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EXAMINING THE LIVED-EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL L2 PHD STUDENTS: A NARRATIVE STUDY

Sydney B. Basford
Southeastern University - Lakeland

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By

SYDNEY B. BASFORD

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SYDNEY B. BASFORD

Dissertation Approved:

Janet L. Deck, EdD, Dissertation Chair

James A. Anderson, PhD, Committee Member

Mackenzie V. Johnson, PhD, Committee Member

James A. Anderson, PhD, Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my ultimate support, my husband, Jeffrey. Your love points me to Christ every moment of every day.

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The culmination of my educational career is finalized on these pages. This dissertation would have been impossible without the three most impactful people in my life, my husband Jeffrey, my mother, and my late father. Thank you for your unwavering love and support.

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their theses/dissertations. The second purpose of this study was to identify ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses/dissertations. This qualitative narrative study was founded on the theoretical framework of constructivism and sociocultural theory created by Vygotsky. The research participants were three L2 international PhD students who lived in America while conducting research for their dissertations or theses. Video recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to gather rich, detailed information about their lived experiences, while using academic English literacy and conversational English. Data collected from the interviews were transcribed, verified for accuracy from the participants, coded and analyzed to determine emergent themes. The two themes of this study were conversational English and academic English literacy. Findings from this study suggested that domestic and international universities should provide English speaking and literacy supports for L2 students.

Keywords: PhD L2 students, international PhD students, academic English literacy, AEL, conversational English

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I. INTRODUCTION

For PhD students completing their capstone research projects, the opportunity to study abroad can be a chance for professional and cultural development. PhD students can set themselves apart while interviewing for study abroad programs by being literate in English. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization defines *literacy* as the ability to understand, identify, and communicate with printed and written materials within various contexts (Montoya, 2018). For PhD students, literacy in English is not the only necessity when seeking to study abroad. Academic English literacy (AEL) can help PhD students be competitive when applying for study abroad opportunities and successfully communicate with their peers of other nationalities. Likewise, literacy in EAL is practical for PhD students, because 75% of global publications are written in English (Findari & Ferrari, 2008). If international students do not adequately understand English, then data collected for empirical studies could be compromised by linguistic miscommunications.

In some non-English speaking countries, English is taught and emphasized throughout the elementary and secondary school years. Subsequently, English taught in non-English-speaking countries' schools could be American, British, Australian, or another country's English (Findari & Ferrari, 2008). In other countries, English is not integrated throughout the curriculum, and learning English is comparable to taking a Spanish I high school course in America. Unfortunately, students may learn foundational English tools, but they cannot converse or comprehend well enough to continue their education in America. For international students, English proficiency and educational background can directly affect achievement (Andrade, 2006). Even if the international graduate students are conversational in English, other language-

based and cultural challenges can still arise when students arrive in America. In particular, international graduate and PhD students have a greater need for English proficiency than their undergraduate counterparts.

Background of the Study

International PhD students face unique challenges compared to their American counterparts, yet complete graduate school faster than their American peers (Curtin et al., 2013). International students provide financial, intellectual, and technological value to United States (U.S.) PhD programs. Universities should capitalize on the benefits of having international PhD students participate in their programs. However, universities cannot admit international students and expect them to adjust to a new lifestyle and country without appropriate supports (Andrade, 2006). It is not guaranteed that every prospective student will speak English as a second language (ESL) fluently; therefore, universities should consider providing resources to help the PhD students' success.

A traditional assumption for the second language (L2) learners is that the younger a person immersed in an L2 environment, the faster the learner will attain the L2 (Muñoz, 2011). Muñoz's (2011) research suggested that young adult (not over 30 years old) L2 learners can adapt to an L2 faster than a child or teenager because of L2 learners' motivation and understanding of the necessary cultural contexts. One significant reinforcement for learners in L2 development is listening to the language through informal communication (Muñoz, 2011). Informal communication can occur outside of the academic context when the L2 student is in the community, and interaction with native English speakers occurs (Andrew, 2011). When L2 learners listen and use the L2 informally through personal social connections, L2 learners benefit from long-term syntactic, phonological, and listening comprehension abilities (Moyer, 2009). If

L2 learners can utilize English as a conversational and applicable language, they will speak with more fluency when using AEL (Andrew, 2011). Like Muñoz (2011), Qureshi (2020) indicated that late-English learners (those who learned an L2 post-puberty) scored higher in language acquisition than those who were early-English learners. Even so, research on the connection between a person's age and L2 acquisition is widely studied but inconclusive (Qureshi, 2020).

America's history consists of immigrants seeking refuge for religious and economic reasons. Presently, international peoples of all ages still flock to America, whether legally or illegally, to find a better opportunity than what is available in their home countries. One longstanding and positive goal of temporary immigrants residing in America is to further education. Two areas of interest for immigrant students studying in the U.S. are agriculture and natural resources. In the 2017-2018 academic year, 1,496 agriculture and natural resources doctorate degrees were conferred by post-secondary institutions; 599 of those degrees were earned by non-resident aliens (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019, Tables 324.10 and 324.25). Many PhD and doctoral students were non-resident aliens who used English as a second language. Therefore, universities should be aware of the acute needs of L2 PhD students. In contrast to the number of non-resident aliens earning doctorate degrees in the U.S., the post-secondary ESL education system fails L2 English speakers (Suh & Hodges, 2020). In the Suh and Hodges (2020) study, most classes focused on the students' ability to communicate in the workplace but did not help prepare the students for post-secondary education. Suh and Hodges (2020) indicated that, adult L2 learners benefited from post-secondary learning support, such as tutoring and online writing support.

Likewise, most adult education teachers are not prepared to meet adult ESL students' cultural and learning needs (Rhodes, 2013). For example, adult L2 students are at-risk for

experiencing poor self-efficacy and mental health issues, like stress and anxiety (Suh & Hodges, 2020). Another factor in L2 students' stress is the teachers' inability to meet their needs. Research has indicated that adult ESL learners benefit when teachers provide explicit examples and expectations on assignments, but teachers do not follow these practices (Rhodes, 2013; Suh & Hodges, 2020). One way to help L2 students is through tutoring services. Tutoring services help provide additional help for L2 writers that teachers do not provide (Suh & Hodges, 2020). Likewise, adult L2 students benefit from academic advising for setting academic and career goals (Suh & Hodges, 2020). Additional research is needed to address the cultural and linguistic barriers for ESL learners coming to America for graduate studies. One potential benefit of further research is that both American teachers and international students could communicate more effectively.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study was modeled after Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) believed that cognitive development took place through social interaction. Children inherently have elementary mental capabilities, such as attention and memory, but these capabilities develop as they participate in social interactions. As children interact with the world around them, knowledge is stored in their natural memory, and language and social development occur (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is also applicable for adults immersed in a new society and culture.

Two concepts from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory are the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). MKO describes a child being mentored by an adult with more experience and education. The ZPD is the difference between the child's ability to accomplish with his or her inherent abilities and the child's potential to

achieve with guidance from the MKO. The concepts of MKO and ZPD can apply to L2 learners. As L2 learners engage with the MKO, the L2 learners can develop their language skills and discover how to interact with the new society. As adults interact within the social context, individual learning movement continues until they reach their ZPD (Amineh & Asl, 2015). For international L2 PhD students, the MKOs can be fellow peers who have lived in the United States longer than the international L2 PhD students or can be professors who guide these students to use EAL.

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined the theoretical framework of social constructivism as individuals seeking an understanding of the world in which they live and work. Social constructivism is influenced by Vygotsky's theory of constructivism (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Vygotsky stated that, in constructivism, language is developed and grows in the individual through participation in society. The individual first constructs knowledge in a social context and then internalizes it. Social constructivism research aims to rely on the participants' view of a particular situation or circumstance. Through interviews and personal narratives, researchers use the social constructivism framework to develop subjective meanings of experiences. In social constructivism, the researcher does not start with a theory but develops it after conducting interviews with the participants. The theory is identified by studying the participants' responses and explaining the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Collaborative learning is also based on Vygotsky's social constructivism theory (Saha & Singh, 2016). The study participants learned English through a collaborative setting with native English speakers and fellow L2 learners (though they know different first languages).

This study was framed in social constructivism theory, because the focus was on the participants' views and experiences. Participant PhD students shared their experiences and

perceptions of learning English as an L2 while researching in America. Through their stories, the participants shared their social contexts for learning English in their homelands and the context of using AEL.

Problem Statement

Since the 1970s, study abroad experiences for U.S. higher education students have grown exponentially (Edgar et al., 2018). As international travel, global communication, and advanced studies become more available to people of all cultural and economic backgrounds, U.S. universities need to utilize this cultural shift to their advantage. A critical factor in having international students participate in research is their ability to speak and write in English. University representatives seeking to have international students study for their institutions need to know the best methods to help them succeed in their research. Universities desiring to provide international students research opportunities, but require them to speak English as an L2, should consider providing learning resources for ESL students.

A growing body of knowledge is developing for specific ethnic groups in the American classroom, but limited research exists on ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity (Rhodes, 2013). For this study, international students conducting research are from different cultural backgrounds and speak different first languages (L1). Identifying similarities in L2 acquisition from the culturally diverse PhD students would provide an opportunity for further research and help future L2 students' language development in America.

Scholarly literature emphasizes the study of primary, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary ESL learners. Additionally, the literature describes ESL learners utilizing English in the English-speaking community and thorough life experiences (Andrew, 2011). However, research specific to graduate or terminal ESL students is absent (Ye & Edwards, 2017). PhD L2

learners may come to a primarily English-speaking environment and can enter an academic setting that is not culturally responsive and productive for learning English (Rhodes, 2013).

A prevalent number of ESL studies focus on the age of L2 attainment, emphasizing child language development over adult L2 attrition (Dekeyser et al., 2010). A critical gap in understanding the phenomena is the lack of previous research devoted explicitly to understanding PhD students' L2 development. Through this study, PhD students' individual stories will help others gain knowledge of L2 learning experiences, as well as useful means of learning English as a second language in academic and cultural settings.

The data collected from this study could present vital information in L2 acquisition for international PhD students researching English. This study's target audience will be university representatives who are currently investing, or hoping to invest in, international PhD students. By learning from PhD students' lived experiences, universities can develop practical resources to help future L2 graduate students. Learning from PhD students can help ensure that future research collected will not be compromised because of a miscommunication in English. Also, international PhD students all come with cultural differences and should not be considered a homogeneous group (Ye & Edwards, 2017). By conducting a narrative study, the researcher highlighted the similarities and differences between each L2 experience and concluded helpful practices for further implications and analysis.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their theses/dissertations. The second purpose of this study was to identify ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses/dissertations.

Overview of Methodology

Research Question

This study addressed the following research question:

1. What were the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their capstone research projects?

Research Design

A narrative study is a qualitative research method used to explore a social sciences phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of narrative research is to analyze individuals' lived experiences through their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The narrative approach also requires the researcher to consider the individual's life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative research relies on collaboration and rapport between the researcher and the participants. Participants should feel comfortable openly sharing their stories with the researcher. Because of the personal nature and extended interviews used in narrative research, a concentrated number of participants were interviewed. In this study, three international PhD students participated in interviews regarding their lived experiences as they acquired English as an L2. PhD students shared their stories about learning English prior to living in America and using EAL for their research. The participants' stories were compared for themes in English language acquisition.

Data Collection

Three participants were interviewed for this study. An interview guide containing the interview questions in English were emailed to the participants before the interviews (see Appendix A). Data collection took place through the online video communication application Zoom. The interviews were recorded and saved through Zoom's recording and cloud services.

Upon completing the interviews, the researcher utilized Otter transcription services to transcribe the interviews. The researcher used lean coding to analyze the transcriptions.

Procedures

Upon receiving approval from Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board, the participants of the study were informed of any potential rights, risks, and benefits of participating in the study. Once three participants were secured, a copy of the interview questions and protocols were emailed to the participants at least one week before the interviews. The online video communication platform Zoom was used to record the interviews. The recordings were transcribed through Otter transcription services. The transcriptions were converted into Microsoft Word documents and emailed to the participants for verification. After receiving verification from the participants, the transcriptions were analyzed using an axial coding method. Conclusions were drawn from the transcriptions, themes, and research conducted.

Overview of Analyses

In the qualitative research process, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that researchers consider the data analysis process as a downward spiral. Researchers should manage and organize the data, read and memorize emergent ideas, describe and classify codes into themes, develop and assess interpretations, and represent and visualize the data. For this research project, the data management entailed storing it in a locked office on a password-protected computer. In addition to the recorded interviews, handwritten notes were acquired during the data collection process.

Creswell and Poth (2018) described coding as central to the qualitative research process, because it helps the researcher make sense of the data. The data were reviewed multiple times, and quotes were highlighted in specific colors to represent information categories. A codebook

was created in Google Sheets to organize the data/highlighted quotes. Direct quotes from the interviews were categorized and listed by code. A lean coding process was used to condense the 13 codes into two themes: Conversational English in English and Academic English Literacy (AEL). Lean coding is recommended for qualitative research, because most publications will allow only five to six themes per study.

The themes of the data were identified by how the participants described using English. When the participants shared about their experiences for learning and using English for recreational purposes, their direct quotes were categorized under the theme of Conversational English. Quotes about using English for their graduate and PhD studies were classified as AEL.

Limitations

The research was limited to participants from different home countries and spoke different native languages. All participants spoke English as a second or third language and were first exposed to English at different points in their lives. All three participants sought agricultural degrees; therefore, the data may not represent students in other degree specializations.

Definition of Key Terms

The following words and phrases are key terms for this study:

- **Conversational English:** the style of speech used with familiar interlocutors (Leone & Levy, 2015).
- **AEL (Academic English Literacy):** Knowing particular content, language, practices in English and strategies for understanding, discussing, organizing, and creating texts (Johns, 1997).
- **ESL (English as a Second Language):** Term for those who are learning English as a second language (Suh & Hodges, 2020).

- **L1:** The first or native language of a person (Suh & Hodges, 2020).
- **L2:** A second language acquired by someone (Muñoz, 2011).
- **Narrative research:** A qualitative study method that analyzes a phenomenon. Narrative research begins with the expressed stories of the participants about the phenomenon or a specific life experience. After hearing the stories/conducting the interviews, the researcher draws conclusions about the phenomenon through the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Significance

The significance of the study was to explore the phenomena of PhD L2 students using AEL. The study could help provide insight and resources, such as teaching tools or practice methods, for universities as they admit L2 students to research for their capstone PhD projects. The three study participants did not receive any formal training from their universities before coming to America. Still, they were required to participate in a video interview conducted in English. If they could not speak in English in the interview, they were not invited to research their PhDs in America. This study could help universities bridge the gap for students who do not speak English adequately enough to research in America.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The primary purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their theses/dissertations. The second purpose of this study was to identify ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses/dissertations.

Age and L2 Acquisition

Understanding age and L2 acquisition is a controversial but inconclusive topic in academia (Dekyser et al., 2010; Qureshi, 2020). Researchers scrutinize the testing measures for L2 acquisition because of ambiguity in the variables (length of residence in the L2 culture, age of testing, and education of the participant in both the L1 and L2) tested. The critical period hypothesis (CPH) developed by Penfield and Roberts (1959) was a theory used in L2 research, contending that there is an ideal age for children to learn a second language, ending when children hit puberty (Abello-Contesse, 2009; Vanhove, 2013). The end state of CPH is the ultimate attainment of L2 proficiency at the same level as native speakers (Du, 2010). In theory, when the critical period is over, a person's ability to learn a new language declines (Penfield & Roberst, 1959; Johnson & Newport, 1989). The CPH has framed many studies on L2 acquisition but is questioned by researchers in its validity. Two inconsistencies with CPH data were the lack of a set age range for ideal second language acquisition and the setting of the CPH. Because of the inconsistencies, Vanhove (2013) identified, "Most researchers today do not define a starting

age for the critical period for language learning" (p. 2) and distrusts the CPH. Multiple studies also use different ages for the CPH cutoff (Du, 2010; Vanhove, 2013). The setting of the CPH was also inconclusive. The majority of studies agreed that partly structured learning should be provided for the children to acquire a L2, but some studies were solely immersion-based. Specific parameters on the scope of the language during the critical period are debated. Some studies look at the grammar and pronunciation of their participants, while others evaluate the areas of phonetics, morphology, and syntax. Vanhove (2013) reanalyzed data from a CPH-supportive study to "illustrate some common statistical fallacies in CPH research and demonstrate how one particular CPH prediction can be evaluated" (p. 2). Vanhove (2013) reanalyzed data with "proper statistical tools" (p. 13) from two studies (in favor of the CPH); he found that neither of the hypotheses was confirmed.

In contrast to the CPH, Bley-Vroman's (1988) fundamental difference hypothesis (FDH) explained how adults obtain a foreign language differently from children. Adults consciously utilize problem-solving strategies they have acquired with age. Adults also attain a language through structured learning environments, as they use pre-existing learning strategies. Children have not developed their learning strategies; therefore, children are more likely to learn a language through their environment instead of a classroom setting (Jaspal, 2009-2010).

Jaspal (2009-2010) explored the theory of the FDH by interviewing Barbara, a woman in her fifties, who had learned seven European languages throughout her lifetime and worked as a language consultant. At the interview time, Barbara had just learned Spanish as her newest acquired language while living in Spain for one week. Barbara shared that her brain used pre-existing learning strategies to pick out key phrases, replace nouns for nouns, and listen for intonations when acquiring a new language. Jaspal (2009-2010) argued against DeKeyser's

(2000) assumption that everyone loses some of the abstract patterns required to learn a new language after puberty. Jaspal's (2009-2010) argument originated from Barbara's sophisticated learning style for acquiring a new language while in her fifties. Unlike children who adapt to their environment during language acquisition, Barbara took conscious time and effort while learning Spanish in a native Spanish environment. Using her advanced implicit and explicit learning mechanisms, Barbara defied the CPH and successfully acquired Spanish to near-proficiency with a native-like accent and described it as "easy" (Jaspal, 2009-2010, p. 239).

Jaspal (2009-2010) credited Barbara's motivation and identity for her success with learning a new language. Barbara had a high motivation to learn a foreign language, and this motivation impacted her ability to reach native-like proficiency. When living in Spain, Barbara only interacted with native Spanish speakers and needed to communicate with them for her profession. Secondly, Barbara was raised in a bilingual household of English and Danish. By having two household languages, Barbara's identity was not established in her L1. Barbara shared that her identity changed as she was immersed in a new culture. When living in France, Barbara obtained a different persona by speaking and acting as a native Frenchwoman. Because Barbara acquired a new language with native-like proficiency as an adult, Jaspal (2009-2010) recommended the term "critical period" (p. 236) to be adjusted to Knusden's (2004) "sensitive period" (p. 236).

To determine the impact of student age and exposure to English, Qureshi (2020) studied the L3 acquisition of university students in Pakistan. Group 1 consisted of 225 participants who were exposed to English in first grade, and 110 students who were exposed to English in eleventh grade. The participants of the study completed a grammatically judgment task (GJT), including an editing task. The original GJT, developed by Johnson and Newport (1989),

consisted of 276 items. For each item, participants selected which of the two sentences was grammatically correct. Johnson and Newport's (1989) GJT was modified by DeKeyser in 2000. DeKeyser (2000) edited the GJT to have 200 items with only six items (instead of eight) per subcategory. Qureshi (2020) shortened DeKeyser's (2000) GJT to 114 items "to minimize fatigue effects" (p. 38) on the participants.

The editing task developed for the study by Qureshi (2020) had similar features to the GJT. Qureshi (2020) selected a written passage and adapted it "to match the morphosyntactic features contained in the shortened version of the GJT so that participants' performance on the two tasks could be compared" (p. 40). The passage for the editing task contained 24 morphosyntactic errors. The errors stayed in a consistent font throughout the passage and were not easily identifiable to the readers. Before administering the editing task, Qureshi (2020) tested the editing task twice with native and non-native English speakers to ensure its reliability and validity.

After conducting an independent sample *t* test, Qureshi (2020) found no significant difference between the two groups on the GJT. However, there was a small and significant difference on the editing task. Overall on the GJT, the late-English learners outperformed the early English learners on 8 of the 12 morphosyntactic features tested. The late-English learners outperformed the early-English learners on all 12 of the morphosyntactic features tested for the editing task. Both late- and early-English learners showed a similar level of difficulty for the testing measures. Of the two tests, the GJT appeared to be the easiest for both groups. Qureshi (2020) explained that the editing task was more difficult, because the learners needed to identify the grammatical inconsistency and then decide how to correct it. Late learners may have outperformed the early learners because of their cognitive skills in linguistic problem solving

(Qureshi, 2020). One conclusion drawn from Qureshi's (2020) study was the misconception that a younger age of attainment yields superior success when learning a second or third language.

Undergraduate L2 Learners

For international undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students, L2 acquisition and having academic English literacy is vital for success in a U.S. university program. However, Suh (2016) found that many L2 college students struggled to transition into the college setting because of their limited English skills and lack of support from their colleges. In an attempt to help the L2 students, universities require the students to take additional ESOL courses that are not eligible for financial aid. To avoid extra financial burdens on their families and additional time to complete their degrees, the L2 students prematurely test out of the ESOL courses; however, they still may struggle with AEL. Suh (2016) conducted 14 interviews with L2 students at a community college. Upon reviewing the interviews, Suh (2016) found academic goals, perceptions of the community college, and the college's resources (both academic and ESOL) to be salient themes for the L2 college students. The L2 college students were motivated to reach their academic goals of graduating as critical components of getting a better job and life. As a result of the study, the community college developed supplemental reading and writing courses by collaborating with the English and ESL faculty and staff. A further area for research is understanding how L2 learners transition from the foundations of English to fluency and literacy in English to help experts develop or change resources to enhance L2 students' needs.

In another study, Suh and Hodges (2020) analyzed the needs of international learners who began their undergraduate U.S. education as adults. Suh and Hodges (2020) described the needs of L2 undergraduate learners and their struggles with "helpful" resources (such as the writing center) provided by a community college. International students who start their U.S.

education at the undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral levels have a unique learning experience, because their elementary and secondary studies can differ from their American peers. Suh and Hodges (2020) found that basic adult ESL classes at a community college lacked funding to provide L2 learners with adequate academic English literacy training. The current ESL classes provided basic literacy needs for L2 learners and prepared them for the workforce but not higher academic readiness for postsecondary preparation.

In the same study, Suh and Hodges (2020) also found that international undergraduate students of all languages and backgrounds were more engaged with their community college experience through a positive relationship with their academic advisor. A relationship with an academic advisor is predictive of student success and helps students with self-efficacy and emotional satisfaction. International students are more at risk for low self-efficacy and higher stress and anxiety rates that may intensify their academic struggles. Having either on-campus counselors specifically trained to meet immigrant students' psychological needs can help international students struggling with adjustment or isolation in the American college setting.

Suh and Hodges (2020) conducted a case study with five participants to identify L2 undergraduate learners' needs at a community college. The participants were international students enrolled in a program to help them transition to college. The program included tutoring in all subject areas and help from the college's writing center. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with the participants and faculty/staff, including observations of participants' interactions in class and in learning assistance meetings. Suh and Hodges (2020) used thematic analysis to develop themes throughout the data and relevant literature.

In the interviews, Suh and Hodges (2020) learned how the participants would seek additional help and consistently use the community college's resources. If a tutor did not provide

explicit instruction, the participants would return to the tutoring center and seek help from a different tutor. Suh and Hodges (2020) described the participants as highly self-motivated through their attempts to seek assistance in their education. The participants shared a common theme of feeling more comfortable asking the tutors questions instead of their professors. In contrast, the expectations of tutors and advisors did not match those of the participants. The tutors and advisors shared mutual frustrations with the participants about their time spent in the tutoring lab or advising offices. As a result, the community college implemented a 45-minute allocation for tutoring sessions. Having misaligned expectations led to miscommunication between the participants and their tutors. Suh and Hodges (2020) recommended that more research to be conducted on L2 students at the post-secondary level to minimize confusion and realign expectations. Also, training for all faculty and staff to help L2 students, international students' learning experiences could be significantly improved.

Graduate and PhD L2 Learners

Inviting international students is a common goal for higher education institutions (Hung & Hyun, 2010). As international travel becomes more accessible for the global population, U.S. universities show a growing interest in accepting international graduate, and PhD students. Campuses desire to advertise a "culturally diverse student body" (Hung & Hyun, 2010, p. 341) by accepting international students. However, hosting international students "does not guarantee internationalization" (Hung & Hyun, 2010, p. 341). Although many nations incorporate the English language into their everyday life, some non-native students may struggle with conversational English, including English literacy, upon coming to the United States. If universities hope to increase their enrollment numbers of international students, then universities should consider screening the students' English abilities before admission and providing tools to

help those who struggle with English. Likewise, universities should consider teaching intercultural skills to their faculty members as they engage with international students. Hung and Hyun (2010) found that educators of L2 students struggled to find a balance in adequately correcting linguistic errors on their papers. The professors did not want to overburden the international students but risked lessening the academic rigor expected in PhD students' work (Turner, 2004).

Hung and Hyun (2010) indicated "The ability to write a scholarly paper for publication is crucial for the future careers of graduate and post graduate students" (p. 343); therefore, graduate and PhD L2 learners need academic English literacy specifically for their field of study. While the L2 graduate and PhD students are comfortable in their academic English literacy, they struggle with conversational English when talking to native English speakers. The students' inability to speak fluently can result in culture and study shock. The ability to comfortably converse in English is valuable for both academic and casual settings. Hung and Hyun (2010) recommended that graduate and PhD learners improve their conversational English skills by frequently engaging with native English speakers within the disciplinary context.

In a narrative study, Ye and Edwards (2017) interviewed four Chinese PhD students who studied at an English-speaking university in the United Kingdom (U.K.). The participants shared the complexities of their experiences and the development of self-identity as international PhD students. Through the study abroad process, the students had changed perceptions of their social categories and cultural identities. From the study, two themes of the student narratives emerged: self-actualization, as well as survival and thriving. Each of the participants recognized the prestige and honor of earning a PhD in another country, particularly in the U.K. A common enticement for the participants in studying abroad was to become better English speakers and

potentially use their abilities in China. In regard to self-actualization, the only female participant found herself more secure in being educated and single, in contrast to the majority of Chinese women who choose marriage over their educations and careers.

In contrast to undergraduate L2 students, the PhD students interviewed in Ye and Edward's (2017) study used personal positive reinforcement improving their English skills. The mental transition used by the participants helped transition them from surviving to thriving. One participant described knowing two languages as two empowered identities. When he spoke Mandarin with his Chinese family, the language felt smooth. When he developed and used academic English literacy, he felt like a powerful person. As the international students grew more comfortable with English, they moved from the rote-memorization style of Chinese learning to autonomously understanding English. After studying in the U.K. for a semester, one participant shared he learned his own study methods independent of his traditional Chinese study methods. As the international students transitioned from a survive to thrive mentality, they were able to participate in cultural norms of the U.K. and showed concern about the British perception of Chinese people.

Ye and Edwards (2017) believed that conducting studies like theirs could help inform universities' policies and practices. One recommendation was for universities to adopt multicultural inclusive practices for their international students. Ye and Edwards (2017) shared that, if universities were more culturally responsive to their international students, their enhancement of learning experiences may increase. Likewise, international "PhD students should be encouraged to develop agency, autonomy, and reflexivity" (Ye & Edwards, 2017, p. 871).

International doctoral students in the U.S. face unique challenges to their domestic counterparts; however, they have a higher and faster graduation rate (Curtin et al., 2013).

Universities should consider admitting international students because of their significant financial and intellectual contribution to their programs and the U.S. workforce, if the students choose to stay post-graduation. Friendships with their American peers can help remove feelings of isolation for international students. Still, Curtin et al. (2013) also recommended that the students develop relationships with those from other countries. Even with social and language challenges, the graduate and PhD students typically complete their degrees on time. Curtin et al. (2013) recommended that researchers focus on the differences in international and domestic students' experiences. Curtin et al. (2013) suggested that advisor support, a sense of belonging, and academic self-concept can influence the successful completion of a graduate and PhD international student's degree. Literature indicates that an apprenticeship model for PhD programs helps foster a professional relationship between students and their advisors (Curtin et al., 2013). Overall, PhD students are more likely to stay in the program when their advisor portrays a mentor's role for the student. Likewise, PhD students have a greater academic self-concept if they have quality relationships with their advisors and a sense of belonging within the graduate program.

To examine the differences between international and domestic PhD student relationships, Curtin et al. (2013) surveyed 841 students online. Of the 841 participants, 188 (22%) were international students who had lived in the U.S. for less than 10 years. Curtin et al. (2013) acknowledged that, in the study, international students were underrepresented, and women were overrepresented with a 60% submission rate. At the time of the survey, all participants had completed at least one year of their PhD programs. After analyzing the surveys, Curtin et al. (2013) found that, international students who were more likely to pursue PhDs in the physical sciences and engineering to be male, to be of Asian descent, and less likely to have

financial struggles than their domestic counterparts. In contrast from the American students, the international students indicated that the research-related and professional experiences were more important aspects of their education than the social experiences. However, the international students did not rate their social experiences lower than the American students; the international students valued the research experiences higher than their peers. Curtin et al. (2013) concluded that the international students regarded research and academics to a higher standard and did not expect to assimilate into American culture. Without specific expectations for socialization, the international students felt a sense of belonging in the academic environment better than their domestic peers. Curtin et al. (2013) hypothesized that international students were able to graduate faster than their domestic peers because of quality relationships with their advisors and strong academic self-awareness.

Regardless of their knowledge in a field of study, academic English literacy is imperative for PhD students who are required to present their dissertations in English (Çelik, 2020). AEL is a process that requires the skills of linguistic knowledge, a basic understanding of composition, the purpose of writing, and awareness of the target audience. Self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-regulation can play a significant role in the student's writing ability. PhD students need to believe they can accomplish the task of writing in English. The students should also be able to evaluate and regulate their writing process.

Many universities in non-native English-speaking countries expect their L2 PhD students to write their dissertations in English (Çelik, 2020). Likewise, scholarly publications have shown an increasing tendency to print English-only submissions. With the limitation of English-only publications, L2 scholars are unable to accurately express themselves and the significance of their work. PhD students from other cultures may struggle because their L1s have considerably

different styles of rhetoric from those used in English-speaking countries. To understand the struggles of L2 PhD students, Çelik (2020) evaluated the impact of instructor feedback on Turkish L2 PhD students. In Turkey, many universities require that PhD dissertations to be written in English, but the universities do not provide adequate feedback for academic English writing. Turkish PhD students who do not publish their dissertations in an English-speaking journal find themselves at a great disadvantage in their careers.

As a professor at a Turkish university, Çelik (2020) used his "Current Issues in Foreign Language Education" doctoral course to find participants for the study. The culminating assignment for the course was submitting a research paper to an academic journal in English. For the research paper, Çelik (2020) required the students to submit each section of their research paper for feedback. Çelik (2020) used a scaffolding design to edit and build the students' English writing abilities. Throughout the research and writing process, the students also met with Çelik (2020) for one-on-one tutoring sessions. When the course was finished and grades had been submitted, Çelik (2020) surveyed the six students of the "Current Issues in Foreign Language Education" doctoral course and asked for participation in his research study. Of the six students in the course, five agreed to participate. Çelik (2020) interviewed the participants in English, developed transcripts of the interviews, and analyzed them for reoccurring themes. The study participants shared that they felt more confident in evaluating their work, identifying specific errors in their writing, managing their time for writing, and using the feedback process in their teaching.

At the completion of the study, Çelik (2020) expounded that Turkish PhD students did not correctly use academic English literacy for scholarly publications. Through the analysis of interviews with five PhD students, Çelik (2020) found feedback and one-on-one tutoring

sessions were tools to improve his students' academic English literacy and teach them how to evaluate their work in English. Çelik (2020) shared that there were still areas for further research for graduate students and types of supports universities can provide to help develop their students' AEL.

Theoretical Foundation

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory was framed with the idea that cognitive development occurs through social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the sociocultural theory impacts all children, because they learn how to interact with society through social interaction. As children participate in society, they store knowledge in their natural memory. Through natural memory, children will develop language and social skills. When adults are immersed in a new society and culture, they reenter a child-like state of social interaction, and the sociocultural theory begins again.

Vygotsky (1978) also included two concepts within the sociocultural theory. The more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The MKO is an adult who mentors or sets an example for a child. The MKO teaches the child how to act in society and use a language in a native-like way. The ZPD is the potential achievement rate of interacting in society and learning a new language for a child with the help of an MKO. For L2 PhD learners, having an MKO can significantly increase their ZPD. An MKO can be a fellow peer who has lived in the U.S. longer, a professor who instructs them in AEL, or a native English speaker.

Another theoretical framework developed by Vygotsky (1978) is constructivism. In the constructivist framework, language is developed as an individual engages in society. Creswell and Poth (2018) used constructivism as the foundation for another theoretical framework: social

constructivism. Social constructivism is a way for researchers to seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. In social constructivism, researchers analyze a participant's view of a particular situation or circumstance through interviews and personal narratives.

Summary

For this narrative study, literature was reviewed related to three topics of study: age and L2 acquisition, undergraduate L2 students, and L2 graduate and PhD students. The literature discussed primarily used interviews and surveys to examine the lived experiences of international peoples living or engaging with the English language. Age and L2 acquisition addressed the Critical Period Hypothesis and the controversial concept that children have a faster L2 acquisition rate than adults. Undergraduate L2 students discussed the impact of tutors and writing supports for international students at a community college. L2 graduate and PhD students explored the academic English literacy expectations for students. The sections about undergraduate and graduate L2 learners also identified the positive and negative emotions international students experience while speaking in English and utilizing academic English literacy.

III. METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their theses or dissertations. The second purpose of this study was to identify ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses or dissertations.

The narrative design was selected to study the phenomenon of international PhD students coming to America and using AEL. Narrative research relies on the participants' narratives as they described their lived experiences. In narrative research, the participants should feel comfortable sharing their life stories with the researcher; therefore, the interview process requires longer interviews and a rapport between the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Description of Research Design

The five approaches to qualitative research are narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research focuses on a specific phenomenon and describes several participants' similarities, including their lived experiences through the phenomenon. The participants of this study developed English proficiency over time and not through one similar phenomenon; therefore, a phenomenological research design was not a suitable option. Grounded theory research is used when a researcher

wants to discover a theory for a specific process or action. A new theory is not being analyzed or studied; therefore, the grounded theory approach was inappropriate for this study. Ethnographic research relies on participants' similarities in culture-sharing groups. Although the study participants were in similar circumstances, they were not from similar backgrounds and cultures. The participants of this study all had different first and second languages, because they were from different countries (Brazil, Madagascar, and Peru). The case study approach analyzes a specific case within certain parameters for time and space. Interviews for the case study focus on a particular time and place in the participants' lives and not on their entire lives. This study focused on how the participants learned English over time and not through one particular circumstance as required in the case study design.

A narrative study is a qualitative research method used to explore a social sciences phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative research has changed over time, but it originated from the disciplines of literature, history, anthropology, sociology, and education. The purpose of narrative research is to analyze individuals' lived experiences through their stories. In the narrative approach, the researcher considers the participant's entire life and encourages participants to share their life stories. Narrative research relies on collaboration and rapport between the researcher and the participants. Participants should feel comfortable sharing their stories with the researcher. Through a previously developed rapport with the participants, a narrative design was chosen for this study. The participants were open to sharing their life stories and journeys to learning AEL. Because of the personal nature and extended interviews used in narrative research, a concentrated number of participants were interviewed. In this study, three international PhD students participated in interviews regarding their lived experiences as they acquired English as an L2. PhD students shared their stories about learning English prior to

living in America and using AEL for their research. The participants' stories were analyzed for themes in English language acquisition.

Participants

With only one to three participants at most, narrative research requires the smallest number of participants in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants for this study were chosen through convenience sampling because of their intent to study in America for their PhD thesis or dissertations and prior relationship with the researcher. The participants were contacted via email and through a recruitment letter (see Appendix C). All three participants were from different countries, spoke different native languages, and have earned or are finishing their PhDs in agriculture. The participants voluntarily represented international students who were using AEL.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant Number	Gender (M/F)	Native Country	Native Language	L2	L3	1st Exposure to English
Participant 1	M	Madagascar	Malagasy	French	English	Middle school: pre-teen
Participant 2	M	Peru	Spanish	English	n/a	High school: teenager
Participant 3	F	Brazil	Portuguese	Spanish	English	12 years-old

Role of Researcher

During my time as a certified English teacher in the state of Florida for five years, I taught the foundational aspects for literacy in English. Outside of the classroom, I have tutored numerous adult L2 English learners. Having a proper understanding of English grammar, phonics, and syntax can help English learners of all ages. Though I have a personal rapport with

the participants, my relationship with them is entirely separate from this study of understanding their use of AEL.

Measures for Ethical Protection

Ethical protection was considered a top priority for the participants and data for this research study. Prior to conducting research, a requirement of Southeastern University (SEU) was participation in a CITI training program in research, ethics, and compliance. This research was conducted in accordance with SEU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). In addition, each participant was provided with a consent form informing them of their rights, potential risks, and benefits for participating in the study (see Appendix B). The participants were aware that the interviews would be video recorded and transcribed, and that all data associated with this research project would be permanently deleted within five years of the study's completion. Only the dissertation chair, methodologist, and I had access to the data. Data were stored in a locked office and on a password-protected MacBook Pro.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research question:

1. What were the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their capstone research projects?

Data Collection

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The narrative research process requires open-ended research questions and statements. The participants were encouraged to share in-depth answers about their lives regarding a specific topic or theme. Questions and answers followed a chronological format following the participants' lives. For this research project, data were collected through one-on-one interviews

with three international PhD students who speak English as a second language. Open-ended questions were used to encourage the participants in sharing about their English language acquisition and using AEL for their PhD studies in America.

An interview guide containing the interview questions was emailed to the participants before the interviews (see Appendix A). Data collection took place through the online video communication application Zoom. Handwritten notes were also taken to supplement the data to ensure correct interpretation for analyses. Interview transcriptions were emailed to the participants and verified for accuracy.

Procedures

With the committee chair's approval, seven interview questions were developed to follow the narrative research format, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018). Once the proposal was defended and approved, the appropriate research documentation was submitted to SEU's IRB. Upon receiving approval from SEU's IRB, the participants were contacted and informed of any rights, potential risks, and benefits of participating in the study. Once three participants were secured, a copy of the interview questions and protocols were emailed to them at least one week before the interviews. The video interviews were recorded onto a password-protected Zoom cloud account. Through the virtual cloud, Zoom forwarded the recordings to Otter transcription services, and the transcriptions were developed. The transcriptions were transcribed into Word documents and emailed to the participants for accuracy. After receiving verification from the participants, the transcriptions were analyzed using an axial coding method. Conclusions were compiled from the results of the transcriptions, themes, and research.

Methods to Address Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) contended that a validation process is necessary for determining "the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants" (p. 254). Several strategies were utilized to ensure validation of the data. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an interview protocol and copy of the interview questions. The participants were encouraged to read over the protocols and questions, and then respond with any questions or comments about the pending interview. After completion of the interviews, each participant received an interview transcript and was asked to verify accuracy of the document. Because the participants were more comfortable reading and writing in English than speaking in English, they were active in editing the transcriptions. The participants' edits on the transcripts helped clarify and validate their thoughts and intents on English literacy and using AEL. Lastly, a peer-reviewed process (consisting of the researcher, dissertation chair, methodologist, and third reader) was also used for validation in this research project.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1

To answer the research question guiding this study, "What were the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their capstone research projects?", axial coding methods were used to analyze data and to develop themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended having less than 25 categories of information, then developing five or fewer themes throughout the data. To find themes in the data, the interview transcriptions were coded with 13 different reoccurring codes/colors. After coding each interview, a Google Sheets spreadsheet was created to organize the coded data and develop condensed themes. The responses for each participant were pasted into the spreadsheet by codes.

The coded data were counted and compared to identify the most frequently mentioned English acquisition resources. By using axial coding methods, two themes (Exposure to Literacy in English and Exposure to Academic English) were identified from the responses of the participants and the number of reoccurring codes within the responses. On the same spreadsheet, a new sheet titled "Collapsed Themes" was developed. The quotes from the first draft of coding were separated into the two themes of Exposure to Literacy in English and Exposure to Academic English.

Summary

A narrative study is used when individuals' lived experiences are to be shared for research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Chapter 3 focused on the methodology for this narrative study, analyzing the lived experiences of learning and using English by international PhD students. This study was developed through a rapport between the participants and the researcher. Three interviews were conducted, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Codes and themes were derived from the transcriptions of the interviews. All ethical practices were followed to ensure the protection of participants' data. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed analysis and results of the data.

IV. RESULTS

The primary purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their theses/dissertations. The second purpose of this study was to identify ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses/dissertations.

The data analysis process consisted of individually and collectively examining the three interview transcripts. A lean coding method was used to code the individual transcripts. Quotes from the coded transcripts were organized on a Google Sheets spreadsheet, and two themes were developed: Exposure to English and Exposure to Academic English.

The participants in this study were international students temporarily living in America to earn their agricultural PhDs. All participants were from different home countries with different native languages. On November 16th, 2020, approval for this research project was granted by SEU's IRB. After institutional IRB approval was granted, the participants were contacted to set up appointments for interviews.

Methods of Data Collection

In narrative research, participants share their life stories, and the researcher makes conclusions from the stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the interviews' comprehensive nature, data collection in narrative research takes a longer amount of time than other qualitative research methods. Therefore, only one to three participants who meet specific parameters for the

study are selected. For this research study, participants were international PhD students who learned English as a second or third language. An interview guide (Appendix A) consisting of seven questions was developed to guide the participants in sharing their journeys to learning English for conversational and academic purposes. Prior to the interview, the participants were emailed interview guide and consent forms (Appendix B). The interviews were recorded on Zoom and transcribed through Otter transcription services.

After the interviews were completed, the transcriptions were reviewed while watching the recorded interviews, and minor changes were made to the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. The participants validated the transcriptions, with minor recommendations added for clarity and intent of information shared. The transcripts and recordings were stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office. Files will be deleted after five years from the conclusion of the study.

As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), a lean coding method was used throughout the coding process. Participants' quotes were coded by their relativity to learning English. The first cycle of coding was conducted by using the highlighting tool in Microsoft Word. During the first coding cycle, thirteen codes were identified, as reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Codes Identified in First Reading of the Transcripts

Code	Description
1	Age/Grade of first English Acquisition
2	Reading and Writing in English
3	Masters/Graduate School
4	ELA School/Training/Help from Tutor
5	Watching English Movies/YouTube
6	American University
7	Research Station/Laboratory/Conducting Research
8	Animal Sciences PhD
9	Reason to Study in the USA

Code	Description
10	Motivation to Learn English
11	Speaking and Listening in English
12	Challenges with English
13	Attending Church

Once the three transcriptions were coded, direct quotes were entered into a Google Sheets spreadsheet to organize the number of times each participant addressed the codes throughout the interviews. Two condensed themes were identified based on the codes, and direct quotes were added to a new spreadsheet. The quotes were categorized as Conversational English and Academic English Literacy.

Findings by Research Question

Three agricultural PhD L2 learners were interviewed for this research project. Participant 1 was a Malagasy male who learned English as his third language. Participant 2 was a Peruvian male who spoke English as his second language. Participant 3 was a Brazilian woman who spoke English as her third language. The interviews were coded individually and then collectively reviewed for consistent themes. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Research Question 1

What were the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their capstone research projects?

Participant 1

Participant 1 started learning English when he was a pre-teen in middle school. He said he first learned how to count and write in English. Participant 1 shared that in graduate school, it was a requirement to publish a paper in English before he could begin his thesis. To help with his papers in graduate school, participant 1 “had to use a dictionary and translator tools.” He also would “often ask for favors from [a] specialist in English or someone who know English well to

correct [the] article before submission in the journal." Even so, Participant 1 decided it was necessary to be more intentional about learning English before coming to America for his PhD research. Participant 1 "followed a course with an English teacher, maybe for about three months before the travel." He knew that reading and speaking English was an unofficial requirement for his PhD program because he needed to read many papers in English, but "officially there [are] no requirements."

Participant 1 mentioned throughout the interview that reading books and papers in English was fundamental in learning the language both for academic and casual conversations. Also, he "watched every day many movies and documentaries, on YouTube." Lastly, Participant 1 shared that talking with native English speakers was very helpful for him. An impactful way Participant 1 interacted with native English speakers was attending church worship services and Bible studies in English. Through attending church Participant 1 "had opportunities to communicate with other believers." "Believers" referred to other people with the same religious or belief system. For Participant 1, the believers were fellow church members at a local Baptist church. While attending church services on Sundays and Wednesdays, Participant 1 had the opportunity to use his conversational English skills. During this time, Participant 1 developed a friendship with a church member who offered for him to say at his guest house while he waited to return to Madagascar (COVID-19 travel restrictions prevented his return). While living in the guest house, Participant 1 interacted with the church member's family and used his conversational English skills.

Some challenges Participant 1 experienced while communicating in America was talking with Americans who spoke very fast. For example "sometimes they swallow some words. They kept some words, and it's very difficult for me to understand what they say." Another challenge

was some of the expressions and idioms used by Americans. To help Participant 1 understand the challenges of other international students, Participant 1 shared, “The students are very excited to discover the life in America, but they are facing many challenges like language, the linguistic barrier.” Participant 1 also suggested for international students to practice communicating with native English speakers.

Participant 2

Participant 2 began learning English in high school, but it was not important to him; therefore, he did not retain much about the language. When Participant 2 finished his undergraduate degree and started his master’s degree, he actively started to learn English because it was a necessity for the degree. To help improve his English, Participant 2 studied in Brazil for three months at an English school. Participant 2 considers this experience as his first contact with the language. In order to come to America, Participant 2 had to participate in a virtual interview with an American secretary from the research station. He said, “it’s a simple interview…if you are able to answer this question, this candidate is select to come here.”

Participant 2 encouraged international students to read books and online articles, watch videos/films, and listen to music in English to help improve their English literacy. To help with conversational English, Participant 2 recommended international students to “speak with other persons, to involve and make new friends, American friends…participate in events…like go to celebrations in the city, go to social events like church for example to involve and make new friends, American friends, I think it improve a lot.” Participant 2 connected the English language as part of the American culture and key for making friends. While living in America, Participant 2 had the opportunity to attend the same church as Participant 1 and make the same American friends. As an international student, a challenge Participant 2 experienced was talking with

Americans who spoke with the dialect of the southeast U.S. “This is my principal challenge, especially when some native speakers speak so fast is so hard for me to understand, but if the people communicate to me go slow, I can understand.”

Participant 3

Participant 3 started learning English when she was in high school, but her first exposure to English was when she was a pre-teen. Participant 3 shared, “When I was twelve-years-old, I started to pay attention to American songs and I didn’t understand no thing, but I loved it…the language, the words… it’s so pretty this language.” As a young girl, Participant 3 said that she listened to English musicians such as “Mariah Carey, Madonna, Whitney Houston…Red Hot Chili Peppers, Backstreet Boys. [She] listened but… didn’t understand.” When Participant 3 was fifteen years old, she received her first English dictionary and started learning the foundations of English in high school. With the dictionary, Participant 3 “translated all the words around [her], such as, name of the colors…the songs, word-by-word.” Through translating words, reading books in English, and listening to American music, Participant 3 began understanding English.

In 2010, Participant 3 visited America as an exchange student to study for her graduate degree in animal sciences. At first, Participant 3 was very nervous about speaking English, but after living in America for a few months she felt more comfortable. Participant 3 explained the moment when she realized that she was comprehending English by saying,

> I was a little bit more comfortable because I bought many books, talking about in my class, a nice start study, study all day, all day long. And when the professor started to talk, I could understand more than before. Then I start open my mouth, I open my mouth and start talk in English with natives, and Chinese, Brazilians too. Step by step I could feel more comfortable. And in the end of six months there, I was really fluent in that

moment. I felt so fluent. I can understand. I can talk I can write more [and] I felt really more comfortable.

Participant 3 also shared that it made her feel good about being literate in English. She described it as a feeling of "power" that gave her the ability to, "participate in a real country to make new friends." Another helpful tool Participant 3 used to understand English while living in America was attending church with other internationals who were in the same situation. An American intern from the research facility invited Participant 3 and her colleges (including Participants 1 and 2) to attend church. The services were in English and all church members were Americans. By attending church, Participant 3 practiced in conversational English with Americans and made American friends. Participant 3 said that reading her Bible in English was also beneficial for her English literacy.

When Participant 3 finished her graduate studies in the U.S., she went back to Brazil for two years. During that time, she spoke more Portuguese and less English and realized her English literacy was declining. By not speaking in English, she said, "I forgot a lot of the words and I forgot the fluency because many times I was without the contact of conversation."

By 2016, Participant 3 decided to earn her "sandwich" doctorate. A "sandwich" doctorate is a degree that is completed partly in one country and partly in another. Participant 3 returned to the same American university to conduct research for her PhD in Animal Sciences. When Participant 3 returned to America, she described her English fluency as, "…40% because the all the things that they're talking about I knew in Portuguese...But after some, some weeks, I could understand almost 100% of other things I was missing, and I started talking more too." While living in the dorm for her studies, Participant 3 saw studying English as a challenge because her international roommates would speak Spanish and Portuguese at the research compound.

Another challenge for Participant 3 was building her own confidence in her English abilities. Participant 3 shared that her accent would get in the way of communicating with Americans. Participant 3 emphasized that Americans should slowly project their words with kindness and not make jokes about an international person's accent. Using jokes or sarcasm about internationals' speaking abilities can make them give up their English training.

Themes

Theme 1: Conversational English

Each of the participants were first exposed to English in middle or high school. The reoccurring practices recommended by all three participants were reading books, listening to music, watching television, and talking to Americans in English. Those wanting to learn English should use at least one of the practices to engage with the language on a daily basis. Participants 1 and 2 briefly mentioned that they attended English tutoring classes, however they did not share the helpfulness of, or topics covered in the classes. In contrast, the participants repeatedly recommended the practice of intentionally engaging with the English language.

Participants 1 and 3 were exposed to English in school the youngest by learning in middle school. Participant 3 described loving the English language and thinking it was "pretty" and "beautiful" from a young age. Throughout her teen years, Participant 3 exhibited the most self-taught English learning methods. In contrast, Participants 1 and 2 attended formal English lessons prior to traveling to America for their PhD studies. Participants 1 and 3 specifically shared about using a dictionary as a translator tool to help them become literate in English. Participants 1 and 2 showed motivation for learning English because of their PhD studies. Participant 3 genuinely loved the English language and had a desire to improve.

For the purpose of the PhD research, Participant 3 shared that conversational English fluency was not required. Those wanting to research at the lab needed to be able to speak and understand English. However, Participant 2 shared that if someone wanted to be a student with the American university (and not conduct research with an international university in conjunction with the American university) the student would need to be fluent in conversational English and the interview is much harder.

To learn the foundations of English and improve his conversational English Participant 2 traveled from Peru and lived in Brazil for three months to study at an English school. After participating in the English school and while living in America, Participant 2 continued watching movies and reading books in English to supplement conversational English abilities. Of the three interviews, participant 2 emphasized the importance of being part of American culture for L2 acquisition. He encouraged international students to participate in American holidays, community functions, and attend church. In these contexts, he was able to make American friends and speak English comfortably.

English language challenges for the participants predominately were with speaking with Americans. The participants all recommended for Americans to be conscious of speaking slow when talking with internationals. For their PhD studies, the participants lived in the southeast region of the United States. In this area, the locals can have a unique dialect (or southern accent) that made it difficult for the participants to understand. Participant 2 noted that people without a southern accent are easier to understand than those with stronger accents. Participant 3 shared feelings of self-consciousness for her accent and when Americans asked her to repeat something and encouraged for Americans to share kindness with those who can't speak English. Participant

1 described the challenges of speaking a second language and trying to understand American idioms and expressions.

Theme 2: Academic English Literacy

The participants primarily used academic English literacy for their PhDs while working through their degrees. The only requirement for conducting research in America was being interviewed in English by the laboratory's American secretary. The interview was informal and discussed using conversational English. Participants 2 described the interview as "simple". Participant 3 shared the interview as "light" with questions such as, "Why do you want to go to the United States?" and "What do you think it should be good for your career?" For the interviews, AEL was not required. However, the participants submitted their curriculum vitas in English.

The participants all shared about reading periodicals in English as part of their PhD programs. As a result of constantly reading periodicals in English and writing papers in English, the participants were fluent in AEL. Throughout the interviews, the participants would share content-specific vocabulary words such as animal sciences, forage trials, feed analysis, and soil microbial biomass. A motivation for researching in America was the tools and methods available in an American laboratory that are not offered in their home countries. While studying their PhDs in America, the participants all attended an agricultural scientific meeting in Austin, Texas. The participants discussed their research in English and listened to other scientists' presentations in English. Participant 3 said she understood, "My area, my career, and I understood in Portuguese, but in English… it's hard…because, like everyone, they talk faster than this."

The participants all recommended reading in English as a positive way for international PhD students to engage with the language prior to coming to America. The participants also felt

more comfortable with their English reading and writing skills than speaking. As a requirement for his master's thesis, Participant 1 was expected to have published at least one article in an English periodical. He shared that there are no official English language requirements for his PhD program, but being literate in English was a necessity for success. Even with his skills in English, Participant 1 shared he would use an English tutor prior to submission for a periodic journal. Participant 1 showed the most motivation for learning AEL and using it for future research in his native country.

Evidence of Quality

Creswell and Poth (2018) consider validation as an effort to assess the accuracy of the data. Multiple validation strategies should be used for qualitative inquiry. For this study, Creswell and Poth's (2018) member checking, peer review, and rich, thick descriptions were used as validation methods.

Member checking is critical in establishing credibility. For working with internationals who speak with accents and use different phrases from Americans, member checking helped ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. After the interview, transcriptions were sent to the participants and they were asked to edit and/or validate the transcriptions. Because the participants are stronger in reading English than speaking it, it was important for them to ensure that their thoughts were accurately articulated in the transcriptions.

Peer review was used to validate the data for the research. During the process, the researcher, dissertation chair, and methodologist had access to the raw data. The third reader, a professor of ESOL at a state college, read the final draft of the research study to verify the ESOL practices described. The peer team acts as an external check to ensure the honesty and reliability of the findings and results.

Rich, thick descriptions were used to describe the participants and their journeys to learning English. In the interviews, the participants were encouraged to share their life stories and the processes they used to learn English conversationally and for academic purposes. Specific details of the participants (such as their native countries, English training, and types of research they conducted) were used in the study to discover the ways the participants learned English. As quoted in Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 263), Stake (2010) said, "…a description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details…" themes about learning English were drawn from the interconnectivity of the data. To validate the rich, thick descriptions, the data were revisited immediately after each interview by re-watching the Zoom recordings and editing the transcriptions created by Otter.

Summary

The interview data showed that the participants used multiple strategies to learn English prior to coming to America. The participants all had some English training in grade school. However, the most frequently mentioned strategies were reading, watching movies, listening to music, and translating words and phrases in English. To learn academic English literacy, the participants encouraged reading periodic journals and talking with other American scientists. While living in America, the participants frequently spoke with Americans at a local church. Through attending church, the participants developed friendships and only conversed in English. The interactions with their American friends helped improve their conversational English. Chapter 5 is a discussion on recommendations for further research.

V. DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their theses/dissertations. The second purpose of this study was to identify ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses/dissertations. Three international students who lived in America for their PhD research were interviewed for this study. One research question guided this study into evaluating the PhD students' lived experiences and their journeys to using academic English literacy and conversational English with their peers.

Methods of Data Collection

In narrative research, participants share their life stories, and the researcher makes conclusions from the stories. Due to the interviews' comprehensive nature, interviews in narrative research take a longer amount of time than other qualitative research methods. Therefore, only one to three participants who meet specific parameters for the study are selected. For this research study, participants were international PhD students who learned English as a second or third language. An interview guide (Appendix A) consisting of seven questions was developed to guide the participants in sharing their journeys to learning English for casual and academic purposes. Prior to the interview, the participants were emailed interview guides and

consent forms (Appendix B). The interviews were recorded on Zoom and transcribed through Otter transcription services.

After the interviews were completed, the transcriptions were reviewed while watching the recorded interviews, and minor changes were made to the transcriptions because of the participants' accents. The participants validated the transcriptions, with minor recommendations added for clarity and intent of information shared. The transcripts and recordings were stored on a password-protected computer. Files will be deleted after 5 years from the conclusion of the study.

As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), a lean coding method was used throughout the coding process. Participants' quotes were coded by their relativity to learning English. The first cycle of coding was conducted by using the highlighting tool in Microsoft Word. During the first coding cycle, 13 codes were identified, as reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Codes Identified in First Reading of the Transcripts

Code	Description
1	Age/Grade of first English Acquisition
2	Reading and Writing in English
3	Masters/Graduate School
4	ELA School/Training/Help from Tutor
5	Watching English Movies/YouTube
6	American University
7	Research Station/Laboratory/Conducting Research
8	Animal Sciences PhD
9	Reason to Study in the USA
10	Motivation to Learn English
11	Speaking and Listening in English
12	Challenges with English
13	Attending Church

Once the three transcriptions were coded, direct quotes were entered into a Google Sheets spreadsheet to organize the number of times each participant addressed the codes throughout the

interviews. Two condensed themes were identified based on the codes, and direct quotes were added to a new spreadsheet. The quotes were categorized as Exposure to English and Exposure to Academic English

Summary of Results

In this qualitative narrative study, three international PhD students were interviewed to understand their lived experiences of learning and using English in America. From the interview data, two themes were discovered: conversational English and academic English literacy. Conversational English is the style of speech used with family and friends (Leone & Levy, 2015). Academic English literacy is knowing and applying content-specific language and practices in English for the purpose of creating texts (Johns, 1997).

All three participants were exposed to conversational English prior to studying in America. Their first exposure of English was in either middle or high school. As the participants grew older, they used tools, such as watching television and movies in English, listening to American music, using a dictionary, and paying for English tutors/school. The participants lived in the southeast region of the U.S. when they were conducting their PhD studies. Due to the locals' dialect, the participants struggled with understanding the fast speech of Americans, especially those who spoke with a "southern" accent. The participants shared that it was beneficial when Americans intentionally slowed their speech and offered kindness when asked to repeat a word.

Overall, participants were more confident in their AEL than their conversational English skills. Their AEL abilities were apparent during the study when they sent the revisions for the transcribed interviews. All three universities the participants attended did not have explicit AEL requirements. Still, it was understood that they needed to be proficient in AEL because of the

amount of scholarly literature written in English. A memorable experience shared by the participants was attending an agricultural conference in Texas. The participants enjoyed talking with other scientists about their fields of study and using AEL outside of the research lab.

Discussion by Research Question

Research Question 1: What were the lived experiences of international PhD students who used academic English literacy during their research for their capstone research projects?

Prior to temporarily living in America, all participants of the study were exposed to conversational English. Outside of learning English while in secondary school, the participants pursued other measures to learn English while living in their home countries. By dedicating their finances and time to their English studies, the participants demonstrated that learning English was a priority. Throughout the interviews, all participants shared about the daily activities of reading, listening, and watching television in English to improve their knowledge and skill.

As a positive consequence of their agricultural PhD studies, all participants were experienced in using AEL before coming to America. Using AEL was a standard part of the participants' studies because of their need to read scholarly articles. However, the participants were modestly exposed to conversational English in their non-English-speaking native countries. To thrive in an American research facility, all participants needed to be comfortable using conversational English and AEL. Having adequate capabilities in speaking, reading, and writing in English would have helped the L2 students understand their American professors and research associates. Being fluent in English would also ensure accuracy and clear communication while working in the research facility.

The participants of this study were enrolled in universities based in their home countries. During their time in America, the participants conducted research for an American university and

used the research for their theses or dissertations. Neither the home universities nor the American university provided resources for the L2 PhD students' English abilities. As a part of conducting research in America, participants were expected to speak, read, and write in English. If non-English speaking students wanted to study in America, they would need to find their own measures to learn English. The only English proficiency examination required by the American university was conducted by the administrative assistant at the research laboratory. Participant 2 described the interview process for coming to America as "simple." Participant 3 described the interview as "light." The short interview simply asked the participants their reasoning for coming to research in the laboratory and if they were confident in their English abilities. In the interview to come to America, Participant 3 admitted she was not comfortable speaking English, but she was willing to learn and grow.

While living in America, the participants struggled to understand native English speakers, particularly those who spoke with a dialect common to the southeast region of the U.S. During the interview for this study, Participant 3 shared her insecurities about her accent and embarrassment when Americans joked about her English pronunciation. All participants discussed how they used conversational English with native speakers while attending church in the local area. When the participants were at church, they were immersed in American culture. In church, the participants read the Bible in English, listened to sermons and songs in English, developed American friendships, and participated in American cultural events (such as Thanksgiving). Without the participants' prior efforts of studying English before coming to America, making friendships and memories with Americans would not have been possible.

The Findings Related to the Literature

While reviewing the data from this study, two themes were identified from L2 PhD students' lived experiences. The themes were (1) conversational English, and (2) academic English literacy. Chapter 4 shared quotes from the participants' interviews that supported the two themes. The following discussion shows the context for each theme discovered from the participants' lived experiences.

Theme 1: Conversational English

The study participants were exposed to conversational English in either their pre-teen or teenage years; however, they did not become fluent in conversational English until adulthood. All participants were able to speak English because of their intentional efforts of studying English prior to living in America. Bley-Vroman's (1988) fundamental difference hypothesis theories showed how adults learn foreign languages differently than children. Adults (like the participants in the study) use problem-solving strategies that they have learned through age and experience (Jaspal, 2009-2010). When the participants decided to formally learn English (through a tutor or English school), they were motivated to learn by their identities as graduate and PhD students. Jaspal (2009-2010) credited identity and motivation as two critical factors in adult L2 acquisition.

Before coming to America, all participants utilized strategies, such as paying for an English tutor, using a bilingual dictionary, reading in English, and watching television and listening to music in English, as strategies for learning conversational English. When the participants lived in America, they were immersed in a native English-speaking society but continued their English study methods. The participants had to drive, shop, and dine while using conversational English to thrive in society. The education provided by the participants'

secondary schools was not adequate in preparing them to speak conversational English. Likewise, the international universities and the American university did not provide resources to improve the participants' conversational English. Their universities expected the participants to learn English outside of the classroom, sacrificing their time and finances.

The participants followed Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and constructivism framework as they increased their English-speaking abilities when conversing with Americans. International students living at the laboratory could have intentionally avoided American society and forfeited improving their conversational English skills. In contrast, the study participants voluntarily engaged with the American culture by attending church and developing friendships with church members. Attending church multiple times a week became the primary source of English-interaction for the participants. When the participants came to church, they had the opportunity to dialogue with Americans in small group Bible studies regularly. During Bible study time, the participants discussed Bible history, theology, and Christian living. The small group leader gave the participants Bibles and Christian books in English. Participant 3 was excited to receive a women's study Bible in English and openly discussed her commitment to continue reading the Bible in English for her spiritual growth and to improve her English literacy. With their friends from Bible study, the participants also attended Passion Conference in Atlanta: a two-day conference of listening to worship music and learning from American Bible teachers. The conference brought thousands of college-age adults together to worship through music and Bible study. The participants became part of the church family and developed lasting relationships with the church members that have continued since they returned to their home countries. The relationships formed with the church members and the participants helped both parties become more culturally diverse and receptive to others.

Theme 2: Academic English Literacy

The participants began their training in academic English literacy (AEL) prior to studying in America. Proficient use of AEL was not a requirement for the PhD programs. However, all participants shared the need for reading scholarly journals and writing in English throughout their studies. Frequently reading academic journals in English led the participants to have stronger abilities in AEL than conversational English. For this study, the participants showed strength in AEL when correcting the transcripts of the interviews. During the interviews, all participants had minor but frequent grammatical errors when using conversational English, but they fixed the minor errors when editing the transcripts. One reason the participants were more comfortable in AEL than conversational English was from having more accessibility for English reading materials than speaking with a native English speaker. Even after living in America, the participants were more confident in reading and writing than speaking in English.

By practicing AEL and conversational English, L2 PhD students are at a greater advantage for career opportunities. Without a thorough understanding of AEL, L2 PhD students could put themselves and their institutions at risk for public embarrassment if they published research with preventable grammatical errors. After completing the interviews, all participants received a transcript of their interviews to ensure accuracy. All participants added corrections to their responses, because they understood their conversational English errors and wanted the transcripts to describe their thoughts accurately. Therefore, the participants were concerned about their images as L2 learners, PhD students, and international student representatives.

All study participants found resources outside of the university to learn English, such as paying for private tutors, using a dictionary to translate as they read in English, and watching YouTube videos about speaking in English. The participants all said that daily exposure to

English helped them develop their literacy and speaking skills. Even without ESL support from his university, Participant 1 was required to publish one scholarly article in English for his graduate program. Participant 2 saw that he needed English for his graduate studies; therefore, he left Peru and attended language school in Brazil before coming to America. As with other institutions worldwide, the international universities and the American university did not provide English speaking or writing supports for the participants during their PhD programs. The participants' AEL developed because of their intentional acts of studying English in conjunction with their PhD work while living in their native countries. Without learning English independently, studying in America would have been impossible for the participants and narrow their career opportunities. Without English, the participants would not have passed the interview with the laboratory administrative assistant. Besides, the participants would be limited to researching or accepting careers in countries that speak and write in their native languages.

To help L2 students, universities need to adopt multicultural, AEL, and conversational English aids (Curtin et al., 2013, Hung & Hyun, 2010). Having resources about new cultural immersion for L2 students could help them feel comfortable in society. Resources, such as videos about interactions between Americans and L2 speakers, points of contact for other L2 students, contact information for counselors trained in helping international students, could benefit international students. Likewise, universities could benefit by training their professors on engaging with their L2 students and their expectations for writing in English. Professors hinder the English literacy of L2 students when they do not correct grammatical errors. Providing English support for L2 students could limit self-consciousness of their accent and speaking abilities. Participant 3 experienced embarrassment when Americans joked about her accent or asked her to repeat herself. She shared her fears of never learning English, and her desire to quit

learning English. Instead of abandoning her dream of learning English, Participant 3 wrote her dissertation in English and currently tutors Brazilians in conversational English.

The participants experienced two ways of working with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of having a more knowledgeable other (MKO) in language development while living in America. The research lab professors guided the participants in using AEL to speak and write subject-specific vocabulary and concepts. Professors who hold L2 PhD students to the same AEL standards as native English students can help improve their students' AEL (Çelik, 2020; Ye & Edwards, 2017). When the participants were at church, the Bible study teacher acted as the MKO in teaching the participants Bible study techniques and living according to biblical standards. Positive interactions with both types of MKOs may improve the self-efficacy, self-awareness, and cultural experience of L2 PhD students.

Study Limitations

This study was limited to three participants from different home countries who spoke different native languages. Participants 1 and 3 spoke English as their third language. Participant 2 knew English as his second language. The participants were exposed to English at different points in their lives. All participants sought agricultural degrees from various international universities; therefore, the data may not represent students in other degree specializations or English language supports from other universities.

Implications for Future Practice

With 75% of global publications written in English, it is beneficial for international PhD students to consider learning academic English literacy (Findari & Ferrari, 2008). To help improve their English, international students seek opportunities to study in America or other English-speaking countries. One motivation for L2 students to study in America is to learn

conversational English and improve their AEL (Ye & Edwards, 2017). In theory, both L2 students and universities benefit when universities admit international students. Universities advertise having a "culturally diverse student body" (Hung & Hyun, 2010, p. 341) and L2 students can learn or improve their English. Unfortunately, the beneficial relationship between international students and universities is one-sided (Hung & Hyun, 2010). Most universities are not prepared to meet adult ESL students' cultural and learning needs (Rhodes 2013).

The results of this study indicated that the participants had to seek their own measures to learn conversational English and AEL. The participants of the study did not share any explicit English supports from the international or U.S. universities. Therefore, universities should consider providing resources, such as tutors, for both writing and speaking English. Proper language acquisition can help the students feel immersed in their new cultures and become proficient in AEL.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study examined the lived experiences of three international PhD students, more research is needed to understand the complexities of conducting research as an L2 student. The research reviewed for this study analyzed the experiences of Asian students who studied at English-speaking universities (Çelik, 2020; Hung & Hyun, 2010; Ye & Edwards, 2017). The participants of this study represented three countries, three different first-languages, and two L2s. International students do not only come from the East but travel from all directions to study in English-speaking countries. For the success of L2 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and PhD students, universities need to provide support, such as language training in conversational English and AEL.

Recommended changes to the current study could involve interviewing students from the same international university, native country, or first language. If a university provided English tutoring for the PhD students prior to arriving in America, the students may feel more confident in their conversational English abilities. Interviewing the international students' American professors would provide additional insight into the English-abilities of the PhD students. Further study could be conducted to see the professor's influence as the MKO for the L2 PhD student in using AEL and conducting research in America. With university approval, researchers could observe the international students in the research lab using AEL and conversational English with other researchers. The researchers could assess misinterpretations between the L2 students and their domestic counterparts. To evaluate the AEL of the L2 PhD students, participants of future studies could provide examples of their research in English.

Conclusion

Conversational English and academic English literacy are imperative in international PhD student success. International students come to America with the intent of improving their English, but both domestic and international universities are not providing support for their culturally diverse student body. Three international PhD students shared the lived experiences of how they learned and implemented both conversational English and AEL while studying for their PhD dissertations/theses. The research in this study added to the existing literature on L2 PhD students studying in a foreign country.

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Appendix A

Narrative Interview Guide

Warm-up Questions

1. Tell me about your journey to learning English.
2. Tell me about your study/research during your time in America.

Interview Questions

3. What were the English requirements for your PhD program?
4. How did you navigate academic English for your PhD program?
5. What challenges did you face while learning English and communicating with others in America?
6. What tools or study methods were beneficial to help you speak and understand English?
7. Wrap-up: What else would you like to contribute to my study about PhD students coming to America?

Potential Questions

8. How frequently and in what context did you speak with native English speakers while working on your PhD studies in America?
9. Outside of the laboratory and university compound, where else did you speak English in the community?

Appendix B

Consent Form
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION
SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Title: Examining the Lived-Experiences of International L2 PhD Students: A Narrative Study

Investigators: Dr. Janet Deck (Principal Investigator) and Sydney Basford

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of international PhD students who used English as an Academic Language during their research for their theses/dissertations. The second purpose of this study is to identify the ways international PhD students mitigated academic language challenges for their theses/dissertations. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

What to Expect: This research study is administered online. Participation in this research will involve a recorded interview with the student investigator (Sydney Basford). You will receive a copy of the interview questions and instructions for accessing the online interview in English and your first language. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer and ask for clarification on any questions you do not understand. You are encouraged to share personal stories about your journey learning English. The interview should take about an hour but can vary depending on how much you would like to share. After the interview, you will receive a transcription of the interview. You will be asked to review and approve the transcription for accuracy. Once you have approved the transcription, your part of the study is complete.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this project, which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain an appreciation and understanding of how research is conducted.

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for your time participating in this interview.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data, transcriptions, and video recordings will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following email addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Dr. Janet Deck, Principal Investigator
(863)-667-5737
jldeck@seu.edu

Mrs. Sydney Basford, Student Investigator
(850)-209-6575
sbbasford@seu.edu

If you choose to participate: Please respond to this email by completing the following sentence and provide your preferred date and time that you will be available for an interview. Please email your response to the student investigator, Sydney Basford:

- I (enter your first and last name) give my permission to participate in study.
- I am available on (date and time) for an interview.

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter/Email

Hello!
For my Doctorate of Education degree dissertation, I am conducting a research study on international PhD students.
Would you be willing to share your experiences while living in America and communicating in English for your studies? Participation in this study will require you to partake in one virtual interview. You will not receive compensation for the interview. However, one benefit of participation is that you will be part of a research study which will contribute to the body of knowledge about second language learners.

If you're interested, please respond to this email.

Gratefully,
Sydney Basford
sbbasford@seu.edu