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UNQUIET QUITTING: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX TEACHER
ATTRITION IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

A Dissertation

By

DOLORES ARAUJO JR.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

July 2024

UNQUIET QUITTING: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LATINX TEACHER
ATTRITION IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

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by
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July 2024

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ABSTRACT

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Teacher attrition, a critical issue in education, has significant implications for the quality of instruction and student success. The Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, known for its substantial Latinx population, faces a concerning trend of high teacher turnover particularly among Latinx educators who leave teaching within their novice years. This inquiry provides a comprehensive examination of the factors contributing to teacher attrition in the region, with a specific focus on the experiences of Latinx teachers.

Findings are organized into four thematic categories: "Traversing Organizational Terrain," elucidating the institutional dynamics shaping teachers' experiences; "Interweaving Bonds," highlighting the relational aspects within the educational context; "Balancing Act," examining the complexities of managing personal and professional demands; and "Navigating Aspirations," capturing teachers' aspirations and trajectories beyond teaching.

Ultimately, this study offers valuable insights into the factors contributing to teacher attrition among Latinx educators in the RGV. By shedding light on these challenges, it provides crucial information for educational policymakers and stakeholders to develop targeted interventions aimed at improving teacher retention and fostering a more supportive environment for Latinx educators. Through these efforts, the study aims to enhance the overall educational experiences and achievements of students in the region.

DEDICATION

With profound gratitude, I humbly dedicate this work to the guiding presence of God, whose unwavering strength and boundless grace have illuminated my path through every challenge and triumph. A mis queridos padres, cuyo amor constante, apoyo inquebrantable y aliento perdurable han sido el fundamento de mi resistencia, les estoy eternamente agradecido. En mis momentos de mayor vulnerabilidad, al borde de rendirme, ustedes se mantuvieron como faros de fe inquebrantable, alentándome y creyendo firmemente en mis habilidades. Su fe inquebrantable en mí ha sido la luz guía que me ha llevado a través de los momentos más oscuros, y por su presencia inquebrantable en mi vida, estoy infinitamente agradecido.

Also, to my dear siblings, Ismael and Amor, you have been my constant source of inspiration and motivation. I have always strived to be a beacon of guidance for you, encouraging you to pursue your dreams and goals with unwavering determination. To my close friends and colleagues, your unwavering support and encouragement have been my pillars of strength. Esta dedicatoria también es un tributo a mis queridos abuelos y bisabuelos, cuyo amor inquebrantable y sacrificios han allanado el camino para mi éxito educativo. Aunque ya no estén físicamente con nosotros, su legado vive en los valores que me inculcaron y el apoyo inquebrantable que brindaron a lo largo de mi viaje. Su fe inquebrantable en mí y las oportunidades que me brindaron han sido la fuerza impulsora detrás de mis logros, y por eso, estoy profundamente agradecido. With love, Dolores Araujo Jr.

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Your sage advice, encouragement, and unwavering support have been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of my research and academic pursuits. I am indebted to you for your steadfast belief in my capabilities, for challenging me to push beyond my limits, and for providing constructive feedback that has undoubtedly enriched my scholarly endeavors.

As I embark on this new chapter with the completion of my dissertation, I am fueled by a profound sense of purpose to make meaningful contributions to the education field in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. It is my fervent hope that through my work, I can inspire and motivate fellow educators to embrace lifelong learning and to continually strive for excellence in serving our students. Thank you, from the depths of my heart, for your unwavering support, guidance, and belief in my potential. Your mentorship has been a beacon of light, guiding me through the challenges and triumphs of this academic journey.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Many public schools aim to attract and retain successful classroom teachers. According to Stotko, Ingram, and O' Ferral (2007), "The success of urban schools depends heavily on the quality of the teachers who serve the schools and the administrators that support the teachers" (p. 30). Teacher attrition has been an issue of enduring concern in education. High rates of teacher turnover not only create a disruption in the continuity of learning but also have a negative impact on student achievement and school performance (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). While teacher attrition affects all teachers, it disproportionately affects teachers of color, particularly Latinx teachers (Boser & Simone, 2015; Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Latinx teachers are underrepresented in the teaching profession, with only 9% of teachers identifying as Latinx (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Minority teachers, including Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous teachers, leave their schools at higher rates than do White teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The reasons for this disparity in attrition rates are multifaceted, including factors such as low pay, inadequate support, lack of representation, and cultural isolation (Podolsky et al., 2016). The loss of Latinx teachers has significant implications for students, particularly Latinx students.

Research such as that conducted by Cherng and Halpin (2016) has shown that the presence of same-race teachers, including Latinx teachers for Latinx students, was associated with increased academic motivation and educational aspirations among students of color. Additionally, Boser (2014) adds, “It is important for all students to interact with people who look and act differently than they do in order to build social trust and create a wider sense of community” (p. 3). In other words, the benefits of diversity are not just for students of color; they are also important for white students. As a matter of fact, minority students perform better on standardized tests and have other positive academic outcomes when taught by teachers of the same race or ethnicity (Boser, 2014).

Despite the importance of retaining Latinx teachers, there is still more research to be done on the experience of Latinx teachers leaving the profession and the factors that contribute to their attrition. My study provides a glimpse into the Rio Grande Valley Latinx teachers' firsthand narrative experiences and how they interpreted - made meaning of - these experiences when leaving teaching. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how they made meaning of their experiences of leaving teaching within their first 6 years of entering the field, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of attrition among Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Chapter 2 focuses on literature relevant to teacher attrition in the United States, particularly on the minority group such as of Latinx teachers. Towards these ends, it begins with a review of a snapshot of teachers at the national and state levels and then takes a more focused look at the issue in rural and Latinx contexts. Then, it discusses literature from Nguyen, Pham,

Springer, and Crouch (2019) identifying factors that influenced teacher attrition focusing on the study's framework and factors influencing Latinx teacher attrition.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation introduces the study's case-study design, identifies and describes the setting and participants for the study, and details the process of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on the emergent themes that came across from the data that was gathered and analyzed from the participants. Finally, chapter 5 discuss the significance of the study along with the implications for practice and further research.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher attrition is a major issue in the field of education. These attrition rates cause negative implications for the education system. According to Marx, Lavigne, Braden, Hawkman, Andersen, Gailey, Geddes, Jones, Si, and Washburn (2023), "These attrition patterns are of immediate concern to school and district leaders as teachers' exits have negative effects on teachers, schools, and students" (p. 2). Currently, public schools in the United States face an alarming teacher shortage that disproportionately affects school districts that serve working-class communities of color (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Albright (2023) states, "This is even more of an issue for teachers of color, with their numbers being much lower in relation to the overall teacher workforce" (p. 4).

While a deeper understanding of the experience of teacher attrition across all populations is important, understanding the attrition of teachers of color is of greater significance to students within their same cultural backgrounds and diversity. Despite the importance of retaining Latinx teachers, there is a lack of research on the factors that contribute to their attrition. Research by Scott, Bettini, & Brunsting (2023), Pitt (2023), Senteno (2023), and Wintner (2023) suggests that Latinx teachers face unique challenges that may contribute to their high attrition rates. For

example, Latinx teachers often work in schools serving predominantly low-income and minority students, which can result in high levels of stress and burnout (Villalba, Smith, & Morales, 2018). In addition, Latinx teachers may feel a sense of cultural isolation in their schools, which can lead to a lack of support and mentorship (Flores & Day, 2018). Furthermore, Latinx teachers may face discriminatory practices and policies, such as being denied tenure or promotions (Villalba et al., 2018).

Given the importance of retaining Latinx teachers, it is essential to understand the factors that contributed to their attrition and to identify strategies for supporting and retaining this group of Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. If we do not retain these effective teachers, our students are less likely to benefit from teachers with a shared ethnicity, linguistic, and cultural background.

Research Question

The research question that drove this study was: What were the experiences of 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how did they make meaning of their experiences leaving teaching?

In order to pursue this question, I used an exploratory case study design. According to Mills and Gay (2019), "Case study research is appropriate when the researcher wants to answer a descriptive question (e.g., what happened?) or an explanatory question (e.g., how or why did something happen?)" (p. 405). A case study design was appropriate for studying the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts because it allowed me to deeply explore and understand the unique stories and perspectives of these individuals.

Through a case study, I was able to capture the specific challenges, insights, and emotions they encountered during their time as teachers and the reasons behind their decision to

leave the profession. In addition, a case study design was appropriate because it allowed me to listen to the voices of former Latinx teachers, gain a deeper understanding of their unique experiences, and learn how they made sense of their time in teaching and the reasons they chose to leave. The setting for this study was in school districts in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. Participants for this study included 10 Latinx teachers who left the teaching profession within their first 6 years of entering the field. These teachers were once employed in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas school districts and were identified as Latinx. Potential participants were recruited through professional networks and met the following criteria: (a) were employed as teachers for 6 years or less (b). identified as Latinx (c) taught in lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas school districts during the period between 2014 and 2023 (d) left the teaching profession.

The school districts selected were across the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas and these school districts had similar teacher and student body demographics. Data was gathered through semi-structured and focus group interviews. Data was analyzed by taking the following steps: (1) by arranging data and looking at it at a glance (2) by transcribing the data collected in text format (3) data was exported by pdf/spreadsheet (4) data was organized by each of the questions (5) presented themes of the data collected. By exploring the experiences of Latinx teachers to leaving teaching in the lower Rio Grande Valley, this study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that impacted retention rates for this population. With this qualitative case study, I aimed to identify effective strategies for supporting and retaining effective Latinx classroom teachers; this study could inform policy and practice changes that promoted diversity, equity, and inclusion in the teaching profession.

Definition of Key Terms

Definitions of key terminology utilized through this study are provided in this section:

Cultural competence: The ability to understand, appreciate, and effectively interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This includes knowledge of different cultural values, norms, and practices, as well as the ability to adapt to diverse learning styles and communication patterns (Friedrich, Hernández Finch, & Boryczka, 2018).

Cultural Responsiveness: The capacity of educational institutions and teachers to recognize, respect, and integrate the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs of diverse student populations, including Latinx students (Friedrich, Hernández Finch, & Boryczka, 2018).

Inclusive education: The practice of creating an educational environment that is welcoming and supportive of students from diverse backgrounds, including students with disabilities, students of different races and ethnicities, and students from low-income families. Inclusive education aims to promote equal access to education and improve academic outcomes for all students (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Latinx teachers: Teachers who identify as Latinx, or of Latin American origin. This includes individuals who identify as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, or from other Latin American countries (Friedrich, Hernández Finch, & Boryczka, 2018).

Professional Development: Opportunities for Latinx teachers to enhance their teaching skills and knowledge (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

Retention Strategies: Strategies, policies, and interventions implemented by educational institutions and stakeholders to enhance teacher retention rates, focusing on factors such as professional development, work-life balance, job satisfaction, and support systems (Friedrich, Hernández Finch, & Boryczka, 2018).

School Climate: The influence of the school environment on Latinx teacher job satisfaction and retention (Gottfried, 2013).

School Leadership: The impact of school administrators on the attrition of Latinx teachers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Teacher attrition: The phenomenon of teachers leaving the teaching profession, either voluntarily or involuntarily. This may include teachers who leave to pursue other career opportunities, retire, or are dismissed from their position (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Teacher Job Satisfaction: Latinx teachers' level of contentment and fulfillment in their teaching roles (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Teacher Preparation Programs: The effectiveness of teacher training programs in preparing Latinx educators (Clewell & Villegas, 2001).

Teacher Turnover: The rate at which Latinx teachers leave their positions in schools over a specific time period (Allen & Lee, 2013).

Workload and Burnout: The impact of excessive workload on Latinx teacher attrition (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

These terms and concepts are important to clarify in a dissertation on teacher attrition in Latinx teachers, as they provide a framework for understanding the experiences of Latinx teachers and the broader social and cultural context in which they work. By defining these terms and concepts, the study can ensure that the reader has a clear understanding of the key issues and themes being explored.

Significance of the Study

Teacher attrition poses a significant challenge nationwide, with estimates suggesting that between 10% and 20% of teachers leave their roles annually (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This

turnover can detrimentally impact student achievement by disrupting learning continuity and diminishing instructional quality. The departure of experienced educators necessitates the recruitment and training of new teachers, a costly and resource-intensive endeavor for schools and districts (Podolsky et al., 2016). Additionally, the transition period for new teachers involves a steep learning curve, often characterized by trial and error and a lack of institutional support. By shedding light on the specific factors influencing Latinx teachers' decisions to exit the profession, this study can contribute insights and recommendations to address the broader challenge of teacher attrition in the United States.

This study is significant as it lends more specific insight into the important issue of Latinx teacher attrition. While influential studies such as those by Nguyen and Springer (2021) have explored the broader picture of minoritized teacher attrition, less attention has been paid specifically to Latinx teacher attrition. According to García and Weiss (2019), Latinx teacher attrition is a growing national problem that needs further study, particularly in light of the increasing population of Latinx students. According to Colmer (2019), Egalite, Kisida, and Winters (2015), and Garcia and Guerra (2004), these students benefit from being taught by Latinx teachers.

This study shares a more localized approach with Guerra and Rodriguez (2023) who studied the experiences of Latinx teachers in the "New Latino South," emphasizing the need for professional networks and culturally responsive practices to mitigate the challenges these teachers face. Their study reveals that Latinx teachers often encounter cultural isolation and a lack of professional support, which can lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately, attrition. Similarly, Garcia & Weiss (2019) highlight the unique challenges Latinx teachers face, describing the "double binds" of navigating professional and cultural expectations in the

localized contexts of communities characterized by new and flourishing Latinx communities. My study, however, looks at the lived experiences of teacher attrition within the context of longstanding Latinx communities in which Mexican American administrators, teachers and students represent the majority across the districts under study.

The insights from my literature review on Rio Grande Valley teacher attrition reveal that factors such as supportive leadership, professional development opportunities, and addressing socio-cultural challenges significantly impact teacher retention. In the Rio Grande Valley, transformational leadership and inclusive support systems help reduce attrition rates to around 6%, lower than the national average of 8% (2021 RGV FOCUS Annual Report). This underscores the importance of tailored strategies that address the specific needs of Latinx teachers in this unique context. By examining these localized factors, my study provides valuable insights into how longstanding Latinx communities in the Rio Grande Valley navigate and mitigate teacher attrition. These findings suggest that focusing on leadership development, systemic support, and addressing socio-cultural challenges can effectively reduce Latinx teacher attrition and enhance educational outcomes in the region.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE TEACHER ATTRITION IN LATINX TEACHERS

Introduction to the Chapter and Background to the Problem

This chapter aims to review the literature discussing teacher attrition among Latinx teachers. According to Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019), "Research on teacher turnover continues to grow because teacher attrition remains a salient and costly issue for schools" (p. 2). In fact, much current literature such as Ingersoll and May (2019), Gu and Johnson (2014), Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2018), Pukelis and Lerkkanen (2020), and Kraft, Marinell, and Yee (2020) describe working conditions as one of the key concerns impacting the teaching profession. According to Nguyen (2018), the issue of attrition among teachers from marginalized groups is more complex and has become more pronounced since the pandemic.

This literature review begins by providing a snapshot of teachers at the national and state level and then takes a more focused look at the issue in rural and Latinx contexts. Next, it presents the conceptual framework that will be used for this study and discusses literature identifying factors that influence teacher attrition. To focus on teacher attrition among teachers of color, the discussion is structured around factors influencing teacher attrition among teachers of color as identified by Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) literature regarding

teachers and then uses this framework to hone in on factors influencing Latinx teacher attrition as discussed in literature specific to Latinx teacher attrition.

Teacher Attrition in the USA in Urban and Rural Schools in Minority Groups- Latinx Teachers

Over the past years, a significant number of educators have left the teaching profession. As noted by Simon and Johnson (2015), "Of the 3.5 million public school teachers in the United States, roughly half a million leave their schools each year" (p. 4). Harris and Adams (2007) highlight that turnover has become a critical issue in debates about the teaching profession in the United States, noting that it reduces the number of available teachers and potentially exacerbates localized teacher shortages (p. 325). They further state, "Teacher turnover has become a common indicator of the state of the teaching profession and a common tool of researchers for understanding teacher behavior. Understanding its nature and causes is of critical importance to researchers and policymakers" (p. 336).

Teacher attrition tends to be highest during the early years of a teacher's career. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found that many teachers leave within the first five years of entering the profession, which disrupts the stability of the teaching workforce and can negatively impact student learning. This early-career attrition undermines student achievement, as frequent turnover disrupts instructional continuity and hampers the development of meaningful teacher-student relationships. Addressing teacher attrition necessitates comprehensive efforts to improve working conditions, increase compensation, provide professional development, and create supportive environments that promote teacher well-being and job satisfaction.

Recent literature on teacher attrition suggests that those leaving the teaching profession come from diverse backgrounds. According to Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas

(2019), "In many states, bilingual education or teaching of English as a second language (ESL) is another subject area with intense shortages" (p. 6). They also note that "special education is a field with severe shortages" (p. 6). The departure of experienced and effective teachers poses challenges to maintaining a stable and qualified teaching workforce.

Attrition affects teachers across various settings, both urban and rural, each presenting unique challenges. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) state, "Researchers have also long held that both teacher shortages and teacher turnover problems affect some types of schools and communities more than others. Much of the existing research and reform has tended to focus on urban environments" (p. 399). They further add, "Our data indicate that teacher turnover is the primary driver of staffing problems and shortages in rural schools" (p. 420). Rural schools face specific challenges, including limited resources, teacher shortages, and geographic isolation, which can lead to professional isolation and impact job satisfaction and well-being.

Moreover, rural schools often struggle to attract and retain teachers due to limited opportunities for career advancement and professional development. The geographic distribution of teacher attrition underscores the need for targeted strategies to address the specific challenges faced by schools in different contexts. García and Weiss (2019) elaborate, "The increasing teacher shortage further understates the magnitude of the problem because the estimates don't reflect the fact that the shortage of qualified teachers is not spread evenly among all schools but is more acute in high-poverty schools" (p. 5).

Numerous influential studies have contributed to our understanding of teacher attrition. Ingersoll and Tran (2023) assert, "Beginning over two decades ago we empirically documented that teacher shortages are not solely a consequence of producing too few new teachers, but also a result of too many existing teachers departing long before retirement, which in turn is largely

driven by school organizational conditions" (p. 398). Research consistently shows higher attrition rates among teachers in high-poverty schools, subject-shortage areas, and minoritized groups. According to Ingersoll and Tran (2023), "The leading factors behind dissatisfaction-related turnover in rural schools are dissatisfaction with school administrations, dissatisfaction with accountability and testing, and dissatisfaction with a lack of classroom autonomy or lack of input into school decision making" (p. 421).

Latinx Teacher Attrition in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Teacher attrition is a critical issue affecting education systems across the United States, with national turnover rates around 8% annually (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). However, the Lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV) of Texas presents a unique case, with slightly lower attrition rates at approximately 6% (2021 RGV FOCUS Annual Report). Understanding the factors contributing to this lower rate offers valuable insights into strategies that can potentially be applied more broadly.

On a national level, high attrition rates are exacerbated by factors such as inadequate support, challenging work conditions, and insufficient professional development opportunities. According to the 2022 Charles Butt Foundation Teacher Poll, these issues are particularly pronounced in urban and rural schools and among minority teachers, who often feel isolated and unsupported (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

In contrast, the Lower Rio Grande Valley's lower attrition rate suggests that certain stabilizing factors are at play. Despite facing systemic challenges similar to those in other regions, the RGV's educational ecosystem appears more resilient. This resilience invites a closer examination of the region's strategies, particularly those involving leadership, professional

development, and socio-cultural dynamics, to understand how they contribute to retaining Latinx teachers.

Transitioning from a national perspective, we can see that leadership plays a crucial role in teacher retention within the RGV. Studies by Garza (2018) and Jimenez (2020) highlight that transformational leadership, characterized by support and empowerment, significantly enhances teacher job satisfaction and retention. This leadership style involves principals and administrators actively supporting teachers, fostering a sense of being valued and appreciated. As a result, such an environment encourages teachers to remain in their roles longer, contributing to the lower attrition rates observed in the region.

Moreover, in the RGV, leadership development programs that emphasize transformational and inclusive leadership styles are pivotal. These programs equip school leaders with the skills to create supportive and communicative environments, which are essential for boosting teacher morale and retention. This suggests that similar leadership development initiatives could be effective in other regions with high attrition rates.

Beyond leadership, continuous professional development and strong community engagement are critical for teacher retention. The Texas Comprehensive Center's report on district excellence underscores the importance of implementing best practices from high-performing districts to enhance teacher satisfaction and retention. Programs like the Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching and Leading Excellence provide mentorship, leadership training, and collaborative learning opportunities, which are instrumental in creating a sense of community and belonging among teachers (Young, Wei, & Patel, 2018).

Specifically, in the RGV, professional development initiatives are tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by teachers. These programs not only improve teachers' skills

but also foster a supportive community that helps reduce feelings of isolation and stress. Therefore, such initiatives are vital in retaining educators by ensuring they feel prepared, supported, and connected to their professional community.

Equally important is the socio-cultural context of the Rio Grande Valley, characterized by a predominantly Latinx population. Latinx teachers in this region often share cultural backgrounds with their students, which can create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. This cultural alignment helps in building stronger relationships between teachers and students, which is crucial for job satisfaction and retention (Munter, McKinley, & Sarabia, 2012).

However, despite these cultural similarities, Latinx teachers still face unique challenges that necessitate targeted professional development. These include navigating the complex socio-political dynamics of the border region, such as immigration policies and border violence, which can impact teachers' professional lives and contribute to attrition (Buehring, 2020). To address these challenges, professional development and community support programs are essential. Initiatives that equip teachers with the skills to handle these complexities can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and stress, thus lowering attrition rates.

Additionally, small rural districts in the Rio Grande Valley encounter specific challenges, such as limited resources and high demands on superintendents. These pressures can create a stressful work environment that indirectly affects teacher retention (Menchaca & Estrada, 2021). To alleviate these pressures, policy reforms and increased support for superintendents could contribute to a more stable and supportive environment for teachers.

In summary, addressing these systemic challenges is crucial for creating a conducive work environment that supports teacher retention. By providing adequate resources and support

for educational leaders, districts can reduce the stress and demands placed on teachers, thereby improving retention rates.

Overall, the RGV's lower teacher attrition rates can be attributed to a multifaceted approach that includes strong leadership, professional development, and addressing socio-cultural and systemic challenges. For instance, López-Estrada and Koyama (2010) discuss how Mexican American teachers in the region benefit from a supportive environment that acknowledges their cultural and professional challenges. Similarly, Trevino (2018) emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive school environment for teachers working with Mexican immigrant students.

These insights underscore the need for tailored strategies that address the specific needs of Latinx teachers in the Rio Grande Valley. By focusing on leadership development, systemic support, and professional development, the region has successfully created a more stable and supportive educational environment, which can serve as a model for other areas struggling with high teacher attrition.

In conclusion, reducing Latinx teacher attrition in the Lower Rio Grande Valley requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. By enhancing leadership practices, addressing systemic challenges, and providing continuous professional support, educational leaders and policymakers can create a more supportive and sustainable environment for Latinx educators. Ultimately, these strategies not only improve teacher retention but also enhance educational outcomes for students in the region. Thus, the RGV's success in maintaining lower attrition rates offers valuable lessons that can inform efforts to address teacher attrition on a broader scale.

Conceptual Framework

This study employs the conceptual framework of Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) to explore Latinx teacher attrition in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The framework by Nguyen et al. is particularly well-suited for my research as it provides a comprehensive lens to examine the multifaceted experiences of Latinx teachers. In addition, it categorizes factors influencing teacher attrition into four key domains: personal, professional, organizational, and contextual. These domains align perfectly with the goal of understanding and interpreting the complex experiences of these educators in the RGV.

To provide a clearer understanding of these domains and their relevance to the study, I delve into the specifics of each category as proposed by Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019). These four categories collectively offer a robust foundation for analyzing the factors contributing to teacher attrition.

To begin with, in the context of the RGV, personal factors such as demographics, career motivations, and individual resilience are critical in influencing teacher retention. Latinx teachers in this region often share cultural and linguistic backgrounds with their students, which fosters a deep sense of connection and purpose. This cultural alignment with the community not only enhances job satisfaction but also strengthens teachers' commitment to their roles. Furthermore, motivations such as the desire to contribute to their community or serve as role models for Latinx students bolster their dedication to the profession, helping them to persevere despite challenges.

Moreover, professional factors, including workload, support, and career development opportunities, are also crucial. In the RGV, the availability of tailored professional development programs plays a significant role. Initiatives like the Rio Grande Valley Center for Teaching and Leading Excellence provide mentorship, leadership training, and collaborative learning

opportunities specifically designed to meet the needs of Latinx educators. These programs help teachers feel more prepared and supported, which significantly reduces feelings of isolation and stress. By addressing these professional challenges, these programs are vital in maintaining lower attrition rates among Latinx teachers in the region.

Also, organizational factors such as school culture, leadership, and administrative support are pivotal. Research by Garza (2018) and Jimenez (2020) underscores the importance of transformational leadership in the RGV. School leaders who actively support and empower teachers create environments where educators feel valued and appreciated. This supportive culture is essential for enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover. Leadership development programs that emphasize inclusive and transformational leadership styles are crucial in equipping school leaders to foster such environments. These programs are fundamental in maintaining the relatively low teacher attrition rates observed in the RGV.

Finally, contextual factors encompass the broader socio-cultural and policy environment impacting teachers. The unique socio-cultural landscape of the RGV, characterized by a predominantly Latinx population, plays a critical role in teacher retention. Latinx teachers often share cultural similarities with their students, creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. However, they also face unique challenges, such as navigating the complex socio-political dynamics of the border region, including issues related to immigration and border violence (Buehring, 2020). Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development and community support initiatives is crucial for retaining Latinx teachers.

Additionally, small rural districts in the RGV confront specific challenges, such as limited resources and high demands on superintendents, which can indirectly impact teacher retention (Menchaca & Estrada, 2021). To mitigate these pressures, policy reforms and increased

support for educational leaders are necessary. Alleviating these systemic stresses can create a more stable and supportive environment for teachers.

In the literature review, the framework by Nguyen et al. (2019) will be utilized to systematically analyze existing research on teacher attrition, with a particular focus on how personal, professional, organizational, and contextual factors influence Latinx educators in the RGV. This structured approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of Latinx teachers in this region by examining:

1. Personal Factors: Examining the demographics, career motivations, and personal resilience of Latinx teachers in the RGV.
2. Professional Factors: Investigating how workload, support, and professional development opportunities in the RGV influence teacher retention.
3. Organizational Factors: Analyzing the impact of school culture and leadership on teacher satisfaction and retention in the RGV.
4. Contextual Factors: Exploring how the socio-cultural and policy environment of the RGV affects Latinx teachers, particularly in rural and border settings.

By organizing the literature review around these domains, the study aims to provide a thorough exploration of the diverse influences on Latinx teacher attrition in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). This structured approach, based on Nguyen et al.'s (2019) framework, facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences shaping Latinx educators' careers in this region. Moreover, in Chapter 5, the insights gained from the literature review will inform discussions on potential interventions and strategies to reduce Latinx teacher attrition in the RGV.

Using Nguyen et al.'s framework, chapter 5 will identify specific areas for interventions. First of all, personal interventions will be recommended, focusing on strategies to support the personal growth and resilience of Latinx teachers. These interventions include mentorship programs, wellness initiatives, and community-building efforts tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by Latinx educators.

Second of all, professional interventions will be advocated for, emphasizing the need for professional development programs specifically tailored to the needs of Latinx teachers in the RGV. This involve advocating for culturally responsive pedagogy trainings, leadership development opportunities, and mentoring networks designed to support Latinx educators in their professional growth and advancement.

Furthermore, organizational reforms will be suggested to enhance school leadership and create more supportive organizational cultures. Recommendations include initiatives to promote inclusive decision-making processes, foster collaborative environments, and prioritize the well-being and professional development of all teachers, with a particular focus on Latinx educators.

Finally, contextual initiatives will be proposed, addressing broader socio-cultural and policy-based challenges that impact Latinx teacher retention in the RGV. This involves community engagement efforts to foster stronger connections between schools and local communities, as well as advocacy for policy reforms aimed at addressing systemic inequities and promoting diversity and inclusion within the educational system.

By applying this structured approach, my study aims to develop a nuanced and targeted strategy for improving Latinx teacher retention in the RGV. This framework not only provides a lens for analyzing the current situation but also lays the foundation for designing effective,

context-sensitive interventions that can enhance teacher retention and educational outcomes in the region.

Unpacking the Reasons Behind Teacher Attrition

The literature exploring factors influencing teacher attrition represents a significant aspect of research on teacher turnover. Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) interchangeably use the terms "teacher turnover" and "attrition," encompassing teachers switching schools and leaving the profession (pg. 7). Several studies, including those by Nguyen and Springer (2021), Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019), Garcia and Weiss (2020), Ocasio (2014), Griffin (2018), Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019), Geiger and Pivovarova (2018), Wiggan, Smith, and Watson-Vandiver (2020), and Nguyen (2018), focus on identifying these contributing factors.

Studies by Griffin (2018), Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019), and Ocasio (2014) utilize qualitative methods to identify factors contributing to teacher attrition among Latinx teachers. In contrast, Geiger and Pivovarova's (2018) mixed-methods study analyzes Arizona public schools' teacher retention data and working conditions survey data. Other contemporary studies by Nguyen and Springer (2021), Nguyen et al. (2019), and Nguyen (2018) employ phenomenology methods to explore teacher attrition and retention.

Although these studies vary methodologically and theoretically, they share a focus on urban school districts and schools. They commonly identify low salaries, overwhelming workloads, poor working conditions, mental health issues, and school contexts as key factors in teacher attrition. This literature provides important insights into teacher attrition in urban settings, setting the stage for this study's focus on Latino teacher attrition in border settings.

Building on Nguyen et al.'s (2019) identification of factors influencing teachers of color's attrition, this section is structured into subsections covering teacher evaluation, pay, federal policies, leadership, school reform, and cultural diversity. It then examines how these factors specifically impact Latinx teacher attrition in districts classified as urban but situated in suburban or rural communities. The discussion challenges the often-overlooked use of the term "urban" in educational research and focuses on factors significant in the attrition of minoritized teachers in suburban and rural border contexts.

Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) provide a meta-analysis synthesizing findings from multiple studies on teacher attrition and retention, offering a comprehensive overview. Similarly, Garcia and Weiss (2020), Ocasio (2014), Griffin (2018), and Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019) offer unique insights through individual studies employing various research designs. These studies contribute valuable insights into the complex factors affecting teacher attrition and retention.

Teacher Evaluation

This section examines the relationship between teacher evaluation and teacher attrition, drawing on various studies that highlight the complexities and consequences of evaluation systems. To begin with, Rodriguez, Swain, and Springer (2020) explore how performance evaluation reforms influence teacher attrition and mobility. Their study identifies key reasons why evaluations contribute to teacher attrition, including increased pressure and stress, perceived unfairness, lack of trust, misalignment with educational goals, and job insecurity. These factors collectively create a negative work environment, prompting many teachers to leave the profession.

Similarly, Chingos and Peterson (2017) report that rigorous teacher evaluations can heighten job-related stress and dissatisfaction, particularly among teachers serving in high-need schools. They find that the increased demands and scrutiny associated with evaluations exacerbate existing challenges in these settings, leading to higher turnover rates. Similarly, Simola et al. (2019) highlight that performance evaluations often fail to account for broader contextual challenges teachers face, exacerbating feelings of unfairness and leading to higher attrition rates. This is particularly true for teachers in under-resourced schools, where external factors significantly impact student performance yet are often overlooked in evaluation processes.

Also, Gu et al. (2020) emphasize the disproportionate impact of stringent evaluation systems on minoritized populations, noting that teachers from these groups are more likely to feel undervalued and unsupported. The study suggests that evaluation systems need to be more culturally responsive and considerate of the unique challenges faced by minority teachers. Rockoff and Speroni (2019) discuss how evaluation systems that heavily emphasize student test scores can misrepresent teacher effectiveness, leading to job insecurity and increased turnover. They argue that such systems fail to capture the full scope of a teacher's impact, thereby discouraging talented educators from remaining in the profession.

Furthermore, Chetty et al. (2014) illustrate how high-stakes evaluations can create an environment of fear and competition rather than collaboration, further driving teachers, particularly those in marginalized communities, out of the profession. They note that high-pressure environments undermine the collaborative culture necessary for effective teaching and professional growth. For instance, in Texas, the high demands of the national education accountability system significantly impact teachers. Students from 3rd to 12th grade are required

to take state assessments measuring student success, which rates campus performance through an accountability system of letter grades. Consequently, administrators frequently visit classrooms, conducting formal and informal observations. McLean et al. (2017) note that "teachers are increasingly subject to rigorous systems of evaluation that carry consequences for their compensation and job security" (p. 231). These high stakes lead administrators to require teachers to monitor data weekly, plan explicit lessons meeting all students' needs, engage in excessive professional development, and offer tutoring after school hours.

These variables significantly impact teachers' mental well-being, creating stress and tension in both their professional and personal lives. Schonert-Reichl (2017) notes, "High levels of chronic stress can lead to occupational burnout - characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of accomplishment in one's work" (p. 140). Litt and Turk (2015) describe stress as "a multidimensional construct encompassing teachers' job satisfaction, absenteeism, intention to leave teaching, and emotional and physical symptoms of distress" (p. 179).

Factors such as high-stakes evaluations, lack of trust in the evaluation process, and overemphasis on standardized test scores have been identified as key reasons for teacher attrition. Guarino et al. (2014) found that negative evaluation experiences were associated with higher turnover intentions among teachers. Similarly, a report by the National Education Association (2015) highlighted the negative impact of evaluation systems solely based on student test scores, leading to job dissatisfaction and teacher turnover. These findings underscore the need for fair and comprehensive evaluation systems that support and retain talented educators.

Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) offer further insights into the factors driving teacher turnover. Their study emphasizes the role of work environment, support systems, and the

alignment of evaluation processes with teachers' professional goals. Nguyen et al. (2019) argue that evaluations should be used as tools for professional growth rather than punitive measures. They stress the importance of fostering a supportive and collaborative environment where teachers feel valued and empowered.

The literature indicates that evaluation systems play a significant role in teacher attrition. High-stakes, punitive evaluations contribute to stress, job dissatisfaction, and turnover, particularly among teachers in high-need and minoritized populations. The findings from Nguyen et al. (2019) further highlight the need for supportive, growth-oriented evaluation systems that align with teachers' professional goals and foster a positive work environment. This framework will guide the current study to better understand the experiences of Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, ultimately contributing to the development of strategies to improve teacher retention and support.

Teacher Salary and Attrition

This section discusses the literature concerning the relationship between teacher salary and teacher attrition, emphasizing the significant impact of compensation on teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession.

To begin with, Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) highlight teacher salary as a critical factor influencing minoritized teachers' decisions to leave the field. They note, "In terms of teacher effectiveness, higher quality teachers are less likely to exit than lower quality teachers, and there is evidence that teachers in the lowest quartile or quintile of value-added scores are more likely to leave teaching. Relatedly, teachers in merit pay programs are less likely to leave teaching than those who are not" (p. 33). This indicates that competitive salaries and performance-based incentives can play a crucial role in retaining effective teachers.

Similarly, Bartanen et al. (2021), Schwerdt and Woessmann (2015), Miller (2019), Boyd et al. (2011), and Bhatt et al. (2020) all find that teacher salary significantly impacts teacher attrition among minoritized populations. These studies collectively underscore the importance of financial compensation in maintaining a stable teaching workforce, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged communities.

In addition, Harell, Leavell, Tassell, and McKee (2004) emphasize that "teachers leave the profession due to a lack of money and would most likely return for more money. Clearly, any policies directed toward fully staffing schools with high-quality teachers must consider this factor" (p. 56). The fact that the teaching profession is one of the lowest-paying jobs globally leads individuals to change professions or avoid obtaining a degree in teaching altogether.

Moreover, Berry and Shields (2017) highlight the declining interest in the teaching profession due to economic factors: "Fewer individuals are entering the profession: Between 2009 and 2014, enrollments in teacher preparation programs dropped 3-5% nationwide from 691,000 in 2009 to 451,000 just five years later" (p. 9). This trend underscores the economic challenges as a major reason for teacher attrition in the nation.

The demands of being a classroom teacher are intense, as noted by Ingersoll and Smith (2004). Teachers have extensive responsibilities, and district and state leaders often demand more from them without offering corresponding financial compensation. Teachers are paid very little compared to other professions across the nation. Jimerson (2003) states, "If highly qualified teachers are essential for student academic success, and all children need to meet high standards, then all districts need to be able to offer salaries that will attract excellent candidates" (p. 11).

Also, Ingersoll and May (2011) identify low salaries as one of the main reasons why many educators decide to leave or not join the teaching profession. They argue that the salary

offered to teachers, coupled with the multiple duties and tasks assigned to them, significantly impacts their decision to stay in the profession. Jimerson (2003) adds, "The teacher shortage problem itself involves complex economic, social, and demographic factors. However, any solution needs to include salaries (and benefits) that are fair and competitive" (p. 7). Thus, if low salary issues are ignored, improvements in retaining and attracting teachers are unlikely.

Similarly, Jefferson (2003) highlights the challenges faced by small and rural schools, stating, "Unfortunately, state budget shortfalls continue to plague small and rural schools that pay teachers the state minimum salary. Without a significant commitment to raising teacher salaries, it is unlikely that the teacher shortage problem in small and rural schools will be alleviated in the near future" (p. 56). This underscores the urgent need for policy changes to address the salary issues that contribute to teacher attrition, particularly in underfunded and underserved areas.

The literature consistently identifies teacher salary as a critical factor in teacher attrition. Insights from Nguyen et al. (2019) and other scholars highlight the need for competitive salaries to retain high-quality educators, especially those in minoritized and economically disadvantaged communities. Addressing these economic challenges is essential for improving teacher retention and ensuring that all students have access to qualified and motivated teachers.

For instance, Boyd et al. (2011) suggests that improving salaries can help attract and retain teachers in high-poverty schools. They argue that salary increases, particularly in the early years of a teacher's career, could make the profession more appealing and reduce turnover rates. Additionally, Bhatt et al. (2020) emphasize that policies aimed at increasing teacher pay should be coupled with efforts to reduce the workload and improve the overall working conditions of teachers to be effective.

In conclusion, the literature highlights that teacher salary is a critical factor in teacher attrition. Competitive salaries and performance-based incentives are essential for retaining effective teachers, particularly in minoritized and economically disadvantaged communities. Addressing the economic challenges faced by teachers is crucial for improving teacher retention and ensuring that all students have access to qualified and motivated educators. Policymakers must consider these factors when developing strategies to improve teacher retention and support.

Federal Policies

This section discusses literature concerning the relationship between federal policies and teacher attrition. According to Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019), one of the key factors influencing minoritized teachers' decisions to leave the field is federal policies. They note, "Accountability policies gained prominence under NCLB, and teacher evaluation systems have grown in sophistication and gained more widespread usage in high-stakes decisions about teacher tenure, pay, and dismissal. These developments have been accompanied by research examining how evaluation systems are correlated with teacher turnover" (p. 4). Similarly, Goldhaber et al. (2013), Sass et al. (2016), Feng and Sass (2018), and Ehlert et al. (2016) all find that federal policies are a significant factor in teacher attrition among minoritized populations.

A major issue within the accountability system that motivates teachers to leave the profession is high-stakes testing and evaluation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) drastically changed the teaching profession by requiring states to measure student learning annually and ensuring that schools focus on supporting all students to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) objective (Aydeniz & Southerland, 2012). This increased accountability has led to high levels of stress and mental exhaustion among teachers, prompting some to leave the profession.

Moreover, the NCLB Act also compelled teachers to change their instructional methods to a more focused and explicit approach. Phelps (2011) notes how the NCLB Act changed the way teachers deliver content, stating, “Teach to the test has become an epithet. The very existence of content standards linked to standardized tests, in this view, narrows the curriculum and restricts the creativity of teachers” (p. 38). Teachers are now responsible for meeting all students' needs and ensuring they master state assessments, which has led to a more rigid and less engaging teaching approach.

For instance, Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, and Diaz (2004) explain, “New federal legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, puts additional pressure on states to use test scores for purposes of accountability” (p. 251). This pressure has forced many teachers to focus on rote learning and test preparation, which can be disengaging for students and lead to burnout for both teachers and students. Teachers in test-taking grade levels often have to teach to the test, which can be monotonous and fail to meet students' diverse educational needs.

Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2019) highlight the impact of these policies on minoritized teachers, noting that such accountability measures often lead to increased turnover among this group. Clotfelter et al. (2004) further quote, “The majority of participants held negative views on the role of standardized testing in bringing about improvements to student learning in science” (p. 250). Consequently, many students are unengaged during class, tardiness and absenteeism increase, and many teachers and students experience burnout very early in the school year. Due to these pressures, many educators no longer enjoy the teaching profession, as they cannot expose students to engaging activities that would allow them to become active learners, interact with their peers, and learn from one another. Sloan (2006) adds, “That such curriculum policies, according to the critics, prevent teachers from delivering their 'normal' classroom instruction

appears well established in the educational literature that is critical of accountability-explicit curriculum policies” (p. 123).

Another significant concern due to federal policies is work overload. Teachers are responsible for completing a plethora of data sheets, running communication logs, posting grades, planning explicit lessons, and keeping up with individual documentation profiles for students. According to McLean et al. (2017), “Teachers have many taxing obligations outside of the classroom such as working with parents and school officials, preparing class materials, and keeping up with often-changing curricular and professional development demands” (p. 231). This work overload, combined with the stress of high-stakes evaluations, drives many educators to leave the field.

The literature consistently indicates that federal policies such as NCLB have significantly impacted teacher retention, especially among minoritized populations. The insights from Nguyen et al. (2019) and other scholars underscore the need for supportive leadership and fair evaluation systems to retain high-quality educators. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving teacher retention and ensuring that all students have access to qualified and motivated teachers.

Also, Berry and Shields (2017) argue that policies need to shift towards more supportive frameworks that emphasize teacher development and well-being. They suggest that reducing the emphasis on high-stakes testing and increasing teacher autonomy can help mitigate the adverse effects of current accountability measures. Additionally, Ingersoll and Smith (2004) emphasize the importance of mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, which can provide the necessary support to navigate the demands of the profession.

In conclusion, federal policies such as NCLB have significantly impacted teacher retention, particularly among minoritized populations. High-stakes testing, increased workload,

and rigid accountability measures contribute to teacher stress and attrition. The literature highlights the need for policy reforms that support teacher development, reduce undue stress, and promote a more engaging and flexible teaching environment. These changes are crucial for retaining high-quality educators and ensuring that all students receive a well-rounded and effective education.

Leadership and Administration

This section discusses the literature concerning the relationship between school administration and teacher attrition. According to Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019), one of the key factors influencing minoritized teachers' decisions to leave the field is leadership and administration. They note, “There have also been studies on the relationships between principal effectiveness and teacher attrition. The overall meta-analytic result suggests that a higher principal effectiveness score is associated with decreases in the odds of teacher attrition” (p. 28). Similarly, Miron et al. (2018), Mitani et al. (2020), Yin et al. (2021), and Huang and Loeb (2019) all found that leadership was a significant factor in teacher attrition among minoritized populations.

Administrators play a crucial role in teacher attrition. It is essential that teachers receive the necessary support from administrators, parents, and colleagues to create a more stable working environment and lifestyle. School leaders, or administrators, are instrumental in providing job satisfaction for teachers. Unfortunately, many administrators fail as school leaders and struggle to retain effective classroom teachers. Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019) note, “Of those who depart because of job dissatisfaction, most link their turnover to the way their school is administered, to how student assessments and school accountability affected teaching, to

student discipline problems, and to a lack of input into decisions and lack of classroom autonomy over their teaching” (p. 20).

Furthermore, Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019) state, “Employees should not be held accountable for things over which they have no control; likewise, employees should not be granted control or autonomy without commensurate accountability” (p. 32). This highlights the need for administrators to develop strategies to better serve and retain effective classroom teachers. A study by Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found that administrative support was a significant predictor of teacher retention. Similarly, a report by the Learning Policy Institute (2017) underscored the importance of school leadership in creating a positive work environment that fosters teacher retention.

Also, Nguyen et al. (2019) further elaborate on the importance of effective leadership, emphasizing that supportive and competent administration can mitigate the factors that lead to teacher attrition. They argue that school leaders need to focus on building a collaborative school culture, providing professional development opportunities, and ensuring teachers have a voice in decision-making processes. These actions can significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates.

Moreover, Miron et al. (2018) discuss the importance of principal leadership in creating a supportive work environment. They found that teachers who perceive their principals as supportive are less likely to leave the profession. Similarly, Huang and Loeb (2019) highlight that effective school leaders are those who prioritize teacher development and create a positive school culture. They argue that leadership practices such as providing mentorship programs and fostering professional learning communities can reduce teacher turnover.

Also, Mitani et al. (2020) examine the role of leadership in teacher retention, noting that teachers who feel supported by their administration are more likely to remain in their positions. They suggest that effective leadership includes clear communication, recognition of teacher efforts, and a commitment to addressing teacher concerns. This aligns with the findings of Yin et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of emotional support from school leaders in reducing teacher burnout and attrition.

Effective school leadership involves more than just administrative efficiency; it requires creating an environment where teachers feel valued and supported. According to the Learning Policy Institute (2017), strategies such as involving teachers in decision-making processes, providing opportunities for professional growth, and fostering a collaborative school culture are crucial for retaining teachers. These strategies not only improve job satisfaction but also contribute to a more positive and productive school environment.

In addition, Ingersoll and Smith (2004) argue that administrative support should include mentoring programs for new teachers, regular feedback, and opportunities for professional development. These measures can help new teachers acclimate to their roles and reduce the likelihood of early career attrition.

In conclusion, the literature emphasizes the critical role of strong and supportive leadership in addressing teacher turnover. Research indicates that administrative factors such as lack of support, ineffective leadership, excessive workload, and limited opportunities for professional growth can lead to dissatisfaction and burnout. Therefore, it is imperative for school administrators to adopt strategies that support and retain teachers, ensuring a stable and effective educational environment for all. Addressing these administrative challenges is essential for improving teacher retention and ultimately enhancing student outcomes.

School Reform

This section discusses literature concerning the relationship between school reform and teacher attrition. According to Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019), one of the key factors influencing minoritized teachers' decisions to leave the field is school administration and reform. They note, “Regarding school reform, there has been a swell of new approaches to and evaluations of school improvement, such as research-practice partnerships, that have a strong focus on teacher development and leadership. Recent developments in school reform are important factors influencing teacher attrition and retention that require more attention” (p. 12).

To begin with, McClure et al. (2019) found that school reform initiatives, particularly those focusing on accountability, were significant predictors of teacher turnover. This finding aligns with the work of Nguyen et al. (2019), emphasizing how school reforms can lead to increased teacher stress and job dissatisfaction, particularly when these reforms involve high-stakes accountability measures such as standardized testing.

Similarly, studies by Cullen et al. (2019), Sass et al. (2017), Jia and DeMatthews (2020), and Ali et al. (2016) have all highlighted the significant impact of school reform on teacher attrition, especially among minoritized populations. High-stakes accountability measures can increase stress levels and diminish job satisfaction among teachers, leading to higher attrition rates. These studies underscore the negative effects of continuous and rapid changes in curriculum, instructional practices, and school structures, which are often associated with reform efforts. Such changes can create a sense of instability and challenge teachers' professional autonomy.

In addition, Nguyen et al. (2019) emphasize that school reforms need to better address the development and support of teachers. The rapid implementation of new policies without

sufficient support can overwhelm teachers, making it difficult for them to adapt and thrive in their roles. This sentiment is echoed by Cullen et al. (2019), who found that lack of administrative support during periods of intense reform contributes significantly to teacher dissatisfaction and turnover.

As school reform continues to evolve, it is crucial to consider the impact on teacher retention. McClure et al. (2019) suggest that a more balanced approach, which includes adequate support and professional development for teachers, can mitigate some of the negative effects of reform. This approach is necessary to ensure that reforms do not inadvertently drive teachers out of the profession.

Moreover, Sass et al. (2017) argue that reforms should include teachers in the decision-making process, ensuring that they have a voice and agency in how changes are implemented. They state, “Involving teachers in the reform process can enhance their commitment to the new initiatives and reduce feelings of alienation and disempowerment” (p. 45). This involvement can help create a more collaborative and supportive school environment, which is essential for teacher retention.

Furthermore, Jia and DeMatthews (2020) highlight that reforms often challenge teachers' professional autonomy, leading to dissatisfaction and attrition. They note, “Teachers who feel that their professional judgment is undermined by prescriptive reform measures are more likely to experience burnout and leave the profession” (p. 78). Ensuring that teachers maintain some level of autonomy in their instructional practices is crucial for their job satisfaction and retention. Also, Ali et al. (2016) further emphasizes that frequent and uncoordinated changes in school policies can create a sense of instability among teachers. They found that, “Constant policy shifts without clear communication and adequate support lead to confusion and frustration among

teachers” (p. 62). This instability can be particularly detrimental in schools serving minoritized populations, where teachers often face additional challenges and pressures.

In conclusion, school reform is a significant factor influencing teacher attrition. The insights from Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) and other scholars highlight the need for thoughtful implementation of school reforms that prioritize teacher support and professional development. Addressing these issues is essential for improving teacher retention and ensuring that all students have access to qualified and motivated educators. By adopting a balanced approach to reform that includes teacher input, maintains professional autonomy, and provides adequate support, schools can create a more stable and satisfying work environment for teachers.

Cultural Competence and Teacher Attrition Among Latinx Educators

This section of the literature review discusses factors influencing Latinx teachers' departure from the profession, building on the earlier discussion of teacher attrition among teachers of color. The literature identifies numerous factors influencing attrition, and this section delves deeper into why Latinx teachers quit, drawing specifically from Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019).

According to Collier and Valenzuela (2019), Ingersoll and Strong (2019), and Lloro-Bidart and Verma (2020), Latinx teachers often leave the profession due to inadequate preparation from their educational programs to work with diverse students. Flores et al. (2007) note, “While many reasons are cited, a constant explanation for teachers leaving the field is that many feel unprepared to work with diverse populations” (p. 64). It is crucial to emphasize that Flores et al. (2007) focus on Latinx teachers in predominantly white or African American contexts, not majority Latinx schools. In these environments, Latinx teachers frequently struggle to connect with students from various backgrounds and lack the necessary training to address

their needs effectively. Colomer (2018) found that racial socialization significantly impacts Latinx teachers, affecting their ability to navigate racialized contexts. Similarly, Shapiro and Partelow (2018) highlight the challenges faced by teachers with DACA protections, contributing to their decision to leave.

Moreover, cultural competence among minority groups, particularly in Latinx communities near the border, can significantly impact teacher attrition. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) note that inadequate support for addressing diverse student needs increases attrition rates. Guerra (2015) emphasizes the frustration and burnout among educators in border regions when they cannot connect with culturally diverse students, specifically Latina/o high school students. Additionally, Valenzuela (1999) stresses the importance of tailored professional development and resources for Latinx students and their families to reduce attrition rates. It is worth noting that in my study, teachers and students often share cultural markers, which may help mitigate some of these challenges but does not eliminate the need for comprehensive cultural competence and support.

Also, Nguyen et al. (2019) further illuminate the issue by discussing how a lack of cultural competence training contributes to the attrition of Latinx educators in whistream districts, where Latinx teachers are often a minority. They assert that without proper training and support, Latinx teachers in these settings often feel isolated and ineffective, exacerbating their job dissatisfaction and ultimately leading to higher turnover rates. In contrast, my study focuses on Latinx teachers in the Rio Grande Valley, where they represent the majority and share cultural markers with their students. Despite this, the need for targeted professional development that addresses cultural competence remains crucial, as it ensures Latinx teachers feel more equipped and supported in their roles. This comparison highlights that even in predominantly Latinx

contexts, cultural competence training is essential to reduce teacher attrition and improve job satisfaction.

As a result, minority teachers, including Latinx teachers, play a crucial role in the diverse educational landscape of the United States. Ingersoll, May, and Collins (2019) highlight their significance as role models for all students. However, the lack of preparation to meet diverse learners' needs significantly contributes to their departure from the profession. Addressing these challenges is essential for retaining Latinx teachers and ensuring they can effectively support their students. In my study, where Latinx students and teachers constitute the vast majority, the importance of minority educators, particularly Latinx teachers, is paramount in shaping the educational landscape. Nonetheless, the departure of Latinx teachers from the profession is significantly influenced by the lack of preparation to meet diverse learners' needs. Addressing these challenges is crucial for retaining Latinx teachers and ensuring they can effectively support their students, fostering a culturally responsive educational environment.

Recent studies have further emphasized the critical role of cultural competence in teacher retention. For instance, Acosta et al. (2021) argue that schools must prioritize culturally responsive teaching practices and continuous professional development in cultural competence. They found that teachers who feel culturally competent are more likely to remain in their positions, as they can effectively engage with and support their students. Their research reveals that teachers who feel culturally competent are more inclined to stay in their positions, as they can effectively engage with and support their students, who often come from diverse cultural backgrounds prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley. This finding shed light on how enhancing cultural competence among teachers can directly address the issue of teacher attrition in the

region, as educators equipped with these skills are better equipped to connect with and meet the needs of the local student population.

Moreover, Villegas and Irvine (2010) highlight the importance of recruiting and retaining teachers who share cultural backgrounds with their students. They argue that Latinx teachers bring valuable perspectives and cultural knowledge that enrich the learning environment. However, without adequate support and training, these teachers may feel undervalued and unprepared, leading to higher attrition rates.

Further, a study by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) revealed that schools with high levels of support for cultural competence and diversity training had significantly lower teacher turnover rates. They emphasize that creating a school culture that values diversity and provides ongoing professional development can help retain Latinx teachers.

In summary, the literature consistently shows that cultural competence is a vital factor in reducing teacher attrition among Latinx educators. Schools must invest in comprehensive training programs, provide robust support systems, and foster an inclusive environment that values diversity. By addressing these needs, schools can not only retain Latinx teachers but also improve educational outcomes for all students.

In conclusion, Nguyen et al. (2019) provides valuable insights into the factors influencing teacher attrition, including evaluation, pay, federal policies, leadership, school reform, and cultural diversity. Addressing these factors through fair evaluation, competitive compensation, supportive leadership, responsive policies, and inclusive practices is crucial for enhancing teacher retention. Recognizing and addressing the impact of cultural diversity, particularly in Latinx communities near the border, is essential for mitigating teacher attrition and ensuring equitable educational experiences for all students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, this study employed a qualitative case-study approach to explore the experiences of Latinx teachers who left the teaching profession within six years of entering. The research question guiding this inquiry was: What were the experiences of 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts, and how did they interpret or make meaning of their decision to leave teaching? In this chapter, I discuss the process of gathering and analyzing data that provided insight into this question. Specifically, I detail the process of conducting this as a case study, beginning with a description of the qualitative case study design and my rationale for structuring the study in this manner.

Then, I introduce the setting (or nested settings), participants, and discuss gathering and analyzing data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of my subjectivity as a researcher, including my relationship to the subject under study and its nested context, as well as a discussion of trustworthiness.

Research Design

According to Atkinson (2017), qualitative research methods help gain insight into the processes involved in co-constructions of meaning, lived experiences, cultural rituals, and oppressive practices. Studying human emotions, lived experiences, and cultural rituals through a qualitative approach facilitated the exploration of the experiences of 10 Latinx formerly

employed teachers in school districts in the lower Rio Grande Valley, as well as how they made meaning of their decision to leave teaching.

Qualitative research allowed for the exploration of complex and sensitive topics, capturing the voices and experiences of participants. This approach lent itself to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study and offered insights into the particularities of experience. In this study, a qualitative approach helped fill in the gaps of quantitative teacher attrition literature by offering insights into the lived experiences of teacher attrition and the meanings former Latinx teachers made of these experiences.

In this study, the focused "case" under investigation comprised 10 Latinx teachers who were formerly employed within the school districts of the lower Rio Grande Valley. By narrowing the scope to this bounded system, the aim was to explore the intricate complexities and contextual nuances surrounding the decision to leave teaching within the specific time and space constraints of the shared regional context. Employing a qualitative case study approach enabled the capture of a diverse array of individual experiences within a loosely defined timeframe and geographical area, facilitating an in-depth examination of patterns related to Latinx teacher attrition in the lower Rio Grande school districts. This case-study design empowered an examination of the specificities of this pertinent issue within a defined temporal and spatial context, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic factors that influenced the experiences of Latinx teachers and their interpretations thereof.

Case study methodology has been used to study a variety of educational phenomena. For example, Dixon, Griffin, and Teoh (2019) used case study methodology to study the problems that teachers of color faced as they navigated the profession and to explore the experiences of

staff who intentionally attempted to retain faculty of color. Sumison (2002) used a case study design to explore the blossoming and wilting of an early childhood educator's career commitment and her eventual decision to leave the field. Meanwhile, Okrski and Madison (2020) used a qualitative-multiple-case study to explore Latinx Spanish teachers' experiences working in rural areas.

Researchers such as Okrski and Madison (2020), Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, and Freitas (2010), and Madsen and Hancock (2002) have utilized case study designs to investigate teacher attrition, capturing the intricate dynamics and contextual factors at play. Through the examination of multiple case studies, researchers can uncover commonalities and variations, leading to a more holistic understanding of the experiences surrounding teacher attrition. This nuanced understanding, in turn, can inform targeted interventions and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher retention and, ultimately, improving the quality of education. These case studies of teacher attrition underscore the value of case-study research in elucidating why teachers leave and offer detailed insights into their interpretations of this experience. Studies such as Okrski and Madison's (2020), Merriam (2009), and Sumison (2002) provide an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena, furnishing a comprehensive understanding of the real-life contexts of teacher attrition. The strength of these studies lies in their ability to capture rich, contextualized data regarding the experience of quitting, facilitate theoretical development regarding participants' sense-making processes, and offer practical insights into strategies to retain educators within the field.

As noted by Yin (2018), case studies have the potential to unveil systemic inequities and structural barriers that underlie teacher attrition among Latinx educators, aligning with aspects of the conceptual framework from Nguyen and Springer (2021) that influenced this study. Case

studies, as Yin (2018) writes can also serve as a vehicle for theory generation, particularly in cases where the research question is exploratory or existing theories prove inadequate (Yin, 2018). While the conceptual framework of Nguyen and Springer (2021) seems adequate enough for thinking about the general experience of teachers from marginalized communities, a case study design is useful for thinking more specifically about the experience of Latinx former teachers in majority-minority contexts.

As highlighted by Mills and Gay (2019), case studies offer a platform to comprehend the intricate realities of everyday life, providing readers with insights directly relevant to their own experiences. These studies delve deeply into the multifaceted factors and challenges contributing to teacher attrition, illuminating the personal, professional, and systemic issues encountered by specific educators in specific settings. By focusing on specific cases, readers can engage with the narratives and experiences of teachers who have opted to leave the profession, fostering empathy and a nuanced understanding of the diverse motivations behind such decisions. Case studies serve as tangible representations of the struggles and dilemmas faced by teachers, rendering the issue of attrition more relatable and comprehensible to readers.

Setting

This study took place in the southern region of the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and included participants from four deep south Texas school districts: Lower Rio Grande Valley Ignite Public Schools, Jacinto I.S.D., San Jose I.S.D., and McArthur I.S.D. These districts were selected due to their significant populations of bilingual and economically disadvantaged students, as well as their high number of Latinx teachers, making them pertinent to the study's focus on Latinx teacher attrition.

- Jacinto I.S.D. holds numerous assets that contribute to its educational environment. It boasts a B accountability rating and a predominantly Hispanic teaching staff, with 97.1% of teachers sharing the cultural and linguistic background of their students. The district's commitment to bilingual education is evident, with 55.2% of students enrolled in bilingual or English as a Second Language programs. This strong alignment between teacher and student demographics fosters a culturally responsive learning environment. Despite these strengths, the district faces significant challenges: 80.4% of students are identified as at-risk of dropping out, 93.2% come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and 57% have limited English proficiency. Additionally, Jacinto I.S.D. is situated just 6.4 miles from the Mexico border (Gustavo-Diaz Ordaz, Tamaulipas), emphasizing the importance of addressing these needs within its predominantly Hispanic (99.9%) student population.
- San Jose I.S.D. also demonstrates a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, reflected in its B accountability rating and a teacher workforce that is 94.6% Hispanic. The district supports a significant portion of its student body through bilingual and English as a Second Language programs, with 46.1% of students enrolled. This focus on language support is critical given that 41.3% of students have limited English proficiency. The district's demographics are predominantly Hispanic (99.1%), with small representations of Asian (0.1%), African American (0.1%), and White (0.6%) students. While 91.7% of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the proximity to the Mexico border (18

miles from Reynosa, Tamaulipas) further underscores the necessity of tailored educational strategies to support its diverse student population.

- McArthur I.S.D. excels in academic performance, holding an A accountability rating and a diverse student body that benefits from a robust support system for English Language Learners, with 37% enrolled in related programs. The district's demographic composition includes 93.4% Hispanic, 4.4% White, 1.2% Asian, 0.4% African American, and 0.1% American Indian students. The majority Hispanic teaching staff (87.3%) is well-equipped to provide culturally responsive education. However, the district must address the needs of its students, with 73.8% coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and 34.8% identified as having limited English proficiency.
- Ignite Public Schools embraces diversity with a varied student body and a commitment to bilingual education, as evidenced by 40.7% of students enrolled in bilingual or English as a Second Language programs. The demographic composition includes 85.7% Hispanic, 7.1% African American, 5.7% White, 1% Asian, 0.1% American Indian, 0.3% Two or More Races, and 0.1% Pacific Islander students. The district has a B accountability rating, with 74.1% of its teachers being Hispanic. Despite these assets, 83.3% of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and 40.7% have limited English proficiency, highlighting the ongoing need for targeted support to ensure all students thrive. Situated close to the US-Mexico border, Ignite Public Schools must continue to leverage its diversity and strong bilingual programs to address these challenges effectively.

Participants

The sample consisted of 10 former Latinx teachers who had taught in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. The sample size was based on participants who had taught for 0-6 years, identified as Latinx, and worked in one of the previously discussed school districts. This specific population was directly linked to the research question, aiding in formulating explicit answers to the phenomenon being studied. Recruitment was conducted through networking channels, social media outlets, and email platforms.

The research participants were former Latinx classroom teachers who left the profession after teaching for 0-6 years in urban or rural school districts in the lower Rio Grande Valley. The study comprised 10 former teachers, aged between 21 and 41 years, all identifying as Latinx. School districts and participants were selected based on their similarity in student and teacher demographics, aligned with the research question criteria. The participants had worked in comparable districts with similar student demographics and academic performance levels. Additionally, the selected southern school districts in the lower Rio Grande Valley had received similar accountability ratings for the 2021-2022 school year, chosen based on their relevance to the research question.

Snowball sampling was used as a strategic sampling method for this study. Snowball sampling is a qualitative research technique wherein initial participants, referred to as "seeds," are identified and recruited, then asked to nominate additional participants from the same population. This method is advantageous when studying hard-to-reach or hidden populations. The iterative process of participant referral generates a "snowball effect," gradually expanding the sample size. As participants refer others, researchers gain access to individuals who may not be easily identifiable through conventional sampling methods (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

By leveraging existing connections and networks within the community, potential participants with valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation were reached. Furthermore, snowball sampling facilitated the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences, enriching the depth and breadth of the research findings. As highlighted by Creswell and Creswell (2017), snowball sampling serves as an effective method for accessing hidden or marginalized populations and generating rich qualitative data through personal connections and referrals. This method aligned with the objective of capturing nuanced experiences and interpretations of former Latinx teachers in this study.

To recruit participants, I first identified an initial group of participants who had experienced teacher attrition. Utilizing my professional networks, educational institutions, and educational associations, I located these initial participants. Recruitment scripts detailing the purpose and requirements of the study were included in Appendix 153 for reference.

Following the initial identification, I developed a well-structured Qualtrics survey tailored to address the research objectives. The survey included questions about participants' backgrounds, teaching experience, work history, and self-identification based on ethnicity.

Once the initial participants completed the survey, I asked if they knew other Latinx teachers who had also left the teaching profession and might be interested in participating. With their consent, I provided my contact information (university email and cellphone number) for potential referrals to reach out if they wished to participate. I then contacted the referred participants, explained the study's objectives, and invited them to participate by sharing the Qualtrics survey link. This process was repeated iteratively until approximately 25-30 participants had completed the Qualtrics survey.

Upon reaching the desired number of survey responses, I meticulously analyzed the open-ended questions from the survey to identify responses that met the criteria established for the research study. From these responses, I randomly selected 10 participants to constitute the case. After obtaining consent from the final participants, I distributed a Google Form to collect their availability for focus group and individual interviews. Based on the responses, I sent individual Outlook calendar invites to each of the 10 selected participants, specifying the date and time for the scheduled focus group or individual interviews. On the day of the interviews, I shared the Zoom link with each participant via my university email in the early morning to ensure smooth access to the virtual meeting platform.

Table 1: Research participants general information

	Name of Participant	When they quit?	From where?	Why?	Numbers of years taught
1.	Mrs. Castillo	2023	Jacinto ISD	Stress	5
2.	Mrs. Martinez	2019	Jacinto ISD	Administration	6
3.	Mrs. Yandel	2019	Jacinto ISD	Stress	5
4.	Mr. Elizondo	2020	Ignite Public Schools	Pursue long-term goal	4
5.	Mr. Ramos	2015	San Jose ISD	Opportunity to transition to another profession that offered more flexibility.	6
6.	Mrs. Marzano	2020	Ignite Public Schools	Administration	5
7.	Mrs. Villarreal	2021	McArthur ISD	Opportunity to get out of the classroom came.	5
8.	Mrs. Carreon	2022	Jacinto ISD	Illness	6
9.	Mrs. Mora	2019	Jacinto ISD	Stress	5
10.	Mrs. Grecia	2020	San Jose ISD	Administration	4

Confirmation of attendance for both focus group and individual interviews was managed through Outlook Calendar Invites. Participants were required to accept these invites, which were sent five days prior to the scheduled interview. Upon confirmation, participants received consent forms and logistical details for participation in the focus group or individual interview.

After reviewing the consent forms and logistical details with participants, I provided them with a copy of the interview questions. This allowed participants to familiarize themselves with the questions and, if desired, annotate their responses. In addition, to safeguard the identity of research participants, pseudonyms were consistently employed throughout the study, especially considering the numerous school districts in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and the sensitive nature of the information shared regarding schools and teacher experiences. All communication and consent forms were transmitted via university UTRGV email to ensure compliance with institutional protocols.

Focus Group Interviews

According to Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008), a focus group constitutes a guided group discussion on a specific topic, organized for research purposes, overseen, and recorded by a researcher (p. 293). In my investigation of Latinx teacher attrition, I employed focus group interviews as one of my primary data collection methods. As described by Atkinson (2017), focus groups represent a group interview approach that allows for simultaneous interaction between researchers and participants, whether structured or unstructured, aimed at extracting information or constructing a framework for exploring participants' realities (p. 75). This method enabled me to collect comprehensive data from all participants, engaging them in a collaborative dialogue to delve into the realities and reasons behind their departure from the teaching profession.

Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) articulate that focus groups are instrumental in eliciting collective views, uncovering underlying meanings, and providing an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (p. 293). Once informed consent forms were obtained, I scheduled a focus group session with the 10 research participants. The focus group interview was guided by a protocol comprising five primary open-ended questions, detailed in Appendix 159. These questions were tailored to the research phenomenon of "teacher attrition," aiming to prompt participants to share their experiences as former classroom teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley and elucidate their interpretations of leaving the profession.

The focus group method afforded me, as the researcher, insights into the participant community, enabling me to brainstorm and refine the research questions as necessary. Additionally, it helped address time constraints. The session, lasting between 60 to 90 minutes, was recorded via both video and audio on the Zoom platform to facilitate comprehensive analysis of participants' responses, interactions, and non-verbal cues, aligning with Denzin and Lincoln's assertion (2018) that video and audio recordings yield the richest data for the study of social interaction (p. 1173).

The size of the focus group was a critical factor to consider, as noted by Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008). A group of 10 participants was intentionally chosen for this study to ensure a conducive environment for rich data collection, where participants felt comfortable sharing their insights without feeling overwhelmed by a larger group.

One-on-One Interviews

In addition to focus group interviews, I employed one-on-one interviews to gather data. As Fowler (2014) contends, "In-person interviews remain perhaps the best way to collect high-quality data from a general population sample" (p. 67). Given that our primary data source comprised former Latinx teachers who previously taught at elementary and secondary levels, these individual interviews served as our secondary method of data collection. One-on-one interviews offered an opportunity to explore how former Latinx teachers interpreted their experiences of exiting teaching positions in urban and rural areas of the lower Rio Grande Valley. Each individual interview lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. By employing both focus group and individual interviews, I was able to capture a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Latinx teachers who quit teaching, providing a rich narrative account of their journeys within the lower Rio Grande Valley.

Data Analysis

Data gathered through both focus group and individual interviews underwent thematic analysis to uncover patterns, themes, and insights within participants' narratives. Initially, transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes and concepts. Through manual coding and categorization, emergent themes were refined and interpreted, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and the meanings they attached to their decisions to leave the teaching profession. Utilizing multiple sources of data and informants enhanced the credibility of the findings, as advocated by Creswell (2013).

Coding and thematic analysis were integrated rather than separate steps. The process began with a thorough examination of the focus group data. As recommended by Bertrand, Brown, and Ward (1992), recording focus group sessions using both tape recorders and note-

taking ensures comprehensive data capture (p. 200). Therefore, I utilized Zoom's auto transcription technology to facilitate the transcription of conversations, ensuring a verbatim record of the discussion. Transcription is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research, enabling the systematic organization and analysis of data (Lacey & Luff, 2007, p. 20).

Once transcribed, I synthesized the data by aligning each statement with the respective question posed during the focus group. This synthesis process involved capturing the main points made by participants in response to each question, organizing the information into manageable sections (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward, 1992, p. 203). Subsequently, I manually hand-coded the data, drawing from Saldana's (2013) recommendation to integrate manual coding methods for a deeper understanding of the data (p. 26). This hands-on approach facilitated a more nuanced analysis and enabled fresh insights through periodic generation of hard-copy printouts of code lists and coded data.

Following transcription and hand-coding, I conducted a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as described by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), is a valuable method for uncovering patterns, themes, and underlying factors within qualitative data (p. 2). This approach enabled me to explore and understand the complex phenomenon of Latinx teacher attrition, identifying recurring patterns and themes specific to Latinx teachers' experiences. Thematic analysis also provided a platform for amplifying participants' voices and contributing to social justice efforts in education (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

By employing a systematic approach encompassing transcription, manual coding, and thematic analysis, I aimed to unravel the multifaceted nature of Latinx teacher attrition. This approach amplified the voices of participants and contributed to a deeper understanding of this critical issue in education. According to O'Connor & Gibson (2003), "The best way to organize

your data is to go back to your interview guide. Identify and differentiate between the questions/topics you are trying to answer and those that were simply included in the interview guide as important but not essential” (p. 65). Following this recommendation, I conducted a thorough analysis of the data to ensure robustness in addressing the research question.

Initially, I arranged the collected data for a comprehensive overview, as suggested by Fowler (2014). This involved transcribing the data into text format, aligning with the guidance provided by Creswell and Clark (2018), who defined transcribing as converting interviews and observations into word processing files for analysis (p. 311). I then exported the transcribed data into spreadsheets or utilized data analysis tools, as recommended by Fowler (2014).

In the subsequent phase, I systematically organized and analyzed the transcribed data. This process involved revisiting each interview question and categorizing the responses into respective sub-categories. Following this organizational step, I commenced coding, defined by Creswell and Clark (2018) as the systematic grouping and labeling of evidence and ideas to reflect broader perspectives (p. 313). Coding aids in thematic analysis by condensing extensive datasets into manageable units, facilitating the identification of patterns and insights. It allows researchers to extract meaningful insights and theories from the gathered data, emphasizing the importance of thorough pattern recognition and insightful depth (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

In the analysis of focus group data, I refined and merged codes into themes, following the recommendation of Creswell and Clark (2018). This iterative process involved identifying recurrent themes, beliefs, and opinions throughout the dataset to derive meaningful interpretations. The iterative process of coding and theme identification assists in summarizing and synthesizing the data, streamlining interpretation and conclusion drawing (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

In the concluding phase of data analysis, the identified themes will be presented cohesively, taking into account the study's objectives, target audience, and content delivery requirements. Utilizing coding in thematic analysis enhances the transparency and credibility of research findings by documenting the coding process, including code definitions and criteria, thereby augmenting credibility and dependability (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Analyzing Data Across Data Sources

After completing the analysis of both qualitative data collection methods, my next priority was to examine the compiled data across emerging themes and discern the underlying causes contributing to teachers' decisions to exit the profession. Consistent with the analytical framework applied to focus group and individual interviews, I categorized and codified the gathered data to establish connections between themes, adhering to the guidelines proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

By addressing systemic barriers, fostering supportive relationships, promoting work-life balance, and empowering career aspirations, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing Latinx teacher attrition. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of thorough pattern recognition and insightful depth in qualitative research, ultimately contributing to social justice efforts in education. As emphasized by Merriam (2009), “Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 171). Therefore, my analytical focus was on meticulously evaluating the findings from both the focus group and individual interviews, systematically coding the collected data into major themes while excluding irrelevant information not pertinent to the research topic.

Echoing this sentiment, Mills & Gay (2019) underscored the importance of data organization for thorough analysis, asserting, “If data are to be analyzed thoroughly, they must be organized. Ideally, the researcher will have carefully managed notes, records, and artifacts as they were collected” (p. 568). This highlighted the necessity of structured data management from the outset, ensuring that the analytical process was streamlined and comprehensive. An analysis of data across data sources gave rise to 6 key topics:

1. Student Demographics
2. Pressure and Stress
3. Administration Dynamics
4. Pursuit of Long-term Goals
5. Salary Concerns
6. Mental Health Implications

These topics were evoked across interview questions and across participants. The chart below served as a visual representation of the prevalence and interplay of these topics within and across data from interview questions.

Topics

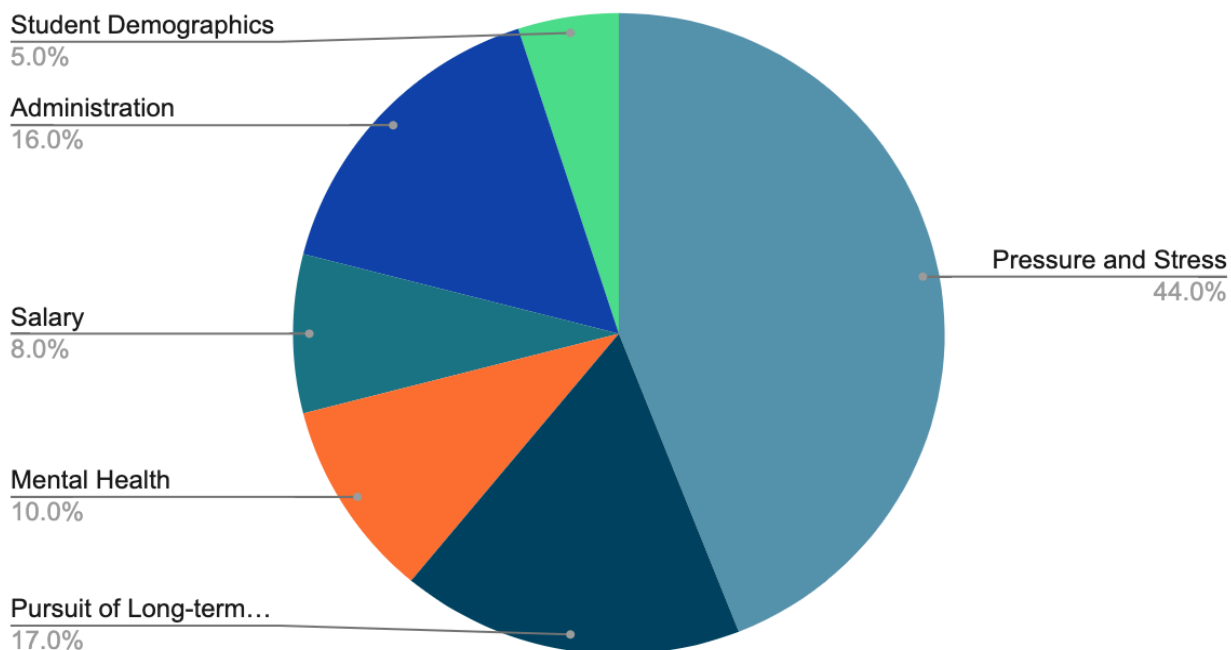


Figure 1: Topics central to experiences of leaving teaching derived from interview data.

The topic of overwhelming pressure and stress experienced by former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts was particularly resonant in the interview data. Participants consistently highlighted the strains imposed by standardized testing, resource inadequacies, and lack of support systems. For instance, some teachers mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to meet testing standards without adequate resources, while others cited the absence of support from administration as a contributing factor to their departure.

Long-term career goals were another central theme in participants' experiences of leaving teaching. Interview data uncovered a notable misalignment between professional aspirations and opportunities for growth within the educational settings described by participants. For example,

some teachers expressed frustration over the lack of avenues for advancement or professional development within their current roles, prompting them to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Administrative influence also stood out as a prominent topic of discussion. Participants expressed frustration and disillusionment towards administrative practices, such as lack of support, poor communication, and perceived disconnection. For example, several teachers cited instances where administrative decisions were made without considering their input or addressing their concerns, leading to feelings of disempowerment and contributing to their departure.

Mental health emerged as a significant aspect of participants' experiences, with narratives highlighting emotional strain, burnout, and feelings of isolation. Participants expressed a need for mental health support within the educational context. For instance, participants shared accounts of feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained by the demands of teaching and lamented the lack of accessible resources and interventions designed to address mental health concerns.

Compensation, particularly salary concerns, frequently arose in the interview data. Participants alluded to financial pressures and inadequate compensation, indicating that this significantly impacted job satisfaction and ultimately influenced their decision to exit the profession. Many teachers expressed frustration over the disparity between their salaries and the demands of their job, highlighting the financial burden as a key factor driving their departure.

Lastly, diverse student demographics were mentioned as both a challenge and a source of potential personal reward. Participants addressed cultural diversity, language barriers, and socio-economic factors as influential elements shaping their teaching experiences and decisions to

leave teaching. For example, teachers discussed the unique challenges of addressing the diverse needs of their students while navigating cultural differences and language barriers.

These initial topics emerged from coding. In Chapter 4, I discuss themes that emerged from data across topics.

Researcher Positionality

As the principal investigator of this dissertation, I brought a unique perspective and background to the study. I am a first-generation college graduate of Hispanic/Mexican-American heritage, and at the time of the study, I served as an Elementary Assistant Principal with 11 years of experience in education. My journey began as a paraprofessional, followed by seven years as a 4th-grade classroom teacher. In the three years leading up to the study, I fulfilled various roles as an elementary school administrator, including instructional leadership, testing coordination, master scheduler, campus behavior coordinator, and parental engagement.

My personal and professional background deeply influenced my choice of topic and the approach I took in conducting the study. Being a part of the Latinx community and having experienced the challenges faced by educators and students firsthand, I was motivated to explore the factors contributing to teacher attrition among Latinx teachers. My experiences enabled me to empathize with the participants and provided valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives, informing the research design and methodology for a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

My professional trajectory spans two distinct school districts: Rio Grande City C.I.S.D. for two years and La Joya I.S.D. for the past nine years, where I am currently employed. Noteworthy is the demographic makeup of my current district, characterized by a substantial

number of at-risk students and a significant portion enrolled in bilingual or English Language Learners (ELL) programs.

On the other hand, my personal and professional background equips me with invaluable insights essential for conducting a meaningful exploration into the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts. My firsthand experiences as a member of the Latinx community and as an educator in the region provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by teachers, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. However, while my background allows me to empathize with the experiences of teachers, it also raises the question of whether it might make it challenging for me to maintain objectivity and be open-minded regarding their experiences.

Navigating this potential bias requires a conscious effort to approach the research with humility and openness to different perspectives. By acknowledging my own background and potential biases, I can actively strive to listen to and validate the diverse experiences of participants without imposing my assumptions or preconceptions. Additionally, engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process allows me to critically examine my role as a researcher and how it may influence the interpretation of data. Ultimately, by recognizing and addressing potential biases, I aim to conduct research that is both rigorous and respectful of the lived experiences of participants.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this research study is paramount, serving as benchmarks for researchers and students who may utilize this study as a foundational resource for their research endeavors or literature reviews. Erlandson et al. (1993) posited that for a study to be considered trustworthy, it must exhibit qualities of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, signifying its accuracy and lack of bias. It was imperative that our presented findings were perceived as credible by researchers, fostering further advancement and contributions to the research topic, aiding in the exploration of enhanced solutions to retain Latinx teachers within the education sector (Fowler, 2014). Maintaining credibility and trustworthiness in research on Latinx teacher attrition was essential for generating reliable findings and enriching the existing knowledge base. Mills & Gay (2019) underscored the importance of trustworthiness, stating that qualitative researchers establish trustworthiness by addressing aspects such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and to bolster the trustworthiness of the research findings on Latinx teacher attrition, a robust methodological approach incorporating triangulation among multiple data sources was employed. Triangulation entails integrating various data collection methods and sources to validate and corroborate research findings, ultimately enhancing the study's credibility and trustworthiness (Denzin, 1978).

Thus, conducting triangulation served to demonstrate the credibility of the findings. Triangulation was accomplished through a combination of phenomenological interviews with Latinx teachers, video and audio recordings of these interviews, and a brief questionnaire administered during the recruitment phase. Phenomenological interviews yielded rich, subjective insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions of attrition factors. Zoom audio and video

recordings enabled the researcher to review recordings, take notes, and analyze cooperative behaviors. The short questionnaires provided accurate data ensuring that the 10 participants selected met the criteria of the research study. By comparing and contrasting data from these diverse sources, a comprehensive understanding of Latinx teacher attrition and its contextual factors was developed. This methodological triangulation fortified the research findings' robustness and increased their trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Moreover, to address trustworthiness issues, a reflexive approach was employed, ensuring that both the researcher and participants remained free of bias. Strategies such as reflexive journaling, periodic member checking, and peer debriefing were implemented to enhance credibility. Reflexive journaling involved documenting reflections before, during, and after the research process, allowing for transparent exploration of the researcher's positionality and its potential influence on the study. Member checking involved seeking feedback from participants on interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data, ensuring accuracy. Peer debriefing entailed colleagues critically engaging with the research process, analysis, and interpretation, contributing to credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). Furthermore, to ameliorate or at least explore biases and work toward credibility, I documented all aspects of the research process, including topics discussed during interviews, thoughts on coding data, and rationale for major themes. This transparent approach provided evidence of my efforts to identify my partialities in ways that contribute to a trustworthy account of the ways in which I attempted to make meaning of participants' experiences and the meanings they made out of them.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to elucidate the research design and its alignment with the study's purpose, question, and conceptual framework. Initially, I delineated the rationale for

adopting a qualitative case study design, highlighting its suitability for the research context.

Subsequently, I expounded on the rationale for structuring the study as a case study, elucidating the defining characteristics of this approach and its integration into the research framework.

Furthermore, I elucidated the rationale behind employing a phenomenologically-inspired case study design, emphasizing the descriptive nature of this method within the broader qualitative case study design utilized in the study. Additionally, I provided insight into the study's context, including details on participants and the methods of data collection employed, such as focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Moreover, I explained why I decided to use a phenomenologically-inspired case study design, focusing on how this approach captures rich descriptions of experiences within the larger framework of qualitative case study design employed in this study.

Lastly, I addressed my role as a researcher and elucidated strategies to ensure the study's impartiality and credibility, emphasizing the importance of trustworthiness. The subsequent chapter delves into the experiences of Latinx teachers that precipitated their departure from the teaching profession.

CHAPTER IV

EMERGENT THEMES

This chapter presents and discusses findings, organized as emergent themes from my exploration into the ways in which 10 former Latinx teachers from school districts of the lower Rio Grande Valley make meaning of their experiences of leaving teaching. In addressing the research question—"What are the experiences of 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts, and how do they interpret, or make meaning of, these experiences leaving teaching?"—I draw upon data from one focus group interview and 10 individual interviews. In the sections that follows, I will briefly outline emergent themes, and then present and discuss findings revived from these themes.

The earlier section discussed the topics that seemed to dominate participants' description of their experiences. In this section, I introduce four themes that emerged from patterns created by the interplay of these topics and which lend insight into the meanings participants made of their experiences. These emergent themes were:

Emergent Theme 1: Traversing Organizational Terrain: Latinx teachers' departure intricately unfolds as a textured journey involving the administration dynamics such as political barriers such as lack of support structures within educational institutions. Beyond the surface challenges lies a nuanced experience where Latinx teachers, unveils the challenges encountered within the complex organizational structures of the education system.

Emergent Theme 2: Interweaving Bonds: Latinx teachers make meaning of their experience on departing teaching in relation to a complex web of student-teacher dynamic relationships. The departure of Latinx teachers is intimately connected to the intricate and meaningful experiences within student-teacher relationships. This finding exploits into the profound layers of connections, challenges, and transformative moments that participants discussed as shaping their experience of leaving the field and the meaning they made out of it.

Emergent Theme 3: Balancing Act: Latinx teachers' experiences of leaving the field are deeply connected to their desire of well-being and work-life dynamics. This finding is synthesized from data regarding the delicate equilibrium expressed by participants as they described their experiences of navigating the multifaceted demands of both their personal and professional lives.

Emergent Theme 4: Navigating aspirations: Alignment (or lack thereof) between personal and professional trajectories influenced the experience of teacher's departure and the meaning they made out of it. More specifically, the individual and focus group interviews data revealed that the experience of navigating aspirations, particularly when they were not aligned with those of the organization, played a significant role in participants' decision to transition away from the education sector. The navigation aspirations shaped their experience of departure and offered a narrative of possibilities within which they could frame their departure as growth.

As a whole these emergent themes reflect the multifaceted nature of the teachers' experiences leaving the field and the meanings they make of their experiences. The subsequent sections of this chapter discuss data organized by these emergent themes in order to provide insight into the dynamics that shaped participants' experiences to leave the field.

Emergent Theme 1: Traversing Organizational Terrain

Interviews and focus group data revealed participants' attempts to navigate organizational terrain involving the administration dynamics such as of political barriers and lack of support structures within educational institutions. Teachers frequently perceived administrative unfairness, compounded by what they viewed as insufficient support structures within their educational institutions at the district and campus level.

For example, Mrs. Castillo, a former 5th grade bilingual teacher who faced perceived unfairness as she viewed it as insufficient support structures at the campus and district level stated the following in her individual interview:

I felt like I was constantly swimming against the tide, trying to meet the demands of standardized testing while juggling a classroom full of diverse learners. It was exhausting. And what made it worse was the lack of support from higher-ups. Every decision seemed to come from above without any consideration for the realities we faced in the classroom. It felt like a constant battle, and eventually, I had to make the tough decision to leave.

Mrs. Castillo articulates a sense of unfairness, stemming from inadequate support at both the campus and district levels, which ultimately led to her decision to leave the profession. Mrs. Castillo's anecdote begins with the metaphor of "constantly swimming against the tide," which symbolizes the relentless struggle faced by the teacher in meeting the demands of

standardized testing and attending to the needs of a diverse classroom. Furthermore, Mrs. Castillo expresses frustration with the lack of support from higher-ups, indicating a disconnect between decision-makers and the realities of the classroom.

Moreover, strained relationships with school administrators can be a significant factor in teachers leaving. When educators perceive a lack of support or constructive communication from administrators, it can create a hostile work environment that may lead to departures. For instance, Mrs. Mora shared during her individual interview:

I advocated for my special education students at all times, but administrative pressures made it impossible. My students had to make the same growth as regular general education students by the end of the school year. In addition, my special education students were not treated equally when it came to inclusivity. I advocated many times for them but the administrative team would always shut me down. I felt like I could make a bigger impact outside the constraints of the system at this campus for students with special needs.

Mrs. Mora, expresses a commitment to advocating for her special education students, demonstrating her dedication to inclusive education and ensuring equal opportunities for all students. However, she also described facing resistance and pushback from the administrative team, which created frustration and a sense of powerlessness. This reflects the dynamic between teachers and administrators in the school environment. When educators perceive a lack of support or constructive communication from administrators, it can create a hostile work environment that undermines morale and job satisfaction. This aligns with the statement about strained relationships with administrators being a significant factor in teachers leaving. Mrs.

Mora's narrative underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping teachers' experiences within the workplace.

In summary, Mrs. Mora underscores the significant impact of strained relationships with school administrators on teacher morale and ultimately, decisions to leave the profession. In this case, the teacher felt frustrated and disheartened by the lack of support and constructive communication from the administrative team, particularly regarding the treatment of special education students. This lack of support created a hostile work environment that hindered the teacher's ability to advocate effectively for her students and fulfill her professional responsibilities.

In addition, studies such as Nguyen et al. (2019) discuss the emotional toll of teaching, including struggles to establish healthy boundaries and feelings of emotional exhaustion due to intense bonds with students, which resonates with Mrs. Mora's narrative. Moreover, I explore the experiences of teachers navigating systemic barriers, reflecting themes of advocacy and resistance against inequities within the educational system. For example, Mrs. Martinez shared:

I was pregnant during my last year of teaching. My campus principal insisted on a doctor's excuse for every appointment or absence. She often expected me to tutor, come in during weekends, or attend festivals, threatening my end-of-year evaluations if I refused. Despite knowing about my high-risk pregnancy, she was unsupportive. When I requested reasonable accommodations, like adjustments to my teaching schedule and workspace, my administrator was reluctant to accommodate my needs, which added significant stress during this crucial phase of my life.

This narrative highlight systemic issues related to administrative insensitivity and lack of compliance with Title IX regulations regarding pregnancy accommodations. Mrs. Martinez's experience illustrates the broader systemic barriers faced by Latinx teachers, emphasizing the need for supportive policies and practices that ensure teachers' well-being, particularly during significant life events. Her experience highlights systemic issues related to Title IX and sex discrimination, particularly regarding pregnancy and the lack of reasonable accommodations. The interweaving bonds formed within the classroom context motivated the teacher to seek alternative avenues where she could advocate more effectively, unencumbered by the constraints of the educational system. The decision to step outside the system reflects a commitment to the well-being and success of the students, demonstrating how interweaving bonds shape the experiences of Latinx teachers as they navigate their decision to leave teaching.

In addition, student-teacher dynamics also played an important role in teachers leaving teaching due to interweaving bonds. Mrs. Martinez shared an additional anecdote on how these systemic-barrier dynamics played a critical role on her leaving teaching:

There were amazing moments when my students succeeded from beginning of the year to end of year, but the system often stifled sustained progress. The last three years of my teaching career I had between 25 to 30 students in my classroom. I requested for more help and all I would get is “we will get back to you- plus you got it!” It felt like I was fighting against systemic barriers. My last three years in the field were very challenging!

Mrs. Martinez's narrative, provided sheds light on the challenges faced by educators in navigating systemic barriers within the educational system, particularly regarding student-teacher dynamics. For example, Mrs. Martinez describes moments of success when their students made

progress throughout the year, highlighting the positive interactions and connections formed between teachers and students. However, she also expressed frustration with systemic barriers that impede sustained progress, such as large class sizes and a lack of support.

Research by Ingersoll (2003) discusses how teacher stress and burnout can be exacerbated by factors such as large class sizes and inadequate support, impacting the quality of student-teacher interactions. This aligns with the teacher's narrative of feeling stifled by systemic barriers that hindered her ability to effectively support their students' learning and development. When educators feel overwhelmed by systemic challenges, it can negatively impact their ability to form positive relationships with their students and contribute to feelings of frustration and burnout.

Likewise, Mrs. Grecia, a former Bilingual Early Childhood teacher who stated the following in her individual interview:

There was this pervasive sense of unfairness that seemed to permeate every aspect of my teaching experience. I poured my heart and soul into my work, but it never felt like it was enough. And when I reached out for support, it was like hitting a brick wall. There were no resources, no guidance, just this overwhelming feeling of being on my own. It became clear that if I wanted to thrive as an educator, I needed to find an environment that valued and supported its teachers.

Mrs. Grecia's narrative provided encapsulates the profound challenges faced by educators when they perceive a lack of support structures within their educational institutions, leading to feelings of unfairness and isolation. These participants express a similar sense of unfairness permeating their teaching experience, indicating a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the

support structures at their campuses. These teachers' sense of unfairness stems from the disconnect between her dedication to her work and the lack of recognition or assistance she received. Mrs. Grecia's description of reaching out for support but encountering a metaphorical brick wall highlights the systemic barriers that hinder effective communication and collaboration within educational organizations. Similarly, Mrs. Martinez, a former 4th grade elementary bilingual teacher said the following in the focus group interview when asked about the challenges that she faced in the classroom:

Campus and district leaders are so focused to teach to the test to ensure that we meet our accountability campus goals. I felt I had to follow a prescribed script on a daily basis when it came to lesson delivery. As a result, my students were dragging coming into my classroom every day and I felt like a miserable teacher for allowing myself to put my students through this. My student's experiences in elementary were not as memorable as I envisioned teaching young children would be.

Mrs. Martinez expresses frustration with the emphasis placed on teaching to the test and meeting accountability goals, which reflects the statement regarding perceived unfairness due to insufficient support structures and challenges faced in the classroom. This sentiment aligns with research on the impact of high-stakes testing on teaching practices.

Moreover, the teacher's description of feeling like she had to follow a prescribed script on a daily basis highlights the constraints imposed by top-down mandates. As chapter 5 will discuss in more detail, this resonates with the findings from Johnson and Brougham (2019), who found that bureaucratic structures often limit teachers' autonomy and, lead to feelings of frustration and disillusionment.

Data in this emergent theme underscores the challenges teachers face in navigating organizational structures that prioritize standardized testing over holistic and enriching teaching approaches. Interpersonal dynamics emerged as a significant dimension of traversing organizational terrain. Teacher anecdotes highlighted instances of microaggressions, bias, and a lack of cultural competence, contributing to a sense of isolation among Latinx educators.

Interview data from Mrs. Castillo, reveals experiences being marginalized during department meetings:

I noticed a pattern where they would only select the same teachers to be part of decision-making committees, lead meetings, and attend specific professional development trainings. This made me feel excluded. I felt like I had no voice or I was not taken into consideration as a teacher at my campus when it came to involving me as a stakeholder for decisions at my campus.

Mrs. Castillo's recounts a recurring pattern where the same teachers are consistently chosen for decision-making committees, leadership roles in meetings, and specific professional development opportunities reflects the unequal participation and distribution of opportunities discussed in the cited source. This pattern of exclusion leads to feelings of marginalization among teachers who are not included in these select groups, as they perceive themselves to have no voice or influence in important decisions affecting their campus. Also, Mrs. Yandel added during her individual interview, *"I was one of the newest teachers to get hire at my campus, and I never got a chance to be in a decision-making committee. Other teachers would see me as the "newbie." I felt underestimated by many of my colleagues and administrators."* Mrs. Yandel alludes to her visibility as a newbie, but the erasure of her capacity in a decision-making committee. This exclusionary practice highlights the challenges participants reported connected

to navigating organizational structures where certain educators seemed to be consistently prioritized and the capacities of others were effectively ignored or erased. Navigating organizational structures shaped by this sort of unfairness left participants, like Mrs. Castillo and Mrs. Yandel feeling marginalized and erased.

Navigating organizational structures also took a toll on Mrs. Marzano as she shared the following narrative on her quest for collaborative support:

I love being a team player, I felt my team and even administrators were all on their own- no collaboration what so ever at this campus. I had to lesson plan on my own and deal with my student's concerns as well. I felt isolated and yearning for collaborative support from my team members and administrators. When I would seek for help, I felt their help was not genuine.

On one level, Mrs. Marzano seems to be describing the challenges of navigating an unsupportive organizable landscape. She emphasizes the lack of collaboration and support within the organizational context. On another level, Ms. Marzano offers a deeper critique insulating that her colleagues as well as her administrator's help was disingenuous and therefore could not be trusted collaborators.

Similarity, Mrs. Grecia added the following during her individual interview,

Every year, I would get the students that had the more needs, I wouldn't get the resources needed when the resources were there and these were only given to the administrator's hand-picked teachers. This happened for 5 years in a row. This was very discouraging and it was one of the reasons why I decided not to come back to teaching.

Mrs. Grecia describes consistently receiving students with greater needs but not being provided with the necessary resources, which were instead allocated to administrators' hand-picked teachers. This pattern of resource allocation exacerbates feelings of marginalization and inequity within the school community, aligning with the statement about feeling marginalized.

Also, Mrs. Villarreal, a former 3rd grade bilingual teacher, articulated how the cumulative impact of systemic barriers lived-out in her organizational landscape, influenced her decision to transition to a different career. Mrs. Villarreal shared the following:

I was in a STAAR tested grade level. We started afterschool and Saturday tutorials early in September as per my campus administrator. By February of the second semester, I was already burnout. Not forgetting of the workload expectations that we had to meet such as: complete weekly data reports, attend lengthy after school faculty meetings, and conduct student home visits. This was an unrealistic workload of expectations that our campus principal had in place for us. These expectations placed us in a vulnerable situation where we had no time to plan effective lessons or spend quality time off with our loved ones.

Mrs. Villarreal's narrative resonates with their findings, particularly regarding the unrealistic workload expectations imposed by campus administrators. Mrs. Villarreal's experience of feeling burnout by February of the second semester due to extensive after-school and Saturday tutorials, along with additional workload expectations such as completing weekly data reports, attending lengthy faculty meetings, and conducting student home visits, reflects the detrimental effects of systemic barriers on teacher workload and work-life balance. As Chapter 5 discusses, this aligns with Lopez and Martinez's (2019) research, which emphasizes the

importance of addressing systemic barriers to alleviate teacher burnout and promote teacher retention within educational institutions.

Similarly, Mr. Ramos shared the following in the focus group interview:

Being a novice teacher is very challenging and not everyone makes it during the first few years. The expectation for a novice teacher is for you to stay later after school and continue working many hours after clocking out. In addition, if you are in a tested grade level, you have to be prepared to be a performing teacher while you are dealing with all of these constraints. An opportunity came to get out of the classroom and I took it. I was in a battle of bureaucracy during my years as a classroom teacher.

Mr. Ramos' experiences reflect the overwhelming demands teachers face and contribute to burnout and vulnerability. These experiences underscore the challenges in traversing the educational organizational landscape. In particular, regarding unrealistic workload expectations that impede effective lesson planning and work-life balance. Participant's' experiences with administrators, resources expectations, and tension of the articulated mission of the school and district, played a pivotal role in shaping the meanings they made of leaving teaching.

Emergent Theme 2: Interweaving Bonds

Data from individual interviews and focus group revealed that student-teacher dynamics played a complicated role in terms of how participants described their experiences leading to their departure, and the often-contradictory layers of connections, challenges, and transformative moments that participants discussed as shaping their experience of leaving the field and the meaning they made out of it. Data related to this emergent theme highlight the tension between the pedagogical relationships and communal ties that the organizational factors described in this

theme shaped their experience of leaving the teaching profession and some of their struggles reconciling this tension.

Mrs. Villarreal shared a heartfelt anecdote about her experiences with students during her tenure as a teacher. She shared the following:

Teaching wasn't just a profession for me; it was a calling. Every student who walked into my classroom became part of my extended family. But as much as I loved them, some relationships became toxic. There were students who tested my limits, who challenged my authority at every turn. I tried everything—extra help, counseling, even just lending a sympathetic ear. But nothing seemed to work. It was like I was pouring all my energy into a black hole. And amidst the chaos, I started neglecting my own well-being. The stress was eating me alive. Leaving was a painful decision, but it was necessary for my own survival. Still, I can't help but wonder if there was more, I could have done, if I failed those students in some way.

Mrs. Villarreal describes teaching not just as a profession but as a calling, emphasizing the deep emotional investment in their students' well-being. This sentiment aligns with research on teacher commitment and passion, as discussed in a study by Day and Gu (2014). They argue that teachers often view their work as more than just a job, investing emotionally in their students' success. However, when these relationships become toxic, it can have detrimental effects on teacher well-being. Mrs. Villarreal's decision to leave the profession due to the toll on their own well-being underscores the significant impact of stressful interactions on teacher retention rates.

Research by Johnson and Brougham (2019) explores how negative experiences with students and colleagues can contribute to teacher burnout and turnover. When educators feel emotionally drained and unsupported, it can lead to a reduced sense of efficacy and ultimately influence their decision to leave the profession. Mrs. Villarreal's anecdotes reflect the emotional toll of prolonged exposure to stressful student-teacher interactions, leading to feelings of burnout. Despite the teacher's deep sense of calling and commitment to their students, they experienced significant challenges in managing toxic relationships within the classroom and motivated her to leave the profession.

Similarly, a study by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) discusses the emotional investment where educators often view their role not just as instructors but as nurturers and guides and when faced with students who consistently challenge their authority, this identity can become a source of distress rather than fulfillment. Mrs. Grecia shared during her individual interview:

I loved my students very much, like if they were of my own. It would make my heart melt when they would call me, "mama" But there were moments when that passion felt like a double-edged sword. I poured my heart and soul into nurturing and guiding my students, but some seemed determined to test every boundary and challenge every rule. It was like watching my efforts unravel before my eyes. As much as I wanted to help them succeed, their defiance became a constant source of distress. I found myself questioning whether I was truly making a difference or simply spinning my wheels. In the end, the emotional toll became too heavy to bear. I had to step away, not because I stopped caring, but because I needed to protect my own well-being.

Mrs. Grecia describes moments when her passion for teaching felt like a double-edged sword, indicating the complex emotions involved in balancing care and discipline in the classroom. This sentiment resonates with the theme of "Interweaving Bonds," which explores the intricate dynamics of teacher-student relationships. When students challenge boundaries and rules, it can evoke feelings of frustration and distress for educators who deeply care about their students' success.

Furthermore, the teacher's reflection on whether they were truly making a difference or simply spinning their wheels highlights the existential questioning that can arise in the face of persistent challenges. Research by Smylie (2015) discusses how teachers' sense of efficacy and fulfillment can be undermined when confronted with ongoing student defiance and resistance. When educators feel unable to effectively support their students' growth and development, it can lead to feelings of disillusionment and burnout.

Ultimately, Mrs. Grecia's decision to step away from teaching underscores the significant impact of emotional distress on educator well-being. Research by Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) highlights how prolonged exposure to stressful interactions with students can lead to emotional exhaustion and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. When educators feel overwhelmed by the emotional toll of their work, it can ultimately influence their decision to prioritize self-care and protect their own well-being. This sense of overwhelm discussed by Maslach et al. (2001) was a clear element of participants' experience leading to their departure from the field. For example, Mrs. Castillo evokes this sense of overwhelm and illustrates the emotional reward as well as the emotional toll of teaching experiences:

Being a classroom teacher for 4 years was memorable and emotionally consuming. The best part of teaching were the connections that I got to make with

my students and seeing them meet their short-term goals was a priceless feeling. Unfortunately, what was really draining was the emotional toll of my student's personal struggles. For instance, whenever I would witness my student's academic or personal lives struggles, that would take a toll on my personal life. I would take all of their personal concerns and life struggles back to my house and just get depressed wanting to make a change in every single one of my students or try to fix their life. My heart was in the profession, but my health and well-being were altered due to this.

Mrs. Castillo describes the emotional toll of witnessing students' personal struggles, which extends beyond the academic realm. When educators empathize with their students' challenges, it can evoke feelings of distress and concern for their well-being, impacting the teacher's own mental health.

Mrs. Castillo's experience of taking students' personal concerns and life struggles home with them reflects the boundary blurring between professional and personal life. Research by Ingersoll (2003) discusses how the emotional demands of teaching can spill over into teachers' personal lives, affecting their overall well-being and work-life balance. When educators feel overwhelmed by the emotional toll of their work, it can lead to burnout and compromised health. Mrs. Castillo's narrative provides insight into the emotional complexities of the teaching profession and the toll it can take on educators' well-being. Castillo's narrative highlights the emotional toll of witnessing students' personal struggles, emphasizing the impact beyond the academic realm.

Similarly, Mrs. Mora shared similar emotional tolls as she shared how her experiences with the academic pressure made her feel emotionally burden when her special education

students faced intense academic pressure, especially in high-stakes testing environments. Mrs. Mora quoted:

It would break my heart when my students would stare at the state assessments and just cry. They had no clue on how to approach the rigorous state assessments and were simply put to failure. I would get anxiety attacks while my students were testing and during my conference time I would cry in my classroom. When I would get home, I would get severe migraines that took me to the emergency room a couple of times. My husband warned me that I was replaceable at school, but not at home. Therefore, I decided to resign.

Mrs. Mora's narrative provided highlights of the emotional toll experienced by educators when their students face intense academic pressure, particularly in high-stakes testing environments. This narrative can be tied back to the statement about the emotional burdens teachers face due to academic pressure on their special education students.

Mrs. Mora describes feeling heartbroken when witnessing her special education students struggling with rigorous state assessments, leading to anxiety attacks and severe migraines. This narrative exemplifies the emotional distress educators endure when their students are subjected to high-stakes testing environments and the impact it has on their own well-being. Similarly, research by Noddings (2013) explores the ethical dimensions of teaching, emphasizing the importance of caring for students' emotional and moral well-being. This aligns with Mrs. Mora's narrative of feeling emotionally burdened by the academic pressure faced by her special education students and her own sense of responsibility for their welfare.

In separate, yet related terms, Mrs. Martinez discusses her decision to leave teaching as being influenced in part by the complex emotions involved in balancing self-care, family time, and working hours,

I loved being a classroom teacher and helping my students, but unfortunately, I was getting home very tired and working excessive hours after school and on the weekends. My role as a mother and wife were not being met. I had to walk away from the teaching profession to dedicate valuable time to my marriage and daughter.

Similarly, Mrs. Yandel shared the following:

When I was in the classroom, I would get discouraged on how every year my students would come with huge learning gaps. I would get students to my assigned grade level that were non-readers and did not have the pre-requisites needed for 3rd grade. It was frustrating working with students that had big learning gaps. This happened every year since I became a teacher at this campus. When I would complain to my administrators, they said it was post-covid learning gaps. I couldn't go another year working with massive learning gaps like these that got me mentally and physically exhausted.

Mrs. Yandel's account highlights the frustration of building meaningful connections with students within the confines of a system that perpetuates significant learning gaps, ultimately leading to burnout and exhaustion. Much like the participants discussed in Mitani, Rodriguez, and Moreno's (2020) study of the experiences of Latinx teachers facing systemic barriers and challenges within the educational system, Mrs. Yandel's narrative of advocating for her students against bureaucratic constraints demonstrates that such challenges take an emotional as well as

professional toll and that this emotional toll is often greater for teachers from minoritized groups working with minoritized students.

This data highlights the intricate relationship between the teacher and students. While positive moments and successes contribute to the strength of these bonds, the frustration with systemic barriers emphasizes the external factors that influence the teacher-student dynamics. The teacher's struggle against these barriers reflects a commitment to the well-being of students, indicating how the interweaving bonds shape and complicate the experiences of Latinx teachers as they navigate the decision to leave teaching.

In summary, the interweaving bonds or social connections among teachers, between teachers and administrators and between teachers and students within the educational community emerge as a critical determinant of teachers' professional journeys. A profound sense of belonging, collaborative engagement, and supportive relationships significantly shape teacher satisfaction and retention levels. Conversely, when these bonds falter or remain absent, educators encountered a daunting landscape, often leading to heightened attrition rates.

Emergent Theme 3: Balancing Act

Interviews and focus group data revealed that participants often viewed their experiences on leaving the field in terms of a “balancing act.” This balancing act seemed to require and to represent challenges related to maintaining a delicate equilibrium between personal, professional, and organizational demands—and for some participants, it was the tipping of the balance that defined their experience of quitting and the take-home message of this experience going forwards. Thus, for participants, the significance of this notion of the balancing act seemed not only to be emblematic of their experiences related to quitting, but also served as a lens

participants used to understand their decision to leave teaching and to contextualize this decision in relation to their personal as well as professional lives.

An illustrative example comes from a former elementary bilingual teacher and mother, Mrs. Martinez, who detailed the challenges during the focus group interview of juggling the demands of classroom responsibilities with familial obligations. Her narrative exemplifies the delicate equilibrium teachers sought to establish between their commitment to students and their responsibilities outside the classroom. Mrs. Martinez said the following when asked about work-life balanced experiences, *“I love teaching but I left because I was putting work first than my actual family, it's insane the after-hours that I was working after school and on weekends!”*

Mrs. Martinez underscores the challenges educators face in balancing their professional responsibilities with familial obligations and the way this balancing act shapes their experiences. This narrative can be tied back to the statement about the delicate equilibrium teachers seek to establish between their commitment to students and their responsibilities outside the classroom. Mrs. Martinez expresses a love for teaching but highlights the toll it took on her personal life, specifically mentioning the excessive hours worked after school and on weekends. This narrative exemplifies the struggle many educators face in prioritizing their familial obligations while fulfilling their duties as teachers.

In addition, Mrs. Castillo shared similar personal and professional struggles during her individual interview as she stated:

I was a full-time college student, I was completing my internship LPC counseling hours, I was planning a wedding, and placed in a STAAR tested grade level with behavioral students that had many social emotional needs. I would get home to my fiancé and cry 3 to 4 times a week about everything I had going on. Every time

I would get to work, I felt very stressed and anxious. In addition, I was developing multiple stress knots and back pain in the back of my head. My husband advised me to resign by the end of the year if things didn't get any better so I could focus on my school and mental health.

Mrs. Castillo attests to the stress juggling multiple responsibilities, including classroom responsibilities, personal commitments, and mental health concerns. Mrs. Castillo describes a demanding workload, which includes being a full-time college student, completing internship counseling hours, planning a wedding, and teaching in a STAAR-tested grade level with students with behavioral and social-emotional needs. This narrative exemplifies the immense pressure educators often face in balancing professional and personal obligations. All participants describe feelings of being overwhelmed by the pressure to balance the myriad of responsibilities they are asked to managing professionally with the myriad of responsibilities they are responsible for at home. Mrs. Castillo's experience of experiencing stress, anxiety, and physical symptoms such as stress knots and back pain underscores the toll that excessive workload and emotional strain can have on educators' mental and physical health. When educators feel unable to manage their workload and maintain their well-being, it can lead to feelings of burnout and ultimately influence their decision to leave teaching

Similarity, Mrs. Yandel shared during her individual interview on how her personal and professional experiences led her to leave teaching by quoting the following, *"I was pregnant while teaching remotely during Covid-19, I had a high-risk pregnancy, and the workload and stress that was given to us was extremely ridiculous, I got very sick and it almost caused me a divorced."*

Mrs. Yandel describes being pregnant during the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented additional challenges due to her high-risk pregnancy. The workload and stress associated with remote teaching exacerbated her health condition, leading to significant strain on her personal life, including her marriage.

On a similar note, Mrs. Carreon illustrates the toll that this lack of balance can take, physically and mentally:

I was diagnosed with breast cancer mid-year and I had to be out constantly. When I was out through (FMLA), I would get asked to contact parents, post grades, and complete data sheets when I was dealing with a deadly disease. I was not reporting to work but my direct administrators would put stress on me by sending me emails on things that I needed to do or would put pressure on me by asking me when I would be returning back to work. This was very stressful and impacted my mental health, I couldn't handle it anymore and I had to resign. The approach from my administrators were not giving me the sanity that I needed to focus on my actual health.

Mrs. Castillo's description of being diagnosed with breast cancer mid-year, which necessitated frequent absences from work under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Despite facing a life-threatening illness, the teacher experienced additional stress from their direct administrators, who continued to assign tasks and pressure them to return to work. Mrs. Castillo's disheartening experience, along with those of other participants in this study, illustrated underscore the significant ways in which work-related stressors shaped the experience of teaching and their decision to leave it. Their experience also suggests that lack of support for educators during such challenging circumstances might influence their decision to leave.

In general, participants in this study indicated that they felt so overwhelmed by demands of work that they were unable to tend adequately to their health and well-being. As they describe throughout this study, this lack of what work-life balance led to feelings of burnout that ultimately influenced their decision to leave the profession.

Interview and focus group data also sheds light on the systemic pressures that contributed to the balancing act. Teachers like Mrs. Martinez, Mrs. Mora, and Mrs. Marzano, who taught in schools with a high-stakes testing environment, shared their experiences of navigating the relentless demands of standardized testing while striving to provide a holistic and enriching educational experience for their students. This highlights the inherent tension between adhering to policy mandates and fostering genuine educational engagement.

The emotional toll of the balancing act is evident in narratives such as that of Mrs. Marzano, who grappled with the emotional weight of addressing students' diverse needs, including those related to mental health and socio-emotional well-being. This finding underscores the emotional labor involved in teaching and the challenges teachers faced in maintaining their own well-being while prioritizing that of their students. As Marzano quoted during her individual interview,

I was constantly managing disruptive behavior and addressing disciplinary issues that led for me to feel frustrated, harassed, stressed, and emotional exhausted. I did not get any support from my administrators. And in addition, I had the responsibility of making sure that my student's performed on their end of year state assessments.

Mrs. Marzano's experience of emotional exhaustion resonates with the concept of emotional labor in teaching (Hochschild, 1983). Teachers often engage in emotional labor as

they manage students' diverse needs and navigate challenging classroom situations, which can lead to burnout and feelings of frustration (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). The lack of support from administrators, as highlighted by Mrs. Marzano, exacerbates the emotional toll of teaching and contributes to feelings of stress and exhaustion. This illustrates the challenges of dealing with behavioral issues without adequate support from administrators, contributing to feelings of frustration and emotional exhaustion and keeping teachers accountable of student performance at the same time. Mrs. Marzano's narrative provided depicts of the emotional toll of addressing students' diverse needs, including behavioral issues, without adequate support from administrators. Marzano experience can be tied back to the statement about the emotional labor involved in teaching and the challenges teachers face in maintaining their well-being while prioritizing that of their students.

Also, Mrs. Martinez added the following about standardized testing and how it affected her to provide a holistic and enriching educational experience for her students:

The demands to teach in a STAAR tested grade level are very demanding. As a former 4th grade teacher, I was expected to stay for tutorials after schools two times a week, attend faculty meetings once a week, and come in every other Saturday for STAAR prep camps. I had a new born and there were times where I was unable to attend these extra-curricular tutoring sessions. My former administrator would question me on why I was not willing to come on Saturdays or stay after school to tutor my kids. He did not understand that I had a new born and my baby needed me after school. I was a dedicated teacher from 7:30am-3:30pm but after work hours, I needed to be a mom. This was one of the reasons

why I decided to leave teaching because I had no balance when it came to being a mother and a teacher.

Mrs. Martinez's narrative illustrates the impact of standardized testing on educators' ability to provide a holistic and enriching educational experience for their students, particularly in high-stakes testing environments. This narrative can be tied back to the statement about the challenges educators face in balancing their professional responsibilities with personal obligations. In addition, Martinez describes the demanding expectations placed on educators in a STAAR tested grade level, including mandatory tutorials, faculty meetings, and weekend STAAR prep camps. Despite being dedicated to her role as a teacher during school hours, she faced challenges in meeting additional demands outside of regular work hours due to her responsibilities as a new mother.

Mrs. Martinez expresses a love for teaching and helping students throughout the interview phase, highlighting the intrinsic rewards of the profession. However, she also acknowledges the toll it took on her personal life, as evidenced by feeling tired, working excessive hours, and not meeting her roles as a mother and wife. This narrative underscores the challenges educators face in achieving work-life balance, a topic extensively discussed in the literature. Unfortunately, when educators feel torn between their professional and personal obligations, it can lead to feelings of guilt and dissatisfaction, ultimately influencing their decision to leave the profession just like Mrs. Martinez and Mrs. Marzano shared.

Similarly, Mr. Ramos also added, *"An opportunity to leave teaching came, and I took it. I was going to earn the same amount of money with less commitments that public schools require. I took the opportunity to pursue this career goal that better aligned with my personal aspirations at that time."* This highlights the struggle of balancing personal identification with students and

professional aspirations. Ramos' experience to leave is interpreted as a strategic move to pursue a career goal that aligns better with his aspirations for personal and professional growth. These anecdotes collectively highlight the emotional labor involved in teaching and the complex decisions educators face regarding their well-being, personal lives, and career paths. They underscore the importance of self-care and the need for support systems within the education profession. In addition, Mrs. Ramos reflects the difficult decision to leave teaching due to the challenges of balancing work responsibilities with personal life, particularly as a mother and wife. This highlights the complex emotions involved in managing self-care, family time, and working hours, ultimately leading to the decision to prioritize personal well-being and family relationships over a teaching career.

Teachers like Mrs. Castillo, Mrs. Martinez, Mr. Ramos, Mrs. Yandel, Mrs. Marzano, and Mrs. Morin shifted to a non-teaching career, and articulated how the constant juggling of personal, professional, and systemic demands influenced their decision to seek a more balanced and sustainable professional path. The stories of teachers transitioning to non-teaching careers emphasize the importance of seeking a balanced and sustainable professional path. These transitions reflect a desire to prioritize personal well-being and family life while still pursuing fulfilling professional opportunities. These stories illuminate the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader systemic challenges in the decision-making process.

In summary, the intricate interplay between personal life commitments, professional duties, and institutional expectations emerges as a linchpin in shaping teachers' job satisfaction and retention rates. Failing to achieve this delicate equilibrium can lead to burnout, disillusionment, and ultimately, attrition.

For instance, Mrs. Martinez and Mrs. Castillo's experiences exemplify the challenges of maintaining a balance between work and personal life. Martinez's narrative emphasizes the detrimental impact of excessive after-hours work on her family life, leading her to prioritize her family over her teaching career. Similarly, Mrs. Castillo's account underscores the overwhelming stress she faced from juggling multiple responsibilities, including her studies, wedding planning, and teaching duties, ultimately impacting her mental health.

In addition, data also illuminates the systemic pressures faced by educators, particularly in high-stakes testing environments. Teachers like Mrs. Castillo, Mrs. Martinez, Mrs. Yandel, Mrs. Mora, and Mrs. Marzano shared experiences of navigating the relentless demands of standardized testing while striving to provide holistic education. Moreover, the emotional toll of teaching is evident in narratives such as Mrs. Marzano's and Mrs. Mora's, who grappled with managing students' diverse needs and the pressure of standardized testing without adequate support from administrators. These experiences underscore the emotional labor inherent in teaching and the challenges educators face in maintaining their own well-being while prioritizing their students'.

Also, Several educators, including Mrs. Castillo, Mrs. Martinez, Mrs. Yandel, Mrs. Marzano, and Mrs. Mora, transitioned to non-teaching careers to seek a more balanced and sustainable professional path. Their stories highlight the impact of the constant juggling of personal, professional, and systemic demands on their decision-making process. This theme, distinct from our previous revelations, underscores the multifaceted nature of teacher retention, highlighting the intricate dance between personal well-being, professional obligations, and institutional demands. As we transition to Chapter 5, this understanding sets the stage for deeper

exploration into strategies for fostering a more sustainable and supportive environment for educators, one that acknowledges and addresses the complexities of this balancing act.

Emergent Theme 4: Navigating Aspirations

The met of "navigating aspirations encapsulates data regarding the ways in which participants' professional ambitions and aspirations shaped their experiences of quitting and the meaning they made of them. The experiences shared by the participants not only illuminate the personal and professional dimensions of their aspirations but also shed light on the challenges and opportunities they faced in interpreting and making meaning of these experiences, ultimately leading to their decisions to leave teaching.

Interview and focus group data revealed that participants shared the experience of frustrated efforts to grow professionally within their roles as teachers. Likewise, data indicated that participants felt that their larger educational aspirations, beyond teaching but within education, were not supported in the educational environments in which they For example, Mrs. Marzano articulated her aspirations for leadership roles within the educational system. However, she faced challenges in realizing these ambitions due to systemic barriers and limited opportunities for career advancement. As Marzano stated in the individual interview, *"I interviewed for an assistant principal position 7 times, and I never got an opportunity to grow within my school district. I did so much for the school district that I worked for and I didn't feel appreciated at all. It is unfortunate how politics play a major role on whether you get to get a promotion at this school district or not."*

Mrs. Marzano's experience underscores the systemic barriers and politics that often hinder career advancement within educational institutions. Interview data from Mrs. Marzano as

well as other participants, illustrates the ways in which bureaucratic structures, limited opportunities for leadership roles and subjective promotion criteria, and favoritism constrained participant's professional growth.

For example, Mrs. Villarreal added during the focus group interview, *"There was an opening at my own campus as a school counselor. I was granted an interview but my administrators never liked to give staff within the campus a chance to grow within. They decided to bring in someone from the outside. This was the clue that I needed to walk away from teaching and try my luck somewhere else."*

One level, Mrs. Villarreal's account reveals many of the bureaucratic barriers to promotion described by Ingersoll (2001) along with the sense of constrained professional growth expressed by all participants. Her experience underscores the impact of organizational dynamics, such as favoritism and limited internal mobility, on teachers' ability to pursue their professional aspirations. On another level, Mrs. Villarreal can be seen to indicate that leaving the field was perceived by participants as a last-ditch effort to promote the sort of professional growth that the teaching profession seemed to seek to constrain. Ingersoll (2003) illustrates that teachers often leave the field to find the professional growth they couldn't find in education.

Similarly, Mr. Ramos reported in the focus group interview: *I left teaching because I felt like I was hitting a glass ceiling. Despite my passion and dedication, I found myself constantly thwarted in my efforts to advance my career and realize my aspirations within the educational system. It became clear that if I wanted to truly make a difference and fulfill my long-term goals, I needed to explore opportunities beyond the constraints of the classroom*

Mr. Ramos's narrative suggests that he faced challenges in realizing his career ambitions within the educational system, ultimately leading him to leave teaching.

Mr. Ramos journey is characterized by a deep-seated desire to contribute to their community and foster a positive impact, showcasing the fulfillment of personal and professional aspirations within the educational organizational context. However, over time, the constraints within the educational system hindered their ability to fully realize this aspiration.

Similarly, Mrs. Marzano added:

my experiences with my former students and administrators made me contemplate to look for other career paths, teaching was not for me. I blame the education system itself. During my last two years in teaching, I was not doing well. I needed to get out of the classroom and navigate towards a new career shift. I am currently a Real Estate Agent, and I love it!

Mrs. Marzano's experience highlights the need for systemic changes within the educational system to address teacher's career aspirations.

Moreover, participants' experiences of thwarted professional growth and career aspirations highlight the nuanced interplay between personal passion and systemic realities through which leaving the profession emerged as a professional growth move. Participants' experiences revealed instances where educators navigated aspirations by shifting career trajectories outside of teaching. Mrs. Marzano, Mr. Ramos, Mrs. Villarreal, Mr. Elizondo, and Mrs. Castillo all former Latinx teachers, expressed their desire to make a broader impact in education policy. These former teachers faced limited avenues for influence within the classroom, therefore they all decided to transition to a role where they could contribute to systemic changes. For example, Mrs. Villarreal said the following on her career shift as a Licensed Practitioner Counselor,

I was passionate about teaching, but I became increasingly disillusioned by the systemic barriers that limited my ability to address broader issues in education. Transitioning out of teaching was a difficult decision, but it was driven by my desire to make a broader impact on education policy.

Mrs. Villarreal's narrative highlights her frustration with the limited avenues for influence within the classroom and their subsequent decision to transition to a role where she could contribute to systemic changes in education policy. This decision reflects the finding of navigating aspirations, where educators seek to pursue their broader career goals beyond the constraints of teaching due to systemic barriers.

Research corroborates this experience, showing how teachers often feel constrained by the limitations of their roles within the classroom. Ms. Villarreal's narrative underscores the challenges faced by educators in influencing change within the classroom and their subsequent transition to roles where they can contribute to systemic changes in education policy.

Similarly, Mr. Elizondo added during the focus group interview,

I felt a deep connection with my students, but it reached a point where I had to choose between that connection and my own professional growth. It was a difficult choice, but I needed room for personal and career development. I decided to leave teaching at year 5 and pursue my long-term goal on becoming a doctor.

Elizondo's underscores the ways in which participants made meaning of the experience leaving teaching and even the educational sector in terms of professional growth.

Also, Mr. Ramos added: *As a Latinx teacher,*

I felt a deep connection to my students and their communities. However, I saw how systemic barriers hindered my ability to enact meaningful change within the classroom. Transitioning to a career in education policy gave me the opportunity to address systemic issues that I couldn't tackle as a classroom teacher.

Ramos narrative underscores the challenges faced by Latinx educators in navigating aspirations for broader impact within the classroom and the decision to transition to roles in education policy to address systemic issues. The decisions of Mrs. Villarreal, Mr. Elizondo, and Mr. Ramos to transition out of teaching reflect a growing trend on teacher attrition.

The finding of Navigating Aspirations underscores the importance of aligning personal and professional aspirations. Mrs. Mora shared her journey of seeking alignment between her teaching philosophy and the educational environment. The dissonance between her aspirations for inclusive pedagogies and the prevailing practices within her school influenced her decision to explore alternative career paths. As she expressed,

As an elementary special education teacher, my vision for teaching that I had for my special education students was to bring awareness on topics such as social and emotional well-being and STEAM. Unfortunately, I felt like I had to follow a script that was given to me on a weekly basis and prepare my students for the big state assessment in May. This practice went against my personal values, beliefs, and the vision that I had for my special education students.

Mrs. Mora's experience underscores the tension between individual aspirations and institutional expectations within the teaching profession.

It is important to note that personal as well as professional aspirations shape the meaning participants made of leaving their profession. As Mrs. Grecia, shared:

I left teaching not because I lost faith in education, but because I needed to follow my own aspirations. I was in my mid-30's and I wanted to start a family of my own. It's important to recognize when it's time to embark on a new journey, even if it means leaving behind a career that once defined you.

Mrs. Grecia's narrative highlights the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of personal and professional aspirations in teachers' career trajectories. This resonates with emerging themes related to work-life balance to suggest that tending to their professional growth and fostering evolving personal and professional goals and aspirations, might mean leaving the teaching profession.

Participants in this study found themselves at the crossroads of reconciling personal aspirations with the demands of their profession. Mrs. Marzano's and Mrs. Villarreal's experiences underscore the systemic barriers that educators face in advancing their careers within the education system. Despite their aspirations for leadership roles or transitions to counseling positions, they encountered obstacles such as administrative preferences and external politics.

Chapter Conclusion

Taken as a whole, these emerging themes emphasize the challenges and opportunities within the organizational structure and highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships and networks. These themes also shed light on the influence of social connections on the teachers' experiences of leaving and the meaning they make out of. Emergent themes also reveal that a burdensome balancing act within conflicting professional demands and between these demands and the demands and desires of home life and professional growth shaped participants' experience of teaching in terms of work-life balance as well as making leaving the profession the

best way to achieve it. This illustrated the teachers' aspirations and ambitions as they embarked on new paths outside of teaching.

The intersections and interconnections among Traversing organizational terrain, Balancing act, Interweaving bonds, and Navigating aspirations offer a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions inherent in the experiences of Latinx teachers in this educational context.

CHAPTER V

SIGNIFICANCE & IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance of the emergent themes discussed in Chapter Four in terms of the research question and implications for practice and further research. The overarching aim of this dissertation has been to investigate the lived experiences of Latinx teachers who have chosen to leave the teaching profession and to understand how they interpret or make meaning of these experiences. This chapter begins by connecting emergent themes to the research question in order to discuss the insight these themes lend to the research question. Following this, I discuss the implications for practice and further study. Then, I talk about post historical context of Covid-19 and teacher attrition. Finally, I end the chapter with a chapter V conclusion summary.

First, I discuss drawings from the emergent themes from Chapter 4 to address my research question: What are the experiences of 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts, and how do they make meaning of their experiences leaving teaching? First, I discuss participants' lived experiences of quitting and make connections to existing literature of teacher's experience of quitting. Next, I use the emergent themes to address the ways in which participants make meaning of these experiences. For this discussion, I lean into the research of, Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) on *The Factors of Teacher Attrition and Retention: An Updated and Expanded Meta-Analysis of the Literature* with my

research question of “What are the experiences of 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts, and how do they make meaning of their experiences leaving teaching?”

The Lived Experience of Teacher Attrition

The perspectives and experiences of participants in this study add layers to our understanding of teacher attrition. By eliciting insights and narratives from this often-overlooked group, the study highlights the unique challenges and complexities faced by Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Findings related to teachers’ experiences leaving the field provide a highly localized perspective on the national problem of teacher attrition. This specific focus allows for a nuanced understanding of how institutional factors, work-life balance, and professional trajectories intersect to influence Latinx teachers' decisions to leave teaching. By prioritizing the experiences and perspectives of former Latinx teachers, the research humanizes the issue of teacher turnover and provides nuanced insights into the personal, relational, and systemic factors that contribute to it. This approach challenges simplistic views that rely solely on statistics, recognizing the complexity of teachers' experiences and the need for a comprehensive understanding of attrition.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) identify key themes influencing minoritized teachers’ decisions to leave the field. The experiences of teachers in this study resonate with factors such as workload and stress, job satisfaction, support and resources, and organizational climate. Their findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic issues within educational institutions to improve teacher retention and create more supportive and sustainable work environments for educators.

In Chapter 3, participant experiences revealed the negative impact of administrative structures and policies on their teaching experience and the time and energy required to navigate these structures. Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) emphasize how institutional policies and bureaucratic hurdles can significantly impact teacher retention, particularly for marginalized groups like Latinx educators. These challenges often manifest as systemic barriers that hinder Latinx teachers' sense of belonging and professional growth within the education system. This was most evident in the data organized under the theme “Traversing Organizational Terrain,” which focused on participants' experiences navigating building-level administrators and larger administrative forces expressed through school-level leadership practices, personnel decisions, and curricular priorities.

For instance, Mrs. Grecia, a former early childhood Latinx teacher, recounted how she struggled with the top-down leadership style of her school's administration, which often led to conflicting priorities and lack of support for teachers. Similarly, Mrs. Mora described feeling overwhelmed by the bureaucratic hurdles involved in accessing resources and support for her students, ultimately contributing to her decision to leave teaching. These individual stories underscore the broader systemic barriers highlighted by Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019), indicating how institutional policies and administrative structures can significantly impact teacher retention, especially for Latinx educators. By examining the specific experiences of former teachers within their school districts, we gain a deeper understanding of how these systemic barriers affect teachers' sense of belonging and professional growth.

Bringing together insights from Chapter 4 and the findings of Nguyen, Pham, Springer, and Crouch (2019) allows us to address a crucial aspect of the research question: the experiences of teachers leaving the teaching profession. By recognizing the specific challenges faced by

Latinx educators within the organizational terrain of their school districts, we can better understand how institutional policies and bureaucratic hurdles influence their decisions to stay or leave teaching. This holistic approach provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between individual experiences and systemic factors in shaping teacher attrition rates, particularly among marginalized groups.

Relationships with students, colleagues, and the community also emerged as key components of participants' experiences leaving the field. As noted by García and Guerra (2004), Latinx educators often serve as cultural brokers within their schools, forming deep connections with students and families from similar backgrounds, which can both enrich their teaching experiences and contribute to feelings of isolation when leaving the profession. The data from Chapter 4 revealed that relationships with students, colleagues, and the community were significant factors influencing participants' decisions to leave teaching. This finding aligns with García and Guerra's (2004) discussion on the role of Latinx educators as cultural brokers. For example, Mrs. Castillo, a former Latinx 5th grade teacher, shared how her strong connections with students and their families enriched her teaching experience but also contributed to her sense of isolation upon leaving teaching.

The narratives shared by participants highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships in shaping their experiences within the education system. For instance, Mrs. Yandel described the supportive network of colleagues who became like family to her, emphasizing the significance of camaraderie and collaboration in the teaching profession. However, when faced with systemic challenges and lack of support from administrators, these relationships alone were often insufficient to sustain participants' commitment to teaching.

By exploring the specific dynamics of relationships within the teaching profession, we gain insights into the complexities of Latinx educators' experiences and the factors that influence their decisions to leave teaching. This deeper understanding allows us to address a key aspect of the research question. By acknowledging the importance of these relationships and the unique challenges faced by Latinx educators, stakeholders can develop more targeted interventions and support strategies to promote teacher retention and well-being within the profession.

The Balancing Act theme speaks to the delicate equilibrium between personal and professional responsibilities faced by Latinx educators. Recent work-life balance literature, such as studies by Smith et al. (2018) and García et al. (2021), emphasizes the challenges of managing workload, family obligations, and career aspirations, particularly for minority teachers. Latinx educators often grapple with competing demands, which can impact their well-being and job satisfaction, ultimately influencing their decision to leave teaching. For example, Mrs. Castillo discussed the struggle of juggling classroom responsibilities with caregiving duties for her family while battling breast cancer. This resonates with the findings of García et al. (2021), who highlighted similar challenges faced by Latinx educators in balancing their professional and personal lives. Similarly, Mr. Elizondo shared how his passion for teaching often clashed with the demands of his graduate classes, leading to burnout and eventual departure from the profession to focus full-time on his medical career.

By delving into specific examples from Chapter 4, we see how the experiences of Latinx educators mirror the broader challenges outlined in recent work-life balance literature. This intersection highlights the relevance of insights from Smith et al. (2018) and García et al. (2021) within the context of Latinx teacher attrition. Understanding the complex interplay between personal and professional demands is crucial for addressing the part of our research question that

focuses on the experiences of Latinx educators and their decisions to leave teaching. By recognizing these challenges and their implications for teacher retention, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms to better meet the needs of Latinx educators and promote their retention within the profession.

Navigating Aspirations reflects Latinx educators' desires for career growth and fulfillment within the teaching profession. Recent research by Flores and Aguirre (2021) and García et al. (2020) underscores the importance of understanding how Latinx educators' career trajectories evolve over time. It reveals that Latinx teachers may face unique barriers to advancement, such as limited access to leadership roles and professional development opportunities, which can shape their interpretations of their experiences leaving teaching and influence their decisions regarding career paths. For instance, Mr. Ramos, a former high school ESL Latinx teacher, expressed his frustration with the lack of support for professional development opportunities within his school district, which hindered his ability to advance in his educational career. Similarly, Mrs. Villarreal shared how she felt her aspirations for leadership roles were overlooked due to systemic biases within the educational system.

By examining specific examples from Chapter 4, we can see how Latinx educators' aspirations intersect with the broader challenges highlighted in the literature. This intersection emphasizes the relevance of insights from Flores and Aguirre (2021) and García et al. (2020) within the context of Latinx teacher attrition. Understanding the barriers that Latinx educators face in pursuing their professional aspirations is crucial for addressing the part of our research question that focuses on their experiences within the teaching profession. By recognizing these barriers and their implications for teacher retention, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms to promote career advancement opportunities for Latinx

educators, thereby enhancing their retention within the profession. This aligns with the overarching goal of the study to provide insights that inform efforts to support and retain Latinx educators in the teaching profession.

Together, these emergent themes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley school districts. By integrating insights from diverse strands of literature, we gain a deeper understanding of the intersecting dynamics shaping Latinx educators' interpretations of their experiences leaving teaching and the systemic factors influencing their career trajectories.

The relationship among these emergent themes—Traversing Organizational Terrain, Interweaving Bonds, Balancing Act, and Navigating Aspirations—is dynamic and multifaceted. For instance, a teacher's struggle to navigate bureaucratic hurdles within the organizational terrain may impact their ability to maintain supportive relationships with colleagues (Interweaving Bonds) or find a satisfying work-life balance (Balancing Act). Similarly, unmet career aspirations (Navigating Aspirations) might exacerbate feelings of frustration and disillusionment with the organizational structure (Traversing Organizational Terrain).

This dynamic interplay between the key concepts represented in these emergent themes is also evident in recent research by Rodríguez et al. (2021), who assert that the challenges of traversing organizational terrain can significantly affect teachers' sense of professional identity and their relationships with colleagues. Participants' experiences suggest that administrative policies often create barriers to collaboration or limit opportunities for professional development, straining interpersonal connections within the school community, and impacting teacher satisfaction and retention.

Furthermore, recent studies by García and López (2020) highlight how the juggling of personal and professional responsibilities, as encapsulated by the Balancing Act theme, is intricately linked to teachers' perceptions of their career trajectories. Consistent with García and López (2020), teachers who struggle to find a balance between work and personal life may experience heightened stress and dissatisfaction, leading to a reevaluation of their career goals and aspirations. Nguyen et al. (2019) highlight the importance of aligning organizational structures with educators' professional aspirations. Participant experiences across emergent themes indicate that when teachers perceive limited opportunities for growth or advancement within the organizational terrain, it can contribute to feelings of stagnation and disillusionment, further complicating their efforts to navigate their career paths.

Overall, the data from this study illustrate the complexity of the experiences of Latinx former teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and the ways in which these highly localized experiences connect to literature about teacher attrition. By considering how these themes intersect and interact, we gain a deeper understanding of the systemic factors influencing teachers' interpretations of their experiences leaving teaching and their decisions.

Making Meaning of Quitting

The data gathered in Chapter 4 of this study provide valuable insights into how 10 former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts interpret and make meaning of their decision to leave the teaching profession. Through qualitative individual and focus group interviews, several emergent themes were identified, including Traversing Organizational Terrain, Interweaving Bonds, Balancing Act, and Navigating Aspirations. This discussion section will explore how these themes shed light on the participants' interpretations of their

experiences in leaving teaching. In addition, recent literature will be integrated to provide further context and understanding of the experiences of these former teachers.

The data suggest that the theme of Traversing Organizational Terrain reveals the complex array of challenges and obstacles encountered by former Latinx teachers within educational settings, illuminating the factors contributing to their decision to exit the profession. Participants articulated feelings of inadequacy in receiving support and navigating institutional dynamics, which exerted a significant influence on their departure. This finding is particularly evident in the data, highlighting the critical role of organizational climate in shaping teachers' retention. For example, Mrs. Marzano lamented the lack of support from school administration, expressing a sense of undervaluation that ultimately led to her departure from teaching.

Supporting literature underscores that organizational climate significantly impacts teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession. Studies suggest that a supportive organizational culture fosters teacher retention and satisfaction (Nguyen, Pham, Springer, & Crouch, 2019). Mrs. Castillo, for instance, felt disheartened by the lack of recognition and support from school leadership, echoing the sentiments found in scholarly research on teacher attrition focusing on the lived experiences of teachers. Exploring these challenges offers valuable insights into Latinx teachers' perspectives on leaving the profession amidst systemic inequalities, underscoring the imperative for schools to address these issues to retain Latinx educators and cultivate inclusive environments.

The data suggest that the emergent theme of Interweaving Bonds underscores the crucial role of relationships in teaching and provides insight into how former Latinx teachers interpret their departure. Participants shared stories of close connections with students and colleagues, highlighting how these relationships shaped their experiences. For example, Mrs. Martinez

described the bond she formed with her students as the most rewarding aspect of her teaching career. However, faced with an increased workload and administrative pressures, she felt disconnected from her students, which led her to reconsider her career choice.

Literature supports these findings, emphasizing the significance of social connections in teacher retention. Research highlights that strong relationships with students and colleagues are critical factors in teachers' job satisfaction and decision to remain in the profession (López, González, & Rodríguez, 2021). Another participant, Mr. Ramos, recounted how a supportive network of fellow teachers provided emotional and professional support, making the teaching experience more fulfilling. However, when this support network diminished due to staff turnover and policy changes, he felt isolated and overwhelmed, prompting his decision to leave.

By understanding the complexities of these relationships, we gain valuable insights into how Latinx teachers make sense of leaving teaching in light of their connections and community ties. This understanding enriches our comprehension of their decision-making process and underscores the importance of fostering supportive relationships within educational environments to retain Latinx educators.

The data suggest that the Balancing Act theme explores the struggle of managing personal and professional life, providing insight into how former Latinx teachers view their departure from teaching. Participants discussed the challenge of balancing work, family, and personal goals, which significantly influenced their decision. For example, Mrs. Yandel expressed her frustration at having to work multiple jobs to support her family while also meeting the demands of her teaching position. This imbalance led to burnout and ultimately influenced her decision to leave the profession.

Literature supports these findings, emphasizing the importance of work-life balance for teacher well-being and retention. Recent studies highlight that achieving a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life is crucial for preventing teacher burnout and promoting retention (Smith, Johnson, & García, 2020). Another participant, Mrs. Castillo, shared how the overwhelming demands of her teaching job left little time for family commitments and personal pursuits. She noted that the constant struggle to meet both professional and personal obligations led to significant stress, eventually causing her to resign.

By addressing these challenges, we see how Latinx teachers interpret their departure within the context of their lives. Understanding the impact of work-life balance on their decisions offers valuable insights for supporting educators in navigating these competing demands, highlighting the need for policies and practices that promote a healthier work-life balance for teachers.

The data suggest that the Navigating Aspirations theme delves into participants' experiences of aligning personal and professional goals within teaching, shedding light on how former Latinx teachers interpret their departure. Participants discussed how their career paths influenced their decision to leave teaching, especially when their aspirations didn't align with the school's expectations. For example, Mr. Elizondo expressed his long-term goal of becoming a medical doctor, emphasizing that leaving teaching was necessary to prioritize his personal aspirations while he was still young and seize the opportunity before time passed by.

Literature supports these findings, emphasizing the importance of supporting teachers in pursuing their professional goals. Recent studies highlight that teachers are more likely to remain in the profession if their career aspirations are supported and aligned with their work environment (González, Martínez, & Ramírez, 2022). Another participant, Mrs. Marzano, shared

how she aspired to advance into educational leadership but felt stifled by the lack of opportunities for professional growth within her school. She eventually decided to leave teaching to pursue a master's degree in educational administration, believing that this path would better align with her long-term career goals.

By navigating their aspirations, participants saw their departure as a strategic move aligned with their long-term career objectives. Understanding how Latinx teachers interpret leaving teaching in light of their professional goals offers valuable insights for supporting educators in achieving their aspirations, highlighting the need for schools to provide opportunities for career advancement and professional development.

The data from Chapter 4 offer a comprehensive understanding of how former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley make meaning of their experiences leaving teaching. By addressing emergent themes such as Traversing Organizational Terrain, Interweaving Bonds, Balancing Act, and Navigating Aspirations, this study contributes to the existing literature on teacher attrition and provides insights for educational policymakers and stakeholders aiming to support Latinx educators and enhance teacher retention efforts.

The emergent themes are interconnected and collectively shape the experiences of former Latinx teachers as they make meaning of their departure from teaching. Traversing Organizational Terrain involves navigating through systemic barriers and support structures within educational institutions. This theme intertwines closely with Interweaving Bonds, which underscores the significance of interpersonal relationships within the teaching profession. Participants shared anecdotes of meaningful connections with students and colleagues, indicating how organizational dynamics impact their relational experiences. Literature underscores the

influence of organizational climate on teacher-student relationships, thereby emphasizing the correlation between these emergent themes.

Moreover, Balancing Act explores the struggles of balancing personal and professional demands. Participants articulated the challenges of maintaining equilibrium between work, family responsibilities, and personal aspirations, all of which influenced their decision to exit teaching. This theme intersects with Navigating Aspirations, where participants discussed their endeavors to align personal and professional goals within the teaching profession. Participants viewed their departure as a strategic decision aligned with their long-term career objectives, showcasing the influence of personal aspirations on their decision-making process. Literature underscores the significance of supporting teachers in pursuing their professional goals, highlighting the relationship between these emergent themes.

Understanding the intersection between systemic barriers, interpersonal relationships, work-life balance, and career aspirations sheds light on the nuanced experiences of Latinx teachers and their decisions to leave the profession. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these emergent themes, educational policymakers and stakeholders can develop more holistic approaches to addressing teacher attrition and supporting Latinx educators in the region. Integrating comprehensive support programs that address both organizational challenges and personal aspirations can enhance teacher well-being and retention rates. Additionally, fostering a positive organizational climate that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion can create an environment conducive to meaningful interpersonal relationships and professional growth. Furthermore, implementing mentorship programs that provide guidance and support to Latinx teachers navigating their professional aspirations can contribute to their retention and career

satisfaction. Investing in culturally responsive professional development opportunities can empower Latinx educators to thrive in their roles and contribute effectively to student success.

Implications for Practice

This study offers valuable insights into the experiences of Latinx teachers leaving the profession and provides actionable implications for practice to improve teacher retention and foster a more inclusive educational environment. Addressing systemic barriers within educational institutions is crucial for creating equitable and supportive environments where Latinx teachers feel valued and empowered to succeed. Implementing policies and practices that recognize and address systemic inequities, such as disparities in resources, opportunities, and support, can help educational stakeholders create a more inclusive environment for Latinx educators.

Former teachers, like Mrs. Grecia, shared experiences highlighting cultural insensitivity and inequitable resource distribution within their schools. Mrs. Grecia felt marginalized due to the lack of culturally responsive support structures, contributing to her decision to leave teaching. This aligns with the conceptual framework of cultural responsiveness, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds of educators and students. Research by Gay (2018) supports this view, highlighting that culturally responsive teaching practices can significantly enhance teacher satisfaction and retention by fostering a sense of belonging and respect within the school community.

Fostering supportive relationships among educators, students, and colleagues is essential for teacher satisfaction and retention. Stakeholders can promote teacher retention by nurturing positive student-teacher relationships, facilitating meaningful collaboration among colleagues, and providing opportunities for mentorship and professional growth. Theories on social capital

and relational trust, as discussed by Bryk and Schneider (2002), underscore the importance of relational aspects of teaching. By prioritizing these relationships, schools can cultivate a sense of community and belonging, which are crucial for retaining Latinx educators (López et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020; González et al., 2022).

In interviews, former teachers such as Mrs. Yandel emphasized the importance of mentorship in providing guidance and support during challenging times, influencing their decision to continue teaching. This aligns with the theory of mentorship as a critical component of professional development, as explored by Kram (1985). Stakeholders can leverage these insights by implementing tailored mentorship programs and fostering collaboration among Latinx educators to enhance job satisfaction and retention.

Promoting work-life balance is vital for mitigating factors contributing to teacher attrition, especially among Latinx educators facing additional challenges outside of the workplace. Stakeholders can support teacher retention by promoting work-life balance through flexible scheduling, access to resources for self-care and stress management, and policies prioritizing educators' well-being. The work-family conflict theory, discussed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), provides a framework for understanding how work-life balance impacts job satisfaction and retention. Research by Smith et al. (2020), Rodríguez and Martínez (2019), and González et al. (2022) further highlights the importance of creating a culture of wellness within schools to support educators in managing personal and professional responsibilities.

Former teachers like Mrs. Martinez shared challenges balancing teaching responsibilities with caregiving duties, influencing their decision to leave the profession. Implementing policies that support educators in managing personal and professional responsibilities, along with creating a culture of wellness within schools, can contribute to higher job satisfaction and

retention among Latinx educators. This approach aligns with theories on organizational support and work-life integration, which emphasize the role of supportive workplace policies in employee retention (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Empowering Latinx teachers' professional aspirations through opportunities for career advancement, leadership development, and continuous learning is crucial for retaining talented educators and promoting a more diverse and equitable teaching workforce. Leaders can empower teachers by investing in their professional growth, providing mentorship programs, and creating clear pathways for career advancement. Theories on career development and motivation, such as Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1966), highlight the importance of providing opportunities for growth and recognition in enhancing job satisfaction and retention.

Former teachers like Mrs. Marzano expressed frustration with limited opportunities for career advancement, influencing their decision to explore other career paths. Educational leaders can address these challenges by fostering a culture of innovation and continuous learning within schools and providing meaningful professional development activities to retain talented educators. This approach is supported by research on professional learning communities, which emphasize collaborative and continuous professional growth as key factors in teacher retention (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

In conclusion, these implications highlight the need for proactive measures to address the challenges faced by Latinx educators and promote their retention within the teaching profession. By prioritizing inclusivity, support, work-life balance, and professional development, educational stakeholders can create environments that empower Latinx teachers and contribute to a more diverse and equitable education system.

Implications for Further Research

Understanding the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and their interpretations of leaving the teaching profession presents opportunities for further investigation.

First, research could explore the role of school leadership and organizational support in shaping the experiences and retention of Latinx teachers. Mrs. Grecia, a former early childhood Latinx teacher, recalls feeling unsupported by her school administration when attempting to implement culturally relevant teaching practices. Her narrative underscores the importance of investigating how factors such as leadership styles, administrative support, and institutional resources influence Latinx educators' job satisfaction and retention rates. Flores et al. (2021) emphasize that school climate and organizational culture significantly shape teachers' experiences, suggesting that positive and supportive environments are critical for retaining Latinx teachers. García et al. (2019) assert that supportive leadership fosters a positive work environment, enhancing teacher morale and contributing to higher job satisfaction and retention among Latinx educators. For instance, Mrs. Carreon experienced the positive impact of strong leadership in her school, where the principal actively promoted diversity and inclusivity, creating a supportive environment for Latinx teachers. This indicates that leadership styles promoting inclusivity and support can have a substantial effect on Latinx teacher retention.

Moreover, future research could focus on analyzing the impact of policy initiatives on the recruitment, retention, and professional development of Latinx educators. Mrs. Mora, a former Latinx Special Education teacher, expressed frustration with the lack of support for Special Education programs on her campus, which contributed to her decision to leave teaching. This highlights the need to examine how state and district-level policies affect Latinx teacher

retention. Hernández et al. (2023) advocate for policy analysis to identify gaps and opportunities for reform, emphasizing that effective policies can significantly impact teacher retention. Valdez et al. (2020) argue for the importance of culturally responsive policies that address the unique needs of Latinx teachers and students, promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. Mr. Ramos, who left teaching due to the lack of professional development opportunities, illustrates the necessity for policies that prioritize ongoing teacher support and growth. This suggests that comprehensive policy initiatives can directly influence Latinx teacher retention by providing the necessary support and resources.

Lastly, investigating the role of peer support networks and mentorship programs could provide valuable insights into strategies for supporting Latinx teachers. Mrs. Yandel, a former Bilingual Elementary Latinx teacher, benefited greatly from a mentorship program that provided guidance and encouragement throughout her teaching career. Her narrative underscores the significance of mentorship in promoting job satisfaction and retention among Latinx educators. García et al. (2021) emphasize the positive impact of mentorship relationships on teacher development and retention. Additionally, Smith et al. (2020) highlight the importance of peer support networks in fostering a sense of belonging and community among Latinx teachers, ultimately contributing to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention. For example, Mrs. Villarreal found solace and guidance in a peer support group of fellow Latinx educators, emphasizing the importance of community and collaboration in the teaching profession. This indicates that creating strong peer support networks and mentorship programs can significantly enhance Latinx teacher retention by providing essential emotional and professional support.

These implications and narratives highlight the multifaceted nature of Latinx teacher retention and attrition, underscoring the importance of continued research to address the complex

challenges faced by Latinx educators. By exploring these areas further and incorporating diverse perspectives and voices, researchers can develop comprehensive strategies to support the retention and success of Latinx teachers in the teaching profession. Understanding the conceptual frameworks behind these studies can inform practical approaches to improving the working conditions and professional satisfaction of Latinx educators, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and effective educational system.

Post Historical Context COVID-19

The first years following the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the educational landscape, exacerbating existing challenges and introducing new ones for educators worldwide. Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, already facing systemic inequities, encountered heightened stress and resource constraints during this period. The pandemic illuminated and intensified pre-existing disparities in educational resources, access to technology, and institutional support, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (García & Weiss, 2020).

Latinx teachers often serve in under-resourced schools and are more likely to face challenges related to cultural insensitivity and lack of institutional support. The abrupt shift to remote learning further strained these educators, who had to navigate not only the logistical complexities of virtual instruction but also the socio-emotional needs of their students, many of whom come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Gándara, 2021).

Research conducted during and after the initial pandemic years highlights the increased workload, stress, and burnout among teachers. In particular, Latinx educators reported feeling overwhelmed by the dual demands of teaching and managing their households, especially when schools transitioned to online platforms (Kraft et al., 2020). These challenges were compounded

by systemic issues such as inequitable access to technology and support, which were critical for effective remote instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Given this context, this study explored the experiences of ten former Latinx teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley school districts. It seek to understand how these educators interpret and make meaning of their experiences leading to their decision to leave the teaching profession.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide a rich foundation for future research aimed at deepening our understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Latinx teachers leaving the teaching profession in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts. The emergent themes of interweaving bonds, balancing act, organizational terrain, and navigating aspirations reveal the multifaceted challenges and complexities that Latinx teachers face in their professional journeys.

By addressing these implications, researchers can develop evidence-based interventions and policies that bolster teacher retention, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately elevate the quality of education for all students. This study underscores the importance of focusing on the lived experiences of participants to enhance our understanding of teacher attrition, especially within the Latinx community in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. By doing so, the research not only adds to the existing body of literature but also advocates for more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to tackling the intricate challenges faced by educators in diverse educational settings.

The takeaway messages for the reader are clear. I now understand more deeply how systemic barriers, administrative insensitivity, and a lack of supportive policies contribute to Latinx teachers' decisions to leave the profession. I have learned that the interweaving bonds

formed within the classroom context are crucial, yet they are often strained by inadequate support systems and organizational challenges. Additionally, the balancing act that Latinx teachers perform between their professional and personal lives is further complicated by unsupportive administrative practices and inequitable resource distribution.

Ultimately, acknowledging and addressing the experiences of Latinx teachers leaving the profession is vital for creating a fairer and more supportive educational environment for everyone involved. The insights gained from this study highlight the need for systemic changes that promote equity, support, and professional growth, ensuring that Latinx educators can thrive and contribute meaningfully to the educational landscape.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A



Online Informed Consent form *Latinx Teacher Attrition*

This research study is conducted by Dolores Araujo Jr., Principal Investigator, and Doctoral Student at The University of Rio Grande Valley.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how do they how they interpret- make meaning of- these experiences leaving teaching.

The individual interviews should take approximately 40-60 minutes to complete and the focus group session should take about 60-90 minutes to complete.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If there are any questions or parts of this study you are uncomfortable completing, feel free to skip that question and terminate your participation at any time without question or comment.

In order to be part of this study, you must: (a) taught for 6 years or less (b) worked in a Rio Grande Valley, Texas school district. (c) Identified yourself as Latinx (d) left the teaching profession.

Participation in this study requires videotaping of all procedures (individual interviews/focus group interviews), by selecting, I Agree, you are giving us permission to make and use these recordings. *All recordings will be treated confidentially and stored on a secure server. However, please be aware that certain technologies exist that can be used to monitor or record data and/or websites that are visited.*

If it is possible that your participation in this study might reveal behavior that must be reported according to state law (e.g., abuse, sexual harassment, intent to harm self or others); disclosure of such information will be reported to the extent required by law.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at (956) 665-3598 or irb@utrgv.edu.

I Agree _____ I do Not Agree _____
Signature: _____

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Script for Dissertation Participants

Hello [Potential Participant's Name],

My name is Dolores Araujo Jr., and I am a doctoral student at The University of Rio Grande Valley. I am currently conducting research for my dissertation, which aims to explore the experiences of Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how do they how they interpret- make meaning of- these experiences leaving teaching.

I came across your [experience, expertise, or affiliation relevant to the study] and believe that your insights would be valuable to this research. As such, I would like to invite you to participate in an individual and focus group interview as part of this study. The semi-structured interview will have 8 main questions. The semi-structured interviews will take between 40-60 minutes long. In addition, the focus group interviews will consist of 5 open-ended questions and will take approximately 60-90 minutes long. I assure you that your participation will be confidential, and your identity will be kept anonymous in the final research report. Your input will be crucial in gaining a deeper understanding of Latinx teacher attrition in the lower Rio Grande Valley and contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. Additionally, there will be no negative consequences for declining to participate or withdrawing from the study.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please feel free to reach out to me at (956) 735-7577. Alternatively, you can respond to this email, and we can schedule a suitable time for the interview.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. Your contribution is invaluable and will make a meaningful impact on the study's findings.

Best regards,
Dolores Araujo Jr.
dolores.araujo01@utrgv.edu
(956) 735-7577

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

Individual Interview Protocol

What are the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how do they make meaning of their experiences leaving teaching?

Welcome remarks: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview as part of my study looking at the experiences of teachers who have left the field. Your insight is essential to this study. Thank you for sharing.

Overview of Interview: The interview has 8 main questions and should take around 40-60 minutes. There are no "right answers" to these questions. I really want to know about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings. This should feel like a structured conversation of sorts. So please feel comfortable asking me questions at any time and just talking.

Reminder of informed consent: As noted in the consent form you signed; your answers will be confidential in that no identifying information will be connected with your answers. Also, you can ask me to stop recording anytime you want, skip any questions, or stop the interview completely. Also, you can revisit questions at any time and add information or ask for information to be removed

- Any questions before we get started? Let's go!

(Questionnaire ahead of time)

- o Age
- o Race/ethnicity (how do you identify yourself?)
- o Where were you born and raised?
- o Where did you live during your previous teaching job/s?
- o In which school district/s did you teach?
- o What were the student demographics in your former school/s? (rural, suburban, urban/upper, middle, lower SES / English, Spanish, Other)
- o How long did you formally teach?
- o Where did you obtain your teacher certification?

Individual Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to originally become a teacher?
 - 1a) Why did you decide to teach in your former school district/s?
2. Tell me about the kinds of experiences you had while teaching in your former position. What are some good experiences? What are some examples of bad experiences?
 - 2a) Can you please elaborate on some of the circumstances surrounding the bad experiences you described?
3. While you were teaching, did you feel prepared and supported by your district and campus leaders?
 - 3a) What supports did the school administration offer you, if any?
4. How did you eventually decide to leave teaching?
 - 4a) What were some of the feelings and emotions you experienced that led to your decision to leave teaching?
 - 4b) So how would you articulate the reason/s for you leaving the teaching profession?
5. Was there anything your administrators could have done to get you to reconsider your decision?
 - 5a) What kind of things could they have done?
6. When you look back on your decision how do you feel about it?
 - 6a) Would you ever consider going back to teaching?
7. What are you doing now?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add that wasn't covered in the previous questions?

Closing Remarks:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this individual interview. Your perspectives and insights have been precious and will significantly contribute to our research. We appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences. If you have any additional thoughts or reflections, please don't hesitate to let us know. Your input is highly valued, and we are grateful for your contribution. Thank you, and have a wonderful day!

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Interview Protocol

What are the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how do they make meaning of their experiences leaving teaching?

Welcome Remarks:

Welcome, and thank you for participating in this focus group interview. Your insights and experiences are essential to our research, and we truly appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts with us today.

Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Dolores Araujo Jr., and I will be the facilitator for this discussion. This focus group aims to explore the experiences of former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts and how they made meaning of their experiences leaving the teaching profession.

Throughout the discussion, I encourage open and honest communication. There are no right or wrong answers, and I value all perspectives. Please feel free to share your thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences openly. Additionally, your privacy and confidentiality are of utmost importance to us. Any information you provide will be anonymized in our research to ensure your identity remains protected.

Now, let me provide an overview of the interview process.

Overview of the Interview:

The focus group interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes during which we will engage in a group conversation exploring your experiences as former Latinx teachers in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts. The discussion will be guided by a series of (5 open-ended) questions related to your time in the teaching profession and the factors that influenced your decision to leave.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers, and we are interested in hearing diverse perspectives. Feel free to respond to the questions based on your own experiences and viewpoints.

As the facilitator, my role is to guide the conversation and ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share their thoughts. However, I will not take a stance on any topic or express personal opinions to maintain an impartial environment.

Reminder of Informed Consent:

Before we proceed, I want to remind you of the informed consent you provided before participating in this focus group interview. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without consequence. If there is a question you prefer not to answer or a topic you feel uncomfortable discussing, please let us know, and we will respect your decision.

Furthermore, any information shared during this interview will be treated confidentially. All data collected will be used solely for research purposes, and any identifying information will be removed from our records to ensure your anonymity.

If you have any questions or concerns at any point during the interview, please don't hesitate to raise them. Your well-being and comfort are our top priorities, and we are here to support you throughout the process.

Once again, thank you for being a part of this focus group interview. Your contributions will help us gain valuable insights into the experiences of former Latinx teachers, and we are grateful for your time and participation. Let's now begin the discussion. Any questions before we get started? Let's go!

Focus Group Questions

1. Can you share your experiences as a former Latinx teacher in the lower Rio Grande Valley school districts? What motivated you to pursue a career in teaching, and what were the highlights of your time in the profession?
2. What were the challenges you faced as a Latinx teacher in this particular region? How did your cultural background influence your interactions with students, colleagues, and the school community?
3. Could you tell us about the factors that ultimately led to your decision to leave the teaching profession? What were the pivotal moments or events that influenced your choice to transition out of teaching?
4. Were there specific support systems or resources that you felt were lacking during your tenure as a teacher? How did these gaps in support contribute to your overall experience and the decision to leave?
5. Looking back, if there were changes or improvements you could suggest for the education system in the lower Rio Grande Valley to better support Latinx teachers,

what would they be? How do you envision these changes could positively impact both teachers and students?

Closing Remarks:

Thank you all for your valuable input and active participation in this focus group interview. Your insights have provided us with a deeper understanding of the topic and will contribute to meaningful research. We appreciate your time and openness in sharing your experiences. If you have any further thoughts or questions, feel free to reach out. Your contributions are highly valued. Thank you, and have a great day!

VITA

Dolores Araujo Jr. graduated with a Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley on July 9, 2024. This accomplishment marks the culmination of a distinguished academic journey characterized by dedication to educational excellence and professional growth.

Dolores began his higher education at the University of Texas–Pan American, where he earned a Bachelor of General Studies on December 14, 2013. His undergraduate education laid a strong foundation in diverse disciplines, fostering a well-rounded academic perspective.

Pursuing a passion for educational leadership, Dolores furthered his studies at Texas A&M International University. Here, he achieved a Master of Science in Educational Administration on May 20, 2016. This advanced degree equipped Dolores with essential skills in managing and leading educational institutions, preparing them for impactful roles in the field of education.

Throughout his academic career, Dolores has actively engaged in various professional experiences. His roles in educational settings have ranged from instructional positions to administrative responsibilities, reflecting a commitment to fostering student success and enhancing educational practices.

Dolores can be reached at his personal email address: rgchsdaclassof2010@yahoo.com.