

Educational Journey of a Mexican Immigrant Teacher

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Abstract: This study explored the educational journey of a Mexican immigrant teacher from a resiliency perspective by taking a particularized look at how the participant overcame the challenges she faced during recertification processes in the United States. Researchers adopted narrative inquiry methods, collected qualitative data including interviews, field notes, and artifacts, and analyzed the data using content analysis. The immigrant teacher encountered a series of challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, and unfamiliarity with recertification processes. Despite the presence of difficult circumstances, the participant optimized various resources and educational opportunities. The study found that the participant resilience was oriented not only in personal factors but also in external resources. The study also uncovered that ongoing, purposeful, and systematic institutional supports had an impact on the participant resilience. The findings indicate that the success and resiliency of highly motivated Mexican immigrant teachers may not be absorbed solely by the personal level of motivation. Rather, they may continue integrating all personal, external, linguistic, cultural resources and systematic institutional supports to surmount obstacles through ongoing and active interactional processes towards their professional goals.

Keywords: Mexican immigrant teachers, Teacher's resilience, Foreign-trained teachers, Resiliency

Introduction

Recently, much research regarding quality teacher education has yielded significant insights and has led to theories concerning teacher resilience (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Ebersohn, 2012, 2014; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016). Broadly defined, resiliency refers to individuals who have the capacity to manage their own emotions, behaviors, and cognition and optimize their instruction and learning despite the presence of difficult circumstances. Over the last two decades, studies on Mexican American resilience have emphasized the critical role of sociocultural factors in individual resilience (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Lusk & Galindo, 2017; Sajquim, & Lusk, 2018). Researchers (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Gonzalez and Padilla, 1997) have identified personal and external resources as the protective factors that enhance individual resilience. Personal resources include self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, whereas external resources include cultural factors such as supports from family, peers, and community. Studies on Hispanic population resilience showed a positive relationship between resilience and protective factors. This might be particularly true for Mexican immigrant teachers who want to become teachers in California, USA.

However, compared to the amount of research on the resilience of Hispanic American students and Hispanic mental health, there has been little research on Mexican immigrant teacher resilience. Researching the characteristics of highly motivated Mexican immigrant teachers is necessary to address the needs of the growing population of Hispanic English Learners in San Bernardino County schools in California. There are over 70,000 English Learners in San Bernardino County schools, and more than 50% are Hispanic, experiencing a lack of fully qualified teachers. As a first step toward understanding Mexican immigrant teacher resilience, this study explored the educational journey of a highly motivated Mexican immigrant teacher from a resiliency perspective. This research specifically examined the challenges the participant faced when preparing to become a certified teacher in Southern California and the ways she overcame those barriers.

Methodology

Participant

One immigrant teacher from Mexico was recruited from a university in southern California. Participant (Isabel) came to America to join her family in the United States. She and her spouse were elementary school teachers for approximately seven years in Mexico. The researchers used pseudonyms throughout the study to protect the participant's confidentiality.

Data Collection and Analysis

This project adopted narrative inquiry methods, reaching into the ethnographic domain such as interviews (two semi-structured and two in-depth interviews), field notes during professional workshops, and physical evidence such as the syllabi of the participant's professors and sample papers to gather narrative data. Participant consented to the data collections. All the interviews, field notes, and physical evidence were analyzed, using

content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Results and Findings

Main Themes on Participant's Challenges

The language barrier was one of the major themes that emerged around Isabel's challenges. For example, Isabel could not pass the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), which must be passed to enter a teaching credential program in California due to her language barrier. Discrimination was another major theme regarding Isabel's struggle. Isabel experienced discrimination at work because of her language origin and interpreted the discriminative statement as incapability of caring her work. Pertaining to a recertification process, Isabel found it difficult to navigate the system of recertification and get appropriate information on teaching credentials in California. Isabel worked as a certified teacher in Mexican for seven years. However, she had to complete associate and bachelor's degrees and a teaching credential program in the United States due to the differences between the United States and Mexico in teaching certification processes.

How to Overcome Challenges: Isabel's Resiliency

There were three major themes on how Isabel overcame the challenges she faced in the process of recertification: (a) professional identity as a teacher, (b) seeking opportunities toward recertification, and (c) social interactions and supports: family supports, community mentors, an institutional program, and a peer learning community.

Having a strong professional identity as a teacher was one of the major themes that emerged around Isabel resilience. Isabel described her professional identity as a teacher. Enjoyment and passion for teaching were the most frequent category of responses regarding the reasons Isabel continued pursuing the long-standing process of recredentialing in the United States.

Isabel did not give up but thrived on overcoming language barriers, discrimination, and recertification processes by actively searching for educational opportunities to obtain a teaching certificate in California. To improve English proficiency, she sought help, visiting a local community college. Following the guidance of a counselor at a community college, Isabel took English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and completed courses for an associate degree. Her education at a community college helped her gain confidence in teaching, and she eagerly looked for working opportunities at schools. After graduating from a community college, she found a job and worked as a paraprofessional, helping bilingual students at a public school in Southern California.

Isabel frequently mentioned the vital role of family supports in the journey of her credentialing. Her family provided Isabel with various supports, including financial and emotional ones. Family's ongoing assistances and motivation enabled her to initiate schooling, taking courses at a community college. The supports and ongoing interactions with community mentors were another major theme pertaining to Isabel's resiliency. One of the

mentors was an assistant principal at her work; the other was her professor at a university she attended. Mentorship and Ongoing interactions with an assistant principal inspired Isabel not to give up but continue her educational journey towards recertification. Isabel's professor provided her with specific guidelines and information to solve her problems.

The institution's systematic support was another major contribution to Isabel's endurance. Isabel participated in a teacher professional development program at a state university for three years. She received purposeful, systematic, and ongoing supports and mentoring to complete her teaching credential in California, including stipends, workshops, mentoring, and assistance to navigate credential systems and to pass credential-related tests and coursework at different levels and entry points into teaching. Isabel felt she was ready to teach students because of the coursework and professors' support at a credential program. She became confident in applying her knowledge into teaching practice. In addition to receiving supports and mentorship, Isabel became a part of the learning community with other foreign-trained teachers from different countries. Isabel valued the community because she felt the members shared similar values, concerns, and experiences and understood each other.

Discussion and Conclusion

We found that the participant in the study encountered a series of challenges related to language barriers, discrimination, and unfamiliarity with recertification processes in the United States. Instead of giving up, the highly motivated and resilient immigrant teacher continued pursuing her educational journey toward her professional carrier goal and optimized various resources and opportunities despite linguistic, cultural, social barriers and a lack of resources.

The present study found that the participant utilized the protective factors which enriched her resilience to surmount the obstacles she faced, as may be seen in other studies (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Lusk & Galindo, 2017; Sajquim, & Lusk, 2018). The participant resiliency was oriented not only in personal factors such as professional solid identity and passion for teaching but also in external resources such as family, mentors, and professors. In addition to the personal and external factors, ongoing, purposeful, and systematic institutional supports and interactions also had an impact on Isabel resilience. The findings indicate that highly motivated Mexican immigrant teachers' resiliency may not be absorbed solely by personal factors. Rather, they may continue orchestrating all personal, external, linguistic, cultural resources and systematic and purposeful institutional supports to surmount obstacles towards their professional goals in diverse sociocultural contexts. This study has a limitation due to studying a Mexican immigrant teacher. Therefore, future research is needed to examine Mexican immigrant teachers' resilience, including more teachers from different regions and cultural backgrounds.

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