer questions in an interview format which should take approximately thirty-five minutes.

There are no known risks to you for your participation in this study.

It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study. However, your responses will help contribute to the body of research being conducted on supporting student success in Master's level programs. The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. All data will be kept in a secure location. Your responses will be audio-recorded for transcription, coding, and analysis. However, all identifying features will be removed and answers will remain completely confidential.

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure(s) described above. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you agree to participate, please indicate this decision by signing below. If you have any questions about this research project please contact me, Donna Roberts, at 209-235-2934 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Dennis Sayers at 209-664-6721. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the UIRB Administrator by phone 209-667-3784 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Sincerely,
Donna Roberts

Please sign to indicate informed consent for this interview experience.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done to fulfill requirements for a Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at CSU Stanislaus. We hope to learn what factors characterize adequate preparation and support for student success in Master's level programs. We also hope to learn about the impact of mentoring on student perceptions of confidence and academic performance as well as how second-language learner (EL) student experiences compare with those of native speakers in Master's level programs. If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to complete a short electronic survey which should take approximately ten minutes.

There are no known risks to you for your participation in this study.

It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study. However, your responses will help contribute to the body of research being conducted on supporting student success in Master's level programs. The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. All data will be kept in a secure location. All identifying features will be removed and answers will remain completely confidential.

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure(s) described above. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

I would greatly appreciate your participation. By clicking the link to complete the short survey, you consent to participating in the survey: <http://www.surveymonkey.com>. If you have any questions about this research project please contact me, Donna Roberts, at 209-235-2934 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Dennis Sayers at 209-664-6721. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the UIRB Administrator by phone 209-667-3784 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Sincerely,
Donna Roberts

APPENDIX F
CODE TREE / LIST

Title of Code	Description	Weight
Areas of Accomplishment	Areas of accomplishment in the Master's level program	None
Areas of Frustration and Struggle	Areas of frustration and struggle in the Master's level program	None
Instances of Mentoring	Instances of the act of a person taking on the role of coaching, giving advice, or serving as a guide to someone who is less experienced	None
Perceived Keys to Success	Student perceptions of a myriad of factors that promote success including but not limited to support, mentoring, levels of confidence, and feelings of connectedness within a graduate level experience	None
Perceived Strengths of MA	Student perceptions of	None

Programs	the strengths in their Master's level program	
Perceived Needs of MA Programs	Student perceptions of the needs in their Master's level program	None
Instances of Self Reliance	Students instances of relying on themselves as a means to achieving a desired outcome	None
Adjusting to MA Expectations a. Academics b. Cultural Norms c. Navigation d. Social / Emotional	Student perceptions of the successes and struggles they have had adjusting to the rigors of Master's level expectations in the areas of academics, cultural norms, navigation, and social/emotional.	None
Administration's Influence	The degree of the administration's influence on students' perceived success. Administration can include but is not limited to: Deans, Directors, Coordinators, Administration office staff, and other.	0 = Negative Influence 1 = Neutral 2 = Positive Influence
BA Preparation	Student perceptions on	0 = Negative

	the level of preparation he or she received from baccalaureate level work to foster success in a Master's level program.	Perception 1 = Neutral 2 = Positive Perception
Faculty Influence	The degree of the faculty's influence on students' perceived success. Faculty can include full or part-time instructors.	0 = Low Level Influence 1 = Neutral 2 = High Level Influence
Family Influence	The degree of the family's influence on students' perceived success.	0 = Low Level Influence 1 = Neutral 2 = High Level Influence
Language	The presence of language support for both native English speakers and second-language learners. This support stems into reading, writing, research, and presentation skills.	0 = Lack of Language Support 1 = Neutral 2 = Language Support Present
Levels of Determination	The degree in which the Master's level student is determined to achieve a desired outcome.	0 = Low Levels of Determination 1 = Neutral 2 = High Levels of

		Determination
<p style="text-align: center;">Peer Support</p> <p>a) Perceptions of Academic Support</p> <p>b) Perceptions of Isolation from Peers</p> <p>c) Perceptions of Social Support</p> <p>d) Perceptions of Unity with Peers</p>	<p>Type of support from one's peers in a Master's level program which impact perceptions to foster: a) perceptions of academic support, b) perceptions of isolation from peers, c) perceptions of social support, and d) perceptions of unity with peers</p>	None
Perception of Self as Student	The negative, neutral, or positive perception of one's self as a student	<p>0 = Negative Perception</p> <p>1 = Neutral</p> <p>2 = Positive Perception</p>

APPENDIX G

OVERALL MEANS ACROSS QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Table G1

Overall Mean and Standard Deviation for Master's Level Success Questionnaire Items

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
I believe that I will contribute positively to society with my knowledge and skills learned from my graduate program.	4.43	0.65	139
My graduate program has provided me tools to reflect with and deal with societal issues.	4.31	0.73	138
My graduate program has provided me tools to reflect with and deal with issues of diversity and equity.	4.27	0.84	139
I felt welcomed and well supported by the faculty and staff upon entering the program.	4.34	0.89	139
My graduate level program has helped me become a reflective thinker and problem solver.	4.31	0.79	139
I feel positive and successful about my graduate level experience.	4.21	0.80	139
I feel knowledgeable and am learning essential skills in my area of expertise.	4.20	0.65	139
My instructors have provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience.	4.01	1.01	139
I feel pleased with the support services of my graduate level program including advising, counseling, and any available academic tutoring.	3.95	1.01	151

Table G1 Continued

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of reading and writing skills.	3.93	0.92	144
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of speaking and communication skills.	3.91	0.93	144
I have excellent reading and writing skills.	3.88	0.88	144
My peers have provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience.	3.85	1.03	139
If I do not understand the content in a graduate level course, I seek help from instructors, support centers, or tutors to help me.	3.82	1.04	153
My Bachelor's degree work has prepared me well for graduate level work in terms of study and research skills.	3.81	1.02	144
I have excellent speaking and communication skills.	3.79	0.90	144
I attend training or workshops provided by my graduate program to strengthen my study and research skills.	2.78	1.05	144
My program informs me of graduate level workshops to help strengthen my study and research skills.	3.73	1.09	144
I have excellent study skills	3.72	0.80	143
I feel that I would benefit from a designated mentor of advisor throughout my graduate program.	3.69	0.95	138
I have received adequate or better advising and support from my graduate program.	3.67	1.00	139

Table G1 Continued

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
I have a program advisor who has helped me with an educational plan and has told me what to expect each step of the way.	3.60	1.27	139
I feel prepared to conduct research.	3.60	1.08	139
I would benefit from more research skill support in my graduate program.	3.51	1.11	153
I would like my instructors to provide more study and research skills training within the program courses.	3.45	1.00	144
I have excellent research skills.	3.45	0.91	144
I would benefit from more writing support in my graduate program.	3.31	1.15	152
I feel confident with research that involves qualitative analysis such as interviews or case studies.	3.29	1.13	144
My family has provided important advice and mentoring throughout my graduate school experience.	3.20	1.41	139
I feel confident with research that involves quantitative (statistical) analysis.	3.14	1.13	144
Time management is easy for me during the graduate program.	3.02	1.11	144
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with writing during my graduate program.	3.02	1.09	152
I would like my instructors to provide more language support with other language communication skills such as speaking and comprehension.	2.93	1.08	153
I often feel frustrated understanding and navigating the graduate school program	2.47	1.01	139

Table G1 Continued

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
I feel intimidated to ask my instructors for help.	2.03	1.15	153
