

ABSTRACT

Christian Walter, FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING: A FRAMEWORK TO MITIGATE THE EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS IN THE US. (Under the direction of Dr. Travis Lewis). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2025.

The United States of America has been relying for the last couple of decades on international teachers to fill instructional vacancies caused by an increasing teacher shortage. North Carolina is one of the states that attracts the highest number of international teachers due to the existing teacher shortage and an uptick in the number of dual language immersion programs. Researchers agree that upon arrival teachers face numerous barriers and challenges caused by the intricate uprooting process, cultural differences and limited support received throughout the initial stages of the transitional period. No previous studies explored the effects of improvement-based interventions to assist international teachers emotionally to successfully navigate the relocation process.

This inquiry employed an explanatory sequential mixed method design and revolved around the experiences of 13 international teachers. It identified the challenges faced by international teachers and measured the impact of two improvement-based interventions: the question of the day and restaurant outings. It unveiled that international teachers experience logistical challenges during the relocation process but are receiving no support as they navigate these challenges; a lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts is detrimental for international teachers during the transition period; and that there is a lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills that make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging. The results also revealed that participants in the present inquiry benefitted from the exposure to both interventions. Finally, planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning

international teachers impacted the scholarly practitioners' leadership development since he found that interventions do not need to be large in scale to have a meaningful effect. All these findings should inform future human resources and onboarding protocols for international teachers to ensure that they successfully adjust to the new setting in a timely manner. Additional longitudinal studies are recommended to better identify other interventions to ease international teachers' transitions and to find the correlation between teacher support systems and their impact on self-efficacy, success, and retention rates.

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING: A FRAMEWORK TO MITIGATE THE EMOTIONAL
CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS IN THE U.S.

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DEDICATION

To my daughters, Avril and Helen. Your support in this academic journey made a world of difference.

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For the past three years, my long-time friends and colleagues provided insights and encouragement that propelled my confidence and resilience as a scholarly practitioner.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Focus of Practice.....	3
Context of the Inquiry.....	4
Statement of the Focus of Practice.....	9
Inquiry Guiding Questions.....	12
Overview of Inquiry.....	13
Inquiry Partners.....	14
Theoretical Framework.....	15
Definitions of Key Terms.....	16
Assumptions.....	17
Scope and Delimitations.....	18
Limitations.....	19
Significance of the Inquiry.....	20
Advances in Practice.....	20
Advancing Equity and Social Justice.....	21

Summary.....	22
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	23
Theoretical Foundation.....	24
Teacher Attrition.....	28
Teacher Attrition in the United States.....	28
Teacher Shortage in North Carolina.....	30
Causes of Teacher Shortages	32
Consequences of Teacher Attrition.....	34
The Portrait of the International Teacher.....	36
Characteristics of International Teachers.....	37
The J-1 Visa.....	38
The H-1B Visa.....	40
Recruiters.....	42
Immigrant Teachers by the Numbers.....	43
Benefits of International Teachers.....	44
Challenges Faced by International Teachers.....	45
Culturally-Rooted Challenges.....	46
Temporary Worker Status.....	50
Challenges Associated with Recruiters.....	51
Support for Teachers.....	52
Professional Development for Domestic Teachers.....	52
Professional Development for Beginning Teachers.....	56
Support for International Teachers.....	58

Summary.....	60
CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY.....	63
Inquiry Guiding Questions.....	63
Inquiry Design and Rationale.....	64
Context of the Inquiry.....	67
Inquiry Partners.....	69
Ethical Considerations.....	69
Inquiry Procedures.....	72
Phase I.....	72
Plan.....	72
Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies.....	72
Instrumentation.....	73
Do.....	74
Study.....	75
Act.....	76
Summary of Phase I.....	76
Phase II.....	77
Plan.....	77
Do.....	78
Study.....	79
Act.....	79
Summary of Phase II.....	79
Phase III.....	79

Plan.....	79
Do.....	81
Study.....	81
Act.....	82
Summary of Phase III.....	82
Positionality.....	82
Inquiry Design Rigor.....	84
Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions.....	87
Role as the Scholarly Practitioner.....	87
Summary.....	88
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	89
Pilot Study.....	89
Inquiry Guiding Questions.....	91
Demographics.....	91
Implementation and Data Collection.....	92
Data Analysis.....	100
Results.....	101
Inquiry Question 1.....	101
Theme 1.....	103
Theme 2.....	114
Theme 3.....	119
Inquiry Question 2.....	124
Theme 1.....	127

Theme 2.....	129
Theme 3.....	133
Inquiry Question 3.....	137
Theme 1.....	137
Theme 2.....	140
Summary.....	141
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	144
Summary of Findings.....	144
Interpretation of the Findings.....	145
Inquiry Question 1.....	145
Inquiry Question 2.....	148
Inquiry Question 3.....	150
Limitations of the Inquiry.....	152
Implications of the Findings for Practice.....	153
Implications of the Findings for Equity.....	155
Recommendations for Practice.....	156
Recommendations for Future Studies.....	158
Conclusions.....	159
REFERENCES.....	161
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	178
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	179
APPENDIX C: INTERNATIONAL TEACHER SURVEY.....	180
APPENDIX D: POST-INTERVENTION INTERVIEW.....	185

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT EMAIL 186

APPENDIX F: QUESTION OF THE DAY 188

LIST OF TABLES

1. Inquiry Partners' Roles by Phase of Involvement in the Inquiry.....	70
2. Matrix of Inquiry Questions, Instrumentation, Question Number, and Phase	86
3. Demographics of international teachers that participated in the inquiry.....	93
4. Teachers' perceptions about challenges before and after moving to the U.S.....	115

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Teacher attrition rates in 2021 in North Carolina by category	2
2. Sunshine Public Schools demographics for 2021-2022.....	6
3. Sunshine Public Schools' staff demographics in 2021-2022.....	8
4. Sunshine Public Schools instructional staffing data in 2021-2022.....	10
5. Annual expenditures on international teachers in US dollars at Sunshine Public Schools by year.....	11
6. Maslow's hierarchy of needs model.....	27
7. Professional learning and development (PLD).....	55
8. Improvement-based inquiry timeline.....	65
9. PDSA cycle.....	66
10. Sequential explanatory mixed methods approach.....	68
11. Instruments and interventions by phase.....	80
12. PDSA cycle for each phase.....	83
13. Number of teacher participants by grade span.....	94
14. Countries represented by inquiry participants.....	95
15. Participant teachers' overall teaching experience.....	96
16. Emerging codes, categories and themes for inquiry question 1.....	102
17. Most frequent challenges faced by international teachers by percentage.....	104
18. Agents who could help prevent challenges faced by participants.....	109
19. Percentage of participant teachers by area of challenge.....	110

20. Experimental interventions approval ratings.....	125
21. Emerging codes, categories and themes for inquiry question 2.....	126
22. Emerging codes, categories and themes for inquiry question 3.....	138

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Teaching in the United States has become a devalued and depreciated profession during the last two decades due to poor working conditions, increasing accountability stakes, instructional demands, and low salaries (Edsall, 2022; Will, 2020). According to empirical research in education, the outcome has been a surge in teacher shortages, which have been steadily increasing nationwide during this time, causing school districts to struggle to fill teaching vacancies (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). These shortages are caused primarily by increasing teacher attrition rates or high numbers of dissatisfied educators that leave their professions in pursuit of other careers. Over 40% of educators leave the profession within 5 years (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Teacher turnover rates are significantly higher in poverty-stricken urban and rural areas (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Other contributing factors include an increasing public school student population and declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs (Strauss, 2017), contributing to a shrinking teacher education pipeline (Wiggan et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified exponentially the shortage of educators across the United States (Rosenberg et al., 2021). North Carolina has also experienced the collateral effects from the uptick of teacher shortages as shown by the increasing number of teacher vacancies at the beginning of each school year (Nordstrom, 2022). The overall attrition rate for teachers in North Carolina is approximately 8% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2021b), with attrition rates significantly higher in urban and rural areas with smaller and more limited funding sources (see Figure 1).

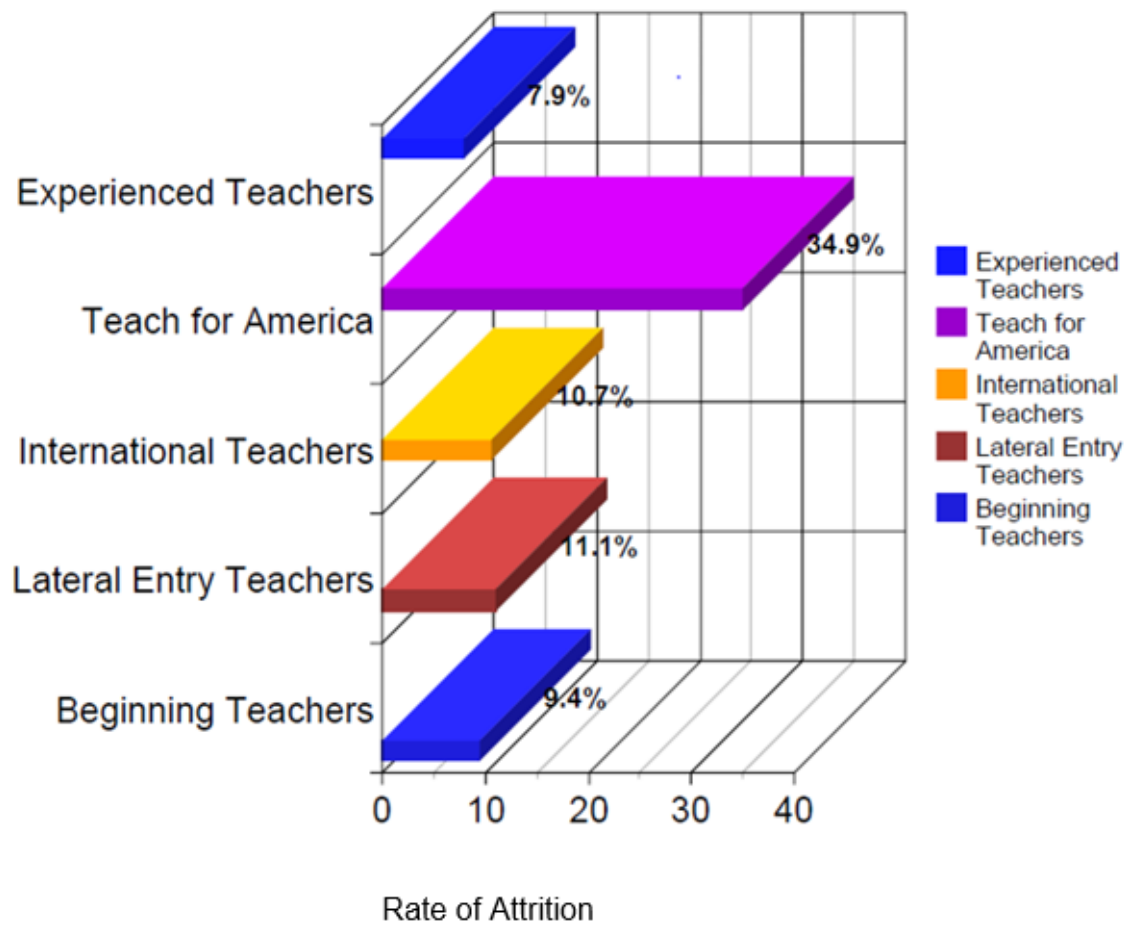


Figure 1. Teacher attrition rates in 2021 in North Carolina by category.

Background of the Focus of Practice

In response to these alarming trends, school districts must adopt creative approaches to mitigate the challenges posed by growing teacher shortages. In most cases, they outsource teachers from other parts of the world by either contracting with an international teacher recruitment agency for a nominal fee, which is usually located in the United States, or by sponsoring the educator with a non-immigrant work visa (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2009). This has become the most common human resource practice or short-term solution used by school systems to fill teaching vacancies in a timely manner as evidenced by studies (AFT, 2009; Furuya et al., 2019).

North Carolina has become the leading state in the nation to attract international teachers. In contrast to ten years ago, there are approximately 2,100 international teachers working in the state, or 1 in 50 teachers (Walkenhorst, 2022) as opposed to 1 in 200 ten years ago. In fact, international teachers became one of the fastest growing teaching populations (Jackson, 2022). In like manner, the setting of this inquiry, an urban school district of the Piedmont region of North Carolina, has seen the same growing influx of international teachers. Other factors that might be responsible for the steady increase of international teachers in North Carolina include the state's promotion of dual language immersion (DLI) programs and the emphasis on global citizenship. Since the inception of the first dual language program back in the early 1990s, North Carolina has experienced a surge in the number of these programs offered across the state. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (n.d.), there are over 60 public school districts, charter schools and private schools offering DLI programs state-wide with 8 different program languages: Spanish, Chinese, French, German, Urdu, Cherokee, Japanese and Greek. In fact, the American Council Research Center (2021) reports that North Carolina ranks number 5

in the U.S. and is leading the southeast in the number of DLI programs. While it is not a requirement to be a native speaker of the language for licensure purposes, international teachers become an attractive option for these programs as they must show evidence of advanced near-native language proficiency and a working knowledge of second language acquisition and content knowledge (Weeks, 2022). Relatedly, North Carolina's State Board of Education advances the importance of global education. In 2013, a Global Education Task Force presented a final report to the Board of Education with clear recommendations to prepare students for the world (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2013). Since then, North Carolina has assumed a strong commitment towards producing graduates that will be able to engage in globally collaborative practices. Moreover, the School Board of Education has enacted laws and guidelines to sustain this effort.

International teachers face numerous challenges when they arrive in the United States as they struggle to become acquainted with an entirely new educational system and a new cultural setting (Kombe, 2016; Waite, 2009). Other recurrent hurdles stem from their temporary employment status and unethical practices from recruiters (Bartlett, 2013). To address these concomitant challenges, it becomes imperative to establish systems. Failure to provide a support framework to meet international teacher's unique emotional needs connected with the array of challenges that they face may translate into higher attrition rates, poor instructional quality in the classroom and deficient teacher self-efficacy (Dunn, 2011; Kombe, 2016).

Context of the Inquiry

The following section provides an overview of the setting and an in-depth description of the variety of schools, student demographics and educational programs offered by the district. The setting of this inquiry is Sunshine County Schools, a pseudonym, located in central North

Carolina and serving nearly 70,000 K-12 students. The student ethnic composition is as follows: 0.31% American Indian, 6.75% Asian, 41.97% Black, 18.15% Hispanic, 5.16% Multi-Racial, 0.15% Pacific Islander and 27.53% White (see Figure 2). The student graduation rate is 91.80% and the student poverty rate reaches 66.00%.

The school district, Sunshine Public Schools, also a pseudonym, includes 126 schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. The county which overlaps the school district is made up of eleven cities and towns and two of the state's nine largest cities. Parts of towns from neighboring counties are also in this district. From a historical perspective, the district was formed due to a merger of three smaller school districts: two city school districts and a county school district in the 1990s. The school district is made up of 68 elementary schools, 22 middle schools, 27 high schools and nine alternative programs. Alternative programs include four special education sites and two sites which provide an alternative to long-term suspensions. In addition, the district has a school for multilingual learners in their first year in the United States. Due to the size of the district, it can offer better opportunities that smaller districts, charter and private schools are unable to offer. Furthermore, Sunshine Public Schools has 48 magnet and choice schools with 66 programs, from Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) to performing and visual arts, advanced academics, Spanish immersion, Montessori, health sciences or aviation.

While this district offers 263 Career and Technical Education courses in 49 schools, including programs in culinary arts, business, nursing, computers, and automotive technology, among others, high schools offer more than 30 Advanced Placement courses. These college-level classes prepare students for the higher-level courses they will take after graduating from high school and moving on to colleges and universities. Furthermore, Sunshine Public Schools also offers the renowned International Baccalaureate program at four high schools, being officially authorized

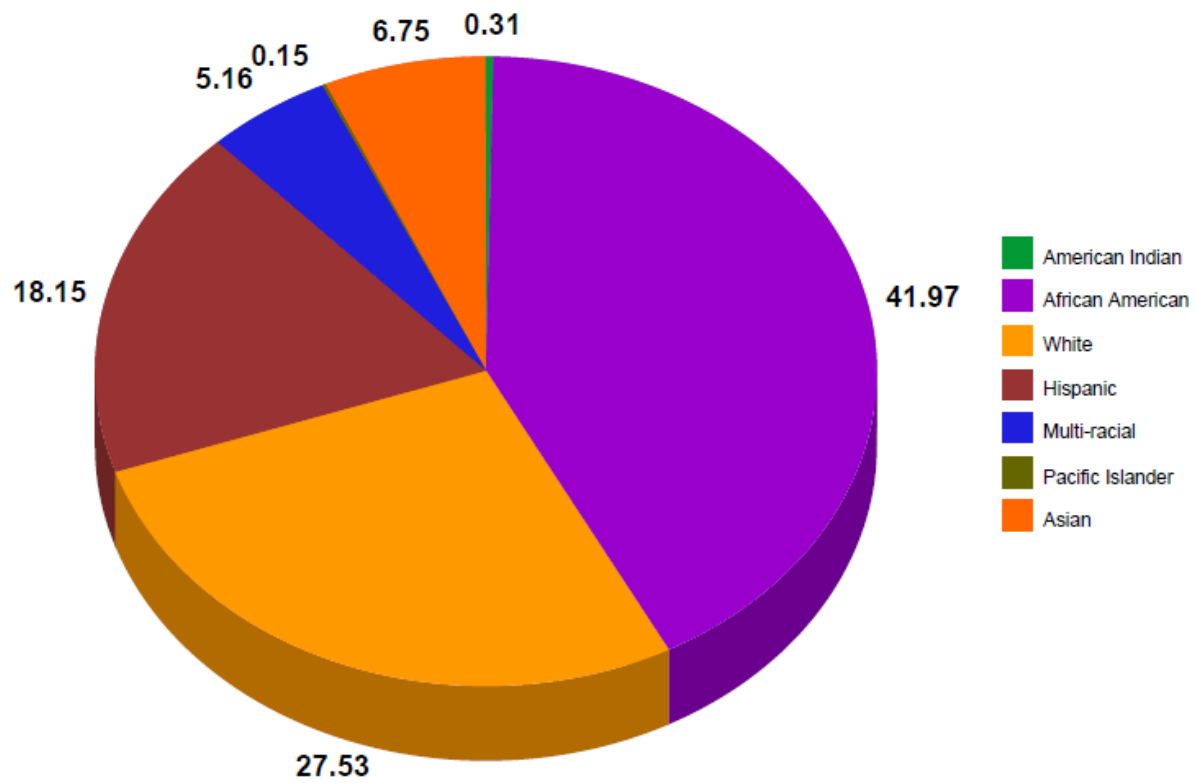


Figure 2. Sunshine Public Schools demographics for 2021-2022.

by the International Baccalaureate Organization to offer the Diploma Program since 1996.

In 2022, staffing data showed that the school district has 2,478 elementary school teachers, 1,005 secondary teachers and 1,384 identified as other teachers. Overall, approximately 5,000 teachers are employed by Sunshine Public Schools. From a demographic lens, Sunshine Public Schools represents a remarkable diversity in its workforce. Public data dashboards indicate that 49% of the teachers are teachers of color while 51% are White. The staff ethnic and racial composition, which is not confined to teachers only since it may include bus drivers, custodial, central office, and support staff, is identified as 51.06% White, 43.53% Black, 3.88% Hispanic, and 1.37% Asian (see Figure 3).

Sunshine Public Schools has replicated many of the same human resources practices performed by other districts in the state of North Carolina to alleviate the impact of teacher shortages. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) mandates special provisions on the funds used to hire international teachers, as outlined in the NCDPI Allotment Policy Manual. The expenditure, allocation, and accounting of state funds in North Carolina is regulated through program report codes or PRCs. The state guidance stipulates that international faculty exchange teachers (PRC 020) is to be designated as “the allotment that provides funding in a separate account into which LEAs may transfer teacher positions to cover a contract for a visiting international faculty member” (NCDPI, 2021a p. 72). Sunshine Public Schools became the top international teacher recruiting state agency in 2005 (Buchanan, 2005), when it hired 130 foreign teachers, becoming the district in North Carolina with the highest number of international teachers at the time. After nearly 20 years, those numbers have virtually remained the same. In 2021-2022, there were 107 international teachers working for this school district. In 2023, Sunshine Public Schools attracts 139 international teachers hired through North Carolina-based

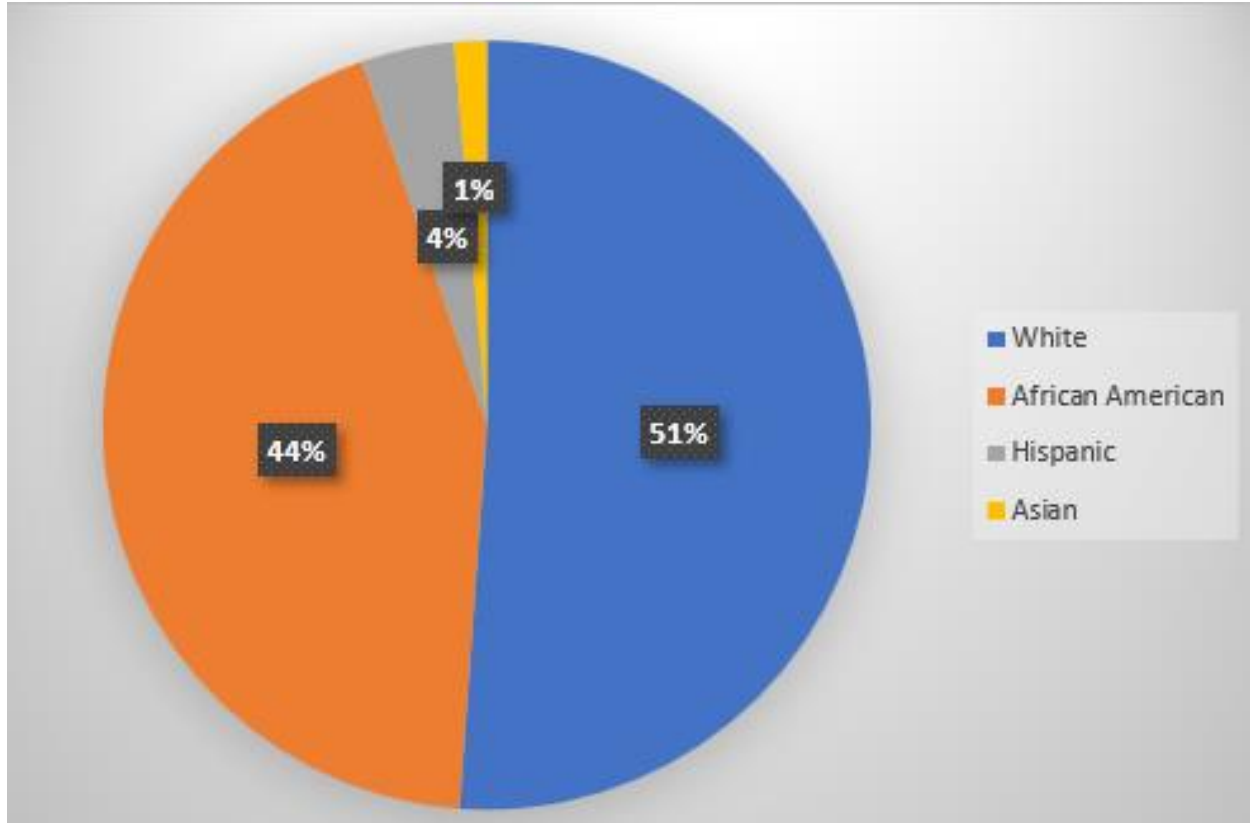


Figure 3. Sunshine Public Schools' staff demographics in 2021-2022.

international teacher recruitment agencies such as Participate, EPI and Global Partners (see Figure 4). This represents 2.8% of the teacher workforce from the district. In like manner, public budget data that includes the district's allotments for hiring foreign teachers in Sunrise Public Schools affords a deeper understanding of the magnitude of this investment and unveils an increasing trend. For instance, during the 2018-2019 fiscal school year, the school district's annual expenditures for foreign teachers were approximately \$1,816,000. However, in 2019-2020 fiscal year, the annual expenditures for foreign teachers jumped to \$2,304,000. Lastly, in 2021-2022 fiscal year, the annual expenditures reserved for international teachers in Sunrise Public Schools soared to over \$4,000,000 annually (see Figure 5). These figures underscore the school district's heavy dependence on the services from international teachers. In other words, the continuous influx of international teachers to Sunrise Public Schools and the growing amount of funds spent to hire them expose the degree of the school district's commitment to hiring international teachers. This inquiry delineates a framework to provide support and alleviate the challenges that these international teachers face upon moving in the United States.

Statement of Focus of Practice

As noted earlier, the United States is relying heavily on international teachers to fill teaching vacancies at public schools due to increasing teacher shortages caused by surging teacher attrition rates and declining interest in the teaching profession. In this context, international teachers have become a cost-effective and reliable fixture for districts to reduce this negative impact. For instance, the number of international teachers has more than quadrupled in North Carolina in the past decade to over 2,100 teachers. North Carolina spent \$121.4 million in 2022 on teachers coming from abroad—six times what it did a decade ago (Walkenhorst, 2022).

Researchers concur that upon arriving in the United States, international teachers face

Sunshine Public Schools' Instructional Staff by Numbers

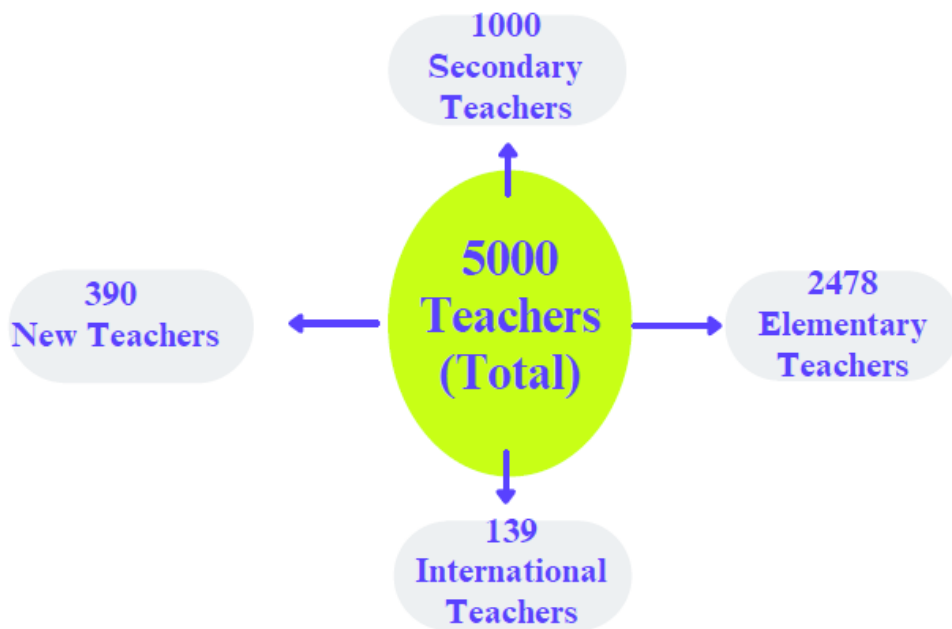


Figure 4. Sunshine Public Schools instructional staffing data for 2021-2022.

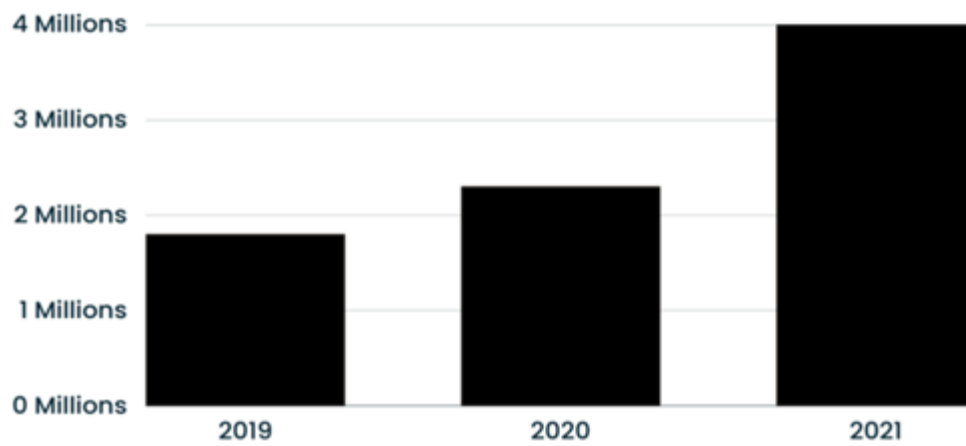


Figure 5. Annual expenditures on international teachers in U.S. dollars at Sunshine Public Schools by 2022.

numerous challenges and barriers that stem from navigating the uprooting process, experiencing cultural differences, and receiving limited support, all of which can lead to mental health issues. The body of empirical research suggests that they struggle due to cultural shock, cross-cultural differences, and unfamiliarity with the American educational system (Bartlett, 2013; Dunn, 2011). However, a comprehensive framework with highly effective strategies to meet teachers' emotional needs while adjusting to their new setting remains undeveloped and represents a gap in the literature. By addressing this gap in the literature, this inquiry builds on the existing research. Unlike previous studies, this dissertation in practice is deeply rooted in the improvement science model and aims to address this problem of practice (Perry et al., 2020). It provides and critically examines a set of interventions to assist foreign teachers emotionally and better equip them to successfully navigate the challenges associated with the transitions into their new lives in the United States, thus translating into higher teacher effectiveness and self-efficacy. Failure to provide a support system to international teachers may translate into higher attrition rates for international teachers posing an economic cost in addition to poor classroom instruction and increasing attrition.

Inquiry Guiding Questions

The questions guiding this inquiry are as follows:

1. What are the challenges that international teachers face upon moving to the United States?
2. How does emotional support affect transitioning challenges for international teachers?

3. How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner?

Overview of Inquiry

I will employ an explanatory sequential, mixed method design to address the inquiry's guiding questions. This approach involves acquiring quantitative data at the outset of the investigation, putting a number of interventions into practice, and then gathering qualitative data to assess the success of the interventions. The entire data collection process is grounded on the improvement science-based PDSA model, which in this case consists of three different cycles that were carefully planned in collaboration with my inquiry partners. Furthermore, each of those three cycles consist of four sub-phases: plan, do, study and act. In more specific terms, surveys will be the data collection instruments used during the first cycle. Finally, interviews will be used during the last cycle to determine the intervention effectiveness and impact. Together with my collaborative inquiry partners, all the data collected over the course of the 3 cycles will be examined, faithfully applying the theoretical framework that serves as the foundation of this investigation. The inquiry participants were international teachers to Sunshine Public Schools. Invitations for them to become part of the inquiry were sent electronically and with follow-up communication if necessary. Finally, rigor was maintained by establishing some preventive measures. For instance, surveys and interviews were administered by inquiry partners to reduce the risk of bias; data was triangulated to increase accuracy results by analyzing data independently, identifying convergences and divergences, and integrating findings.

Inquiry Partners

As I embarked on this research journey, I had to search for a group of inquiry partners to propel this inquiry. These individuals would need to have both passion and commitment towards critically examining the problem of practice and assisting with gathering data to inform improvement efforts. My inquiry partners consisted of a social worker, an ESL teacher coach, and an ESL teacher who had a personal stake in working with multicultural populations.

The school social worker has been working in public education in that capacity for the past 20 years. Born and raised in Kenya, Africa, she is very well acquainted with the uprooting process and adjusting to new settings. She has also served as an adjunct professor at a private university where she taught Introduction to Sociology and Sociology of Developing Countries. However, she also has a strong background in mental health, which aligns with the problem of practice. Other positions held have included clinical supervisor/case manager, family assessment worker, and crisis counselor. Moreover, she has been a presenter at various conferences and is a strong advocate for her students and their families.

The ESL teacher coach is currently employed as an Elementary English Learners Coordinator and is part of the district's EL Department. In this role, she supports and coaches more than forty diverse EL teachers throughout the school district. She also leads professional development and facilitates collaborative lesson planning sessions with all EL teachers in the district. Being a former international teacher herself who came to the United States in 2003 from Argentina, she brings ample experience as a research thought partner. She holds a master's degree in education and school administration and has been awarded the Teacher of the Year recognition in two of the three different elementary schools where she taught English Learners.

Additionally, she also obtained her National Board Certification (NBCT) in 2017 and has successfully completed the NBCT renewal process.

The third inquiry partner is an elementary school teacher for English language learners who has been immersed in teaching and learning language for over a decade. She has lived abroad in Germany and taught in Mexico, allowing her to reflect on the experience of being a foreign language student and international teacher. She regards teaching as an opportunity to empower students with language and cross-cultural communication strategies to engage in their communities more effectively. She has instructed language and culture courses for international university students, K-12, and refugee populations. As a former English language program director and academic coordinator for a language school based on an American university campus, she trained and worked alongside instructors from Saudi Arabia, China, and Palestine, among others. She is a licensed K-12 English as a Second Language teacher in North Carolina, which allows her to work with both students and teachers from around the world. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in German Studies and a master's in teaching English as a Second Language.

Theoretical Framework

This improvement science-based inquiry is deeply rooted in the Theory of Belongingness and the Theory of Basic Needs. The former came to fruition after the collaborative work between Baumeister and Lee in 1995 in which they hypothesized about the role of social connectedness and humans' intrinsic drive for personal interrelations. These authors caution about the risks of individuals being unable to develop a network or circle of relationships, which could impact their mental health exponentially triggering depression, anxiety, and other health issues. Relatedly, international teachers are transplanted from their home interrelationship circles to a foreign land without any readily available affiliation groups with whom to connect. From the onset these

teachers are to start the journey of building a support network by establishing social connections with new people and places. This represents a major undertaking for many international teachers, especially at the initial stages, when they need to juggle so many responsibilities such as finding a place to live, filing important documents, in addition to being prepared to meet the demands of the new job.

Engrained in this inquiry is also 1943s Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's five basic categories of needs represent the basis for human behavioral motivation (Hopper, 2020). Needs are visually organized from concrete and simple to more abstract and complex ones. Underlying this theory is the idea that human beings need to meet their basic needs first before progressing through the hierarchy into more complex ones. Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs captures the reality faced by international teachers as they move into the United States. Additional information and extended discussion of the theoretical framework that serves as the basal foundation for this inquiry will be presented in detail in Chapter 2.

Definitions of Key Terms

This inquiry includes the use of several terms, which are defined in this section for the purpose of clarity according to the existing literature.

International teacher - "those who were born, received teacher education, and have previously taught in countries other than the United States, but who are currently practicing in a United States' public school system on a temporary basis as cultural exchange teachers on J-1 visas" (Kombe, 2016, p. 7).

Teacher attrition rate - process of leaving the teaching profession to pursue another career (Borman & Dowling, 2014).

Orientations - training sessions held for international teachers and organized by recruitment agencies to onboard international teachers upon arriving in the United States (Kombe, 2016).

J-1 Visa - part of the Exchange Visitor visa to promote cultural and educational exchange between the United States and other countries from the world not offering a path to citizenship (Holland, 2012).

H1-B Visa - non-immigrant visa used by employers to sponsor workers in critical area needs such as teachers that grants a path towards citizenship (United States Citizen and Immigration Services [NSCIS], 2022).

Improvement science - application of changes through different cycles, which aim to get to the root cause of a problem of practice and seek improvement (Lewis, 2015).

Cultural shock - initial stage of adaptation process to a new country when individuals may feel confused and develop some anxiety (Segal, 2022).

PLCs or Professional learning communities - framework that fosters teachers' collaboration and student assessment data analysis to improve student achievement (Solution Tree, n.d.).

Assumptions

This section of this improvement science-based inquiry delineates the assumptions of this inquiry. Simply put, assumptions are those ideas inherent to an inquiry that are presumed (Roberts, 2019). Relatedly, Leedy and Ormrod (2010) argue that “Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 62). I include three assumptions that I make as part of this action research inquiry.

The first assumption is that moving to the United States to teach may result a challenging experience. Secondly, another assumption is that international teachers were able to answer all interview and survey questions openly and truthfully, providing honest answers without fear of retaliation. They were cognizant of the different systems in place contemplated by this scholarly inquiry to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in their responses. In other words, teachers' identities were always preserved. Secondly, the sample of teachers used for this inquiry was representative of other international teachers coming to the United States. Their characteristics and experiences mirror, to the greatest extent possible, those from other international teachers that move to the United States to teach. Furthermore, the survey and interviews designed for this inquiry target the core of the problem of practice while assisting me to critically answer the research questions. Both instruments were field tested to ensure their validity and reliability. A final assumption is that international teachers will continue to be hired to fill vacancies at public schools in the United States. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic jeopardized the ability from districts to outsource foreign teachers leading to some dips in recruitments, foreign teacher recruitment has survived and is on a steadily increasing trajectory.

Scope and Delimitations

Goes and Simon (2017) circumscribes delimitations to those elements that define the scope and boundaries of the inquiry. As an academic practitioner, this section refines how the areas of focus have been narrowed to make research more manageable and to focused. These considerations are explicitly outlined here to provide clarity to the reader as to what the inquiry includes and what it does not:

- Participation in the inquiry was delimited to international teachers moving to North Carolina. Only those teachers that matched the definition of international teacher

presented before and that were hired through an international recruitment agency were selected for this inquiry.

- The inquiry had no delimitations regarding participants' gender.
- There were no delimitations with reference to the grade level teachers taught.
- The inquiry examined only those teachers working at a specific urban public-school district in central North Carolina. There were no teachers from other school districts that participated in this research.
- The inquiry took place during a 6-week time period in the fall of 2023.

Limitations

As with any dissertation in practice, this inquiry inevitably carries underlying limitations. Limitations denote potential inquiry shortcomings that may affect the scope and capability to generalize the inquiry results but are deemed to be stated explicitly (Goes & Simon, 2017).

I acknowledge in this research investigation two potential limitations. One of the limitations pertains to the sample population utilized for the present inquiry, which consists of 15 international teachers that moved to the United States to teach in an urban district in central North Carolina.

Another limitation could be linked to time. While the research conducted out in the field with international teachers took place in rapid cycles, the conditions during the time in which the improvement intervention was applied may have potentially impacted the results. Simply put, although the time allotted for teachers to be exposed to the intervention may not have been sufficient, the data gathered from the inquiry is still legitimate to frame improvement for international teachers and articulate future studies (Hanson et al., 2005).

Significance of the Inquiry

This improvement science inquiry poses major meaningful implications for international teachers, school administrators, and human resource personnel. Essential to this inquiry are equity and social justice practices for international teachers and overall improvement of their working conditions.

Advances in Practice

As noted earlier, this inquiry builds on existing research regarding international teachers and the challenges they face when they move to the United States to teach. This inquiry goes beyond the assumptions and assertions found in studies already presented. Unlike other studies that primarily depict these challenges by focusing namely on cross-cultural support strategies, this inquiry offers an inside perspective to a socio-emotional framework that aims to mitigate or alleviate the challenges faced by international teachers upon arriving in the United States and increase their adaptability rate into their new settings (Fee, 2010). It is grounded on the idea that international teachers will always encounter obstacles and hurdles due to cultural discrepancies that emerge during the uprooting process. However, the pernicious effects from those challenges inherent to moving to a new cultural setting could be reduced with international teachers' exposure to this pragmatic socio-emotional intervention designed for this research, enhancing the overall adjustment process and experience.

Furthermore, this inquiry undergirds the existing high need for building capacity among school administrators hosting international teachers. It advances a scholarly understanding among school administrators regarding international teachers' needs and debunks the idea that international teachers should be treated as any native-born teacher new to their campus. In fact, this research represents a game changer as the information and interventions presented here can

be used by school administrators to develop awareness of international teachers' unique needs and gain access to a readily available support system to target them.

This inquiry also proves to be significant to human resource personnel. It provides a thorough understanding of what international teachers go through once they move to the United States and underscores the need for ongoing amplified support for them. The improvement measures highlighted in this research represent a safety net, which may contribute to higher adaptability rates among international teachers, thus lowering their attrition rates. The theories and strategies included in this inquiry should be cascaded all the way down from human resources to school level administrators as a concrete framework to leverage international teachers' transition and, ultimately, to increase their productivity in the classroom.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

Embedded in this dissertation in practice is the advancement of equity and social justice. This inquiry recognizes that due to the temporary worker status of their visas, international teachers may become easy prey for exploitation or suffer from unfair labor practices, as I shall explore in further detail later in the literature review section. While this inquiry does not necessarily spotlight any solution to such systemic unfavorable working conditions and glaring inequities, it recognizes, that adaptation challenges will be unavoidable though they could be lessened with the interventions proposed. Furthermore, the changes recommended to address these adaptation challenges through a unique real-world problem-solving approach level the international teachers' playing field with that of native teachers making it more equitable for them. These strategies will assist international teachers to feel more prepared and equipped to navigate the extenuating circumstances that may stem from adjusting to a new place. In other words, the strategies and interventions recommended in this inquiry will prepare international

teachers for a smoother transition, resulting in greater educational impact in the classroom, more teacher self-efficacy, and increased recruiting.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the background and statement of the focus of practice. I provided detailed information regarding the inquiry partners with whom I collaborated with in addition to context, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the inquiry. Furthermore, I defined several terms that are at the core of this inquiry and presented the theoretical framework on which this inquiry is grounded. Next, in Chapter 2, I will be delving into the current body of empirical research to craft a literature review from the most prominent studies, highlighting the existing gaps. Chapter 3 will take a deep dive into the research methods and data collection tools I used to conduct this inquiry. Lastly, Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on the inquiry data analysis and results.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teaching in the United States has become a devaluated and unattractive profession (Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022; Wiggan et al., 2021). Symptoms of this increasing trend include low enrollment in teacher preparation programs and growing teacher attrition rates (Knox, 2022; Will, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these teacher shortages (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2023). This gloomy reality has caused school districts to struggle to fill vacancies, resorting to alternative recruitment pathways such as hiring teachers from other countries (Bala, 2021; Kombe, 2016). In this review of the literature, I will ground the inquiry in the Theory of Belonginess and the Hierarchy of Basic Needs, exploring the relevance of each to the inquiry. Next, I delve into the relevant strands of literature regarding the topic of international teachers coming to the United States. This literature provides conceptual background knowledge while delineating the state of the current scholarly research and highlighting observable research patterns. Moreover, it will afford a thorough understanding of international teachers, those educators that move from overseas to teach in the United States.

The most prevalent literature strands that I identified are teacher attrition, the portrait of the international teacher, challenges faced by international teachers and supports. In teacher attrition, I give a historical background of the teaching profession in the United States and North Carolina in addition to exploring the causes and consequences of teacher attrition. The second strand is the portrait of the international teacher. This section is designed to granularly describe the characteristics of the teachers that are moving to the United States, the recruitment process and the visa options available to them. Next, I unpack and categorize the most significant challenges faced by international teachers and the unintended implications they pose for them.

Finally, I analyze how professional development has evolved in the United States in the last couple of decades and the options, if any, available for both domestic and international teachers.

Theoretical Foundation

This inquiry will develop and assess the effectiveness of a comprehensive framework to alleviate the emotional challenges that international teachers face when moving to the United States. While scholars recommend culturally responsive and pedagogical training for international teachers, the research literature does not provide a specific framework to support these teachers' emotional needs that arise from the challenges that they face, representing a major gap in the research. This inquiry is grounded on two theories: the Theory of Belonginess and the Theory of Basic Needs.

The notion of belonginess can be linked back to Sigmund Freud, who argued that human beings have the need to belong to a certain group (Freud, 1975). Next, psychologist John Bowlby, famous for his attachment theory, postulates that early bonding relationships between infants and their caregivers carry long-term positive effects on children (O'Gallagher, 2015). While the Theory of Belonginess has been firmly embedded in the field of social psychology since Bowlby, it was not prominently applied to other fields until Baumeister and Leary (1995) framed the most prominent Belonginess Theory, becoming the most widely used in research with over 30,000 citations (Allen et al., 2022). They posit that inherent to human beings is the necessity to have interpersonal bonding relations with other individuals. If that were not the case, then human beings would live in isolation and solitude, and communities would hardly exist. Aristotle's famous quotation that "man is by nature a social animal" supports the notion of this Theory of Belonging. Baumeister and Leary (1995) also argue that the absence of belonginess

may trigger health issues and may pose pernicious and harmful effects on individuals' behaviors, emotions and cognitive systems. Connectedly, building a strong sense of belongingness may underpin good physical and mental health (Theisen, 2021). Thiesen notes that reduced levels of stress and anxiety in an individual may be attributed, according to psychological research, to a heightened sense of belongingness. "When we feel we have support and are not alone, we are more resilient, often coping more effectively with difficult times in our lives. Coping well with hardships decreases the physical and mental effects of these situations" (Theisen, 2021, p. 1). A sense of belongingness has also been linked to declining levels of stress and reduced suicide risks.

These assertions grounded in research validate the relevance of the Theory of Belonginess for the purpose of this inquiry and illustrate how closely it ties into the context of international teachers. International teachers leave behind their circle of interpersonal relationships or groups to become transplants in an entirely new culture and social ecosystem where they need to bond with new individuals to survive and thrive. Exposing teachers to a framework rooted in the Theory of Belonginess as part of a set of interventions for this inquiry is anticipated to equip teachers to become better prepared to face the undeniable challenges that will arise when moving to the United States. This may represent a major undertaking as when you move to another country, it may take considerable time to establish a network of personal relationships or a group with which you can affiliate. Therefore, this framework or intervention encompasses systems in place, which will generate opportunities and spaces for individuals to have interpersonal relationships with other educators and consolidate this idea of belongingness and affiliation with a group.

This inquiry is also grounded in Maslow's Theory of Basic Needs, also known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This theory was proposed by American psychologist Abraham

Maslow (1943), becoming one of the most popular theories of motivation. Maslow groups the basic human needs into five categories, which are conceptualized in a pyramid or triangle (see Figure 6). These categories are physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. On the first level of the hierarchy or base are the physiological needs, which include those related to survival such as food, water, shelter, clothing, sexual reproduction and breathing. Next, at the second level are the safety and security needs, which include actions triggered by financial security, health and wellness and safety against accidents. Social needs come next on the hierarchy and are materialized with friendships, family and romantic relationship relationships and community groups to name some. The fourth level comprises the esteem needs. These encompass the need for appreciation, respect, sense of accomplishment, all of which promote increased self-esteem. At the last level of the hierarchy are the self-actualization needs. Maslow (1943) says self-actualization “refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (Maslow, 1943, p. 383). In other words, self-actualization may concomitantly presume this idea of self-realization and achieving ones’ full potential as an individual (Cherry, 2018).

The pyramid used to conceptualize this theory signals, from a visual standpoint, that people possess that inner eagerness to meet basic needs first before meeting more complex ones. Therefore, at the base of the pyramid are those needs that are more basic while at the top of the pyramid are those that are more complex in nature. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Basic Needs mirrors, to a great extent, the overarching reality faced by international teachers when they move to a new country. In fact, upon arriving to the United States, international teachers must act fast to ensure

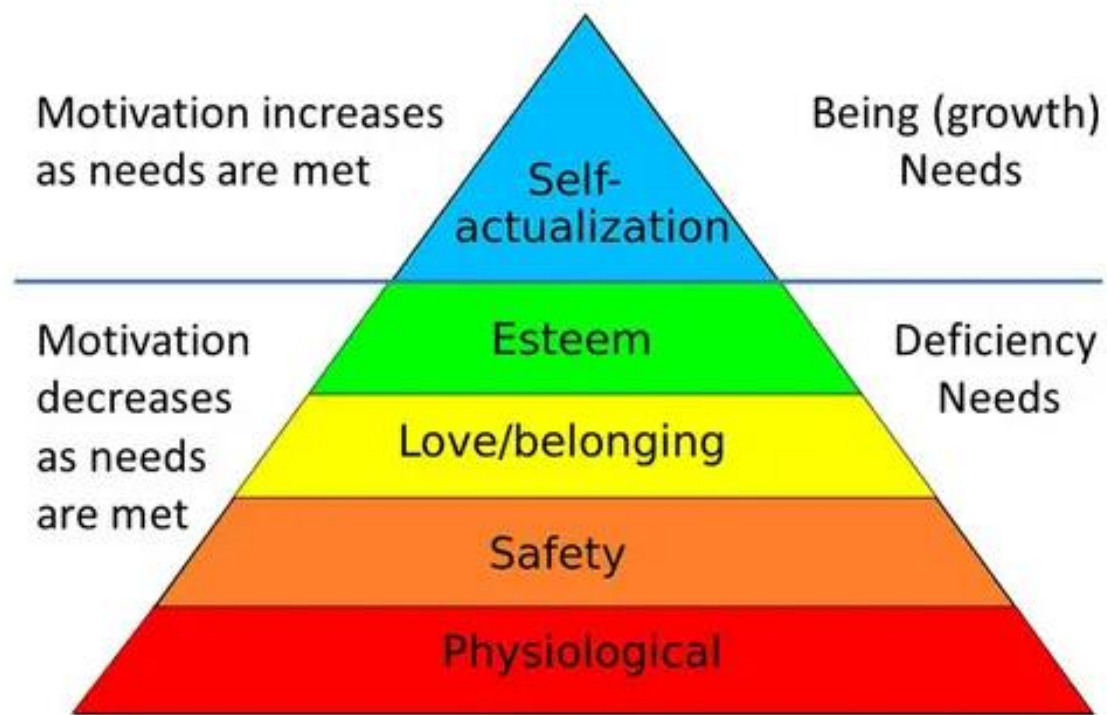


Figure 6. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs model.

those basic needs featured in Maslow's pyramid are met diligently for the sake of survival. While the physiological and safety needs are placed in the bottom levels of the pyramid, the social needs come right after, speaking to the significance of establishing interpersonal relationships, something that proves to be equally crucial for immigrant teachers to survive and successfully adjust.

Furthermore, intersecting with the social needs outlined by Maslow is the Theory of Belonginess, substantiating the importance of being able to possess membership to a given group to avoid potential mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Taken together, both the Theory of Belonginess and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs closely align with each other and provide a solid foundation on which to ground this inquiry. Overall, at the core of these theories is the concept of survival and the need for individuals to have networks for social support and belonginess purposes, something which international teachers must develop from the ground up to successfully transition into their new setting. The aim of this inquiry is to develop and implement a framework of practical strategies and tools that help meet immigrant teachers' need for social support and belonging to mitigate the challenges encountered when moving to the United States to teach.

Teacher Attrition

Teacher Attrition in the United States

The United States is facing an ongoing significant teacher shortage which has received attention in a large and growing body of literature in the last decade (Bastian & Fuller, 2021; Carter, 2021; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Furuya et al., 2019; García & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2020; Sutchter et al., 2016). This shortage stems from teacher attrition, a common term used in the literature to

describe those who leave the teaching profession. Borman and Dowling (2014) define teacher attrition as the process of leaving the teaching profession to pursue another career.

From a historical perspective, teacher attrition did not represent an obstacle for districts when staffing their schools until the late 1990s when shortages started to uptick and concerns became widespread (Wiggan et al., 2021). According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), attrition rates increased from 5.6% in 1989 to 8.7% in 2005. Unlike other developed nations, attrition rates for teachers in the United States are currently holding steady around 8% and have remained the same for the last decade and are even higher for beginning teachers or lateral entry teachers (Levin, 2021; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.b; Sutchter et al., 2016). Relatedly, turnover rates fluctuate by state and within different regions in each state, being higher in the southern United States as opposed to the northern United States where school districts offer more appealing salaries and incentives. Moreover, the most frequent shortages occur in the fields of special education, mathematics, English language development and science. Consequently, many school districts across the nation grapple with filling their teaching vacancies.

Ingersoll et al. (2021) conducted an exploratory research study where they utilized 1998 to 2017 comprehensive national staffing data from the National Center for Education Statistics. The results attest that while the American teacher workforce has “ballooned” or become larger in size, shortages persist and with no solution on the horizon. The data show evidence that high-poverty and high-minority urban and rural areas are the most severely affected by these shortages as their turnover rates are 70% higher (American Federation of Teachers, 2009; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll et al., 2021). Furthermore, ethnic minority teachers have

the highest attrition rates and typically serve marginalized settings (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2021).

The size and scope of the teaching shortage problem is reaffirmed by the data projections across the nation. In 2009, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) projected that 200,000 teachers would need to be hired annually. In contrast, Sutchter et al. (2016) assert that more than 44% of educators change careers within five years causing a “revolving door”, with many people in and out of the field (Ingersoll et al., 2021). They project that by 2025, 316,000 teachers will need to be hired annually to meet the increasing demands. Similarly, Gray and Taie (2015) corroborate these numbers noting that within their first year, 10% of beginning teachers leave the profession. According to a 2022 survey from the National Education Association (NEA, 2022), 55% of educators are planning to change their careers. In like manner, Torpey (2018) predicted in a report written for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics that there would be 600,000 teacher exits between 2020 and early 2022. This federal agency also reports that the current ratio of new hires to job openings is at 0.59 positions for every opening, representing a steep decline from 1.54 in 2010. Researchers agree that the teacher shortage crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic (Schmitt & deCourcy, 2022; Zamarro et al., 2022). Taken together, these figures illustrate the overarching complexity of the phenomenon of teacher attrition.

Teacher Shortage in North Carolina

North Carolina once boasted of their effective educational initiatives and investments, which made it one of the leading states in the union when it came to student achievement and a model to replicate during the 1980s and 1990s (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Such initiatives included additional funding to increase teacher pay at the national level, higher rigor for teacher certification programs and higher academic expectations for students. These investments proved

crucial to closing achievement gaps. However, lack of funding and an unstable political climate during the 2008 recession brought a new educational landscape. In fact, North Carolina has not remained unaffected by this teacher shortage crisis. On the contrary, it has confronted the same critical teacher shortage challenges as the rest of the United States (Berry et al., 2021).

According to a report from the Learning Policy Institute (2018), North Carolina teaching profession attractiveness is relatively low, as the study places North Carolina at 2.65 from ratings on a 1-5 scale, with 1 being the lowest rating or least appealing and 5 being the highest score or most appealing.

North Carolina State Law requires the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (NCDPI), to compile an annual comprehensive report on the state of the teaching profession in North Carolina. According to the 2020-2021 State of the Teaching Profession in North Carolina Report, the overall attrition rate for 2020-2021 increased by 1% compared to the previous school year, climbing to 8.20%. A further look into the NCDPI report data finds that there were 94,342 teachers in North Carolina between March 2020 and March 2021 and that almost 8,000 left the profession and were no longer employed in public schools. Furthermore, the study reveals that the attrition rate for beginning teachers in North Carolina is 9.37%, which is even higher than that of experienced teachers. Similarly, the exit rate for beginning lateral entry educators (those teachers who do not hold a teaching certificate and work towards their certification as they teach) was 11.1%. While the report critically examines figures by counties offering a significant amount of detail, it does not highlight the increasing attrition rate trends in the state. In fact, it posits that “generally teachers in North Carolina are staying in the classroom” (NCDPI, 2021b, p. 6). The “sugarcoated” language choice behind the quoted statement may seek to disguise the real implications behind those figures and the impact it has on students. It insinuates the belief

that there is not a major problem when it comes to teacher attrition and shortages. When comparing North Carolina's current attrition rates with the early 2000s nationwide data, North Carolina attrition rates are higher as they surpass other states by nearly 4%.

In contrast to the NCDPI report, Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal study on the quality, supply, and demand of educators in North Carolina, which provides a more realistic insight into the attrition problem of the state. The project was a partnership between the Learning Policy Institute, Education Policy Initiative at Carolina and WestEd. Substantial evidence presented in this study indicates that the teacher workforce in North Carolina declined by 5% from 2009 to 2018 though enrollment in both public and charter schools increased by 2% during the same period. This research echoes the same challenges taking place at the national level where schools serving high poverty populations of students of color are the ones undergoing the most significant challenges to fill their vacancies (Furuya et al., 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Berry et al. (2021) provides a more nuanced perspective into teacher shortages: they analyzed shortages from the teacher retention standpoint. Their data from 2015 to 2017 reveal that the average school level teacher retention rate in North Carolina was at 80%, though in high poverty schools the retention rate was 73%. These figures afford another understanding of the complexity, extent and implications of teacher shortages in North Carolina. All together they underscore the presence of systemic inequities that propel privileges for wealthy school systems.

Causes of Teacher Shortages

The existing teacher shortage literature and policy discourse delineate multiple causes or reasons why shortages prevail today and for the last two decades (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2021; Ladd, 2011; Strauss, 2017). These multiple causes undergird

in part the complex nature of this problem. The review of research literature uncovers several recurrent reasons featured by researchers, each of which will be explored in the sections that follow.

To begin with, public school students' population has surged in the last two decades in the United States (Wiggan et al., 2021). According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (n.d.a), there are close to 51 million students attending American public schools. While the student population has been steadily growing since the 1980s, the teacher workforce has also grown but not at a rate significant enough to meet the increasing demands (Ingersoll et al., 2021).

Furthermore, while student enrollment at public schools has risen, fewer college students are choosing teaching as their future career (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Furuya et al., 2019; Strauss, 2017; Stucher et al., 2016). In fact, according to a 2016 report from the Learning Policy Institute, teacher preparation program enrollment decreased from 691,000 to 415,000 from 2009 to 2014. This represents a 35% drop. More recently, Wiggan et al. (2021), shared 2014 ACT data which shows how high school students' teacher education interest plummeted. They connect the ACT data to the fact that often teaching is regarded as a temporary devalued profession. Therefore, while the demand for teachers is at a record high, the supply of graduates from educator preparation programs at colleges and universities cannot fully meet those demands, generating a disproportion between supply and demand.

Moreover, most educators leave the teaching profession before they reach their retirement age, whereas others remain in the profession until retirement (Gray & Taie, 2015; Strauss, 2017). In a 2021 study, Wiggan et al. note that the leading cause for teacher shortages has to do with pre-retirement attrition, which has hovered around 63% from 2011 to 2020. On the other hand,

Ingersoll et al. (2021) analyzed 1998-2017 comprehensive data from the Schools and Staffing Survey and the National Teacher Principal Survey for an exploratory research project which concluded that the American teacher has been “graying” or getting older, and that teacher retirement has consistently increased. Contrary to widespread belief, the authors argue that retirements, averaging close to 14% do represent a small percentage of those leaving the teaching profession.

Another contributing reason to teacher attrition comes from educators’ working conditions. People perform better when they like their jobs and feel valued at what they do (McKenna, 2022). Educators’ poor working conditions have been a focal point of research when critically examining the causes of teacher attrition (Furuya et al., 2019; Wiggan et al., 2021). Working conditions encompass a plethora of negative factors such as non-competitive salaries (compared to other fields), lack of support, students’ discipline, negative working environments and culture coupled with too many duties and responsibilities. A 2022 survey of teachers from the National Association of Educators confirms this assertion noting that these unfavorable working conditions lead to “burnout and demoralization.” Relatedly, Ladd (2011) asserts that schools’ working conditions are a strong predictor of whether teachers stay or leave their workplace. The findings of the comprehensive study revealed that teacher school leadership, student behavior and teacher efficacy are all strong positive factors that may promote teacher retention in low-income school settings.

Consequences of Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition affects school districts, students, and parents in a myriad of ways. The research literature affords a scholarly understanding of the numerous challenges that arise when teachers leave the profession.

The broad body of national research finds a direct correlation between high rates of teacher attrition and low student achievement. The same applies to teacher qualifications and student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). This body of theoretical and empirical scholarship also postulates that teachers are the strongest lever for student achievement (Miller et al., 2020). Current attrition rates can cause a chain reaction that translates into poor instructional quality taking place in the classrooms. Certified experienced teachers who leave the profession, for instance, must be replaced by less experienced teachers who lack professional credentials because they hold an emergency or temporary teaching license and do not possess a teaching certificate. They seek licensure through an alternative pathway while they work in the classroom. On the same note, Ingersoll et al. (2021) state that the American teacher workforce is overall less experienced and has many more novice teachers than before. As a result, students' academic performance drops, especially those from high minority and high poverty schools (Berry et al., 2021; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Relatedly, Garcia and Weiss (2019) asserts that teacher attrition plays an instrumental role in "teachers' ineffectiveness and students' inability to learn as students get served by fewer highly qualified teachers. These common threads found in the literature expose once again the ramifications, pernicious effects and the incidental collateral damage as the consequences of teacher attrition.

In addition to the impact on instructional quality, teacher attrition is associated with added costs for school districts (Berry et al., 2021). According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), replacing a teacher costs approximately 21,000 dollars and the overall costs of teacher attrition hovers around 8 billion dollars nationally.

Finally, while most of the literature regarding the teacher shortage does not necessarily link international teachers with the national teacher shortage, research on the phenomenon of

international teachers coming to work to the United States certainly do so. The high percentage of teacher attrition in the United States prompts school districts to get creative and recruit educators from other parts of the world (Wiggan et al., 2021). School districts may directly offer work visa sponsorships to international educators or may contract with a recruitment agency for a fee to gain access to their pool of international candidates. A 2009 comprehensive report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) poses a critical eye on this practice and describes the arrival of international teachers as an easy short-term fix to tackle the teacher shortage problem. Nevertheless, this has become a widespread pivotal step taken by school districts to ensure that vacancies can be filled in a timely manner. As the AFT reports, in 2009 there were around 19,000 international teachers working on temporary visas in the United States, and this emerging trend continues today.

The Portrait of the International Teacher

The previous section, Teacher Attrition, took a deep dive into the perennial teacher shortage that the United States is experiencing caused by multiple factors, a combination of high attrition rates and the systemic devaluing of the teaching profession (Bruno, 2018). Incidentally, one of the consequences of this shortage has impacted the need to find alternative teacher pipelines, one of which included immigrant teachers to fill the vacancies (Bala, 2021; Flores, 2011; Gross, 2018; Kombe, 2016). The United States has historically been relying on foreign workers to meet internal labor demands (International Labor Recruitment Working Group, 2013). Bartlett (2013) notes that transnational teacher migration started in the 1960s though it began gaining significant momentum in the last two decades. This section delineates the characteristics of these teachers that come to work in the United States from other parts of the

world and stay on an H-1B or J-1 visa. For the purpose of this inquiry, Kombe's (2016) definition of international teachers is utilized:

Those who were born, received teacher education, and have previously taught in countries other than the United States, but who are currently practicing in a United States' public school system on a temporary basis as cultural exchange teachers on J-1 visas. Such teachers are designated as non-immigrant aliens by the United States Department of State and are expected to return to their countries of origin after a specified fixed period of employment, often between three and five years (p. 2).

The definition also includes those teachers coming to work in the United States on H-1B visas. Furthermore, it encompasses the requirements of the United States Department of State for immigrant teachers, which will be detailed later in this chapter.

Other terms that will be utilized interchangeably to refer to immigrant teachers are transnational teachers, foreign-born teachers, and foreign-trained teachers. Additionally, the purpose of this section is to critically examine existing available data, the professional profile of these educators, the existing different pathways for them to come and work in the United States, and the benefits associated with their presence.

Characteristics of International Teachers

In contrast to teacher attrition, studies on transnational teachers are not highly abundant though more studies have recently been published. The prevailing research portrays immigrant teachers as bold, diverse and heterogeneous coming from different parts of the world. The top countries for sending immigrant non-postsecondary teachers are Mexico, India, the Philippines, Canada, and Spain (Bala, 2021; Furuya et al., 2019; Seah, 2018). Relatedly, strong content knowledge, eagerness to advance into their professional careers and a tendency to hold advanced

degrees are all common denominators among foreign-born teachers that move to the United States (Furuya et al., 2019; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007). Conversely, Bartlett (2013) distinguishes between those teachers that move to the United States seeking some type of adventure and those running away from high poverty, underdeveloped or developing countries, or escaping from oppressing environments. Bartlett argues that the economic factor plays a decisive role for those looking to improve life outcomes, life prospects and lifestyles. In contrast, adventure seekers have no pressing economic needs and perform their jobs with significantly less pressure as they take it as an opportunity to travel and visit new places. Bartlett (2013) further classifies immigrant teachers into “embracers”, those who understand the temporary nature of their visas and have a limited commitment towards their job duties, and “aspirers”, those who utilize their temporary visas as a steppingstone.

The two most popular avenues for international teachers to be able to move and teach in the United States are the J-1 visa or Exchange Visitor Program and the H-1B Visa. This section will revolve around these two types of visas and the role of recruiters as part of the process. While both the J-1 visa and H-1B visa are temporary nonimmigrant visas that allow foreign nationals to live and work in the US, they have marked differences. Regardless of those differences, research indicates that opponents to teacher migration argue that granting visas to hire foreign teachers contributes to reframing teaching as a low status profession that outsources guest workers for a short time and does not contribute to building a long-term teacher workforce (Bartlett, 2013; Dunn, 2011).

The J-1 Visa

According to the United States Department of State (2022), the J-1 visa, or Exchange Visitor visa, is designed to attract individuals who want to participate in an exchange visitor

program. The J-1 Exchange Program, managed by the office of Private Sector Exchange in the Department of Labor (Holland, 2012), promotes cultural and educational exchanges between U.S. citizens and those from other countries.

These cultural, educational, and professional exchanges foster mutual cultural understanding and diversity (Singer et al., 2019). The 15 exchange visitor categories include those for au pair workers, teachers, summer work travel, and physicians, among others. The first step for those interested in pursuing a J-1 visa is to apply for, and be accepted into, an exchange visitor program through a designated sponsoring organization in the United States. The process includes paying visa fees and may also require the applicant to sit for a visa interview at their home country consular site.

The following are the requirements outlined by the United States' Department of State (n.d.) to qualify for a J-1 visa:

- Meet the qualifications for teaching in primary or secondary schools in their country of nationality or last legal residence;
- Be working as a teacher in the home country or country of legal residence at the time of application, or, if not working as a teacher, otherwise meet the eligibility qualifications and (a) have recently (within 12 months of application) completed an advanced degree and (b) have two years of full-time teaching experience within the past eight years;
- Have a degree-equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree in either education or the academic subject field in which they intend to teach;
- Have a minimum of two years (24 months) of teaching or related professional experience;

- Satisfy the standards of the U.S. state in which they will teach;
- Be of good reputation and character;
- Be seeking to enter the United States for the purpose of full-time teaching as a teacher of record at a primary (including pre-kindergarten) or secondary accredited educational institution in the United States (pre-kindergarten teachers must teach full-time, and at the pre-kindergarten level, may teach only language immersion at an accredited host school); and,
- Possess sufficient proficiency in the English language.

The J-1 visa entails a restrictive and complex journey for those teachers looking for permanent residency status. Participation in the J-1 visa program does not clear a citizenship pathway. Teachers employed with these visas may work in a U.S. school for up to three years, with the possibility of a one- or two-year extension. Moreover, J-1 visitors may be subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement upon completion of their final extension unless they apply for a waiver. Despite these unfavorable conditions, Bartlett (2013) argues that the J-1 visa has increasingly become more popular among recruiters because it is a short-term option, does not require a labor certification and has no caps in the numbers of visas that can be issued each year.

The H-1B Visa

Unlike the J-1 visa, the H-1B visa provides the opportunity for foreign professionals to work in the United States while seeking permanent residence status. It allows employers to hire qualified foreign workers, including teachers, in the United States in specialty occupations on a temporary basis. The foreign teacher has the possibility to obtain a position based on his/her acquired skills. To be eligible for the H-1B Visa, the employer and potential employee are

obligated to adhere to the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) conditions and regulations. The H-1B visa requirements strive to ensure that the American employer and foreign professional comply with the Department of Labor standards. A critical component of this compliance is filing for a Labor Condition Application (LCA).

According to the USCIS (2022), the H-1B visa process involves two major factors: the sponsorship by an employer (typically a school district if it is for a public school or a private institution for a private school) from the United States and petitioning with the USCIS. The applicant must have an American employer to start the process. When the potential H-1B holder finds this employer, who is eligible and willing to file an H-1B visa on their behalf, the employer must receive a labor certification application and submit an H-1B petition to the USCIS. The following are the requirements to file an H-1B visa per the USCIS's website (USCIS, 2022.):

- Theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge; and
- Attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The position must also meet one of the following criteria to qualify as a specialty occupation:

- Bachelor's or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum entry requirement for a particular position;
- The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, the job is so complex or unique that it can only be performed by an individual with a degree;
- The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position;

- The nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree;
- Hold a U.S. bachelor's or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university;
- Hold a foreign degree that is the equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university;
- Hold an unrestricted state license, registration, or certification that authorizes you to fully practice the specialty occupation and be immediately engaged in that specialty in the state of intended employment; or
- Have education, specialized training, and/or progressively responsible experience that is equivalent to the completion of a U.S. bachelor's or higher degree in the specialty occupation and have recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions directly related to the specialty.

On a different note, H-1B visas have an annual cap, which limits the number of visas that can be issued. According to USCIS (2022), the existing annual visa quota for H-1B visas is at 85,000. The H-1B visa program has been under mounting scrutiny in the last years as the Trump administration placed significant restrictions on the eligibility for H-1B visas in 2020. These restrictions were later lifted by a United States District Court (Sanford News, 2020; Torres, 2017; Zak, 2020).

Recruiters

The journey of moving to the United States to teach begins when the candidate submits an application to a recruiter or designated sponsor organization. The submission of the

application will trigger a process that includes initial interviews with the recruiting agency to determine eligibility and assess overall qualifications. Once the candidate has been thoroughly screened by the recruiter, he or she will interview with a school or school district and later probably receive a job offer (Bala, 2021). Bridge USA is the branding for the Exchange Visitor Program that falls under the umbrella of the United States Department of State. Its website houses information regarding sixty-seven sponsor organizations including private corporations and public-school districts. Participate, Inc, formerly Visiting International Faculty Program (VIF), with headquarters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, has been one of the largest private sponsor agencies in the United States with a heavy presence in North Carolina and the southeastern United States (Holland, 2012; Waite, 2009). Relatedly, North Carolina was the state hosting the highest number of international teachers between 2016 and 2019 and was featured as the top United States destination in 2021 (Department for Professional Employees Research Department, 2021; United States Department of State, 2022). While some recruiting agencies may charge the school districts up to 15,000 dollars for their entire menu of selection services per teacher, there have been reports that other agencies charge both the school district and teachers for their placement fees (AFT, 2009). Furthermore, the role of recruiters and their impact on the challenges faced by international teachers will be presented in the next section.

Immigrant Teachers by the Numbers

Official data regarding the number of immigrant teachers in the United States is not readily and easily accessible. In fact, the AFT (2009) noted that the federal government does not release teacher migration data for public analysis. Despite those obstacles to data access, Barber (2003) created a report for the National Educator Association in which he estimated that there were 15,000 international teachers working in the United States, out of which 10,000 were in

public schools. This upward trend is expected to continue. In like manner, according to AFT 's calculations, there were approximately 19,000 teachers working with temporary visas in 2007. Conversely, Bartlett (2013) regards this practice of hiring transnational teachers as a “movement” that is gaining traction and increasing popularity among school districts. She reports that between 2000 and 2009 there were 100,000 foreign-trained teachers in the United States and that the heavy influx of international teachers varies by geographical area with New York, California and Texas being at the top. On the other hand, Seah (2018) asserts that the foreign-born teacher population increased from 2% in the 1960s to 8.6% in 2017. Furuya et al. (2019) confirmed this assertion with data retrieved between 2012 to 2016 from the United States Census Bureau. Their study affords a different understanding and insight into the magnitude of foreign-born teachers in the United States by revealing that 11% of the teacher workforce in the United States are considered immigrants. Their data shows that 11% of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, 7% of elementary and middle school and 7% of secondary and special education teachers are immigrant. Finally, they also note that more than half of these foreign-born teachers are naturalized citizens. While these two data sets provide perspective into foreign-born teachers, they do not necessarily focus solely on those teachers that move to the United States from overseas to teach and start teaching immediately after their arrival on J1 or H-1B visas. In other words, they also include those teachers who may have been former refugees or immigrants and who have already been living in the United States for some time. Therefore, both studies are not necessarily aligned with the target population or focal point of this inquiry.

Benefits of International Teachers

The existing research literature echoes the benefits of hiring foreign teachers. While Holland (2012), Visiting International Faculty (2015), and Furuya et al. (2019) describe

international teachers as cultural ambassadors who can expand students' cultural awareness and better connect with multi-lingual students and parents, the AFT (2009) claim that this is a marketing strategy used by recruiting agencies to increase their teacher placements. Conversely, Lee (2005) argues that international teachers have an asset-based mentality regarding their students' cultures and show eagerness to participate in schools' cultural events. Embedded in this assertion is the idea of advocacy and serving as a role model, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Carrison, 2007; Edwards & Edick, 2013).

The intersection between culture and foreign-born teachers has also been captured by other studies. For instance, Irvine (1990) notes that international teachers can serve as “cultural translators” as they assist with closing differences between cultures. Furthermore, international teacher recruitment may also have a positive impact on diversifying the teacher force and fostering diversity and cultural awareness in the classrooms (Broutian, 2016; McCawley, 2005; Niyubahwe et al., 2013). Relatedly, Hutchison and Jazzar (2007) agree with the qualities presented so far and is convinced that international teachers can become a great resource for their schools. Furthermore, Biegen (2018) studied immigrant teachers of color at public schools in New Jersey. Biegen concludes that the research insinuates that immigrant teachers of color may have a positive impact on student achievement. In addition to promoting global and cultural awareness, diversity, and student success, other virtues exhibited by international teachers and amplified in the research are linked to their great sense of responsibility, dedication, and professionalism (Lee, 2015).

Challenges Faced by International Teachers

The previous section was laser focused on the widespread problem of teacher attrition affecting the United States, subsequently causing significant teacher shortages. As noted earlier,

one of the consequences of the teacher shortages is the burgeoning arrival of immigrant teachers to the United States to fill vacancies. This literature review strand will concentrate on the obstacles and challenges that immigrant teachers encounter as they arrive in the United States. Moving to another country can be rewarding for immigrant teachers, but it can also be a complex and psychologically overwhelming undertaking (Berry, 1995). While studies on immigrant teachers in the United States are somewhat scarce, they are increasingly gaining more attention due to the current teacher shortage crisis. The number of studies exploring the hurdles and hardships that teachers must overcome when moving to the United States has been growing (AFT, 2009; Bartlett, 2013; Cabaniss, 2014; Dunn, 2011; Hutchison, 2005; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kombe, 2016; Kombe, 2017). Scholars widely agree on the difficulties faced by foreign teachers as they move to teach in the United States and adjust into their new settings. This section will begin with an analysis of culturally-rooted challenges that teachers endure upon relocating to the United States. This initial area of focus is content heavy as it encompasses several challenges such as teachers' temporary employment status and its implication along with the challenges that stem from unethical recruitment practices.

Culturally-Rooted Challenges

Moving to another country entails the encounter and exposure to a new set of social norms and culture that may be radically different from one's home country. In fact, Herskovits (1948) argues that culture is that space created by people where they live. Hofstede (2011) agrees with that assertion noting that people's behaviors are grounded in their socio-cultural roots. The transition to the new country becomes even more intricate and intertwined for immigrant teachers who are viewed as newcomers at schools that mirror their own society and culture making these two elements intrinsically and mutually connected (Fowler, 1996). Thus, the

effects of the immigrant teacher's cross-cultural interactions and exposure to such a dynamic and complex "ecosystem" has emerged as the underlying causes of challenges faced by international teachers in the United States as documented by the literature.

Kombe (2016) suggests that immigrant teachers' prior knowledge is grounded on their experiences within their own culture. Challenges arise when they need to become familiar with an entirely new and different set of rules and protocols when moving to a new country, including learning about a new educational system (Kombe, 2016). The author argues that this is not necessarily an easy task as cross-cultural interference may affect their interactions with students, colleagues and the school community, thus having a detrimental effect on instructional effectiveness. Therefore, Kombe debunks the notion of transferability of instructional effectiveness arguing that those teachers that are deemed to be successful in their home countries may not be nearly as effective in their new country. In other words, teaching is framed by the unique cultural context in which it takes place and teachers with high levels of self-efficacy in their home country may struggle to effectively teach in another country (Bartlett, 2013; McAllister, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005). Furthermore, other studies confirm this assertion by claiming that even experienced American teachers sometimes grapple with adaptability and adjustment when they transfer from one school to another due to differences in student population, race and culture (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Notably, prior research substantiates the belief that minority students benefit from teachers who understand their home lives, can relate to their personal experiences, and show compassion (Bell, 2017; Warren, 2014).

Literature suggests that challenges arise between immigrant teachers, students, school community, parents and colleagues when a cultural gap exists. This cross-cultural interference caused by the lack of cultural awareness translates, for instance, into difficulties managing

student conduct (Dunn, 2011; Waite, 2009). Tension turns into conflict when teachers view students' behavior and interactions as disrespectful and teachers frame their discipline response on punitive and sometimes authoritarian approaches brought from their own countries (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Oriaro, 2007; Ross, 2003; Su, 1997). In this scenario, immigrant teachers' own dispositions about teacher authority come under scrutiny and they are questioned or challenged by students, parents, or administration (Kombe, 2016). Consequently, students who possess similar dispositions are viewed as non-compliant, disobedient, unmotivated and rude resulting in classrooms filled with poor negative interactions, a common theme extensively acknowledged by prior research (Fee, 2010; Nganga, 2011). While some international teachers may be able to adjust and abide by the new procedural rules and status quo to the point that they can control their students' behavior, those teachers who do not show appropriate classroom management, for instance, will narrow the chances of getting their contracts renewed resulting in added stress (Bartlett, 2013). These policies and processes undermine their effectiveness leading some teachers to shift their focus to classroom management while reducing the emphasis on instructional quality and delivery. "The potential loss of the high-paying position, the debt incurred, and the desire to be reunited with family leave them vulnerable to exploitation" (Bartlett, 2013, p. 77). Attention to these gaps undergirds the lack of cultural proficiency exhibited by many international teachers who are transplants and who struggle to adjust into their new workplace (Bartlett, 2013; Hutchison, 2005). It also underscores the importance of both relationship building skills as a crucial cultural factor for highly effective teaching and professional development to tackle those cultural deficits (Hutchison, 2005; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2015).

In addition to difficulties managing student behavior, immigrant teachers must learn to navigate the new educational system and get a clear understanding of how schools are structured. Hutchison (2005) defines this learning gap as the challenge of “effective cross-cultural teaching” and identifies three overarching categories of challenges: support system issues, knowledge gaps and knowledge shifts. The former involves onboarding programs for immigrant teachers shortly after their arrival. Knowledge gaps encompass the learning of those school’s structural organizations, new curriculums and even instructional methodologies, which may vary depending on teachers’ cultural identity or country of origin. The latter refers to the idea of teachers becoming lifelong learners and getting exposure to professional development to bridge those gaps. Additional literature suggests that other socio-cultural challenges exist among international teachers’ narratives which include conflicts with parents, language barriers, prejudice and discrimination (Biegen, 2018; Lee, 2015). While parent teacher interactions can become hostile due to a lack of a clear understanding of the mainstream culture, international teachers’ foreign accents may be associated with a deficiency or language barrier as the prevailing norm is American Standard English, potentially exacerbating bias and rejection.

Failure of international teachers to adjust timely to this culturally new landscape and to understand the American mainstream culture may have other dire concomitant ramifications besides non-renewal of a contract. Hutchison (2015) uses the term “pedagogical shock” to describe how immigrant teachers view the stark contrast between pedagogical approaches used in their own countries and in the United States. Furthermore, scholars note that international teachers experience considerable cultural shock, frustration, and logistical challenges associated with moving to another country. Cultural shock refers to that feeling of anxiety and confusion that is common in those that move to another country (Segal, 2022). Conversely, Lee (2015)

asserts that school authoritative discourses can place immigrant teachers in a subordinate position. Lee notes that tension or conflict between the immigrant teacher's beliefs and the authoritative discourse results in "cultural dissonance", confusion and rejection from the dominant culture. Relatedly, Wang (2002) introduces the expression "cultural negotiation" to reference the coping skills used by international or immigrant teachers in their new setting. This statement advances the argument that teachers need to negotiate their own cultural and ideological identities. In contrast, immigrant teachers who possessed mainstream cultural awareness because they were married to someone who is American did not struggle and were able to adjust rapidly.

Temporary Worker Status

International teachers' temporary employment status underscores their vulnerability regarding job security. Cabaniss (2014) exposes immigrant teachers' fragility and existing inequalities that result from their guest worker status in a study conducted at a newcomer school in the southeastern United States. Her research included surveys and interviews that provide firsthand insight into the uncertainty, fears and anxiety fueled by the contingent nature of their jobs. "They were structurally vulnerable, had fewer rights and little institutional power. In critical ways, they were not like the native-born teachers" (Cabaniss, 2014, p. 645). In like manner, Bartlett (2013) argues that these widespread unfair labor practices with immigrant teachers do not guarantee fair treatment and equity and may make immigrant teachers prone to exploitation. While these teachers are hired to teach temporarily, their jobs are designed and structured with long term employment benefits. Bartlett concludes that there should be a work visa exclusively designed for immigrant teachers to place them on a citizenship pathway.

Challenges Associated with Recruiters

The AFT (2009) has raised questions and concerns regarding some of the tactics used by international teacher recruiters. In fact, this agency reported that some recruiters resort to misleading practices to attract more international teachers to move to the United States, creating disadvantageous circumstances for applicants. Their deceiving practices involve enticing applicants with false and unrealistic expectations about life in the United States, salaries, tax responsibilities, not sharing how difficult the adjustment process and job assignment can turn out to be and withholding information about their placement (Delinger-Holton, 2012). The AFT argues that part of the underlying issue is linked to the fact that immigrant teachers' recruitment is poorly regulated by the government despite being a highly profitable business for these companies. In fact, one study conducted by the AFT (2009) exposed the unfavorable and inadequate working conditions that some Filipino teachers experienced in Texas after paying 10,000 dollars in fees to come and teach in the United States. Exacerbating these challenges is that immigrant teachers are indirectly employed by a school district, recruitment agencies are ultimately the immigration sponsor and therefore possess the legal right to terminate the work or cultural exchange visa at any given time or at their discretion. Conversely, the Alliance for Ethical International Recruitment Practices (2014) is a non-profit organization that advocates to ensure that all immigrant professionals are employed with transparency and fairness in the United States. In response to increasing concerns regarding unethical and unfair recruitment practices, this agency released The Teacher's Code of Ethical International Recruitment. This code is a partnership effort between different stakeholders, including recruitment corporations, union representatives and school districts. It highlights best practices for the recruitment of international teachers to safeguard their integrity and advocate for their rights.

Supports for Teachers

The preceding sections discussed three predominant strands from the literature: teacher attrition, the portrait of the international teacher and challenges faced by international teachers. This section examining the supports available for teachers will be divided into two subparts. Initially, I will provide an analysis of the different types of professional development available for domestic teachers in the United States. Presented is the rationale grounded in research as to why professional development has gained so much momentum in the field. I also provided an overview of the literature on support programs for novice teachers. Later, the section examines the supports available for immigrant teachers who move to the United States and how these supports could be enhanced to leverage their effects. Note that the word “support” is purposefully used here as international teachers demand supports that are not just exclusively limited to professional development (Kombe, 2016; Nganga, 2011).

Professional Development for Domestic Teachers

Professional development for teachers has garnered significant attention in publications due to the changes in teaching and learning over the past few decades (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Fullan & Gallagher, 2017; Guskey, 2002; Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Hunzicker, 2010). From a historical perspective, Hopkins and Stern (1996) summarize the attempts to improve education in the United States. They note that in the 1960s, heavy focus was placed on the development of curriculum and instructional materials to secure instructional effectiveness, an approach that failed in the 1970s. Later, in the 1980s, the shift was geared towards identifying key measures of successful schools. The 1990s were marked by a continuous search for school improvement practices. On a different note, Adey (2007) also admits that the conservative agenda in the 1970s gave rise to more accountability in the field of education, exerting more pressure on school

districts for effective instruction and higher student achievement outcomes. Hence, professional development practices emerged as one of the focal points and a lever to advance school improvement and school reform (Adey, 2007; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Hopkins, 2015).

The body of theoretical literature affords a tangible understanding of the abundance of terms used in the research to discuss teacher professional development. Glatthorn (1995) uses the term “teacher development” and defines it as “the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically” (p. 41). Rooted in this definition is the notion that the craft of teaching entails self-reflection and continuous learning or education as the case in many other fields such as engineering and medicine because teaching, skills and content knowledge evolve or change. On the other hand, Campbell et al. (2016) use the term “Professional Learning and Development” or PLD. PLD refers to the professional capital from teachers that must be grown and expanded over time. Professional development may include the concepts of growth, mindfulness, and team building, to name a few. Professional learning, on the other hand, refers to learning something new and can be connected to measurable outcomes like teacher effectiveness. Moreover, Campbell et al. (2016) use a Venn Diagram (see Figure 7) to illustrate the interconnection between both professional learning and professional development, placing PLD in the middle of the diagram to convey the idea of mutual interaction and overlapping. Since this is the case for most of the research literature, I will use the terms professional development, teacher training, and professional learning interchangeably throughout this section.

For quite a few decades, the only conceivable approach to professional development was the old-fashioned lecture workshop or short-term course in which educators learn about a certain topic or be given new information. This method became obsolete and there was a radical shift in

the professional development paradigm when training for teachers became reframed as a long-term endeavor to foster growth and development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Walling & Lewis, 2000) becoming the norm today.

A compilation of the most prevalent characteristics found in these contemporary professional learning methods for teachers include the fact that professional development is informed by constructivist approaches in which teachers are viewed as active and lifelong learners who teach, observe and reflect on their teaching (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1994). Furthermore, best practices for professional development are those that presuppose a long-term continuous process with consistent follow-up sessions (Ganser, 2000; Schifter et al., 2016), which take place on campus and revolve around teachers' professional duties and responsibilities (Anness & Ort Wichterle, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Moreover, best practices presuppose that teachers assume the role of reflector as they grow into a stronger and more effective educator while gaining experience and being exposed to new content knowledge (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1994). Relatedly, Hunzicker (2010) stresses the importance of infusing adult-learning strategies to better engage teachers and make the content relevant to their needs. "Once support for teacher commitment and intrinsic motivation is established, effective professional development engages teachers in learning opportunities that are job-embedded, instructionally-focused, collaborative, and ongoing" (Hunzicker, 2010, p. 4).

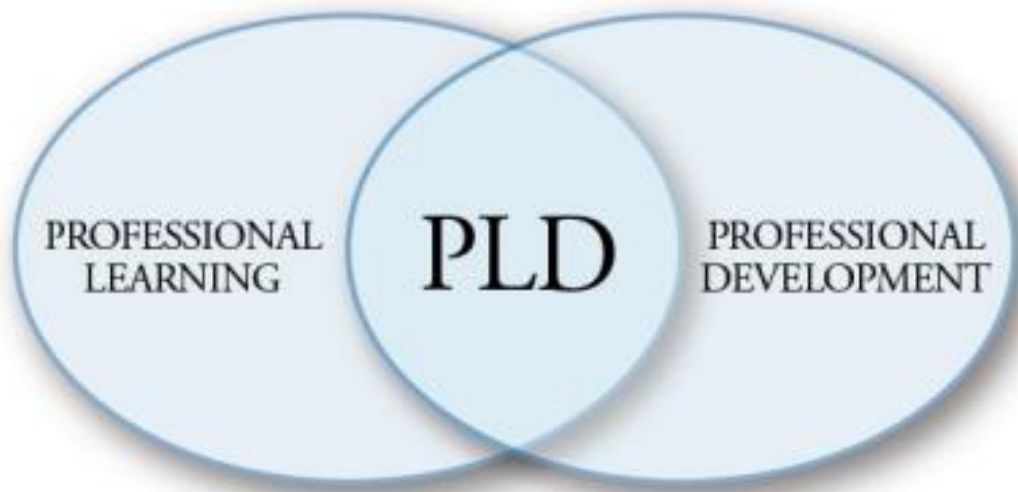


Figure 7. Professional learning and development (PLD).

Other high-yield levers delineated by the research include an emphasis on the significance of collaboration among teachers, administrators and support staff (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, are one of the frameworks for professional development most often used, which completely depend on collaboration, and has significantly increased in popularity over the past 20 years. The term professional learning community was initially coined by scholars in the 1960s though research started to gain traction in the 1990s (Solution Tree, n.d.). Finally, the turning point came in 1998 with the publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*, causing this framework to leap in popularity in the United States (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The authors, DuFour and Eaker, reconceptualize professional learning for educators, bringing a concrete shift towards adult learning, authentic reflective teaching and data-driven instruction focus. While professional learning communities focus on collaboration and collective work among educators, the goal of professional learning communities is deeply grounded on increasing student achievement and instructional effectiveness (Solution Tree, n.d.).

Professional Development for Beginning Teachers

The advantages of having systems of support in place for beginning teachers are broadly agreed upon by academic practitioners (Davis & Higdon, 2008; Hobson et al., 2009). On the one hand, comprehensive support systems for new teachers are vital since they have been shown to be crucial as a strong predictor of lower teacher attrition rates. They are also associated as a significant predictor of lower teacher attrition rates (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In other words, improved beginning teacher retention rates may be attributed to the initial support they receive. Besides helping reduce teacher turnover and attrition rates, induction programs for beginning

teachers may contribute to improved teachers' performance in the classroom and may eventually help school districts save money (Lambeth, 2012). Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) distinguish between low intensity support strategies and high intensity support strategies. The former is less costly and is comprised of new teacher orientation, pairing an experienced teacher with a novice one for mentorship purposes, changing employment conditions (for instance, class size) and collaborative structures. Conversely, high intensity support strategies tend to be more expensive. They consist of one-on-one coaching with a trained mentor and onboarding time for novice teachers to attend professional development, meet with their own coaches and observe seasoned teachers.

Although induction programs for beginning teachers may vary depending on the state, most of them are usually managed by school districts. Thus, school districts with larger funding sources may find it possible to commit to more sustainable and higher quality mentoring programs. North Carolina State Board of Education Law, for instance, regulates a mandatory three-year induction program for beginning teachers (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2021). In fact, the NCDPI (2022) offers guidance to school districts through their regional "facilitators" on the implementation of the beginning teacher induction programs and specific trainings for mentors. Once beginning teachers fulfill this three-year requirement, they receive a clear teaching license. This North Carolina state agency also offers a wide array of support services for novice teachers such as beginning teacher newsletters and beginning teacher orientation policy modules through an online platform. Relatedly, the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (2022) is a collaborative from the University of North Carolina General Administration and several campuses from the University of North Carolina System

designed to provide coaching to beginning teachers. This partnership is part of the Race to the Top efforts taken in North Carolina to improve the retention of beginning teachers.

Support for International Teachers

In agreement with studies on professional development for native-born teachers, scholars concur on the high leverage benefits of professional development support for transnational teachers (Dunn, 2011; Gibson, 2009; Kombe, 2016; Oriaro, 2007). These supports systems or structures play a crucial role, since researchers debunk the idea of transferability of instructional effectiveness when moving from one country to the other as presented earlier. While researchers highlight the mounting evidence regarding the advantages of these supports, they also acknowledge the absence of authentic supports, such as professional development and emotional support, for foreign-born teachers to alleviate some of the aforementioned challenges that they experience upon arriving in the United States (Bartlett, 2013; Beck, 2010). The following explores some of the limited supports that cross-cultural teachers receive after moving to the United States. Additionally, an examination of some of the common threads found in the research that relate to best practices for international teacher support will be presented.

Some studies provide an insight into the orientations teachers receive when arriving in the United States. Overall, they may vary significantly depending on the area where the newly arrived teacher relocates (AFT, 2009). Beck (2010) carried out research on Afro-Caribbean teachers who work in urban schools. The underlying theme that emerges from the teachers' interviews presented in the research speaks to the deficiencies of the orientations received by teachers. These onboarding sessions are short in nature and do not provide teachers with critical relevant takeaways that could be used in the classroom. Connectedly, Kombe (2016) distinguishes orientations from induction and describes the former as those sessions that are

organized by the recruitment company, usually held at a hotel averaging between one to three or four days, revolving largely around school district's policies and completing paperwork such as tax forms, bank accounts, and teaching license applications. While teacher survey data offered by this research shows divergent opinions regarding the quality of orientations, teachers in Kombe's study recognize the discrepancies or disconnect between the information presented in the sessions and what teachers experienced later in the classrooms. Kombe finally notes that these conclusions had been previously corroborated by other studies such as Waite (2009). Coincidentally, Bala's (2021) study validates poor quality as a recurring trend in these orientations, emphasizing an absence of pre-departure orientations for teachers and lack of consistent support meetings between local advisors and their assigned international teachers.

Orientations and supports can be revamped to better equip international teachers with authentic tools to ease the hurdles that they encounter upon transitioning to their new setting. In fact, researchers recognize the complexity of the issue and believe that onboarding processes for international teachers should include discussions to promote cross-cultural awareness, conversations around the dynamics of American schools, teacher-student interactions within the classrooms, local culture, classroom management and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ainsworth, 2011; Bartlett, 2013; Lee, 2005; Sethna, 2008; Waite, 2009). This underscores the significance of the culturally rooted nature of the challenges faced by teachers. International teachers should receive access to strategies and support regarding lesson planning, existing pedagogical trends and methods to better serve diverse urban populations (Bartlett, 2013; Kombe, 2016; Waite, 2009).

Furthermore, the existing research literature on international teachers highlights the need to address other aspects for support purposes. It is crucial to offer pre-arrival induction sessions

and follow-up courses upon arrival (Bala, 2021; Beck, 2010), which undergirds the cultural knowledge gaps that international teachers may have. International teachers should be exposed to differentiated targeted induction content (Kombe, 2016) as induction courses for American teachers do not meet international teachers' needs. They should also receive opportunities for yearlong mentoring programs facilitated by experienced teachers whose classrooms are used as lab sites for other teachers to observe and to also provide support outside school (AFT, 2009; Beck, 2010; Gibson, 2009; Hutchison, 2006; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kombe, 2016; Lee, 2015). Creating spaces for American teachers to learn about their on-campus international teachers' cultures (Bala, 2021), deepening school administrators' professional preparation so that they become more aware of their international teachers' needs (Kelly, 2014) as well as embracing the international teacher in a supportive and collaborative work environment (Dellinger-Holton, 2012; Schmidt, 2010), may also have a positive impact on emotional wellness. These are additional layers of support that school districts may choose to implement.

The overarching theme that stems from the onboarding literature highlights the importance of having sustainable and continuous scaffolds in place to assist international teachers in navigating the intricate challenges inherent to moving and teaching in a different country.

Summary

This inquiry is grounded on the theory of belongingness and Maslow's basic needs theory. In this this chapter, I analyzed the most prevalent and pertinent strands that I encountered for the existing research on international teachers moving to the United States. They are teacher attrition, the portrait of the immigrant teacher, challenges faced by international teachers, and support for teachers. For each of them, I identified both areas of agreement and disagreement

among researchers, compared and contrasted recurrent themes and perspectives, and further elaborated on each's relevant to this inquiry. As such, a review of the literature confirms that chronic teaching shortages have surged during the last decade due to a combination of multiple factors such as higher accountability, poor working conditions, unattractive salaries, shrinking teacher education program enrollment, and a growing student body. Therefore, school districts have grappled to meet those demands and have resorted to hiring foreign national teachers to fill their vacancies. These teachers are largely hired through recruitment agencies which serve as their sponsor and receive predominantly a J-1 or H-1B visa in some cases. While these teachers may have displayed instructional effectiveness in their home countries, their arrival to the United States is usually marked with challenges that stem from lack of cultural awareness of the American stream culture, culturally-rooted pedagogical gaps, and their temporary employment status. Some of these challenges usually translate into classroom management issues, parent-teacher conflicts, generating anxiety and distress in teachers. On the other hand, this review of literature unveils the cause and effect that limited support, professional development, and cross cultural training have on the success of an international teacher.

Contrary to what researchers strongly recommend, most of the immigrant teachers that move to teach in the United States do not receive sustainable long-term professional development to build cultural proficiency and professional capacity and be able to successfully adjust and transition into their new setting. Finally, even though researchers acknowledge the importance of emotional support for international teachers to be able to overcome all these hurdles, studies do not offer, postulate, or test any specific framework to provide emotional support to teachers to offset and alleviate those challenges. This inquiry aims to address this problem of practice by developing a framework to tackle emotional transitional challenges faced

by foreign teachers that move to teach in the United States. Chapter 3 will explore the research methods on which this inquiry will be grounded.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

International teachers face numerous challenges upon moving to the United States that stem from having to adjust to an entirely new cultural setting and workplace. These challenges have been previously documented by the existing body of research. In contrast to other studies, this improvement-based inquiry intends to solve this problem of practice by examining a set of interventions to lessen these challenges. Therefore, it seeks to fill a gap in the research and create a purpose-built framework to alleviate challenges. In this section, I will explore the overarching methods used to investigate this focus of practice.

Inquiry Guiding Questions

This inquiry is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the challenges that international teachers face upon moving to the United States?
2. How does emotional support affect transitioning challenges for international teachers?
3. How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner?

The purpose of the first question is to find out if the inquiry participants' challenges mirror those challenges captured by the existing research literature and described in detail in Chapter 2. Question number 2 is at the core of this research as its primary goal is to measure the effectiveness of the improvement measures and to determine if emotional support can in fact lessen international teachers' challenges. Question number 3 measures the impact of the dissertation journey on the leadership development.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

The goal of this inquiry is to determine the impact of a specific set of interventions to alleviate the pernicious effects associated with the challenges faced by international teachers when they move to work in the United States. The architecture of this inquiry is defined by collaborative improvement science (Langley et al., 2009). The collaborative nature of this work becomes self-evident when considering the participation of the inquiry partners. As a scholarly practitioner, I strategically gathered a network of highly qualified and dedicated inquiry partners with whom I collaborated closely to examine the effects of the intervention on the problem of practice about international teachers. Figures 8 shows the timeline for this inquiry.

This inquiry is also methodologically framed in improvement science. In other words, once the problem of practice was identified, efforts revolved around targeting changes to rectify the problems, testing the effectiveness of changes, and adopting those changes that were deemed to generate improvement (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). On a more specific note, it employs the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model for improvement cycle (see Figure 9). The Plan-Do-Study-Act model was conceived by Langley et al. (2009) as a measure for improvement that provides a framework for developing, testing, and implementing changes leading to improvement. It is based on scientific methods and enables practitioners to test out changes on a small scale, building on the learning from these test cycles in a structured way before wholesale implementation. It is an effective tool for learning from ideas that do and do not work (Cleary, 1995). It can include several inquiry cycles. According to Perry et al. (2020), the PDSA model intends to find answers to the 3 following questions:

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will I know that change is an improvement?

Research Timeline

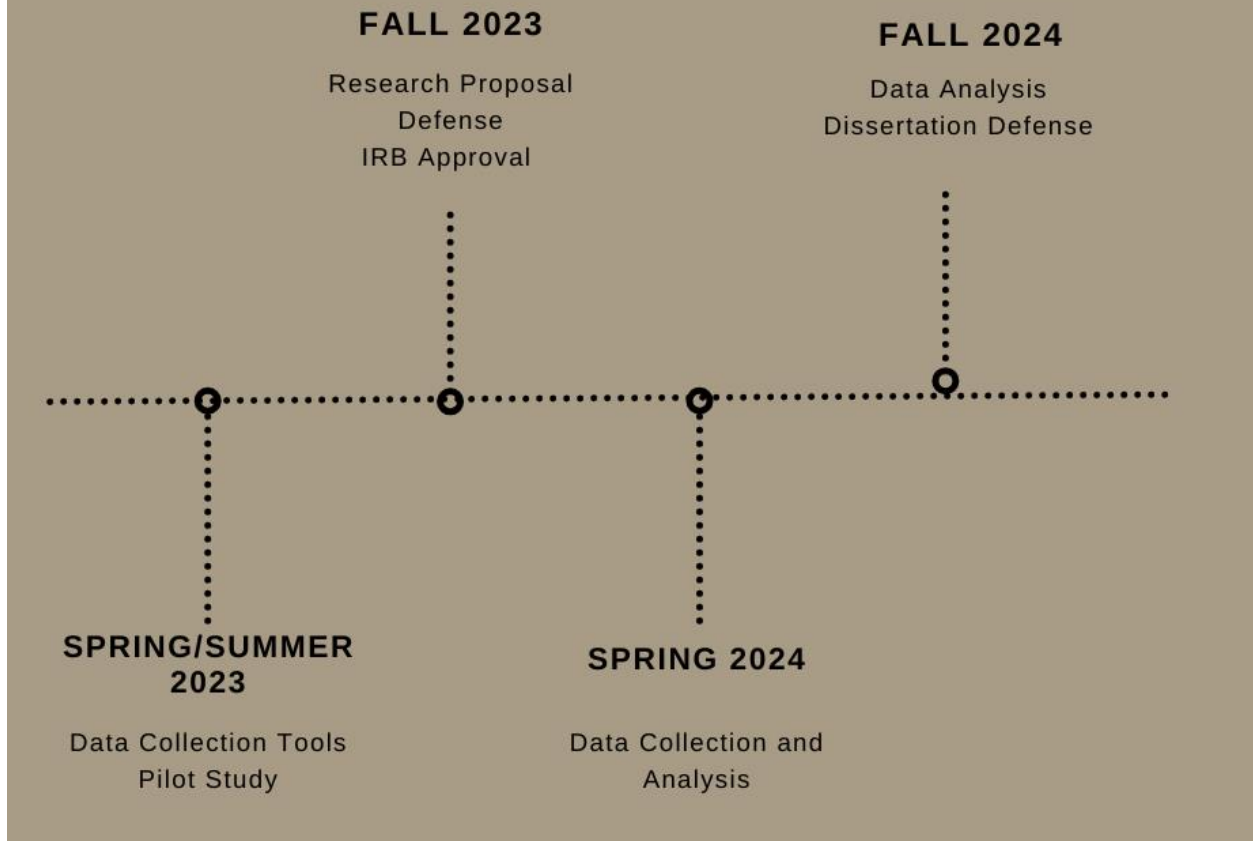


Figure 8. Improvement-based inquiry timeline.

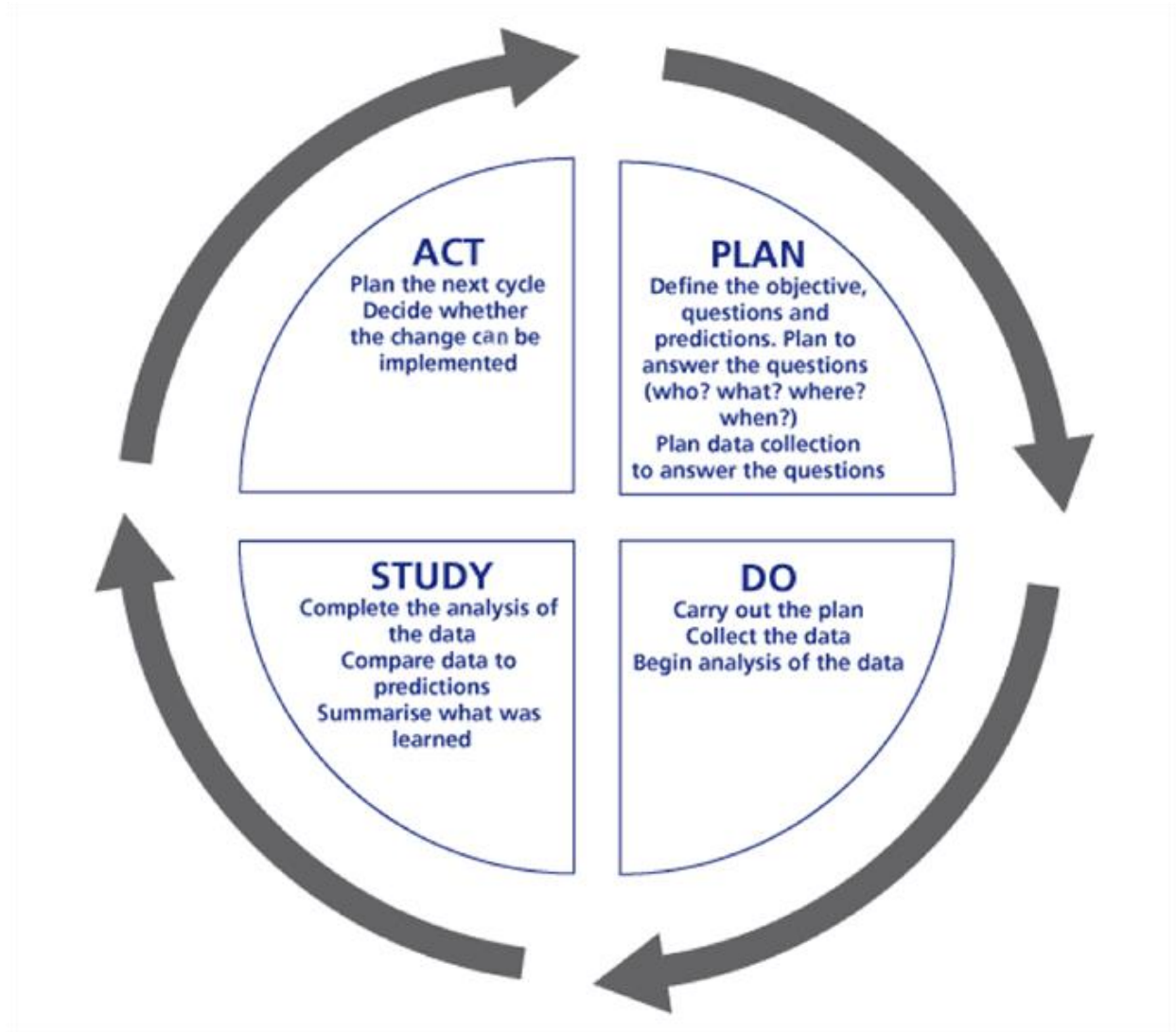


Figure 9. PDSA cycle.

3. What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

Later in the chapter, I will give detailed information on how each phase from each cycle of the PDSA model will be carried out in practice for my dissertation.

Additionally, this inquiry will be designed with explanatory sequential mixed methods. Explanatory mixed methods involve the use of quantitative data during the inquiry onset, which will subsequently inform the use of qualitative data later in the inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In other words, once quantitative data is collected and later analyzed, there will be an improvement intervention in place, which will be assessed with qualitative tools (see Figure 10). This mixed method approach is advantageous from an empirical standpoint as it provides access to more comprehensive results (Roberts, 2019). Furthermore, the combination and integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a better understanding of the problem of practice than either approach alone (Creswell, 2002).

Context of the Inquiry

The context of this inquiry is Sunshine County Schools located in central North Carolina, serving nearly 70,000 K-12 students. Demographic data shows that there are 0.31% American Indian, 6.75% Asian, 41.97% Black, 18.15% Hispanic, 5.16% Multi-Racial, 0.15% Pacific Islander, and 27.53% White students. As noted earlier, the school district includes 126 schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Human resources data shows that the school district employs approximately 5,000 teachers. The public data dashboards indicate that 49% of the teachers are teachers of color while 51% are White.

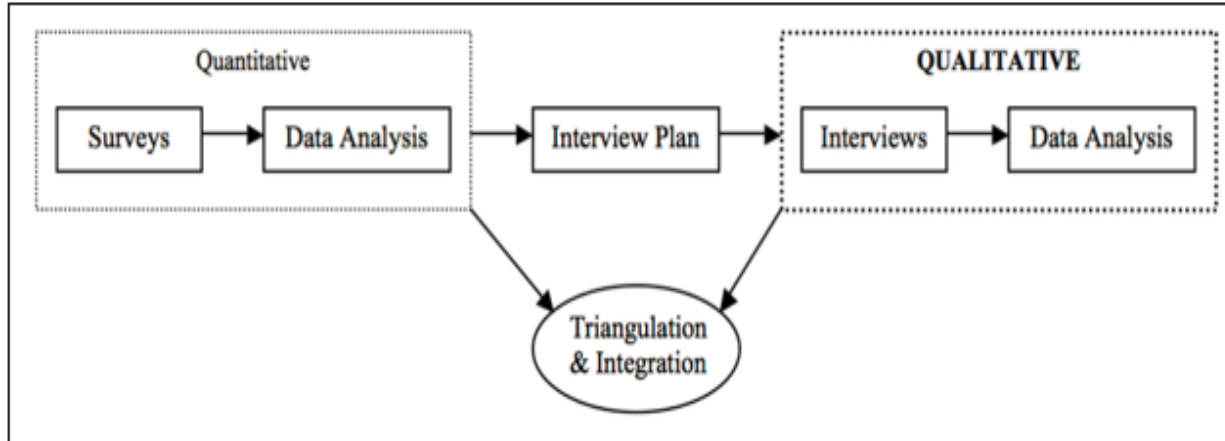


Figure 10. Sequential explanatory mixed methods approach.

Inquiry Partners

To reduce the impact of teacher shortages, Sunshine Public Schools has heavily relied on the employment of international teachers. This becomes evident when analyzing the budget and staffing data. Annual expenditures allocated to hire international teachers have been on the rise. Furthermore, as indicated above, in 2005, the school district was the state agency with the largest number of international teachers in their staff. Today Sunshine Public Schools has 139 international teachers, which represents 2.8% of their instructional workforce.

Doing improvement-based research entails working collaboratively with a group of inquiry partners to carry out the inquiry. As previously indicated, my inquiry partners consisted of a social worker, an ESL teacher coach, and an ESL teacher. All these individuals had a long-proven record of working with multicultural populations and exhibited the passion and determination necessary to overcome any upcoming challenge or obstacle. Their participation in the inquiry was documented through minutes from meetings or by recording their names when holding interviews or carrying out surveys. My inquiry partners were instrumental in carrying out this inquiry (see Table 1).

Ethical Considerations

To comply with pre-approval requirements from the school district, I submitted an application to Sunshine Public Schools' Research Review Committee to seek formal authorization to conduct research in the district. These are standard protocols in place for school districts to ensure that the research that is being carried out at their sites follows legal, ethical, and quality guidelines. Furthermore, I complied with the East Carolina University (ECU)'s requirements for Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative or CITI Training modules for this dissertation in practice. In the case of educational research, CITI modules are specifically

Table 1

Inquiry Partners' Roles by Phase of Inquiry

Role/Title of Inquiry Partner	Role in the Inquiry	Phase of Involvement
Social Worker	• Assistance with developing research tools and conducting pilot study • Contributor for pilot study data analysis • Assistance with inquiry intervention implementation and post-interventions exit survey data analysis	Phases I, II, & III
Curriculum Coach	• Assistance with developing research tools and conducting pilot study • Contributor for pilot study data analysis • Assistance with inquiry intervention implementation and post-interventions exit survey data analysis	Phases I, II & III
El Teacher	• Assistance with developing research tools and conducting pilot study • Contributor for pilot study data analysis • Assistance with inquiry intervention implementation and post-interventions exit survey data analysis	Phases I, II & III

designed for investigators conducting social and behavioral studies. They provide critical skills for scholarly practitioners regarding human resource protections which are mandated training for researchers by East Carolina University following health and human services guidelines.

Furthermore, these ethical protocols and guidelines are also part of the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) application process, which aligns with the Code of Federal regulations to be able to start conducting human subject research (see Appendix A).

The following principles guided the research design and practice of this inquiry and were explicitly brought to participants' attention prior to becoming part of the inquiry:

1. Voluntary participation: as noted earlier, participants invited for this inquiry had to meet the definition of first year international teachers and voluntarily agreed to be part of it, being aware that they could opt out of it at any given time. They had a personal stake and passion and felt strongly about the topic of inquiry and the improvement outcome.
2. Informed consent: participants knew the purpose, benefits, and risks behind the inquiry before they agreed or declined to join and signed the informed consent form to document that they were voluntarily agreeing to participate. See Appendix B for the informed consent form.
3. Confidentiality: participants' identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were also utilized. Personal identifiable information was not included in the inquiry. No information that could reveal participants' identities was included in this inquiry. Moreover, participants were fully aware of these procedures in place to safeguard their identities and integrity. Research data was securely stored in ECU's Microsoft cloud and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Inquiry Procedures

Phase I

Plan

Phase 1 started in the late spring and early summer of 2023. The overarching focal question for Phase I revolved around the challenges that international teachers face upon moving to the United States. Each phase was guided by a plan, do, study, and act cycle of inquiry. This pragmatic method of inquiry in improvement research results in the most convenient option for my dissertation of practice as it represents a problem-solving model to improve a process or carry out a change. Each phase was carefully planned in collaboration with my team of inquiry partners.

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

The population group is defined as the group designated to receive the improvement intervention in the inquiry (Roberts, 2019). The target population for this inquiry includes international teachers. As described previously, international teachers are those that come to teach to the United States on J-1 visa or H1-B visa. According to Creswell (2002) sampling is defined as the target population subgroup that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population. A convenient sample of international teachers was used for participation in surveys and interviews. As a scholarly practitioner, this nonprobability or nonrandom sampling method was the most convenient method to access as it entails using individuals who are available and willing to be part of this inquiry (Etikan et al., 2016). After identifying inquiry participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in this inquiry and after getting their signed informed consent forms back, I was ready to start carrying out the research in the field.

Instrumentation

I started by strategically planning and designing the survey questions with assistance from my inquiry partners. The purpose of the survey was to gather baseline quantitative data. Additionally, at these preliminary stages, the survey was supposed to inform about the challenges faced by international teachers upon arriving in the United States. As noted earlier, the data for this improvement-based inquiry was collected with two instruments. Initially, online surveys were given to participants to gather quantitative data used to establish a baseline (Appendix C). Surveys were delivered and data was subsequently collected using the Qualtrics software to ensure confidentiality and accuracy in the data collection process. Qualtrics is a survey tool that helps scholarly practitioners and researchers build and distribute surveys, view reports and tabulate and analyze participants' responses. Participants were reminded with follow-up communication regarding the fact that surveys had been sent via email. Survey data collection lasted 3 weeks and was completed by February 2024.

The data gathered through the surveys was securely stored in a password-protected Microsoft One Drive cloud service from East Carolina University. Furthermore, the survey included a cover letter explaining the purpose of it and reminding participants of confidentiality measures in place with clear directions for them to complete it. The survey asked participants questions regarding their demographics, years of professional experience in the field, and attitudes or opinions about teaching in the United States or the challenges associated with it. Moreover, questions were purposefully crafted leaving ambiguities aside, avoiding the use of double-negatives, leading and double-barred questions. On a more specific note, I used both Likert-Scales questions and open-ended questions. One of the most often used methods for survey data gathering, Likert-Scales questions are understandable, replies are easily measurable,

and the data can be readily compared to that from open-ended questions (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014).

Do

Both surveys and interview questions were validated before using them in the field with inquiry participants through a pilot study. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the instruments to ensure that both surveys and interview questions would provide the data necessary to conduct this inquiry (Roberts, 2019).

Once I had met with the inquiry partners to discuss and proof-read the survey and interview questions, it was time to distribute them to the pilot study participants. Pilot study participants had been selected randomly and were second- and third-year international teachers who had voluntarily agreed to participate. One of them was from Spain, another teacher was from the Philippines and the other one was from Colombia. From a gender perspective, two teachers identified as female and the other as male.

Pilot study participants could officially start working on the project once they received an email with an attachment containing the survey and interview questions in addition to clear directions regarding their tasks. They also received a graph that illustrated the inquiry timeline with the different inquiry phases. It was also brought to their attention that the purpose of the initial survey was to gather data to answer the first inquiry guiding question while the interview questions were to assess the effectiveness of the interventions implemented. For instance, they could report back on the clarity of the instruments' instructions and whether questions could be repetitive or confusing. They were also aware that questions should be relevant to the study goals and purpose. Furthermore, piloting the instrument also entailed the possibility of checking on the use of correct grammar, spelling and assessing the length of the survey and interview.

Study

After the pilot test was completed, participants came back with valuable and constructive feedback and revisions were made to the inquiry instruments. Overall, the comments and recommendations received from the pilot study allowed inquiry partners and I to be able to refine the instruments, enhancing inclusiveness, more accuracy in question formation and more specificity when it came to word choice. For instance, an initial statement that required participants to identify their sex was reworded so that prospective study participants could select the gender with which they identify, adding words such as neutral or non-binary. On the other hand, based on the input from pilot study participants, some Likert-scale questions were too vague or general and needed to include a more specific array of selections, which entailed producing a new set of categories from which study participants would have to choose. In like manner, one interview question was deemed redundant and had to be removed because it essentially asked the same thing as another question even though it was phrased differently. As a result of extensive discussion with inquiry partners the recommendations resulted in clearer, more reliable tools for data collection. The pilot study completion and the adoption of the recommendations sent by participants indicated that the optimal data collection instruments had been successfully crafted and that they were ready for use with study participants in the field. Once the selected measurement tools were piloted, the next step was to seek official district approval to be able to start the data collection and intervention implementation in the field. To obtain district approval, I compiled and submitted several documents to fulfil the school system's internal Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. Simultaneously, I also worked on the IRB submission to seek university approval to conduct research. After the school district and the university granted the research approval and after defending my research proposal in front of the

committee, I was officially cleared to start the research. As previously stated, the method employed for this inquiry is an explanatory sequential mixed method because it relies on the collection of quantitative data at the onset of the study, an intervention implementation phase, and final qualitative data collection to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. As previously indicated, the data collection process was framed in the PDSA model and consisted of 3 different phases.

Act

Once instruments were field tested and study participants completed the survey, I met with my inquiry partners several times to work on data analysis. I relied on some of the embedded Qualtrics features to organize and tabulate the quantitative data gathered from the surveys and to create graphs and tables. SPSS and JMP available through ECU were statistical analysis software used for analytical reporting and graphing purposes. The survey data analysis was completed by the end of winter 2024 and informed the design of the improvement interventions that would be implemented in Phase 2.

Summary of Phase I

Phase I consisted of the pilot study and initial gathering of quantitative baseline data through a survey of international teachers. The purpose of the survey was to determine the most significant challenges faced by international teachers upon moving to the United States. Research instruments (survey and interview questions) were piloted with a small group of international teachers to assess the instruments' validity and reliability. Finally, quantitative survey data was analyzed with assistance from inquiry partners. Overall, Phase I proved to be crucial to gather the quantitative foundational data and was used to craft the interventions designed for this improvement-based inquiry in Phase II.

Phase II

Phase II began after I met with my inquiry partners to design the interventions and implementation plan. Phase II was directly linked to both planning and rolling out the interventions to provide emotional supports for international teachers to navigate transitional challenges when moving to the United States.

Plan

In collaboration with my team of inquiry partners, we developed improvement interventions based on survey data analysis and recurring themes identified from pilot responses. As stated earlier, this dissertation of practice is deeply framed by improvement science. Therefore, one of the purposes of this study is to implement a set of small, measurable, and individualized changes (interventions) while focusing on continuous inquiry and learning. The interventions selected to mitigate the emotional challenges faced by international teachers are the daily Discussion Board Question of the Day and monthly restaurant outings. The former is a question pushed out via a Discussion Board every day to international teachers. The primary purpose of the Question of the Day is to build culture and support among teachers in their new setting by learning from each other. In fact, it can help to highlight what the group shares, what each person values and motivates them. Furthermore, this represents a safe space for them to develop fellowship among themselves and to ease the uprooting process. While teachers respond to the daily question of the day, they can also learn about each other by reading other participants' responses. This can generate an interactive and lively "back and forth" among teachers. In like manner, monthly restaurant outings help international teachers advance community, establish a new network, and improve the uprooting experience. Eating with others represents a research-proven strategy that increases feelings of satisfaction with life. Dunbar

(2017) suggests that social eating increases social bonding and feelings of well-being and enhances one's sense of contentedness and embedding within the community. Similarly, Purnell (2021) argues that food enables people to look past their differences and focus on their similarities, thus creating a stronger sense of community via the sharing of a meal. In the same line of thought, Katz (2012) depicts eating together as a space inherent to human beings to engage in spiritual levels.

Notably, the nature of both changes and interventions selected to bring improvement captures the essence of the theoretical framework of this study. In other words, they foster belongingness and Maslow's basic needs, which are crucial ingredients for international teachers' successful transition into their lives in the United States. They are the foundational stepping stones for building a solid circle of relationships and therefore generating belongingness.

However, during the pilot phase, the focus of the discussions with inquiry partners was the duration of implementation and frequency of time for each intervention. Questions from the Question of the Day may range from personal ones regarding hobbies, best childhood memories or plans for the weekend to more professional-related ones such as for instance, best practices in the classroom or best teachable moments. On the other hand, restaurant outing locations would be chosen out of consensus from teachers by sending an online form with 4 potential locations and choosing the restaurant with the highest votes.

Do

Both the Question of the Day and the monthly restaurant outings were carried out for five weeks. Teachers had 24 hours to read and answer the Question of the Day and read other teachers' entries. While the Padlet Question of the Day was pushed out to teachers daily, the

restaurant outings occurred at the beginning of each month. Figure 11 shows the inquiry instruments and interventions implemented depending on the phase of the inquiry.

Study

Although both interventions were constantly monitored while being implemented, I met with my inquiry partners once implementation was over to analyze the execution. This phase included, for example, the analysis of data regarding Question of the Day respondents' rates, level of engagement, restaurant outing attendance rates, etc.

Act

After meeting with inquiry partners to analyze how interventions phased out, it was determined that no changes were deemed necessary for the interventions since improvement changes had been successfully captured and evaluated.

Summary of Phase II

In short, Phase II involved the design and implementation of both interventions with assistance from inquiry partners. Once interventions were deployed, Phase II also included monitoring and analyzing intervention implementation and adjusting if needed.

Phase III

Phase III was the last phase for our improvement-based inquiry. From a general perspective, the goal of this phase was to determine the impact and effectiveness of the improvement interventions set in place.

Plan

I met with my inquiry partners to discuss the execution of the outcome data collection stage. The idea was to collect primarily qualitative data through personal interviews with each study participant to determine the effectiveness of both executed improvement interventions. As

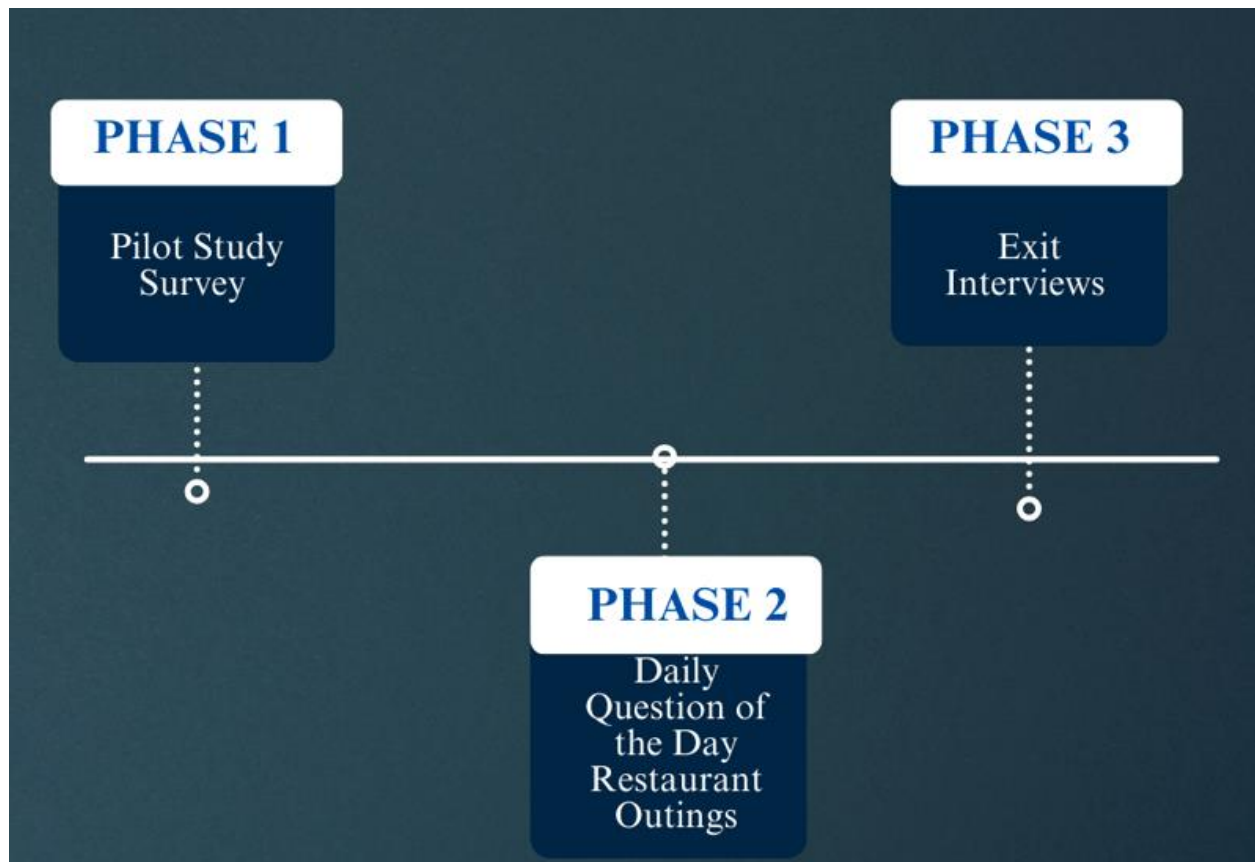


Figure 11. Instruments and interventions by phase.

indicated earlier, questions were piloted to ensure validity and relevance.

Interview questions were constructed to elicit qualitative information regarding the intervention effectiveness to mitigate the challenges faced by international teachers (see Appendix D). They were the result of thoughtful, careful, and collaborative work that I assumed as a scholarly practitioner with the assistance of my inquiry partners to delve deeply into the efficacy of the interventions.

Do

The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Moreover, they were recorded and transcribed using the transcription tool from Microsoft Teams. Interviews were semi-structured in nature in the sense that they consisted of open-ended questions and some yes-no questions that had been created prior to the interview but could be formulated in any order with room for follow-up questions as needed. To reduce the risk of bias and enhance objectivity, interviews were conducted by my inquiry partners after receiving the participants' informed consents and voluntary agreements to participate. Documenting the results of interviews and gaining access to their transcriptions for future use were the post-interview tasks.

Study

After carrying out the semi-structured interviews, it was time to analyze the data gathered from the interviews. For that reason, I met with my inquiry partners to analyze the qualitative data. The qualitative data that resulted from the survey was exported to a separate document for coding purposes. The multi-tiered inductive NVivo system used to code the qualitative data acquired from the interviews conducted in this phase combined descriptive/structural, topic/thematic, and analytical approaches. The focal points revolved around both identifying common threads and themes that transpired from study participants' responses and seeking

comparisons. Furthermore, content, thematic, narrative and discourse analysis were other methods used to examine this qualitative data. East Carolina University provided NVivo statistical analysis software for use with unstructured non-numerical data. Other activities from this collaborative team at this stage included comparing findings to those anticipated and gaining new insights.

Act

Once interview data was collected and analyzed, the findings from the study were disseminated to different stakeholders such as human resources personnel and school principals. This stage also included brainstorming ideas regarding recommendations for future research based on the findings from my study. Figure 12 summarizes the PDSA cycle phases of this inquiry.

Summary of Phase III

Phase III was the culminating research stage in which qualitative data was gathered through interviews and later analyzed with assistance from inquiry partners. The purpose of Phase III was to measure the effectiveness of the interventions that had been rolled out in Phase II.

Positionality

Scharp and Thomas (2019) suggest that critical social science researchers need to evaluate and reflect upon their own positions and experiences and if they contribute to their interpretations of people's lived experiences. In their view, it is necessary to understand and acknowledge the scholarly practitioner's positionality to specify the lens utilized for research data and result interpretation. I acknowledge my standpoint as a White Hispanic foreign-born bilingual American. I moved from Argentina to the United States in 2000 to teach English as a

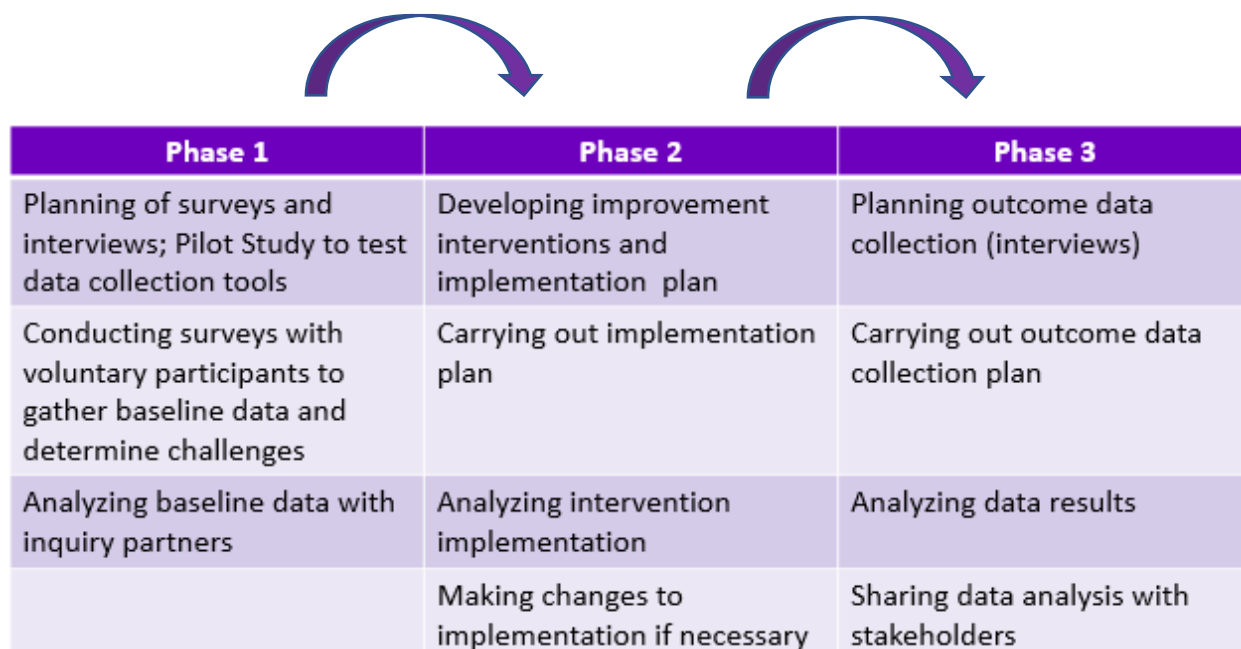


Figure 12. PDSA cycles by phase.

Second Language at a public school in central North Carolina. Initially, I held a J1 Cultural Exchange visa and later, I was able to transition to an H1-B visa to seek permanent residence status. Over the years, I became an expert on second language acquisition and later made the leap to school administration. My background will allow the study participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences and to best express their thoughts and feelings. Finally, I acknowledge that my positionality did not influence this project to any extent. Having been an international teacher myself, I am well versed in the numerous challenges international teachers face and the emotional impacts they face. The data analysis was the result of collaborative work among my inquiry partners and myself, posing no bias risk for the study. Surveys and interviews were conducted by my inquiry partners. Table 2 summarizes the relationship between each research question and the data collection instruments, survey or interview questions and phase of inquiry.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Different preventive measures set in place informed the rigor of this dissertation in practice. Evidence of research rigor is manifested through systems and processes contemplated by the study and that are bias-free or are not confined to just the scholarly practitioners' perspective (Stringer, 2013). Relatedly, Mertler (2019) posits that research rigor is closely related to the trustworthiness of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered and that is characterized by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

To begin with, as indicated before, survey and interview questions were the by-product of the collaborative work between my inquiry partners and myself and had to align and capture the essence of this inquiry's guiding questions. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted for data collection tool validation purposes (Mertler, 2019) and to identify possible issues with questions. Feedback from pilot study participants informed the final design of the data collection

instruments. Another bias deterrent measure in place is related to the fact that both surveys and interviews were carried out by inquiry partners. While the inquiry participants did not work under my supervision on my site, I felt that my professional work as a school principal could potentially affect participants' responses. Therefore, I delegated the task of the survey and interview facilitation to the inquiry partners. Upon surveys and interviews completion, I analyzed and tabulated the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this mixed method approach collaboratively with the assistance of inquiry partners to enhance objectivity and leverage the transparency of the process.

Inquiry design rigor was also guaranteed with the use of the following practices:

1. Cycle repetition: as noted earlier, this inquiry employs the PDSA model, which entails the use of multiple research cycles. The repetition of cycles results advantageous for accuracy purposes as it allows the researcher to gather more data and learn more about the problem of practice (Mertler, 2021).
2. Data triangulation: the mixed method approach used by this study allows the use of multiple data sources. Data triangulation increases the accuracy of the study results (Stringer, 2013).
3. Member checking: study participants reviewed raw data, analysis reports and final analyses stemming from the research work.

Table 2

Matrix of Inquiry Questions, Instruments, Question Number, and Phase

Inquiry Question	Data Collection Instrument	Question Number(s)	Phase of Inquiry Collected
1. What are the challenges that international teachers face upon moving to the United States?	Initial Survey	Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	Phase I
2. How does emotional support affect transitioning challenges for international teachers?	Post-interventions Exit Interviews	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	Phase III
3. How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner?	Scholarly Practitioner Journal	N/A	Phases I, II, III
	Post-Intervention Interview		Phase III

Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions

As with any research study, there are delimitations, limitations and assumptions that emerge from this inquiry. On the one hand, participants in this study were delimited to international teachers who had moved to work in North Carolina. Therefore, only those teachers identified as international teachers that had been hired by two distinct recruitment agencies were part of this study. On the other hand, the focal point of this inquiry is emotional support for international teachers to mitigate their transition challenges. Furthermore, there were no delimitations regarding participants' gender or grade levels taught.

However, the sample size population used for this inquiry (13 international teachers) can potentially represent a study limitation for extrapolation purposes. Time was also another factor identified as a possible limitation within the study as research cycles were rapid in nature.

Finally, it was assumed that moving to the United States to teach represents a challenge for international teachers. Furthermore, other assumptions include that study participants provided honest and truthful responses for both survey and interview questions as they were fully aware of all the systems in place to preserve confidentiality.

Role as a Scholarly Practitioner

I served as a school administrator at Sunshine Public Schools for 3 years. Prior to that, I was a teacher and English Learners teacher coach since 2008 when I arrived in this district. The primary purpose of this study was to develop an effective emotional framework grounded on the theories of belongingness and Maslow's basic needs to ease international teachers' challenges as they transition to their new lives in the United States. As a scholarly practitioner, I led the entire inquiry process by managing my group of inquiry partners and being responsible for organizing, planning, and facilitating meetings and the execution of each of the phases of the PDSA

framework. I used observational notes and anecdotes that I captured in a journal to answer inquiry question number 3. In this way, I could reflect and provide insight into self-awareness. During the data collection phase, I recorded in the journal thoughts and ideas that came to my mind or teachable moments that I experienced. Notably, data collection and analysis procedures and systems implemented gave no room for the data to be skewed due to bias or influence. On the contrary, they represented the safety net to preserve transparency and objectivity throughout the inquiry process. Relatedly, as stated earlier, study participants did not work under my supervision and had volunteered to be part of the inquiry. International teachers selected for this study worked in different schools across the district. This was a strategic and pre-planned measure so that teachers did not feel pressured when responding to the questions and they could speak openly with honesty and without any fear of retaliation.

Summary

Throughout Chapter 3, I presented the research methods employed for this inquiry study. The inquiry questions propelled this study and provided comprehensive information regarding how the PDSA research model is employed through divergent phases and the explanatory mixed methods approach. Furthermore, the inquiry design rigor and my role as scholarly practitioner were presented. Next, Chapter 4 will concentrate on the inquiry results.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The United States has been experiencing a surge in the number of international teachers that relocate to work in American schools. This surge has been generated by high teacher turnover and attrition rates, which increased exponentially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Rosenberg et al., 2021). The results have left school districts grappling with how to fill teaching vacancies. When international teachers relocate to the United States, they typically experience difficulties (AFT, 2009; Bartlett, 2013; Cabaniss, 2014; Dunn, 2011; Hutchison, 2005; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kombe, 2016; Kombe, 2017). A comprehensive framework with highly effective strategies to meet teachers' emotional needs while adjusting to their new setting remains undeveloped and represents a gap in the research literature. Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry was to develop, implement, and critically examine a set of interventions to assist foreign teachers emotionally and better equip them to successfully navigate the challenges associated with the transitions into their new lives in the U.S.

Pilot Study

The early stages of this inquiry prompted the need to conduct a pilot study, which is the standard protocol first step in a research study (Roberts et al., 2019). The purpose of the pilot study was to test the planned data collection tools to be used throughout the inquiry. A pilot study can be defined as a test on a smaller scale of the techniques and protocols to be applied on a bigger scale (Porta, 2008). The objective of the pilot study was to provide information regarding potential changes or modifications to the planned inquiry data collection instrumentation and techniques.

The pilot study was conducted with five second- and third-year international teachers who were selected randomly. Participants in the pilot study were officially introduced to the

project when they received an email with an attachment containing survey and interview questions and clear instructions on how to complete their tasks. They also received a diagram illustrating the inquiry timeline with the different inquiry phases. Furthermore, they were reminded that the survey's purpose was to gather information to help answer the first inquiry question regarding challenges international teachers face in transitioning to the U.S., while the interview questions were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented emotional support interventions. However, participants were also instructed to engage in assigned tasks after school and asked to provide feedback within a week. They reported on the clarity of the instrument's instructions and whether the questions could lead to unnecessary or ambiguous explanations, were repetitive, or were confusing. They were also aware that the questions must be related to the goals and purpose of the research. In addition, the instrument's piloting included checking correct grammatical usage, spelling, and estimating the duration for completion of each of the survey and the interview though pilot study participants were not involved in an actual interview.

At the end of the pilot study, changes were made to the survey instruments based on pilot study participants' feedback. Overall, my inquiry partners and I were able, as a result of the comments and suggestions that stemmed from the pilot study, to refine the instruments, which increased engagement, accuracy of question wording, and more precise wording. For example, the first statement asking participants to identify their gender was reworded to allow potential inquiry participants to choose the gender with which they identify, and words such as neutral or nonbinary were added. Further, based on the input of the pilot study participants, some of the Likert-type scale questions were too vague or general and needed a more specific selection, leading to the generation of new categories from which to select. Likewise, one interview

question was removed when it was determined to be redundant. These changes were implemented after a long discussion with inquiry partners about the recommendations received with a focus on how these changes would lead to clearer and more reliable data collected.

Inquiry Guiding Questions

The results of the analysis of all the data gathered for the inquiry are presented in the order of the following inquiry questions:

1. What are the challenges that international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools face upon moving to the United States?
2. How do emotional support interventions affect transitioning challenges from international teachers?
3. How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner?

Demographics

The participants in the inquiry consisted of 13 international teachers who taught different subjects and grade levels (see Table 3). From a gender perspective, seven teachers were male and six were female. Of those 13 teachers, seven were high school teachers, five were elementary and there was one who worked at the middle school level (see Figure 13). Regarding their subject and content placements, eight participants taught English as a second language, three taught math, and two taught Spanish.

These teacher participants met the definition of international teachers as they had moved to teach in the United States on a J1 or H1-B visa and had been hired by two recruitment agencies, TPO and Worldly Consultants. One teacher was from Ghana, five from Colombia, one

from Honduras, one from Macedonia, one from Argentina, one from Spain, one from Philippines, one from Costa Rica and one from Jamaica (see Figure 14). While one of the teachers was about to complete his first year teaching in the United States, the rest of the inquiry participants had been teaching in the United States for an average of 2.5 years, with the exception of two teachers who already had international teaching experience as they had taught before in the United States. In contrast, with reference to their overall experience as educators, two teachers had 1-5 years of teaching experience, two had 5-10, five teachers had 10-15 years of teaching experience, and one had over 20 years (see Figure 15).

Implementation and Data Collection

Once I obtained IRB approval from East Carolina University and from Sunshine Public Schools, I was officially cleared to implement the inquiry, including data collection in the field. The initial stage of Phase I consisted of recruiting international teachers to participate in the inquiry. For this purpose, I created a recruitment email, which introduced the purpose of the inquiry and provided international teachers with an overview of background information regarding timeframes and what this commitment entailed (see Appendix D). This email also emphasized key points such as the fact that participation was voluntary, along with the measures implemented to safeguard and protect participants' confidentiality with the use of minimal identifiable information, and a timeline of activities, which determined participants' engagement. Attached to the email was the consent form, which teachers were asked to sign and return once they agreed to participate in the inquiry. Beyond the recruitment email, the consent form provided more in-depth information about the inquiry. Beside the signature line of the consent form, participants had to select a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. Teachers had five days to complete and return the consent form indicating their agreement to participate in the inquiry.

Table 3

Demographics of International Teachers that Participated in the Inquiry

Participant's Alias	Sex	Subject	Country of Origin	Teaching Experience	Years in the U.S.
Jim Reeves	M	HS Math and Algebra	Ghana	15	3
Pollux	M	Elementary ESL	Colombia	14	2
Jay P.	M	High School ESL	Honduras	8	3
Irazu	F	Elementary ESL	Costa Rica	10	3
Olivia Green	F	Elementary ESL	Macedonia	7	3
Sebastian Hernandez	M	High School ESL	Colombia	21	3.5
David One	M	Elementary ESL	Colombia	10	2
Mr. Nebolous	M	Middle School ESL	Argentina	15	1
Dani	F	Elementary ESL	Colombia	14	1.5
David Two	M	High School Spanish	Spain	16	3
Lisa	F	High School Math	Jamaica	20	3
Hedwig	F	High School Statistics	Philippines	21	2
Nikita	F	High School Spanish	Colombia	30	8 (2 terms)

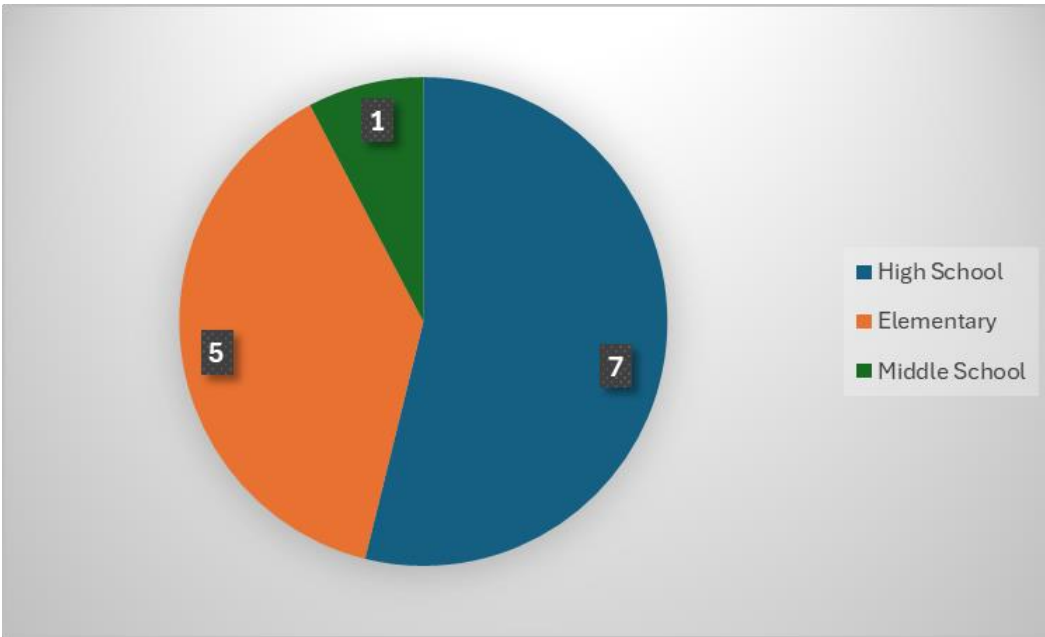


Figure 13. Number of teacher participants by grade span.

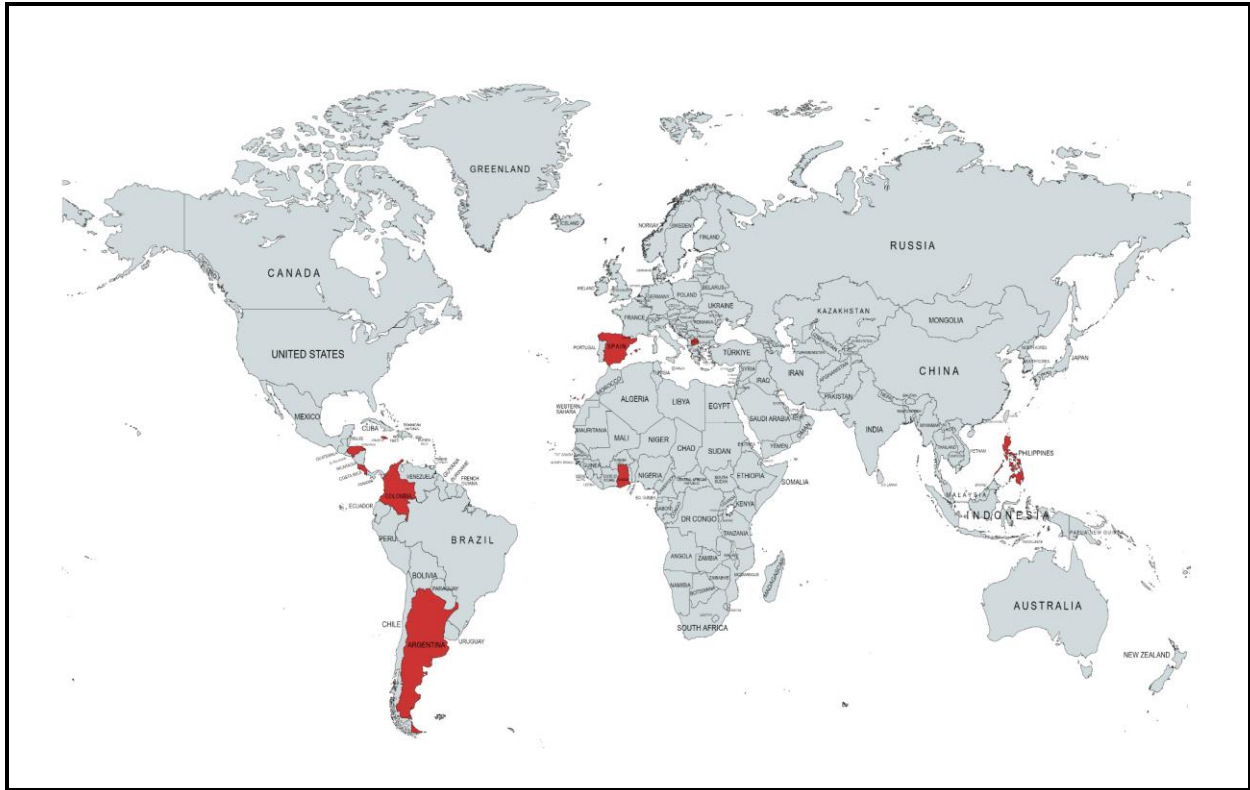


Figure 14. Countries represented by inquiry participants.

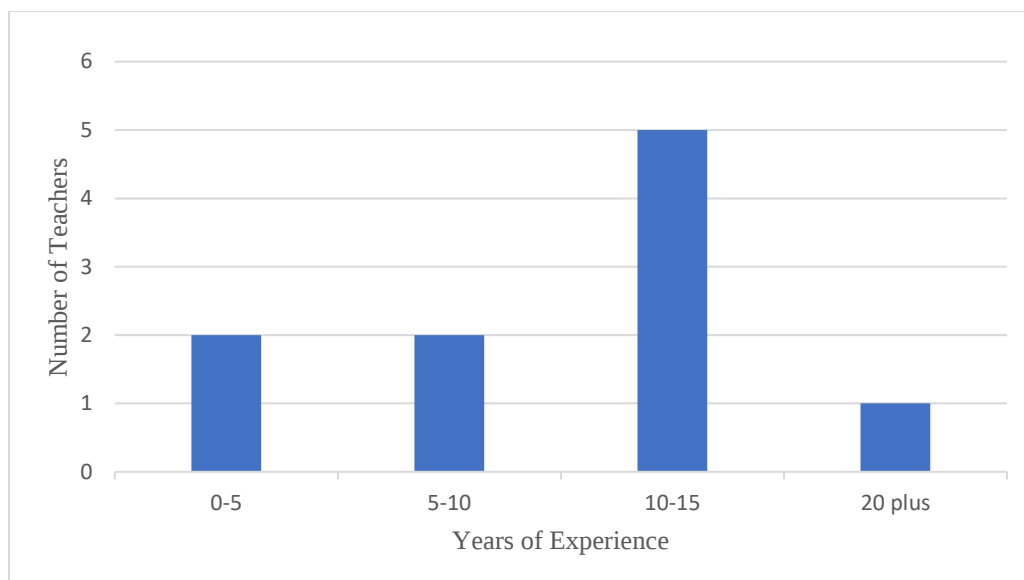


Figure 15. Participant teachers' overall teaching experience.

The recruitment process demanded reaching out to my professional network, including fellow principals, district leaders, and international teachers that had previously worked under my supervision, to ask them for recommendations of names of international teachers that I could invite to participate in the inquiry. In order to reduce to reduce the risk of bias, the district's guidelines explicitly prohibit research from being conducted using staff members under their supervision for research purposes. The district's guidelines did, however, provide me with the opportunity to be able to recruit an array of diverse international teachers from various parts of the world who taught different grade levels and subjects throughout the district. While 14 international teachers were contacted, with all 14 submitting their consent forms, only 13 teachers actively participated in the inquiry.

The final step of Phase I was to share the first task with inquiry participants. International teachers received an email with a link to a Qualtrics survey. Notably, as mentioned earlier, this quantitative data collection tool had been field tested and reviewed earlier to enhance its effectiveness. As stated in Chapter 3, the primary purpose of the survey was to identify the most significant challenges faced by international teachers upon moving to the U.S. The email included considerations regarding the amount of time that would be needed to complete the survey and the date by when it should be completed. Teachers had up to five days to complete it and were also required to enter their pseudonym for tracking purposes. During Phase I, I was also collecting data with my journal to reflect on the experiences of this inquiry journey.

Phase II came next and involved rolling out two improvement-based interventions: the Question of the Day (QOTD) and two restaurant outings. As outlined in Chapter 3, the Question of the Day is structured to foster positive culture and propel a community of support among teachers in their new surroundings by learning from each other. For example, it can help to

highlight commonalities among group members, what each person values and motivates them. Several questions from The Question of the Day exercise were intentionally crafted to elicit insights into challenges or struggles that international teachers were encountering. For example, Question of the Day 4, titled “Balance so Far” read: Moving to another country is a major undertaking and we have all been through it. What is it that remains a challenge when it comes to adjusting to a new country? What have been some gains? In like manner, Question of the Day 8 invited participants to reflect on the adjustment process with the following prompt: Moving to a new country to teach entails learning an entire new educational system and cultural norms. What has been the most difficult aspect of this adjustment in your case? Similarly, Question of the Day 11’s title was Wishful Thinking and probed teachers to think about circumstances and factors that would positively change or improve their experience as an international teacher here.

Additionally, another goal of the Question of the Day is to generate a safe space for them to develop fellowship among themselves and to overall improve or ease the uprooting process. The Question of the Day can certainly draw comparisons with an interactive journal. Special focus was placed on determining the most effective and convenient platform to push out the Question of the Day to inquiry participants. My inquiry partners and I ultimately concluded that Padlet was the most convenient online tool to use with the Question of the Day. Padlet is user-friendly, and teachers are mostly familiar with it since it is a widely-used tool for professional development purposes. Secondly, it allows users to upload both text and images, making it more visually appealing. Moreover, posts can be downloaded and securely saved in a PDF file for future reference.

Next, I informed teachers that each day they would receive a link to answer the Question of the Day. In that communication, I included some informational how-to screenshots of Padlet

and basic information regarding how to respond to the Question of the Day. To bring clarity about the process, I also shared with them that Questions of the Day would be posted daily by 8:00 AM. On a different note, I highlighted the fact that teachers had 24 hours to respond to the Question of the Day before receiving the one for the following day, and I encouraged them to read and reply to other participants' entries to interact between each other. Finally, I also included a table with a dated weekly planner for this intervention so that participants could have a road map. Although I had initially planned to have teachers answer the Question of the Day for seven weeks, I decided to shorten the period and adjusted it to five consecutive weeks, as it was determined that five weeks was sufficient time for teachers to get the full experience and value of this intervention.

In addition to the Question of the Day, the other intervention considered for this inquiry was the restaurant outings. As stated earlier in Chapter 3, restaurant gatherings are intended support the development of sense of community, building relationships and improving the uprooting experience for international teachers as they become a safe space for social interactions. Participants were made aware that there would be two restaurant outings as part of the improvement-based interventions, which would take three weeks apart from each other. One of the meetings was held at a casual American restaurant while the second one took place at a Mexican restaurant. Participants had to respond via email to confirm attendance at the two gatherings. These gatherings served as a safe space for social interactions and networking and built a circle of trust in the new setting. There were no pre-scripted questions or topics during these restaurant outings. On the contrary, conversations were organically driven and revolved around participants' interests and experiences. Restaurant outing attendees received a stipend of twenty dollars at my own expense to cover the cost of their meal. The purpose of the stipend was

twofold: to secure participants' attendance at the restaurant and to prevent international teachers from incurring any unforeseen or unplanned expenses. All participants attended the first restaurant outing while there were 2 teachers absent on the second one.

Data Analysis

As an overview, all phases of the data collection process (initial survey and exit interviews) and natural interactions that were observed throughout both interventions (the Question of the day and restaurant outings) among international teachers provided ample relevant information to answer the inquiry questions. Questions 6-14 and question 20 from the initial survey afforded the opportunity to access quantitative data pertaining the challenges faced by the international teachers from Sunshine Public Schools when moving to the United States. As noted previously, I used Qualtrics to create, administer, and analyze part of the survey data. Qualtrics provided feedback as questions were generated to improve or make them clearer; furthermore, the data is presented with a variety of graphs, making it easier to analyze. Descriptive statistics, namely percent to total and frequency distribution, were utilized to aid with analysis of survey data collected. Later, the initial survey, which included open ended questions and exit interview transcripts, were uploaded to NVivo for coding purposes. NVivo is a software program that can also help with qualitative data analysis by saving time during the analysis and write-up phases and making analysis faster, more accurate, and reliable. With NVivo, I initially used open coding as the goal was the exploration and discovery of emerging patterns and concepts, allowing me to break the data into smaller discrete excerpts. The codes represented a label, description, definition, or category name. These codes produced in a round of open coding were meant to be loose and tentative and subject to evolve and change in further rounds. Later, in order to find categories connecting participants within the larger group,

I used axial coding to compare the smaller codes labeled in open coding. Axial coding allowed me to compare and find relationships between individual participants and to analyze every category. In certain instances, the examination of codes during this phase led to the combination of codes or the development of new codes that were not previously identified during the coding of participant data. The culminating task during this phase was the identification of recurring themes or threads that emerged from the coding and thematic analysis.

Results

In this section, the results are organized by each inquiry question separately to present the data analyzed in a systematic and detailed way.

Inquiry Question 1

What are the challenges that international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools face upon moving to the United States? Interestingly, three recurrent themes emerged from the creation and deep examination of codes (see Figure 16). Taken together, these are the core themes that illustrate the challenges faced by international teachers, recurred throughout the data collection process and that I will use to articulate the analysis of inquiry question 1. These themes are:

1. International teachers experience logistical challenges during the relocation process but are receiving no support as they navigate these challenges;
2. The lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts is detrimental for international teachers during the transition period; and
3. Beyond logistical challenges, there is a lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills that make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging.

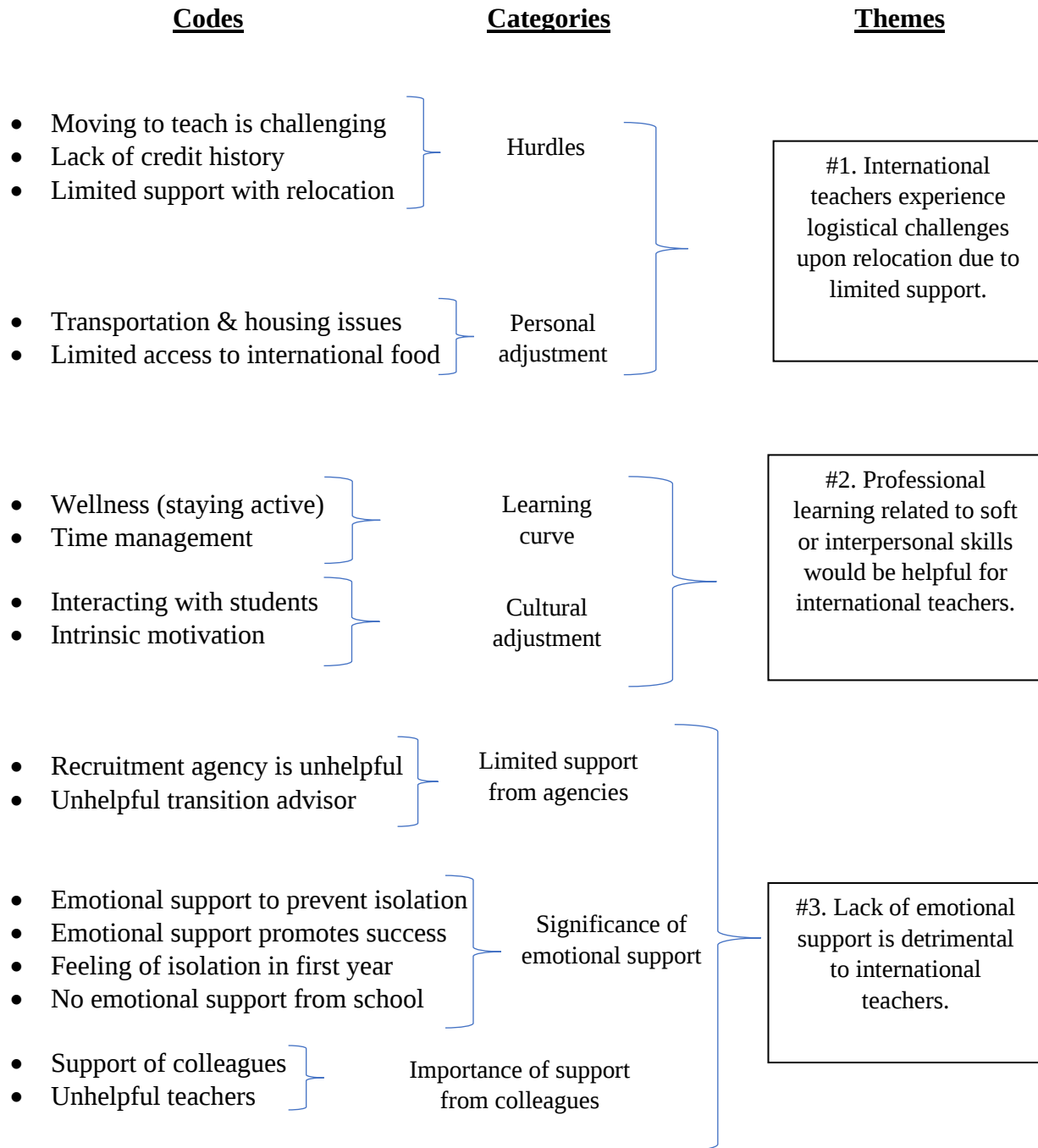


Figure 16. Emerging codes, categories and themes for inquiry question 1.

Theme 1: International Teachers Experience Logistical Challenges During the Relocation Process but are Receiving no Support as they Navigate These Challenges.

One of the broad themes that consistently emerged from the analysis of the initial survey, Question of the Day and even exit interviews involves the logistical challenges that international teachers experience during the relocation process. Interestingly, these adverse situations were largely attributed to the lack of adequate support during the critical transition period. Throughout all the data collection process, I did not encounter any reluctance in the participants to get any of their confessionals. In fact, they openly voiced with vehemence the struggles they faced once they moved to the United States due to a relocation process that lacked proper assistance. In fact, relocating abroad presents a variety of difficulties that extend far beyond the physical act of moving. I shall organize this theme by initially focusing on those challenges that teachers find outside the classroom. Later, I will unpack, based on the data collected, those hurdles that teachers encounter at their schools or classrooms.

Logistical transitional challenges outside the classroom may stem from the barriers or obstacles international teachers encounter when renting an apartment, setting up transportation (for instance, buying a car), trying to get access to healthcare, adjusting to the new food culture and belonging to the new place, to name a few. Figure 17 captures some of the most significant challenges according to our inquiry participants based on seven categories from which they had to choose. Access to comprehensive affordable healthcare represents a common challenge among participants. Hedwig, a third-year international teacher, put it in this way in The Question of the Day exercise:

The limited insurance options provided by the agency for international teachers are a source of frustration for me, as they offer minimal coverage, leaving me to cover

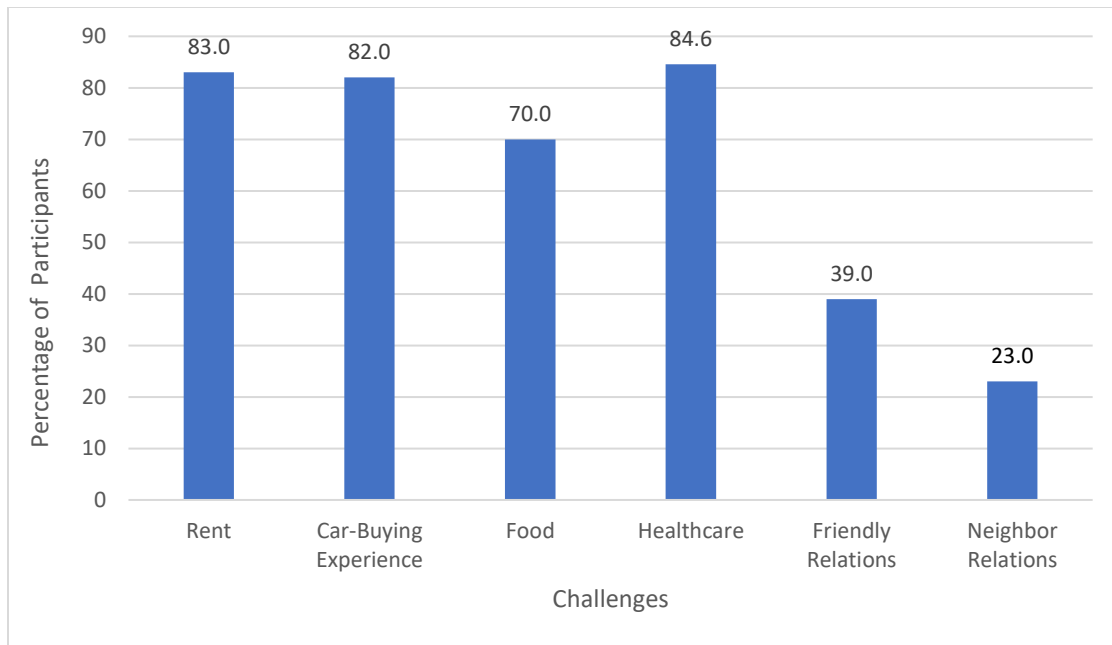


Figure 17. Most frequent challenges faced by international teachers by percentage.

significant medical expenses, especially for my daughter's asthma treatment and vaccinations, which are ENTIRELY uncovered. I know many Americans are facing the same challenges in their own country, however, that is not a consolation for me. I wish we were at least given the same insurance policy as the other teachers who are not international.

Another international teacher, Nikita, when asked about ways to improve the transition experience also brought the healthcare issue "Another thing is the medical insurance!! We should have the right to choose the one we want...or allow us to join the one the district offers. The one we have is really a nightmare." Likewise, David Two, another international teacher in his second year concurred with Nikita. "I also agree that some options for dental and vision should be provided by the agency. Navigating a new medical system, and not having support at all, is quite challenging." He sympathized with one teacher who had to wait until the school year was over and went back home to have surgery there since the medical insurance coverage made the surgery unaffordable in the United States.

Inadequate health insurance coverage, which usually translates into limited or costly health services, may be viewed as a stressor and a barrier for international teachers moving to the United States. Other relocation challenges emerge when international teachers have just arrived and after a short orientation at a hotel, they start looking for housing with no credit or apartment rental history in this country. Whilst just one teacher mentioned that he had been able to secure his apartment from his home country before moving to the United States, all agreed that renting an apartment resulted in a stressful and hassling experience upon arrival. Olivia's account unveils the ordeal that she went through when she tried to get an apartment:

After three days in the hotel, I desperately tried to find an apartment, however, having no credit history and no rental history, the only thing I had was the job contract. Apartment complexes were not keen on accepting that document as “insurance”. So, I called and emailed the agency to help me get situated somewhere with my child, but their answer was “I am so sorry that you are having trouble finding an apartment.” When I asked if they could vouch somewhere for me, they would answer “I hope you find something soon!” and how sorry they felt... The agency was not helpful again, and I was without a salary until the end of the month.

The extract above shows that some recruitment agencies do not necessarily make pre-arrival arrangements with apartment management companies to secure fast and affordable housing for international teachers. In this sense, Sebastian is convinced of the benefits of guidance from recruitment agencies when looking for apartments. “I would have liked to have some practical advice on how to find an apartment when once you get here with no credit score and all that, and maybe like also navigating banking, that type of practical experience... just sharing.” Jay P. assented to this recommendation, saying “Also, I consider that this kind of exchange program should have some references like places that can help with a quick renting process.”

The lack of reliable and widespread public transportation may also contribute to a hectic and stressful transitional period for international teachers. In that context, it becomes a crucial necessity for teachers to be able to have a car. The lack of credit history can make the car-buying experience complicated and tedious as teachers find it hard to gain access to low-interest financing unless they can afford to pay cash. Furthermore, access to a used car has become increasingly harder when considering how used cars’ prices went up during the COVID-19

pandemic and afterwards. Irazu, another international teacher who was part of this inquiry, summarized her experience in these terms: “Once in the US, I run into a lot of issues with trying to get car, I did not have credit history, so it was impossible to get a car loan... I bought a secondhand car, and was a nightmare...”

In addition to cost-effective reasonable healthcare, the lack of practical access to housing, and the complicated car buying experience, another adjustment challenge that was echoed by teachers’ responses concerns becoming used to the American food. For example, one teacher said, “Food has been a major issue for me. There are no stores in the neighborhoods, and if you want to buy something, you have to drive to a supermarket”. Talking about this issue, along the same lines, Jay expressed how pricey international food can be to afford on a teacher salary:

Afterwards, I was introduced to the international market. I started feeling a sense of home here and satisfaction.... However, the prices of the food were so high, I guess it cost them a lot to import it but on a teacher’s salary, it cost me an arm and a leg. I’d say, one of the first things teachers should know is how to locate the international market.

Finally, while Lisa also agreed that it was difficult for her to adapt to the local cuisine, she also elaborated on the idea of how food from home can ease teachers’ transition into the new setting:

Food is so different. When I came here, I was really lost because there wasn’t any variety of international food. And when I did find somewhere it was very expensive for the salary that I was getting... When they [teachers] can’t get the food that they want, if it makes you cranky, it makes you want to go back home sometimes.

These responses illuminate those obstacles that international teachers run into as they relocate and settle in the United States while trying to meet their basic life needs.

Finally, teachers agreed that recruitment agencies could help alleviate these challenges during the relocation process when asked the question: if these challenges could be prevented, who would be responsible for preventing them? (See Figure 18). In fact, they all concurred that relocation challenges can be lessened if recruitment agencies acted proactively and set sustainable systems in place before arrival and during their first year. Further, some teachers argued that school administrators could also play a role in reducing those challenges.

As previously mentioned, these challenges are not necessarily limited to those taking place outside the school. Data collected through the initial survey and interviews substantiates the belief that the functional mechanics of the adjustment process also involves teachers struggling in their new workplace (See Figure 19). Most of the school-related challenges presented to teachers were rated as a moderate amount, a lot, and a great deal. Further analysis of the data collected indicates a common view among inquiry participants was that managing the classroom poses one of the biggest difficulties while teachers get a first taste of education in America.

Almost three-fourths of teachers (85.0 %) found classroom management to be a significant issue while 31.0 % reported it to be a moderate one. This was also corroborated by many of the inquiry participants as they described the hurdles they encountered with students. Jay P., a third-year international teacher, alluded to the issue of classroom management in the following terms:

Classroom management has been one of my biggest challenges as I found it hard to enforce some of my classroom expectations. Students at the beginning would not listen to me...probably because of my accent and the fact that I am foreign-born; pair that up with parents and families that are unresponsive and stand up for their students regardless of

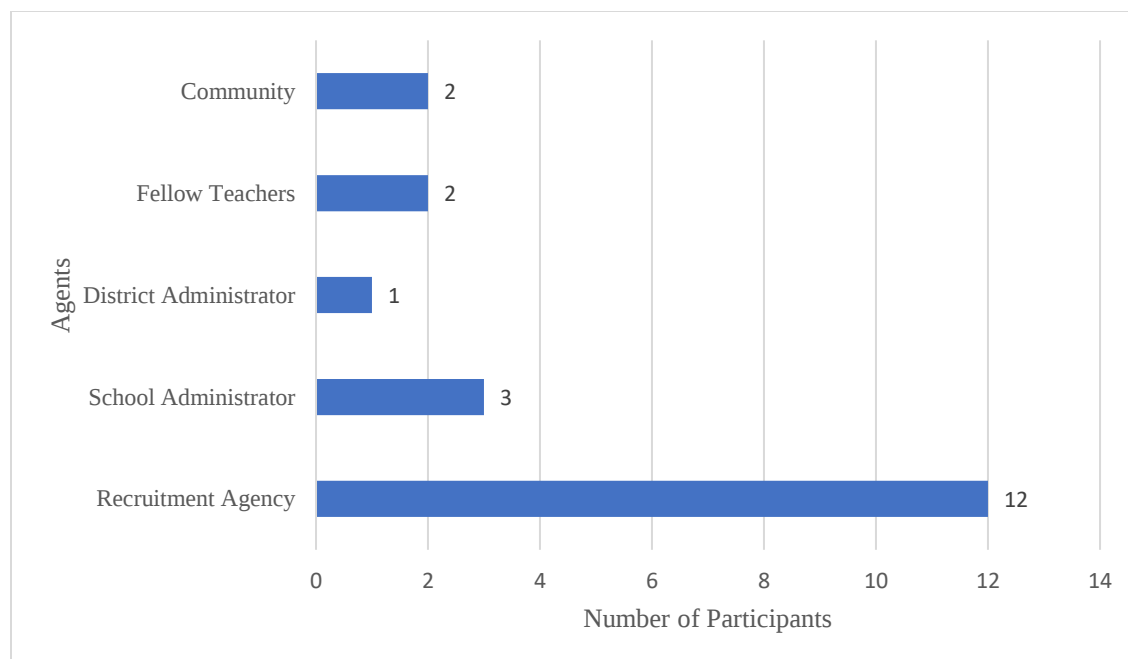


Figure 18. Number of agents who could help prevent challenges faced by participants.

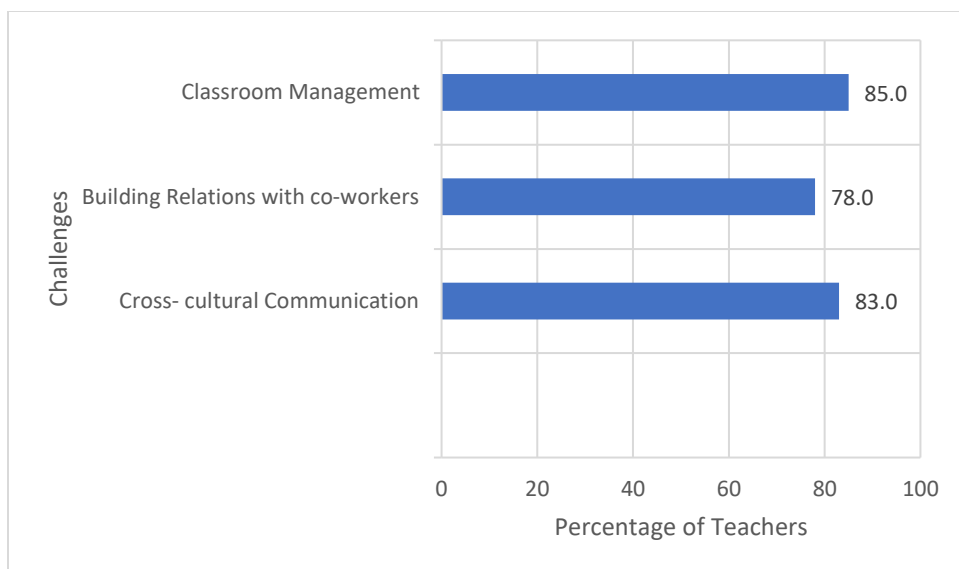


Figure 19. Percentage of participant teachers by area of challenge.

their wrongdoing!

Likewise, another teacher commented: “The other aspect is the lack of good manners, the absenteeism of most parents and kids, but again, it is our job to give them reasons to come and support their kids.” Talking about this issue, Jim concurred with the other teachers’ accounts: “For me, adjusting to the classroom management was a surprise. In my country, students were not allowed to have mobile phones in class and always engaged with their studies.” Following the same line of thought, another teacher, Hedwig, acknowledged that “Classroom management is different from back home. I was told never breakdown with your students around, but a day has come my tears just flowed out in an instant. I had no full control, it just happened...” Finally, Sebastian was also critical of how some students may behave at schools in the United States: “I haven’t had any serious problems with my students, but some students can be problematic or even dangerous in other classes. Sometimes I feel I just can’t handle them or motivate them, but well, they are middle-schoolers!” Overall, management of student conduct proved to be challenging for international teachers.

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered reveals that international teachers also wrestle to comprehend the host cultural context, customs, traditions, and practices resulting from their new workplace abroad. Over half of the inquiry participants find that cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication to be considerable challenges while 40 percent of them believe that they are moderate ones. Nikita, a third-year high school international teacher draws parallels between being an educator back home and in the United States: “Working long hours at this job has been tough for me. Teaching used to feel easier, back in my country. I wasn’t used to a culture of extra credit too.” Likewise, Hedwig described how part of the adjustment process entailed getting used to an English accent from his co-workers and students that he had never

heard before: “Something difficult in this culture, particularly in this region in the southern accent, the lack of articulation and intonation was kind of different as I was used to. I remember it was hard to understand both students and staff.” In like manner, Jay acknowledges, from a different perspective, school-related cultural challenges that he encountered when he became a teacher in the United States:

I am still adjusting to the American way of life. It is amazing to me how students have matriculated to advanced levels of mathematics when they have little previous knowledge and lack foundational math skills. I am also grappling with the fact that administrators require you to be in several places and complete several tasks simultaneously. I am almost convinced I am not human.

Finally, Dani took the cross-cultural variations between people’s behaviors in his home country and the United States as a learning opportunity inherent to the adjustment process: “If you come from a country where people are so affective and say hello 20 times a day, it is hard when you notice that people are kind of ‘cold’. You must adjust to this new culture and never take it personal, people are different, but this is not bad, it is just something new to learn”. The above excerpts illustrate how these international teachers faced unexpected cultural differences in their new workplaces.

Another school-related category that emerged from the data collection process with inquiry participants has to do with building relations with host-country nationals or those employees who are American citizens. Of the 13 participants in the inquiry, 60.0 % indicated that they had remarkable difficulties connecting with local staff members, 30.0 % reported that they had a moderate amount, while a small portion of those surveyed said that they did not have any issues at all. For instance, while Dani had already been teaching overseas prior to moving to

the United States and was used to connecting with people from other countries, she still found it hard to develop relationships with co-workers in the workplace during the first year:

I remember that I was always sitting by myself in staff meetings or any school gathering.

I tried to break the ice and approach people but there was no interest from their part.

Despite my best efforts, I felt like a stranger, unable to bridge some type of gap between myself and my colleagues...not to mention that the cultural divide makes it even more challenging to connect on a deeper level!

For Sebastian, although he had no issues connecting with expatriates or fellow foreigners that had also moved there to teach, it was not that simple with local teachers. He commented:

At first, I tried to be like a social butterfly... I guess they did not understand my sense of humor...until I gave up and decided to focus all my energy on my work and show great work ethics to make a name after myself...I think it eventually paid off.

In like manner, Olivia's memories about her first-year teaching in the United States also unveil how hard it was for her to break into her school to develop host country friendships. She mentioned that most of her friends back home were coworkers. One of her goals as an international teacher was to immerse herself in the host culture by developing friends to increase her social capital and learn as much as she could. In her own words: "It took me almost a year to be able to connect with colleagues at school and develop some type of friendship, but it was worth it. You just have to be patient and be mindful of people's timing".

Dani also found it hard to connect with staff members at school:

Something that has been part of the cultural change is the work environment, I used to have teammates really close to me back home, here people are not that social each person

stay in their classroom, and they don't socialize with others, but is part of the culture or at least in my school.

On the other hand, Irazu took it with humor when reflecting about her experiences with building relationships with colleagues:

I spend a lot of time at work and the more I feel comfortable, the better. Now, it has been difficult here because people like to be sort of isolated and they are like 'respect my space.' Anyway, it is a challenge and risk I like to take, to break walls!!

The experiences portrayed above show the steep learning curve that some teachers experienced when it comes to building relationships with host-country nationals. For some of them, it entailed getting rid of some of their own existing paradigms, reconsidering old beliefs, becoming more culturally sensitive and adapting to new ways to function in the new culture.

Theme 2: The lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts is detrimental for international teachers during the transition period.

Apart from the transitional challenges, another theme that clearly transpired through the data gathered was the absence of emotional support from recruitment agencies and school districts after relocation. The beginning section of the initial survey required respondents to rate a set of transitional challenges (economic, social, professional, emotional, and cultural) as they expected them to be prior and after moving to the United States. A comparison of the two results reveals that international teachers' perceptions about teaching in the United States prior to moving there changed to some extent when they started navigating the adjustment process as demonstrated by their responses. Social and emotional challenges are the areas with highest ratings from the options of challenge categories provided to participants (See Table 4).

Table 4

<u>Teachers' Perceptions about Challenges Before and After Moving to U.S.</u>		
<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Perceptions about Challenge Before Moving to the U.S.</u>	<u>Perceptions about Challenges After Moving to the U.S.</u>
Emotional	23.0 %	75.0 %
Social	38.0 %	72.0 %
Professional	31.0 %	60.0 %

Additionally, this is clearly supported by the volume of accounts from teachers that struggled through the initial stages of the uprooting process. Although one teacher admitted that moving abroad requires mental and emotional preparation to avoid distress and adapt to changes in the physical, occupational, and social environment, there was high consensus among most teachers regarding the emotional complexities of the adjustment process. In fact, all inquiry participants were open and vulnerable to share their emotions and feelings. For instance, Pollux acknowledged that “Being away from my family and my culture has been one of my biggest challenges, I've missed everything.” Similarly, Nikita reflected about her being homesick: “A challenge that I have been facing is dealing with loneliness. It is true that, I am surrounded by people, but it is not the same as having my loved ones close to me.” Likewise, Dani spoke about the implications of feeling lonely: “So feeling lonely makes you feel that you want to come back and don't finish this process, right? So in I think in that way emotions can affect the process and being unable to continue and get back home.”

The same view was echoed by Sebastian who is still grappling with being away from his home country:

Still remains a challenge to be away from your own country of course, and that involves everything and everybody, beginning with the most important people in your life: la familia! Missing the important ‘episodes,’ it is not the same to share through a video call or text, or any of that.

Within the realm of adjustment, Olivia depicted how she witnessed when enthusiasm gradually vanished as teachers jumped out of the initial honeymoon phase when moving abroad to land in their new reality:

We first enjoyed the new life and that phase lasts for a little while and then the enthusiasm drops down and we sometimes feel homesick and all that and we need friends. We've had friends back home for a very long time, a support system, and now we are here by ourselves, so having more, some more emotional support and somebody who can actually relate to what you're feeling would be very beneficial.

While emotional challenges mark international teachers' complex multifactorial transitional period, both quantitative and qualitative data collected in the inquiry exposed that teachers receive very limited support to lessen them. In fact, inquiry participants were overwhelmingly vocal regarding the type of support that they received. Dani acknowledged that "some practical advice on how to find an apartment when once you get here with no credit score and all that, and maybe like also navigating banking, that type of practical experience would have been extremely helpful." Lisa agreed with Dani: "I think that the sponsors bring us here. They leave us here and then do whatever you can." Similarly, David One described the poor support he received upon moving to the United States:

But then my teacher companion was not helping either, so they should look for better teachers or for better companions for you to adjust because I spend like the first two weeks in my apartment because she left me at my apartment, and she never had time to help me. So I ended up using taxis cause she was never available.

Mr. Nebolous also elaborated on the lack of support he encountered once he arrived at his destination:

But my experience with that transition advisor was not the best. That person only picked me up from the place we were when we arrived and that was it. The other things I did by

myself like I bought the car, I started my cell phone plan. So, everything uh, I did it by myself, basically.

In like manner, Pollux 's experience mirrors that of Mr. Nebolous:

So, it was about you having this transitional teacher who will just send you an email, a text message or email, asking How are you doing? And that was it. So, everything was left to you, but they will only come in if maybe you had an issue with your principal.

On the same note, Hedwig spoke to the feeling of loneliness that invaded him upon getting his apartment and moving in by himself:

So, I want to tell you the first time that I came here when I entered to my apartment. That was really empty. There was nothing, just my luggage. It felt weird and you feel weird. You feel like... what am I doing here? ...you need another person.

Lisa also expanded on the idea of loneliness:

You're coming into a culture where you don't have any family. You don't have any friends. And naturally, it will take a toll on you...Personally, I have just felt lonely. Like very lonely and low in my life. Not necessarily because of school or because of finances. But you can't singularly point on what exactly you are just feeling down about it. And sometimes you feel sad because you are not with your family, or you feel alone. I wish I had had some support to better navigate this!

While teachers are allowed to move with their families, the fact is that some recruitment agencies discourage teachers from doing that. Jim Reeves indicated that teachers that move with their spouses may experience less emotional distress after relocating: “ I think that because I'm single, it is just myself and I basically think it hits different rather than if you having like a

husband or wife or like children in Honduras”. Pollux concurred with Jim’s claim that those that move with their spouses undergo a smoother transition:

I think I had a different experience because my wife came here 2-3 months after I came here. So I didn't feel like I was alone. I wasn't bored. I was with my wife, and we could do a lot of things. I feel that that makes me don't feel like that I want to go back.

A lack of support or insufficient support teachers encounter when they relocate to the U.S. to teach permeates all the firsthand accounts shared herein.

Theme 3: Beyond logistical challenges, there is a lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills that make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging.

Another theme that clearly emerged through the data that was gathered from participants was the absence of personal and professional development related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills to better equip teachers to successfully navigate transitional challenges. As noted earlier, international teachers’ initial onboarding process consists of a fast-paced abbreviated orientation upon arrival, which typically lasts for a couple of days and where the primary focus is an overview of classroom management, lesson planning and instructional tips. The orientations are brief; therefore, the contents are not covered in-depth. Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of exposure to learning opportunities that address the following areas on a consistent basis, especially throughout the first year: adaptation to American classrooms, cultivating community in the new place and wellness or selfcare.

Sebastian criticized the type of training he received shortly after arriving in the United States:

They focus on teaching you how to be a teacher, but they already hired you because you have experience and they are focusing on strategies to have classroom management, focus on how to contact parents. All the differences that we don't have in our countries. He strongly believes that training should include emotion regulation strategies to support mental health:

But if you focus on emotional support to teachers, that feature is going to make their work more effectively, because that's one thing that is going to be out of their plate and they will have more room to really focus on the things that matter, which is teaching, because if you are thinking that you are having an struggle, the least thing that you wanna think about is the teaching is the planning, is the job that you were hired for.

Sebastian did not specify whether the school district or recruitment agency should be responsible for this. However, he acknowledged that this type of professional development and self-care activities should begin as soon as possible and be maintained throughout the school year.

Moreover, Lisa's ideas coincided, to a great extent, with Sebastian's. In her view, international teachers do not necessarily just benefit from pedagogical strategies and innovative approaches to teaching. She believes that they should get mentors with whom you can build a close relationship. Her idea of mentorship resembled those systems that are in place for American beginning teachers who receive a mentor during their first years as educators:

Yes, it makes a difference...because you need to talk. You need to have the chance to express how you feel and why you feel that way and frustrations and questions and emotions and all of that. So it would be amazing if schools made this like sort of like meetings with the teacher.

David Two was an experienced Spanish teacher who moved from Spain to teach in the United States. He exhibited ample experience working at American classrooms. Prior to becoming a teacher in the United States, he had been hired as a teacher assistant in a mid-western state. He spoke about the training he had received there, which revolved around strategies for a successful adaptation to American classrooms and which, in his view, should be replicated by international teachers' recruitment agencies:

The training was very interesting because they had some students who were going to drama school to become actors, so they were acting as you know, you had a mock classroom. Students would behave in ways that you know, you had to react and... and they gave you so the kids would do, you know, they would misbehave in a specific way and then they would stop and somebody would ask you, what would you do A, B or C and then the kids would react according to what they were expected...With trainings like this, they [recruitment agencies] could address issues they had the year before in the in the classrooms with international teachers, for example when students make fun of their accent.

Furthermore, there is a learning curve when adjusting to American classrooms, particularly around time management. Long working hours, numerous duties, multi-tasking in addition to multiple deadlines can result in overwhelming stress and anxiety for new teachers to the country. Most of the teachers that were part of this inquiry went through these hardships. Mr. Nebolous shared how he had to refine his time management and organization skills to survive upon arrival:

I remember how I was literally drowning during the first months...Even though I worked for nearly 9 hours a day, I still had work to do at home....grading, lesson planning, etc. I

was so tired! I thought I was not going to make it! The weekends would go by so fast because I had to plan my lessons.

Other stories of adaptation to the American classroom revolve around navigating cross-cultural communication. As noted earlier, international teachers are transplanted into an entirely distinct cultural ecosystem, which may ignite cross-cultural communication challenges that arise when people from diverse cultural backgrounds interact. Teachers' personal recollections deemed that exposure to cross-cultural communication strategies were necessary to promote effective communication with students and staff alike. That is the case of Sebastian who worked at an inner-city school with a significant number of students from different parts of the world:

I remember that I was trying to discipline this female student who was not paying attention in class and was talking to her classmates...I asked her multiple times to look at me while I was talking to her. The assistant principal told me not to ask her that because she was from the Middle East.

David One also elaborated on the idea of how he had to remind himself to be aware of personal spaces after an unpleasant experience with a colleague:

I came from a country where everybody is used to giving hugs, being affectionate and greeting even strangers with a kiss. I recall one of my first days when I met a team member for the first time and while I was greeting her, I tried to give her a kiss on her cheek. She kind of pushed me out of her way. It was so embarrassing.

As stated earlier, the accounts from teachers above demonstrated that international teachers should not be exposed solely to standard traditional professional development. In fact, they also reveal the existence of a vacuum with no systems in place to tackle teachers' emotional needs, stress, and anxiety generated by the new setting. In other words, they validate the

significance of creating safe spaces for teachers to cultivate community in the new place thus promoting wellness. Olivia Green expanded on the idea about how advantageous support groups can be:

Now if you have that group that supports system, I mean maybe you can get out of the house. Maybe you can revitalize yourself, and maybe you just, you know, have that support system to make you feel energized and just get back into preparing for these kids initially.

Dani also looked back retrospectively at her past experiences upon arrival and elaborated on the potential positive impact of a support group system with fellow international teachers to foster self-care, mental health while building community:

But I believe that it would have been a good support for me if I had gotten it so that at least creating that environment around me would have given me that sort of growth. A lot of things were lacking that if I'd gotten it in earlier, I would have been able to really succeed well.

The mechanics and technicalities of moving abroad to teach are complex. Teaching in an international context requires adaptability and flexibility to adjust to different educational systems, teaching methodologies, and cultural norms. Soft skills training can help teachers develop resilience, problem-solving abilities, and a growth mindset, enabling them to thrive in diverse and dynamic environments. Onboarding processes designed for international teachers are brief and focus primarily on instruction. However, they lack continuous sustainable professional learning with an emphasis on adaptation to the new setting, American classrooms, and cultivating community and wellness, which would ultimately benefit the entire learning community.

Inquiry Question 2

How do emotional support interventions affect transitioning challenges from international teachers? Qualitative data gathered during the last phase of the inquiry was used to inform the response to the second inquiry question. As noted in Chapter 3, inquiry participants were asked to engage in an exit interview. The interview questions were purposefully crafted to evaluate the effect and efficacy, if any, of the interventions (The Question of the Day and Restaurant Outings) in place throughout the inquiry. In other words, the goal of this phase was to determine if those interventions posed an impact on the transitional challenges that teachers underwent upon arrival. Furthermore, the interviews, as noted earlier, were conducted via Microsoft Teams and were recorded and securely saved in the university's data cloud system. In this context, all participants agreed to have the interview recorded. Prior to starting the interview, teachers were also reminded of the safety and privacy measures in place to preserve their identities. Moreover, the excerpts presented in this section are direct quotes retrieved from the exit interviews. Overall, all inquiry participants were eager to share their experiences and assess the quality of the interventions on which this inquiry focuses.

On a different note, the interventions that are subject of this inquiry (the Question of the Day and Restaurant Outings) showed high efficacy to ease the emotional challenges faced by international teachers. While both interventions received high approval ratings from teachers in the inquiry, there were slightly more participants that preferred the restaurant outings to the Question of the Day because it was easier to connect, socialize, and bond in a face-to-face setting (See Figure 20). I will now center the attention around how the Question of the Day exercise demonstrated to be an effective transformational intervention to decrease signs of emotional distress caused by the initial transitional stage of the uprooting process.

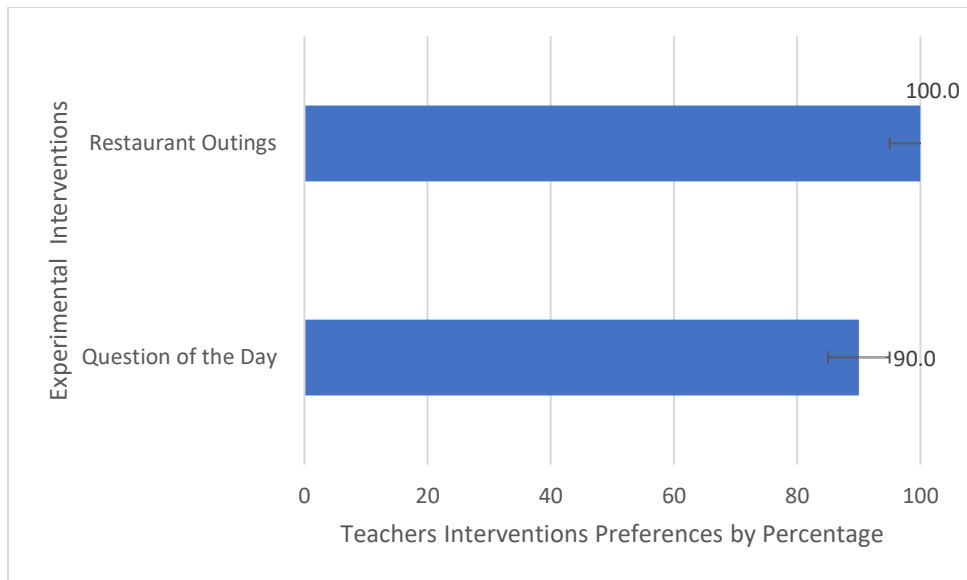


Figure 20: Experimental interventions approval ratings

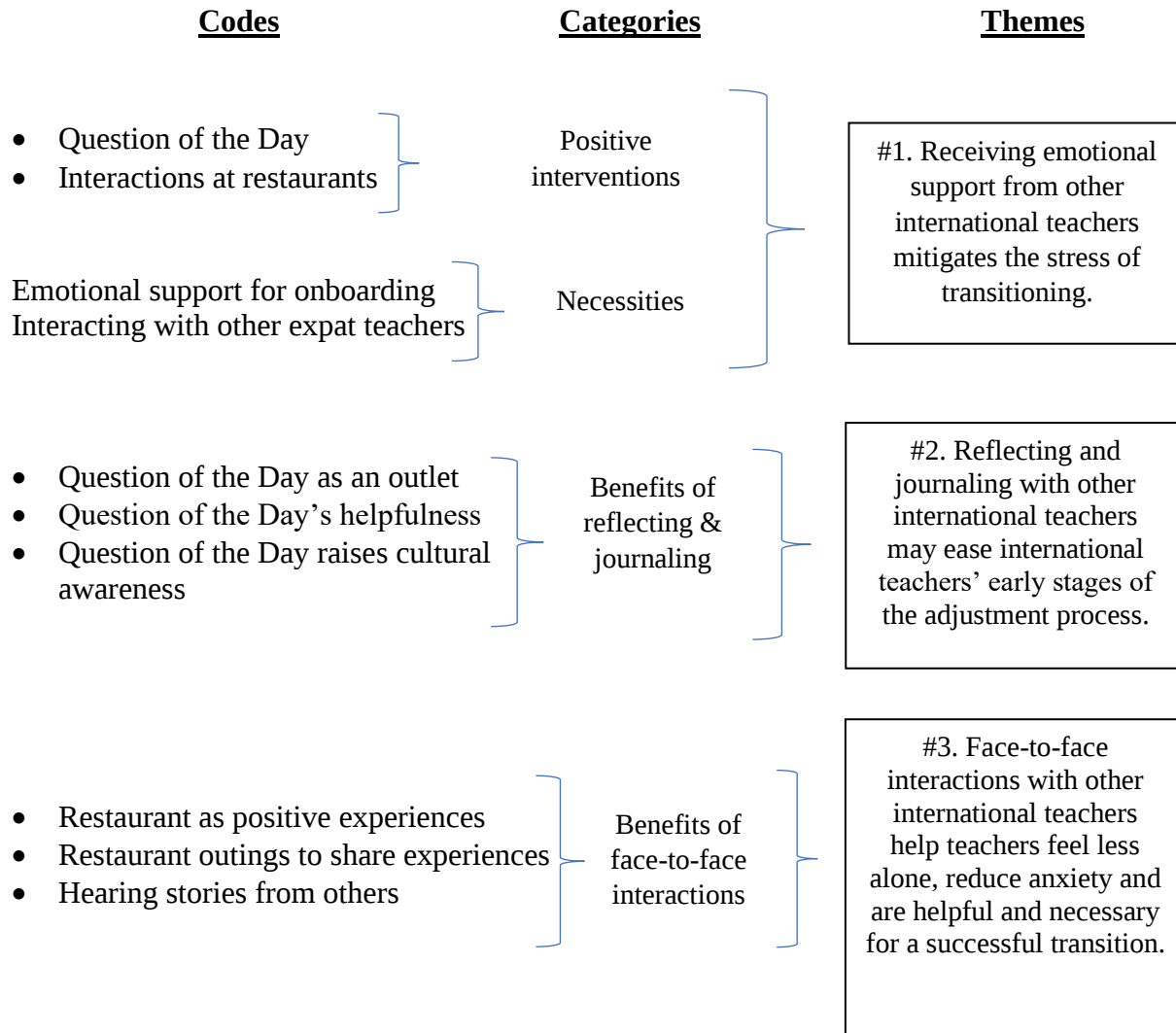


Figure 21. Emerging codes, categories and themes for inquiry question 2

I utilized the same approach to data analysis that was used with inquiry question 1. As a result of the coding process and thematic analysis (See Figure 21), there were a set of themes that emerged. I will unpack in this section the most prevalent themes that surfaced from the interview data as I framed the response for inquiry question 2.

Theme 1: Receiving emotional support mitigates the stress of transitioning.

Receiving emotional support is another pivotal theme that came out from the qualitative data retrieved throughout the research process. Interestingly, 100 % of the inquiry participants strongly believed that emotional support should be at the core of a long-term onboarding program for international teachers. David One, for example, was convinced of the benefits of emotional support for international teachers during the crucial transition period:

Because international teachers come here with knowledge from books, I can say mostly course books and how exposed we are to the culture on TV and all that. But once you get here, the reality, real life is not the same. And building our community from the very beginning and talking to people who are going through the same and having those questions of the day would be beneficial.

Jim concurred with David One and expanded on the advantages of establishing emotional support systems for international teachers as well as pre-arrival preparation to address potential challenges: “That will be a plus for the program, for the international teachers as well, but they also need to be aware of if you are single you are going to be alone, you're going to be by yourself.”

Relatedly, Pedro described the importance of emotional support as that crucial ingredient to leverage teacher’s instructional effectiveness, which would render higher performance in the classroom:

It is very important. I've spoken to many teachers and since I've been here before, I can tell, you know, it's a huge shock. A lot of people come from more social, you know, more outgoing societies and so on. And people gather every evening and a lot of people from Africa, from Asia, from Europe, feel the same way from South America too...I think agencies need to compensate by dedicating more time and some resources, including emotional. You know, training and being aware of the, you know of the of all the extra issues that come with moving abroad, leaving your family behind...This could be an investment...an effort you put into making sure that the teachers are taken care of...that will benefit students because the teacher will come and perform at a higher level than just than they would if you didn't.

On the same page, Dani elaborated on the importance of sustainable emotional support, particularly at early transitional stages. She cautioned about the direct dynamic correlation between emotional support and high retention rates of international teachers: "Being lonely makes you feel going home and don't finish this process. The emotions can affect make you unable to continue being an international teacher. The risk of quitting the program decreases if you get the emotional support." She concluded by acknowledging that recruitment companies that bring international teachers do not care about providing emotional support.

David Two also pointed out the importance of emotional support to alleviate distress associated with navigating an unfamiliar landscape to have a fulfilling experience: "It is important...With no family, far from your roots, it is hard to mingle as people come from more social, you know, more outgoing societies. Therefore, an emotional support system becomes crucial." In like manner, Mr. Nebolous recalled how the emotional support he received from his school administration made a world of difference in his case: "And that emotional support was

really helpful. I was still dealing with my own issues. But knowing that I had people's back felt recomforting. I was able to vent my stress and struggles.” He also explained the rationale behind the significance of emotional support for teachers: “It's impossible. Companies didn't hire a robot. They hired a human being, and we are made of emotions. The first thing that they should tackle is the emotions because they didn't hire an AI.” Hedwig also echoed negative experiences from other teacher he met when he arrived: “In the group that I was with, some teachers had a really breakdown because of their emotional heart. We are social animals, and we need others, so it would have been nice to hear from people that were already here.” Comparably, Jay articulated his thoughts around the idea of what emotional support could potentially look like: “You can let go the negative emotions and have someone just sitting beside you and listening with you and feel what you've been going through, but you have a someone to lean on and someone who would listen to you”. Finally, Pollux shed light on the connection between emotional support and high teacher effectiveness: “So, I think you need to compensate by dedicating more time and some resources, including emotional...that will benefit your students because the teacher will come and perform at a higher level than just than they would if you didn't”.

As confirmed by the above life stories, the accounts from international teachers underscore the importance of emotional support. They reinforce the idea that high-yield emotional support can substantially improve teacher efficacy and reduce international teacher attrition rates.

Themes 2 and 3 exhibit a strong connection with the outcome of the emotional support interventions tested in this inquiry.

Theme 2: Reflecting and journaling in an online platform with other international teachers can improve international teachers' early transitional stages of the adjustment process.

Another theme that clearly stands out when analyzing the exit interview transcripts concerns the benefits associated with reflecting and journaling for international teachers. In other words, the compelling accounts from international teachers suggest that reflecting and journaling would prove to be a safe, low-cost symptom-modifying exercise to alleviate the stress and anxiety inherent to moving abroad. In this context, participants highlighted the effectiveness of the Question of the Day exercise as a means to promote healing reflection and release the chronic anxiety and stress caused by the significant changes they experience from uprooting. Out of 13 participants, 11 teachers found this exercise useful and practical as it was presented and would not make any changes to it. In a dissenting opinion, only two teachers mentioned that this exercise should be a weekly question as they thought it was an extra task that they had to complete. As mentioned previously, the Question of the day were purposefully crafted to engage teachers in self-reflection and jump-start back and forth meaningful discussions and generate community among teachers. The questions may force us to think about our lives. They do not necessarily strive to make us think just about our personal answers, but they allow us to listen to and learn from answers from other teachers.

Olivia admitted that the Question of the Day resulted in a daily reflection tool:

It allowed me to do a self-assessment about the emotions that we have, about the life that we are living here, and about the things that we are doing here. I also like them better compared to traditional professional development because I had many more opportunities to meet people and share my experiences and learn from their own life experiences.

Furthermore, Nikita commented on the how Question of the Day can be more functionally helpful as opposed to standard professional development topics: “I think those types of questions might be more beneficial compared to the classroom management sessions that we

got...how to teach and how to manage a classroom, not like building a community and just chatting with other people”.

In like manner, Hedwig stressed the therapeutic effects of the Question of the Day as he used it as a reflective practice to uncover personal emotional reactions that were rooted deep inside himself:

Now having those interventions and giving me the chance to reflect every day during those weeks, it hits different...it just helped me to reflect and to understand and see what are the things that I have been achieving until now, just about reflection, basically.

Lisa reflected upon how she would have benefitted from the Question of the Day exercise if she had it during the first year as an international teacher:

It could have prepared me better and I could have...dealt with that [challenge] a lot better than I used to do before that, like I could have reacted differently if I have seen those possible questions because I could have reflected more...I am sure I could have reacted better if I ...had had those questions before.

Similarly, Jim admitted that the Question of the Day turned into something that he looked forward to receiving and answering to unleash positive thoughts and journal:

This just came up right now, so it made me realize that I was looking forward to the question of the day every day that I now create my own journal. So, I can jot down what happened and what I could have done better for. The days end and I didn't usually write my journal. I didn't usually do that because I don't have the time to do that, but then after we did this question of the day, that made me realize that I was actually looking forward to it. I even downloaded the Padlet app. just to look and just to hand it carry with me every time. Then I created my own Padlet account to write my own journal. I also like

going back to the questions you gave us so I could write down and think about it at the end and have a like a meditation with myself. All the questions are very insightful. They made me think so much. You know, thinking is a battleground, and thinking is really good because you get away from your stress. It's one way of getting away from stress. Nikita also found that the Question of the day afforded her an opportunity to do introspection, which allowed her to look inward to examine her own thoughts, emotions and perceptions and maintain an asset-based mentality throughout the day:

Honestly, one of those questions made me cry. Just like realizing my purpose in here or I don't know it was like just thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking... And I just realized that I've been doing a lot until now that I am like, brave enough to make a decision like this. But yeah, those are like pretty useful questions. It must have touched me and made me reflect!

The final Question of the Day was titled The End, and it read: We have finally completed this journey. For the last question of the day, let's reflect on the last couple of weeks as we engaged in discussions to reflect, get to know, and learn from each other. What question of the day resonated with you the most throughout the last months as we interacted with each other in this space? The most popular Question of the Day turned out to be The Blob Tree. The Blob Tree is a tool that can be used to assist individuals articulate their feelings and emotions. It consists of many blob figures that are on or around a tree. The tree represents a setting or place, and the blob may represent a different state or emotion. For this particular question, teachers had to identify the blob that represented them in the tree based on their current state and explain why. Lisa commented on the blob tree question:

There were so many good questions, I liked all of them. I think one that stood out right now might be the related to the blob tree. It reminds me that life journeys are ongoing.

There is always more impact to make and more people to help along the way. All we can do is our best when we can and pass the baton to someone else.

David One concurred with Lisa: ‘I think the blob tree. It made me realize that there are a lot of things that I need to reconsider in order to continue building my future as a professional and my personal life’. Finally, Hedwig also agreed with Lisa and David One:

I liked the blob tree as it gives you a very graphic image of how one is doing or where one stands today or any other day. I find it now very useful because I understand the importance of assessing the moment we are living to make any necessary changes.

On the other hand, David Two produced a bulleted list to describe how he had benefitted from the Question of the Day exercise:

I am not alone in this journey; my feelings and thoughts are valid; I am grateful to everyone who has been part of my journey and made me appreciate my work more as it reframed my purpose as a person; I am reminded that it is perfectly ok not to be ok; Everyone has been through a lot and coming from different walks of life.

Theme 3: Face-to-face interactions with other international teachers with shared experiences help teachers feel less alone, reduce anxiety and are helpful and necessary for a successful transition.

Another theme that surfaced from the data collected is the fact that face to face interactions among international teachers may ease the transition into their new lives in the United States. These interactions should be rooted in safe community-driven spaces. In the context of the present inquiry, as indicated before, teachers were asked to attend two restaurant

outings with fellow expat teachers, with whom they had been interacting via the Question of the Day on Padlet. As noted earlier, conversations and topics were not scripted. On the contrary, teachers could interact with each other about any topic of their preference. One hundred percent of inquiry participants rated this intervention as extremely useful by virtue of its bonding, exchange of ideas and community building potential.

All teachers pointed out the importance of interactions that took place during restaurant outings among teachers. Pollux commented, “So I think that those kind of activities would help because it helps a lot when we get together on weekends and hang out together and talk about the things that were happening.” Similarly, Dani stressed the value of community building to confront unexpected issues and challenges:

When we socially interact, we build a support system for each other. If we're sick, if we have issues with rent, if we have issues with our district, I mean, we can get feedback or opinions from our brothers and sisters and it would definitely provide some solutions to the problems, potential problems that we face.

Likewise, Irazu admitted that when she moved to the U. S., she did not meet with other fellow international teachers at a restaurant. She found the restaurant outing intervention as an opportunity to learn from other teachers and feel strengthened:

Getting to know about someone else's experiences or knowing other people who are going through the same situation as you...that helps a lot... Feeling that I'm not here alone? Right? Because when we arrive here for the first year, we feel that we are alone, that nobody's living the same thing. And with that type of activity, we can learn that other people may be struggling as myself and we can, like, I don't know, maybe take some ideas and suggestions from them to face our own problems.

Sebastian also found in the restaurant gatherings the perfect setting to learn from other international teachers' experiences. "I can notice that I'm not alone in this process as well. Other people may have it worse, or maybe...they're having it better than me. There are a lot of people who are having the same hard times." Like Sebastian, Jay expanded on the benefits of the social interactions that stemmed from the restaurant gatherings:

That was an environment where I could be myself. I knew that I was not going to be judged by the things that I did there. Having the opportunity to share not only with my colleagues, but with my wife and with my family, was very good for me because when we had those opportunities, that was like the window we needed to share all the struggles. Hedwig regretted not having the possibility to meet with other fellow teachers during his first year in the United States. He recognized that that would have been a game changer:

Oh yes, that would have been a great resource because I would have learned a lot from a lot of my peers, teachers who are also doing the same program and also like, for example, the insurance and stuff that other teachers were talking about would have provided some idea about insurance and stuff. So I think that would have helped me if I'd known it in my first year. Coming together, having sharing meals and all those encounters would have made us...sort of made us like a family, which is something that was lacking when I came. So this experience has really improved my idea of family. That is not just your immediate family, but teachers that you shared the same challenges and growth to it can be like a family now. So a community where the teacher, not a large community because sometimes maybe have 60 and that's huge, but like ten, maybe 15, a smaller community where they develop some sense of belonging and they feel welcomed and also they feel like they can also share their challenges.

David One also talked favorably about the positive impact of restaurant outings. In his view, most of the teachers coming to work to the United States come from more social environments, where they spend ample time interacting with each other. “Any social gathering makes a difference...People will make their connections and eventually people you know will become friends and will have some sort of connection...It's important to make it real physical...Meeting at a place with some food is important.”

Relatedly, Mr. Nebolous argued that social interactions among fellow international teachers and mental health are fundamentally linked:

If you got those kind of restaurant get togethers, they're going to help with your mental health. So you will get better. You will. You will now not feel bad about it, about being alone here. So I think those gatherings will be helpful for you if you come here the first time you got somebody to talk.

Olivia agreed in its entirety with David One and Mr. Nebolous. In her opinion, conversations with fellow international teachers may create mutual empathy, which serves as a palliative for some of the pernicious effects from the uprooting process:

Getting together is useful because when you see the other one and you know that that other one is going through the same stuff, you really feel that you are with someone who knows what you're talking about or knows exactly... But it's good to feel like there are people with you.

Moving abroad to teach can evoke a deep sense of distress and sadness as individuals are transplanted into an entirely new ecosystem, leaving behind their social circles, and attempting to understand new cultural nuances, those subtle variations and intricacies embedded within the host culture. For expats teaching overseas, forging new friendships can be a significant

challenge. The recollection of stories presented above acknowledges the importance of creating spaces for international teachers to meet and socialize with fellow international teachers. They also shed light on how propitious restaurant outings can become where teachers meet and exchange ideas, develop community and a strong positive culture.

Inquiry Question 3

How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner? For the analysis of inquiry question 3, I used observational notes and anecdotes that I captured in a journal. This was a powerful way to reflect and to provide insight into self-awareness. During the data collection phase, I recorded in the journal thoughts and ideas that came to my mind or teachable moments that I experienced throughout this section of the inquiry. While my journal was replete with insightful entries, there were two themes that stood out after conducting a coding exercise with ideas extracted from my journal notes (See Figure 22): interventions do not need to be large scale; simple interventions can be just as impactful and meaningful, and writing a dissertation of practice can leverage your confidence as a leader.

Theme 1: Interventions do not need to be large-scale; simple interventions can be just as impactful and meaningful.

Both the Question of the Day and the restaurant outings were not overly complex interventions that contained several interacting components and phases. On the contrary, they consisted of relatively simple steps and did not require a multifaceted rollout and delivery plan. This reinforces the idea that interventions do not necessarily need to be complex and sophisticated to render positive outcomes. Therefore, some of the benefits associated with these two simple interventions were accessibility and convenience, cost-effectiveness, and increased

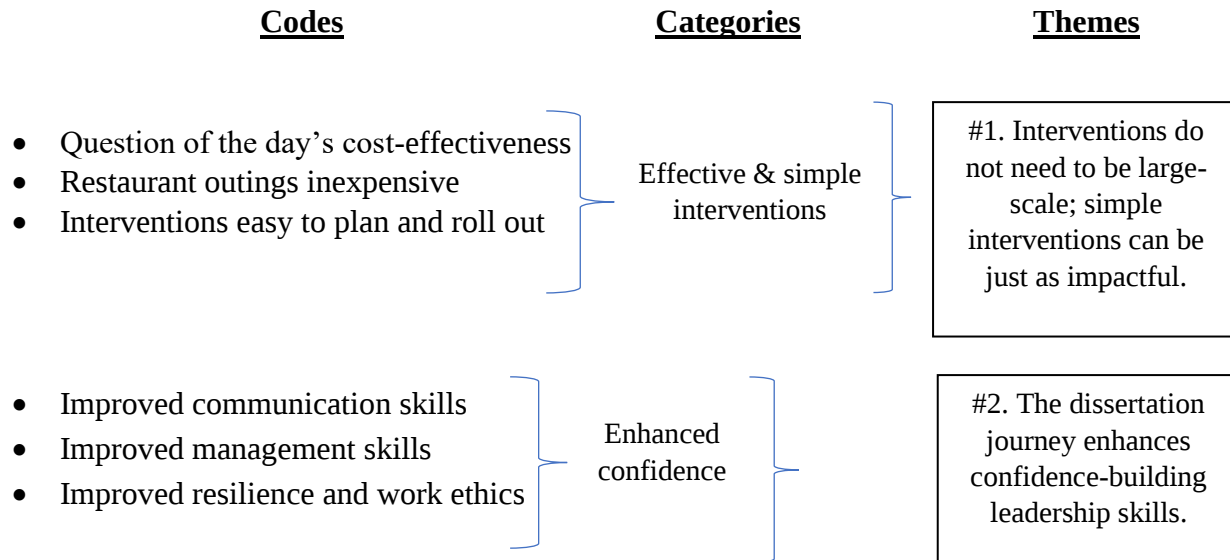


Figure 22. Emerging codes, categories and themes for inquiry question 3.

participation.

The Question of the Day and the restaurant outings were two interventions that were easy to implement. I became familiar with the Question of the Day during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was an exercise that my former principal decided to roll out for the staff. Unlike during normal working conditions, there was this need to instill a sense of community and positive culture as all staff members were working in isolation far from each other. As stated earlier, the topics for the question of the day were fluid to some extent. I tried to include thought-provoking questions related to education and wellness and some that purposefully probed teachers' thinking regarding what they were going through. For instance, sometimes I would screenshot compelling quotes or questions from posts that I found on social media. I used some of those to push the study participants' thinking by generating a safe space where teachers felt comfortable being vulnerable. It was a fairly simple process for me to create and upload the questions on Padlet and for teachers to answer the daily questions, something that could be done in less than five minutes. In a similar manner, planning the restaurant outings did not take a long time either. A reservation was made at a restaurant and international teachers received in advance a calendar invitation for both restaurant outings.

In addition to their simple implementation logistics, both interventions were deemed cost-effective and cost-saving as they did not pose significant costs. As reported before, for the Question of the Day, I used the basic Padlet subscription, which is free of charge for educators. Participants did not incur any monetary costs to answer the daily questions either. Likewise, participants were not responsible for any expenses to attend the restaurant outings. Based on the promising feedback received from the inquiry participants on the effects of the two interventions,

the value and benefits of the interventions justify the cost. They provide practical solutions to barriers at a low cost.

Finally, given the simple nature of both interventions, inquiry participants engaged in the Question of the Day exercise and restaurant outings. For the former, all participants responded to the 25 questions and even interacted among each other, making comments on other teachers' submissions. For the latter, restaurant gatherings had good attendance. There were two teachers that were not able to attend the last one due to existing conflicts. Overall, teachers provided overwhelming positive feedback regarding the efficacy of both interventions.

Theme 2: The dissertation journey enhances confidence-building leadership skills.

Embarking myself on the dissertation journey to plan and lead a support program for international teachers was a test on my leadership skills. It enhanced my confidence as a leader in multiple ways.

Firstly, it gave me so much needed reassurance as a leader. I recall that when I was about to send out the recruitment email, which contained the consent form for teachers to complete, I was hesitant to do it as I was afraid no one would get back to me. Contrary to what I initially suspected, it turned out to be the opposite as every single one of the teachers invited to participate got back to me with their signed consent form. The same happened when I pushed out the first Question of the Day and when it was time to organize the first restaurant gathering. I had some reservations regarding how many inquiry participants would answer the daily question or show up to the first social event. All teachers engaged to answer the daily question and attended the first restaurant gathering, even though it was on a regular weekday shortly after school. While teachers work long hours every day, they still showed commitment to the project. They got involved with both interventions and they stuck with them until the end even though they did

not know me personally. This shows that there was clearly an acute need for a safe space where teachers could interact with each other either virtually or face to face. Looking retrospectively, as a leader, I was able to produce two improvement interventions to solve a problem of practice and received positive feedback from international teachers upon implementation. It has been a transformational experience. I feel much more confident now as a leader to get people to follow my lead and to strategize, plan and rollout improvement-based intervention projects.

Secondly, it helped me develop higher critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As a scholarly practitioner, I was faced with various circumstances in which I had to analyze complex situations, evaluate numerous options and make informed decisions. I also had to draw conclusions based on evidence and analysis. Finally, in addition to reassurance and refining critical and problem-solving skills, as a scholarly practitioner I became more resilient and perseverant. There were numerous challenges that I faced while conducting research and writing the dissertation. Some of the most difficult setbacks involved the actual writing, time management, multiple deadlines and facing writer's block and wrestling with impostor's syndrome. I feel far more equipped now to manage adverse situations or to motivate people to become more resilient and persist through difficult situations. Overall, leading the implementation of a support program for international teachers has strengthened a wide range of skills, including critical thinking, problem solving and resilience, that collectively enhanced my confidence as a leader.

Summary

The purpose of this mixed method inquiry was to design, plan, implement, and assess the efficacy of an emotional support system for international teachers. The inquiry identified the challenges faced by international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools and measured the impact

of two improvement-based interventions: the Question of the Day and restaurant outings. It unveiled that international teachers experience logistical challenges during the relocation process but are receiving no support as they navigate these challenges; a lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts is detrimental for international teachers during the transition period; and beyond logistical challenges, there is a lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills that make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging.

On a different note, the results revealed that participants in the present inquiry benefitted from the exposure to both interventions. All of the teachers in the inquiry found the restaurant outings contributed to alleviating the emotional challenges faced by international teachers as it represents a space for community building and social interaction and bonding. Similarly, ninety percent of teachers considered the Question of the Day to be beneficial for teachers, as it promoted a sense of community and provided teachers with an opportunity to get to know each other and exchange ideas. Finally, planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted my leadership development as the scholarly practitioner conducting this inquiry since I found out that interventions do not need to be large in scale to have a meaningful effect; relatively simple interventions can be just as impactful as a confidence building tool as a leader. Chapter five, the concluding chapter, will explore the findings of the inquiry, discuss the implications for the school districts and recruitment agencies, and make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this improvement-based inquiry was to examine a set of interventions to lessen the emotional challenges faced by international teachers upon relocating in the U.S. This concluding chapter offers a summary of the findings of this inquiry relative to the three guiding inquiry questions, an interpretation of the findings, and a review of the limitations that may have influenced the results. Further, I explore the implications of the inquiry for practice. Finally, I present recommendations for practice and future studies.

Summary of the Findings

This mixed method inquiry was designed, planned, and implemented to assess the effectiveness of an emotional support system for international teachers. The two improvement-based interventions that were part of the inquiry were the Question of the Day and restaurant outings. Results showed that participants benefitted from being exposed to both interventions. All the teachers in the inquiry found the restaurant outings helped them reduce the emotional challenges faced by them when moving to another country as these allowed them to build community, bond, and have meaningful social interactions. Similarly, ninety percent of teachers also found the Question of the Day to be useful since it became a channel for them to get to know other teachers, promote community, and exchange ideas. The first inquiry guiding question was: What are the challenges that international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools face upon moving to the United States? Three themes emerged from the qualitative data analyzed to answer that question: international teachers experience logistical challenges upon arrival but are receiving no support as they navigate these challenges; a lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts poses negative effects on international teachers during

the transition period; and in addition to logistical challenges, there is a lack of onboarding related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills , making the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging.

The second inquiry questions that was posed was: How do emotional support interventions affect transitioning challenges from international teachers? Qualitative data analysis also showed three overarching themes: receiving emotional support does reduce the stress of transitioning; reflecting and journaling with other international teachers may ease international teachers' early stages of the adjustment process; and face-to-face interactions with other international teachers with shared experiences made teachers feel less alone, reduced anxiety levels, and were a necessary ingredient for a successful transition.

Finally, the last inquiry guiding question was: How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner? The qualitative analysis revealed that even relatively simple interventions can have a positive impact as much as large-scale ones, particularly when it comes to building confidence as a leader.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I will describe the ways in which this inquiry's findings confirm, contradict, or extend knowledge by comparing them with the research presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. Furthermore, findings will be analyzed in the context of the conceptual framework on which this inquiry is grounded. This section is organized by each of the questions guiding this inquiry.

Inquiry Question 1: What are the challenges that international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools face upon moving to the United States?

There were three prevalent themes that consistently transpired when analyzing the data

from the initial survey to international teachers and all along while implementing the two sets of improvement-based interventions: international teachers experience logistical challenges during the relocation process but are receiving no support as they navigate these challenges, the lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts is detrimental for international teachers during the transition period and beyond logistical challenges, there is a lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills that make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging.

Confirming the findings from previous existing literature (Barlett, 2013; Kombe, 2016; Nganga, 2011) international teachers that participated in this inquiry unanimously agreed that the relocation process posed significant logistical challenges, many of which could have been prevented or lessened. As noted in Chapter 4, logistical challenges could stem from the hurdles international teachers encounter when renting an apartment, such as, setting up transportation (for instance, buying a car), trying to get access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare services, adjusting to the new food culture and belonging to the new place. Notably, some of these observed challenges are inevitable in nature for anyone moving to a foreign country since international teachers lack credit history. On the other hand, other challenges were inherent to the new workplace and revolved around classroom management, building relationships with co-workers and cross-cultural communication. These findings also seem to be consistent with earlier observations from previous studies (Bartlett, 2013; Hutchison, 2005; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kombe, 2016;; Nganga, 2011). Overall, the results produced by this inquiry mirror those of the previous studies that have examined the challenges faced by international teachers when moving to teach to the U.S.

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this inquiry also unveiled that international teachers experience a lack of emotional support from either recruitment agencies or school districts, which proved to be pernicious during their transition period. In other words, the qualitative data collected through the Question of the Day, restaurant outings and exit interviews demonstrated that the initial phase of the uprooting process is marked by an absence of emotional support. Teachers start to have difficulty as they become homesick, miss their families and have virtually no emotional support to navigate this initial phase. While in Chapter 2 I found some indirect references in the literature with regards to the positive effects of collaborative workspaces on teachers' mental health (Dellinger-Holton, 2012; Schmidt, 2010), the fact is that the lack of emotional support had not been previously detected or described in earlier work of the field.

The last theme that emerged from the data analysis for inquiry question 1 pertains to the absence of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills, making the initial transition more difficult. Although most of the teachers that participated during the data collection process were involved in post-arrival orientations, these fast-paced trainings revolved largely around instructional strategies, content and some logistical items and did not take longer than a couple of days. Overall, teachers concurred on how onboarding programs for international teachers should include exposure to explicit cross-cultural communication, self-care, time-management, and wellness promoting techniques. They should not be designed as a brief content-heavy arrival orientation which may sometimes result in cognitive overload for teachers due to the amount of information presented to teachers in such a short period of time. On the contrary, programs for onboarding international teachers upon arrival must be continuous and sustainable in nature to provide ongoing adaptation support and

promote community and well-being. These findings further support the results from earlier studies such as those from (Ainsworth, 2011; Dunn, 2011; Kombe, 2016; Lee, 2005; Waite, 2009) as they underscore the significance of the cultural nature of the challenges that international teachers face. These results also shed light on the notion of transferability of instructional effectiveness (Bartlett, 2013; Kombe, 2016; McAllister, 2002; Peeler & Jane, 2005) as teachers with a history of instructional effectiveness may still struggle due to an absence of ongoing training on soft, cross-cultural, and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, the gaps from the lack of exposure to cross-cultural communication translates into challenge of “effective cross-cultural teaching” (Hutchinson, 2005).

Inquiry Question 2: How do emotional support interventions affect transitioning challenges from international teachers?

There were three themes that surfaced when analyzing quantitative and qualitative data gathered to answer inquiry question 2. Those themes were receiving emotional support mitigates the stress of transitioning, reflecting and journaling in an online platform with other international teachers can improve international teachers’ early transitional stages of the adjustment process and face-to-face interactions with other international teachers with shared experiences help teachers feel less alone, reduce anxiety and are helpful and necessary for a successful transition.

This inquiry began with the aim of developing a framework to mitigate the emotional challenges faced by international teachers in the U.S. Incidentally, the findings corroborate the notion that emotional support reduces the stress of transitioning. In fact, 100 % of teacher participants unanimously agreed that international teachers should receive some type of ongoing emotional support upon relocating to ease the transition. Furthermore, their accounts attest to the fact that high-yield emotional support can lower attrition rates among foreign teachers and

significantly increase teacher efficacy. A possible explanation for these results may be the lack of adequate emotional support that international teachers currently experience. In accordance with the present results, earlier studies simultaneously highlighted the importance and absence of emotional support in international teachers' onboarding programs (Bartlett, 2013; Beck, 2010).

Another broad theme that clearly emerged from the data analysis concerns the benefits associated with reflecting and journaling in an online platform with other international teachers. These types of interactions can improve international teachers' early transitional stages of the adjustment process. They can mitigate the stress and anxiety that come with relocating overseas, proving to be an affordable method. In the context of this inquiry, participants stressed how the Question of the Day provided them with a safe solution-oriented space, allowing them to vent, reflect and heal while navigating the initial stages of the uprooting process. While previous published studies emphasized the significance of emotional support for international teachers (Barlett, 2013; Beck, 2010), they did not offer, describe, or test any type of intervention such as the Question of the Day to offset and alleviate early transitional challenges.

The last important theme that stood out from the data analysis is that face to face interactions among international teachers may make the early relocation transition easier. These interactions took place during two restaurant outings that international teachers attended. These restaurant outings represented the second improvement-based intervention. All teachers stressed how meaningful interactions became as they connected among themselves while eating at the restaurant. There are several possible explanations for this finding. Firstly, the effectiveness of this intervention could be attributed to the fact that interactions among fellow expat teachers took place in a safe community-driven space. Secondly, conversations were organically driven with no set topics in advance and revolved around challenges they faced and problem-solving

situations, generating a powerful sense of camaraderie. Although there has been an increase in publications and research on international teachers in recent years, these last two findings herein are new and not previously described in any current literature. They are still valuable contributions to the existing literature as they underscore the significance of establishing systems to alleviate those aforementioned challenges that international teachers face upon relocating in the U.S.

Inquiry Question 3: How has planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for transitioning international teachers impacted the leadership development of the scholarly practitioner?

Turning now to inquiry question 3, two themes became evident from the analysis of the notes that I captured in my journal while working on the dissertation of practice: interventions do not need to be large-scale; simple interventions can be just as impactful and meaningful, and the dissertation journey enhances confidence-building leadership skills.

The primary purpose of this inquiry was to develop and assess the effectiveness of two interventions designated to alleviate the emotional transitional challenges that international teachers experience. The Question of the Day and the restaurant outings were convenient as they were simple in nature, relatively easy to plan and did not require a complex implementation plan. Moreover, they were affordable for teachers as there were no direct costs for them to participate. From a logistical standpoint, I did not incur any expenses using the Padlet platform to push out the Question of the Day as I used the basic membership which is cost free. On the other hand, teachers were not responsible for any of the costs of the meals at the restaurants as they received 20 dollars each to cover those expenses. Notably, both the Question of the Day and restaurant outings turned out to be two highly effective interventions based on the substantial positive

feedback received from teacher participants during the exit interviews. All these factors explain how these two simple-scale interventions can still pose a significant positive impact for international teachers' early relocation stages without requiring extensive resources, labor and effort. Taken together, these results suggest that there is no direct relationship between the complexity and size of the intervention and its effectiveness.

If I now turn to the second theme, planning and leading the implementation of an emotional support program for international teachers afforded me an opportunity to strengthen and solidify a wide range of skills that are directly applicable to leadership. A completed dissertation is typically described as “the pinnacle of academic accomplishment, demanding rigorous research, critical analysis and a compelling argument” (Shadan, 2024, p. 1). Relatedly, Roberts (2010) uses the metaphor of climbing to the top of a mountain to depict the dissertation writing process. She goes deeper into this analogy to describe how fulfilling it feels to be able to finish writing a dissertation, saying “ I learned, as you will, that journeying to the peak is more than an intellectual pilgrimage, it is also an emotional and psychological one. It requires commitment, perseverance, stamina and mental toughness” (Roberts, 2010 p. XIV). Consequently, as a leader, I feel far more self-confident after the dissertation journey. For instance, I was able to refine my skillset for project management as I had to get district approval, later recruit a group of international teachers and be responsible for planning and executing the implementation of two interventions for international teachers. That involved meticulous planning and organization. Secondly, I was able to strengthen my critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This was a long-term commitment with obstacles that I had to push out of the way while approaching issues critically and developing well-reasoned solutions. This allowed me to become more resilient, which prepared me to handle difficulties at any level and have the

courage to lead with determination. Thirdly, I feel I have refined my communication skills as a leader as I spent so much time writing clearly and persuasively. Finally, planning and leading this project increased my level of self-discipline and motivation, traits that are so valuable in any leadership position.

Limitations of the Inquiry

In practical terms, this inquiry has some limitations that could affect its scope and ability to generalize its findings. I recognize three possible limitations in this research inquiry: on the one hand, the sample population used for this investigation was comprised of 13 foreign educators who came to work in an urban district in central North Carolina through two distinct recruitment agencies. In other words, the sample population does not include teachers hired by all recruitment agencies in existence. Therefore, their transitional experiences may be confined, limited and also informed to the practices performed by those two particular agencies . Conversely, time might be another constraint. Although the research involving international teachers was conducted in short cycles, it is possible that the circumstances surrounding the application of the improvement intervention affected the outcomes. However, even though there may not have been enough time for teachers to take a full dive into the interventions, the data obtained from the intervention implementation and collection processes is still valid for outlining future research and providing guidance for improving the transitional relocation process of international teachers from an emotional standpoint.

While all but one of the teacher participants in this inquiry were in their second or third year in the US, all of them had struggled to navigate the intricate and complex adjustment period with limited or virtually no emotional support based on their recollections. Lastly, the sample population of teachers that participated in this inquiry consists of educators from nine countries

and hence is not representative of all the existing cultures or countries in the world. It did not include teachers with nationalities from any of the countries in conflict with the U.S. and who may be more prone to being victims of discrimination. All these existing limitations presented here may not impede the ability to generalize findings across international teachers. The lessons learned from this inquiry offer invaluable insights that may contribute to easing the emotional challenges faced by international teachers during the early stages of their relocation process.

On a different note, the data collection tools were field-tested through a pilot study described herein for reliability purposes. The pilot study was conducted at the early stages of the inquiry process and consisted of veteran international teachers who provided constructive empirical feedback regarding the survey and exit interview questions. Following the pilot study, the findings were used to improve the data collection tools' design and enhance its reliability. The data gathered influenced the architecture of the data collection tools (for instance, some questions were reworded for specificity purposes or additional options were added to multiple choice questions) but had no impact on the improvement-based interventions designed for the emotional support framework for teachers. Overall, the pilot study represented a safety net to ensure both survey and interview questions were in alignment with the inquiry purpose, thus effectively capturing all the necessary relevant data.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

International teachers have become one of the most convenient solutions for school districts to fill the instructional vacancies propelled by an acute teacher shortage. This inquiry began with the goal of providing an improvement-based framework to meet the emotional needs of international teachers during the transitional relocation stages or their first year in the U.S. The findings reaffirm the results from earlier studies with reference to logistical transitional

challenges, that the lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts, which affects international teachers during the transition period, and the lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills, make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging. Unlike previous research (AFT, 2009; Bartlett, 2013; Cabaniss, 2014; Dunn, 2011; Hutchison, 2005; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kombe, 2016; Kombe, 2017), the inquiry results showed that international teachers strongly benefit from both online journaling and face to face interactions with fellow expat teachers.

It is my hope that the inception of this inquiry and its results lead to practical intervention opportunities for recruiting agencies and school districts to improve international teachers' transitions and ease logistical challenges by prioritizing ongoing and sustainable emotional support. On the one hand, the inquiry results underscore the significance and seriousness of the challenges that international teachers face when moving to the U.S. All teacher participants concurred on the complicated nature of the relocation process as they faced challenges that were outside of their circle of control, with virtually no support in a new country. There is, therefore, a definite need for recruitment agencies and school districts to instill a sense of urgency, revamp orientations and provide continuous emotional support, at least during their first year. This also poses major implications for school administrators, who hire international teachers, and are usually unaware of the hurdles international teachers face when relocating. To effectively support international teachers on campus upon arrival, school leaders must have a thorough awareness of the transitional problems arising from the uprooting process from their homeland to the relocation to a new country. These systems might be just temporary in nature depending on each case basis, but they would not have to be limited to those provided to beginning teachers. In fact, they should include positive steps to assist international teachers to develop community

and belongingness in the new setting. For instance, school principals could establish a network of support within their schools with their own staff to ensure international teachers feel welcomed, valued and create a school environment that limits the ideations of isolation.

Secondly, the results of this inquiry yielded an unanticipated evidence-based discovery, the idea that interventions do not necessarily have to be complex and costly. In fact, small-scale cost-effective interventions like the ones that were part of this inquiry can also render impressive results and school districts or recruitment agencies should be able to implement them. As shown earlier, 100.0% of teacher participants found both improvement-based interventions that were focal point of this inquiry to be highly effective as they allowed them to rebuild their social capital and to generate community, among other benefits. Another significant and equally practical implication supported by the result of this inquiry is that emotional support for international teachers may translate into improved mental health, morale, teacher efficacy, productivity and engagement in the classroom and may, potentially, lead to higher learning outcomes for students as teachers find the adjustment process more manageable and less stressful.

Implications of the Findings for Equity

In addition to implications for practice, there are also implications for equity that can be drawn from the findings. As indicated earlier, this inquiry is also anchored in the overarching themes of social justice and equity. International teachers experience significant adaptational and emotional challenges when moving to the U.S. in part due to limited or absence of emotional support. Notably, they transplant themselves into a new setting with different social norms far from their families and circle of social relationships. The inclusive and social framework proposed herein was purposefully crafted to generate action-oriented steps in order to alleviate

those challenges. Simply put, this initiative is an equity-promoting corrective tool that allows international teachers to exit the complex adjustment process with affirmation, self-development, teacher efficacy and less stress. Moreover, it bridges the gap between international and American teachers, providing fair support and opportunities for international employees.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this inquiry have provided compelling evidence regarding a significant number of notable implications for future practice. School districts and recruitment agencies must strategize to foster a culture of belongingness and inclusion among their employees. Like local teachers, international teachers are part of the greatest asset to an educational organization. In this context, international teachers should not remain outside the scope of these practices. Their vulnerability should be a familiar concept to forward-thinking school systems and recruitment companies as the systemic hurdles that international teachers must overcome have been extensively recorded by previous studies. The findings from this inquiry have shown that international teachers should be at the core of emotional support systems since they are at risk when relocating to the U.S. Emotional support systems are the foundation of adaptation and performance. They are not just imperative, but a key to retaining talent. They also showed that any interventions or systems in place designated to reduce challenges do not necessarily have to be costly or on a large scale. Therefore, school districts and recruiters should work collaboratively not just for business alliances but to generate partnerships and provide sustainable, continuous support for these teachers. After all, teachers are sponsored with a cultural exchange or employment visa by the recruitment agency while their professional duties take place at a public school. Simply put, both recruiters and school districts mutually benefit from international teachers' services.

Furthermore, recruiters should not rely solely on two-to-three-day post-arrival orientations. Tangible supports must be staggered throughout the initial school year to assist teachers emotionally and help them develop belongingness to meet their basic needs. Relatedly, teacher companions assigned by recruiters should be held accountable to ensure international teachers receive the support they need. On a different note, capacity should be built among school administrators to raise awareness of international teachers' adaptational and emotional challenges when relocating so that they can also establish support systems on their end. Once school principals get a clear understating of those challenges, they could serve as bridges or advocates for their international teachers to ensure that they are connecting or building relationships with their co-workers on campus so that they do not feel isolated or marginalized. They could also facilitate weekly or bi-weekly check-ins with them to target or problem solve any potential challenges that teachers may be experiencing during their transitional period upon relocation. Capacity among school administrators could also be built by organizing trips overseas, providing opportunities for them to engage in culture outside of their regions or states so that they can better empathize with international teachers.

Moreover, provisions to intentionally support international teachers' during their first year should also come from policy from the Department of Public Instruction. State guidelines should inform clear steps for the creation of a mandatory international teacher mentor program to provide ongoing support during their first year working at U.S public schools.

Finally, international teachers who spend over three years in the U.S. develop roots as they finally become used to their new home and sometimes bring children who also become acclimated to U.S. schools. Their school districts invest significant amounts of money on costly professional development, becoming stronger educators. Thus, from a policy perspective,

international teachers should not be contractually or legally obligated to return back home after five years by their recruitment agencies. In fact, those with a record of instructional effectiveness and who have been in the U.S. for three or four years should be given the options to switch to a temporary employment visa, which would place them in a pathway to citizenship. For instance, in order to recruit and retain highly-qualified international teachers, immigration policies that grant H-1B visas for foreign STEM workers or nurses and consider a road to citizenship should be replicated. Overall, this pathway that could be offered to foreign national teachers would result advantageous to all parties involved, including international teachers, school staff and students from each particular school, as they could help alleviate existing teacher shortages while providing fairer working conditions to international teachers.

Recommendations for Future Study

This inquiry elevates the profound positive effects of two small scale improvement-based interventions to emotionally assist international teachers with their transitional challenges as they move to the U.S. The findings revealed that these two interventions served as levers to successfully regulate their emotional distress, inspiring community, and an inclusive culture. Nonetheless, a gap persists in the literature, with absence of information or clear understanding about the effectiveness of other potential interventions. Therefore, it is highly recommended that further research be undertaken to identify and explore other interventions from which international teachers could benefit. Secondly, further studies should be done to investigate whether interventions should come from school districts, recruiters, or partnerships between both. The impact of interventions for international teachers at the district level such as the onboarding that first year teachers receive is also recommended as a potential topic of future studies. Future research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of how onboarding

practices received by American beginning teachers influence the performance and adaption of international teachers in their new setting. Furthermore, the emotional challenges faced by teachers coming with families as opposed to those coming without families represents an important topic for future research. Considerably, more work will need to be done to determine if there is correlation between international teachers that come with their families and their adaptability or adjustment in the new environment. Finally, longitudinal studies are required to examine more closely the links between international teachers' supports and their impact on their self-efficacy, success and retention rates.

Conclusions

The present inquiry was designed to determine the effects of two interventions as part of a framework to alleviate emotional challenges faced by international teachers when moving to work in the U.S. The results revealed that participants in the present inquiry benefitted from the exposure to both interventions. All of the teachers in the inquiry found the restaurant outings helped ease the emotional challenges faced by international teachers as it represents a space for community building and social interaction and bonding. Similarly, ninety percent of teachers considered the Question of the Day to be beneficial, as it promoted a sense of community and provided teachers with an opportunity to get to know each other and exchange ideas.

In examining the challenges faced by international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools three themes emerged from the qualitative data analyzed: international teachers experience logistical challenges during the relocation process but are receiving no support as they navigate these challenges; a lack of emotional support from either the recruiting agencies or school districts is detrimental for international teachers during the transition period; and beyond

logistical challenges, there is a lack of personal and professional development support related to cultural, interpersonal, or soft skills that make the transition to the U.S. classroom challenging. Similarly, in examining how emotional support interventions affected transition challenges faced by international teachers at Sunshine Public Schools, qualitative data analysis also resulted in three themes: receiving emotional support mitigates the stress of transitioning; reflecting and journaling in an online platform with other international teachers can improve international teachers' early transitional stages of the adjustment process; and face-to-face interactions with other international teachers with shared experiences helps teachers feel less alone, reduced anxiety, and were necessary for a successful transition.

International teachers, like any other teachers, should be regarded as the backbones of any educational agency, driving cultural awareness, student achievement, and assisting those school districts that systematically struggle to fill their teaching vacancies. Hence, in light of their profound long-lasting contributions, they should be valued and supported. All these findings should inform future human resources and onboarding protocols for international teachers to ensure that they successfully adjust into the new setting in a timely manner and can do their work with dignity and efficacy.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

Willis Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284

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Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral **IRB**
To: [Christian Walter](#)
CC: [Travis Lewis](#)
Date: 12/21/2023
Re: [UMCIB 23-002490](#)
FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING.

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 12/21/2023. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1, 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIB for review and approval. The UMCIB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
2.4 Recruitment Methods Addition(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Approval Letter(0.01)	Dataset Use Approval/Permission
Citi Modules(0.01)	Additional Items
Citi Modules(0.01)	Additional Items
Citi Modules(0.01)	Additional Items
Informed Consent(0.01)	Consent Forms
International Teacher Survey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
International Teacher Survey(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Post Intervention Interview(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Post Intervention Interview(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Recruitment Letter/Email(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Research Protocol(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the **IRB** states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING: A FRAMEWORK TO MITIGATE THE EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS IN THE U.S.

Principal Investigator: Christian Walter

You are invited to participate in a **research study** titled “FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING: A FRAMEWORK TO MITIGATE THE EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS IN THE U.S.” by Christian Walter, a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the College of Education LEED department. The study onset involves surveying international teachers in Guilford County Schools to determine their challenges upon moving to the US. This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Next, participants will get exposure to two improvement interventions: the daily Question of the Day and monthly restaurant outings. The former is a question pushed out via a discussion board every day to international teachers, which should take 2 minutes to complete. The primary purpose of the Question of the Day is to build culture and support among teachers in their new setting. The latter involves voluntary participation in a restaurant outing once a month for 2 months. Please note that I will provide a 20 dollars stipend to cover the costs associated with the meals for each of the restaurant outings. The study will conclude with an exit interview with each study participant. Interviews will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Interviews will be recorded via Microsoft Teams, later transcribed, and kept confidential. Names will not be utilized. The information is expected to help us better understand the challenges faced by international teachers and the impact of the improvement interventions set in place to alleviate them. Your responses will be kept confidential, and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research and all the activities associated with it is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. We **will not** be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study. There is **no penalty for not taking** part in this research study. Please call Dr. Travis Lewis at (252) 328-5485 for any research-related questions or the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

Name of Participant:

By typing your name in the signature field, you are certifying that you have read and understand the consent form and agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Your confidentiality is important to us. Please select a preferred pseudonym (it can be a fictitious name, character, place, etc.) This will be used in all final reporting for this research study to protect your identity.

Pseudonym Name:

Signature of Principal Investigator: Christian Walter

APPENDIX C: INTERNATIONAL TEACHER SURVEY

Please complete the survey below to the best of your ability thinking about your experiences as an international teacher so far. The data gathered through this survey will be utilized as a baseline or starting point for my dissertation in practice and will remain confidential.

1. Indicate the gender with which you identify:

Male
Female
Non-binary
Prefer not to disclose

2. How many years did you teach prior to coming to the US?

0-5
5-10
10-15
15-20
More than 20

3. Have you ever taught in another country overseas (other than your home country) prior to coming to the US?

Yes
No

If yes, for how long?

1 year
2 years
More than 3 year

4. My current teaching assignment is (check all that apply):

Elementary school
Middle school
High school
Other: please specify

5. Overall, PRIOR to becoming an international teacher in the US, how much of a challenge did you expect the following aspects of your experience to be?

1 Very much 2- Much 3-Somewhat 4-A little 5-Not at all

Economic
Social
Professional
Emotional
Cultural

6. My current teaching assignment is (check all that apply):

Elementary school
Middle school
High school
Other: please specify

7. Overall, PRIOR to becoming an international teacher in the US, how much of a challenge did you expect the following aspects of your experience to be?

1 Very much 2- Much 3-Somewhat 4-A little 5-Not at all

Economic
Social
Professional
Emotional
Cultural

8. Overall, AFTER becoming an international teacher in the US, how much of a challenge did you find the following aspects of your experience to be?

1-Very much 2-Much 3-A little 4-Somewhat 5-Not at all

Economic
Social
Professional
Emotional
Cultural

9. What challenges did you find as a teacher at your new school or in your classroom?

1-Very much 2-Much 3-A little 4-Somewhat 5-Not at all

ACADEMIC

American pedagogy
Classroom management
Content knowledge

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

Building relations with co-workers
Building relations with students

CULTURAL

Cultural unawareness
Cross-cultural communication

10. What challenges did you find outside the classroom as you transitioned into your new life in the US?

ECONOMIC

Rent
Transportation
Groceries
Healthcare

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL

Friendly relations
Neighbor relations
Belonging to the new place

11. If these challenges could be prevented, who would be responsible for preventing them?

Recruitment agency
School Administrators
District Administrators
Fellow Teachers
Community
Local Authorities

12. What challenges could be easily prevented?

	To a large extent	To a moderate extent	To no extent
Academic			
Social/Emotional			
Cultural			
Economic			

11. I have received reasonable support from the agency that hired me to come to the US as I started my life in the US in the following fields/aspects:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Relocating					
Cultural					
Making friends					
American pedagogy					

12. Overall, I have received reasonable support from the following actors as I transitioned with my life in the US:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
School district					
Fellow teachers					

Community
Neighbors
Religious organizations
Recruitment agency

13. Rank the following potential challenges that international teachers normally face: 1-least challenging 4-most challenging:

	Least Challenging	Somehow Challenging	Challenging	Very Challenging
Classroom management				
Cultural differences				
Uprooting process (being homesick, etc.)				
Adjusting to the new setting				
Understanding and implementing new curriculum				
District and state-mandated testing				

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: *The overall challenges that international teachers face in their first months into their new setting can lead them to resign and decide to move back to their home countries* (choose one of the following options):

Strongly agree
Agree
Undecided
Disagree
Strongly disagree

14. Did/have you at any point during your first year consider(ed) going back home?

Yes
No

15. If you have been teaching in the US for over a year, did you at any point after the first year consider going back home?

Yes
No

16. List 5 personal traits identified in successful international teachers

17. What did you find to be most helpful during your transitional period?

18. What did you find to be least helpful during your transitional period?

19. Overall, teaching in the US as an international teacher is a most challenging undertaking.

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

APPENDIX D: POST-INTERVENTION INTERVIEW

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Gender and Demographics of Interviewee:

Years of experience and Country of Origin:

The purpose of this post-intervention exit interview is to gather qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of the interventions. Answers will remain confidential. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions

1-Did the question of the day help you better transition into your new life in the United States? If so, in what way?

2-Did the restaurant outing help you better transition into your new life in the United States? If so, in what way?

3-How does emotional support affect transitional challenges of international teachers, if it does at all?

4-What do you think would have happened to you if you had not been part of this study and had not been exposed to these emotional support interventions? What would your transition have been like?

5- How can this emotional support framework for international teachers be improved?

6-Should an emotional support framework be at the core of an onboarding program for first time international teachers moving to the United States? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear International Teacher,

My name is Christian Walter, a doctoral student at East Carolina University. We are conducting a research study to evaluate the impact of two interventions designed to alleviate the challenges experienced by international teachers in North Carolina. We are interested in your experience as an international teacher.

The research is minimal risk, and there is no direct benefit to you. While we would love for you to participate in this study, we want to emphasize that participating in the research is neither an expectation nor a requirement from you or based on any relationship that we have with you. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and strictly confidential. The findings from this project will help us examine the impact of the implementation of two interventions designed to lessen the challenges faced by international teachers upon moving to the US.

If you want to participate in this research study, please open the attached Word document. It will direct you to an online consent form. Complete the form (highlighted areas only) and send it back to me via email at your earliest convenience. When you agree to provide your consent, you will be able to complete the initial survey.

In addition to completing the initial survey, participants will volunteer to answer a daily discussion board question through Padlet (Mondays through Fridays), which should not take over 2 minutes and to attend 2 monthly restaurant outings (one in late February and one in late March). Please note that I will provide a 20 dollars stipend to cover the costs associated with the meals for each of the restaurant outings. Finally, participants will sit for a personal exit interview. Below is a more detailed timeline:

Week of:	Activities
January 29-February 2	Turn in consent form and do initial survey
February 5-February 9	Question of the Day via Padlet
February 12-February 16	Question of the Day via Padlet
February 19-February 23	Question of the Day via Padlet First Restaurant Outing on Feb. 22 (Location TBD)
February 26-March 1	Question of the Day via Padlet
March 4-March 8	Question of the Day via Padlet
March 11-March 15	Question of the Day via Padlet
March 18-March 22	Question of the Day via Padlet Last Restaurant Outing on March 21 (Location TBD)
Week of March 1	Exit interview via Teams

If you have any questions or concerns about this request or the study, feel free to contact me at [phone number]. You can also contact the dissertation chair, Dr. Travis Lewis, at lewistr16@ecu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the East Carolina University IRB Director at umcirb@ecu.edu or 252-744-2914.

I would appreciate it if you agreed to share your insight with us.

Thank you,

Christian Walter

Principal Investigator

[phone number]

APPENDIX F: QUESTION OF THE DAY

1-Let's get to know each other! Briefly introduce yourself. I will go first! My name is Christian Walter, and I am from Argentina. I moved to the US in 2000 as an international teacher. I was an EL teacher, curriculum coach, AP and now I am the principal. I love to run, grill and hang out with friends. How about you?

2- Jon O. Gordon is an American author and speaker on the topics of leadership, culture, sales, and teamwork. I came across his 21 Tips for a Positive New Year at the beginning of this year. As you think about this year that is way underway, which tips do you already implement in your life? Which ones would you be interested in trying but think they could result a little bit challenging? I am seriously trying to get more sleep and to remember my why. I eat healthy for the most part and exercise!

3- Let's pay attention to the blob tree today. Which one are you in the tree based on your current state? I will go first. I am number 6. I have started climbing and probably need some help getting to the next level. How about you? Let's share with each other.

4-Balance So Far: Moving to another country is a major undertaking and we have all been through it. What is it that remains a challenge when it comes to adjusting to a new country? What have been some gains? In my case, missing my family back home is still a challenge though I see them once a year. As far as gains, I have been able to make a good circle of friends. I feel like the character of the book Grandfather's Journey....How about you?

5-Happy “Friyayy” Everyone! It's” Friyayayyy”!!! What a long week but we made it through!!!

What are your plans for this weekend? Any good ideas to share? I will watch the Superbowl. I love the half time shows! Tomorrow, I have to work on a college assignment and will go out and run and exercise as every weekend! How about you? What are your plans for this weekend? Any recommendations? I hope everyone has an amazing time!

6- Who speaks to you today and why? I love them all... today I pick Malala...sometimes you must be brave to make the right decisions...How about you?

7-Flashback: Let's do a flashback into our middle school years...How were you like a student in middle school? Did you like school? How does that impact your relationship with students now while you work with kids in a school building? I was a very responsible student and liked school to some extent. One of the non-negotiables at home was that i could not fail any subject! As a school administrator, I try to build relationships with students all the time.

8- Moving to a new country to teach entails learning an entire new educational system and cultural norms. What has been the most difficult aspect of this adjustment in your case? I recall when I moved to the US to teach, I wasn't used to the culture of the extra credit. Classroom management was also an adjustment. As I worked with American students, I could not believe the lack of cultural awareness they had and the lack of interest to learn about someone's culture. How about you?

9-Affirmations: Which one resonates with you? How does this thinking serve you? The one that resonates with me today is - I don't have to have it all figured out to move forward- especially in the face of many new things that we don't have control over- focusing on those that we do, without seeking perfection.... and you? Consider posting these somewhere where you can be reminded of the one you connect with- daily! (or choose them all!)

10-Weekend!! What a long week!!!! Any plans for this weekend? Any ideas or suggestions? I need to finish an assignment. I usually try to complete my job-related work at school before leaving on Friday. I will be resting, exercising and running. Nothing fancy...How about you guys?

11-Wishful Thinking: Happy Monday, everyone! What is something that would positively change or improve your experience as an international teacher here? Let's learn from each other...

12-The Self-Care Iceberg: Good morning! Check out the infographic above about the self-care iceberg. According to some literature out there, sometimes things that we may think are self-care don't necessarily relate to that. Do you agree with this idea of a self-care iceberg? Why? Why not? Let's open some conversation and dialogue with each other about taking care of oneself.

13-Relationships: The old saying goes that “people don't care what you know until they know you care.” I really believe this and think the ability to build relationships is a very important skill in every aspect of life. The ability to build relationships was helpful when I was a teacher

and just as important when I took on people leadership roles. While this skill is important, many people find it challenging. Please reply and share 1 relationship building tip no matter how big or small. I am sure your tip will be helpful to someone who is struggling to make connections.

14-Mistakes Happen: Do you practice pausing before responding to a mistake someone has made? (Practice taking a pause. Take a deep cleansing breath, and search for the most loving way to respond.) How do you respond to a personal mistake? Do you beat yourself up? Do you respond differently to loved ones when they make a mistake? (Be as compassionate with yourself and others, and remember, we all make mistakes.) Sometimes, I feel like I have more mistakes than successes- some days are just like that! I hate that feeling of doing something wrong, especially something I've done involving someone else (I don't want to disappoint folks), but I make a real effort to give myself as much grace as possible, while accepting ownership for whatever happened so it won't happen again- when we know better we do better! I've learned that when I give grace to myself, it makes room for them to do the same, that makes things easier!

15-Happy Weekend! The weekend is finally here! What are your plans? Anything exciting? I am meeting with my professor and then relax and exercise for the most part. How about you? Any plans? Any recommendations?

16-Happy Monday! Happy Monday everyone! We are close to the end of February without a break until late March. Let's share strategies that you may have to make it through this month. I will go first. I try to enjoy the ride. While it is a lot of time without a break, I try to go one day at

a time and try not to stress over little things. How about you? What strategy do you have in mind to make it through?

17-Moments of Hope: Two years ago, I recorded for EDNC my "Moment of Hope", which published on their official Twitter. As we were phasing out from the COVID-19 pandemic, I shared my hopes about what was to come next. What is something that happened to you in your personal life or in the classroom and that represents a "moment of hope"? Let's share with each other.

18- My Other Career: We are changing gears today. What career path would you have chosen if you were not a teacher/counselor/social worker/etc.? Was teaching always your first choice? In addition to my educational degrees, I also got a degree in broadcasting and journalism. Early in my twenties, I did broadcasting, voice-over talent and even hosted a newscast on TV. I am sure that would have been the career that I would have pursued had not I become an educator. How about you? What would your professional career have been? Let's have some fun. Tell us all about it here...

19-Chronotypes: Which chronotype do you identify with? Would you prefer to be different? My ideal chronotype is the dolphin. I like to get up and exercise but unfortunately, I cannot do that every morning and during the week I usually run after work. I try to be at bed by 10 PM but sometimes I cannot sleep very well. Sleeping is the most underrated medicine. How about you? Let's learn from each other!

20-Weekend! What a long week!!! I am sure everyone is exhausted! Any fun plans for this weekend? I am working on my dissertation, exercising and spending some time with my kids. How about you? Any recommendations????

21-Cultural Awareness: Think about yourself as an international teacher at your school. Are staff members, including administration aware that you are from overseas? Do colleagues at your school show interest in your cultural roots or country of origin? I recall when I was an international teacher I was initially at a big school and I was under the radar...many people did not care where I was from...next, I moved to a small school and things changed. People were very interested in where I came from...

22-Mental Health: October was depression and mental health awareness month. These are topics often not discussed in our personal or work lives, and yet mental health disorders affect millions of American workers. What are some active steps that you are taking each day to maintain your mental health? Does mental health affect international teachers? I will go first....My first year in the US I wanted to go back home. I was so homesick I thought I was not going to make it! Nowadays, running is my non-negotiable. I try to do 30 miles weekly and I run close to 4 miles each day. How about you? Let's learn from each other...

23-Count Your Blessings: Fill the blank... for one or for all- something that money can't buy that I'm grateful for is love...Something in nature that I'm grateful for are the sun and the sea...Something beautiful I'm grateful for is amazing grace... How about you?

24-Who is your person? We all have so much to be thankful for- who holds your feet to the fire when you are falling off track. And who do you celebrate with? We need these folks to be our accountability partners- to help us meet and celebrate our goals- one at a time!

My best friends are my thought partners, my prayer partners, and my cheerleaders-and they will give it to me straight when I need to hear the truth- we've been friends for over 30 years, and I'm thankful for my accountability partners every day- what about you?

25-Last Question of the Day: We have finally completed this journey. For the last question of the day, let's reflect on the last couple of weeks as we engaged in discussions to get to know and learn from each other. What question of the day resonated with you the most throughout the last months as we interacted with each other in this space?

