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# The lived experience of the English as a Second Language RN-BSN degree completion student integrating to an online learning environment

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE  
RN-BSN DEGREE COMPLETION STUDENT INTEGRATING TO AN ONLINE  
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing Education

Nova Southeastern University

Sonique Sophia Sailsman  
2016

**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY  
HEALTH PROFESSIONS DIVISION  
COLLEGE OF NURSING**

This dissertation, written by Sonique Sophia Sailsman under direction of her Dissertation Committee, and approved by all of its members, has been presented and accepted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN NURSING EDUCATION**

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## Abstract

**Background:** Enrollment in registered nurse-bachelor of science in nursing (RN-BSN) degree completion programs have increased in the last several years. Due to this increase, many programs have begun to offer their RN-BSN programs completely online or in a hybrid format. Often times, students who choose to pursue their degree online come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and speak English as a second language (ESL). There is limited research about the experiences of these students in this unique learning environment. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of RN-BSN ESL nursing students who are engaged in learning online and understanding their process of cultural integration. **Theoretical framework:** Vygotsky's sociocultural theory served as the theoretical framework and underpinning for this study. **Methods:** Ten individual interviews were conducted incorporating van Manen's (1990) methodological steps for exploring the lived experience. **Results:** Through phenomenological reflection, five major themes emerged: (a) understanding the online classroom, (b) expressing culture online, (c) alone but not lonely, (d) writing as a surmountable barrier, and (e) faculty role in the online journey. **Conclusions:** RN-BSN ESL nursing students who choose to pursue their degree completion completely online or in the hybrid format do so mainly for convenience and flexibility. Exploring their lived experiences offered insight into their personal challenges and triumphs with online cultural integration, writing, and obtaining the support needed to be successful.

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*I can do ALL things through CHRIST who strengthens me.*

*Philippians 4:13*

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## **Chapter One**

### **Problem and Domain of Inquiry**

Nursing education has experienced many changes over the last several years, most notably the advent and rapid implementation of online learning. The growth of distance education has afforded potential students the opportunity to further their education and to move beyond the traditional classroom into a place of freedom and mobility. Tan, Nabb, Aagard, and Kioh (2010) indicated that the development of technology along with online education has made higher education accessible to a growing number of people. This number includes nursing students who speak English as a second language (ESL). There are varying acronyms used in publication today to describe this population of learners: English language learners (ELL), English for academic purposes (EAP), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), limited English proficiency (LEP), language minority (LM), English as an additional language (EAL), and English as a foreign language (EFL; Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010; Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010; Starr, 2009; Suliman & Tadros, 2011). For the purposes of this inquiry, the term English as a second language will be used to encompass these groups.

ESL students come from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Oropeza et al., 2010). Many have recently arrived in the United States (US) while others have lived here for an extended period of time. International students come to the US on temporary visas (F-1) specifically to obtain their education and return to their home

country while immigrant students are permanent residence that have come to the US as adults for better opportunities (di Gennaro, 2008). The term “Generation 1.5” was introduced in 1988 by Rambaut and Ima (1988) in their study of Southeast Asian youth living in San Diego who were considered to be a distinctive cohort because they were neither first generation nor second generation but straddle the fence of two societies and cultures. Generation 1.5 persons are born in their home country but complete their education in the US during crucial stages of adolescence and early adulthood (Rambaut & Ima, 1988). Asher (2011) further defined Generation 1.5 as young people whose first language is not English, live in an immigrant household in which English is not spoken, who attend American schools, are socially integrated in the US but exhibit a lack of academic fluency in English. Individuals who migrate at a young age are more likely to integrate to the receiving culture’s practices, language, values, and identifications easily and more fluidly than those who migrate at an older age (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010).

The Institute of Higher Education Policy reported that although immigrants experience challenges in gaining access to higher education, they constitute a significant portion of American undergraduates (Erisman & Looney, 2007). In 2014, the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) shared that 24% of 65 million undergraduates were either immigrants or from immigrant backgrounds (CCCIE, 2014). Additionally, immigrants from African and Asian countries are more likely to pursue higher education as compared to those from Latin America and the Caribbean (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

The enrollment data available to the public about ESL nursing students is limited to the student's culture and ethnicity that is self-reported at the time of admission. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2013) reported that 28.1% of students in baccalaureate programs were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The National League for Nursing (NLN, 2011b) showed a decrease in Black student enrollment by 1%, an increase in Hispanic enrollment by 2%, and no change in Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian enrollment (NLN, 2011b). Although important, this demographic information is not an indication of a student's English language proficiency. There are no data available that separates the number of ESL nursing students who engage in online learning from those who engage in traditional face-to-face instruction.

A passing score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is commonly used in higher education as a requisite for admission (McDermott-Levy, 2011; Morris & Maxey, 2014; Wendt, Woo, & Kenny, 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010; Zheng, Everett, Glew, & Salamonson, 2014). The TOEFL measures a student's ability to use and understand English and evaluates how well a student can combine listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to perform academic tasks at the university level (Educational Testing Services [ETS], 2016). Although students may pass these exams and gain admittance into nursing programs, many struggle with English-language acquisition, acculturation, and integration (Salamonson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2008). This struggle leads to poor student outcomes and ultimately attrition from the program (Crawford & Candlin, 2013a; San Miguel, Townsend, & Waters, 2013; Scheele, Pruitt, Johnson, & Xu, 2011). Currently, there are no studies that look specifically at how

struggles affect student outcomes in online nursing programs. This distinction is very important given the proliferation of online learning programs in nursing in recent years.

This dissertation focuses on how RN-BSN nursing students who speak English as a second language integrate into the online learning environment while overcoming barriers in language and cultural differences. Donnell (2015) shared that it is important for nurse educators to explore the specific challenges related to language, integration, and acculturation within higher education. ESL nursing students are an important source of diversity for schools of nursing and ultimately the profession. Inclusion of cultural and linguistic support to retain diverse students in nursing education programs can also affect the ultimate goal of providing and improving health care to all Americans (Choi, 2005; Greenberg, 2013).

### **RN-BSN Online Programs**

RN-BSN programs, also known as degree completion programs, were designed as an opportunity for the registered nurse who has been in clinical practice to return to school and obtain a baccalaureate degree in nursing. In recent years, RN-BSN programs have proliferated across the US (AACN, 2014c; Anderson & Tredway, 2009; Beitz & Snarponis, 2006; McEwen, White, Pullis, & Krawtz, 2012) in response to a highly publicized report from the Institute of Medicine (2010), which recommended that by 2020 to increase the number of baccalaureate nurses from 50% to 80%. The enrollment in RN-BSN programs has seen steady growth over the years with a 15.5% increase from 2011 to 2012 (AACN, 2014a). There are currently 692 RN to BSN programs available nationally with 400 offering the degree completion program online and more programs launching each year (AACN, 2014d).

Nursing education programs across the country are feeling the pressure to meet the demands of students requesting online courses and to provide quality education (Anderson & Tredway, 2009; Cobb, 2011; Cuellar, 2002; Gilmore & Lyons, 2012; Hart & Morgan, 2010; A. Smith, 2010). Completely online programs are those in which 80% or more of the course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2006). Online RN-BSN programs allow a nurse who is already balancing the demands of everyday life to engage in coursework with the advantage of convenience and flexibility by having access to the program anywhere at any time (Gilmore & Lyons, 2012; Smith, 2010). Online RN-BSN programs provide students the opportunity to continue their education without disturbing their employment (Hart & Morgan, 2010). Although online RN-BSN programs may provide convenience and flexibility, online programs typically have lower retention and higher attrition than traditional face-to-face programs (Capra, 2014; Chen & Jang, 2010; Davidson, Metzger, & Finley, 2014; Duff & Quinn, 2006). The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) has reported concerns and challenges with the regulation of online nursing programs secondary to issues with program integrity and inconsistent quality (NCSBN, 2015b). Gilmore and Lyons (2012) shared that student retention and success in online nursing programs is important for program and institutional viability.

The hybrid or blended format of RN-BSN programs is the most common offering (McEwen et al., 2012). This option provides students the opportunity to engage in course material online as well as meet face-to-face at designated times throughout the program. The majority of the course work in a hybrid program takes place online (30%-79%) with students participating in discussion boards and submitting writing assignments via a

learning management system (Allen & Seaman, 2006). It is often considered the “best of both worlds” because it meets the needs of students with varied learning styles (Arispe & Blake, 2012). This dissertation will focus on RN-BSN ESL nursing students who are engaged in coursework either in a completely online or hybrid program of study.

Students who engage in coursework completely online or in hybrid format are expected to be self-directed, self-motivated and have the ability to understand information provided in an asynchronous (non-real-time) format (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). RN-BSN students must have a level of independence to seek out information from outside sources in contrast to the verbal dissemination that occurs in the traditional classroom (Hart & Morgan, 2010). There is a paucity of research related specifically to completely online or hybrid RN-BSN nursing programs and no scholarly inquiry into the experience of the ESL students who chooses to pursue their degree completion online.

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation is an anthropological term that was first broadly defined by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). Cultural learning experienced by individuals who are exposed to new ethnic and cultural groups defines the acculturation process (Organista, Marin, & Chun, 2009). In an in-depth look at the concept of acculturation, Berry (2005) wrote that the process has been taking place for millennia, however, contemporary research interest stems from concern for the effects of European domination on indigenous people. The transformation that occurs during the acculturation process entails the integration of behaviors, identities, and

customs of the host culture (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008; Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2014). Historically, acculturation has been most salient in the US due to geography, the settling of Western Europeans, the displacement of Native Americans, and the importation of slaves from Africa and the Caribbean (Rudmin, 2003). Most recently, with the rapid growth of international migration to the US, there has been increased scholarly interest in acculturation research (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Acculturation as a concept was originally proposed as a group-associated phenomenon. It is a multidimensional process of cultural and psychological change that can involve both groups and individuals (Berry, 2005). At the group level, change occurs to cultural practices, social structures and institutions; the individual experiences change to his/her behavioral repertoires (Berry, 2005). Over time, it was determined that the individual enters into, participates in, and changes at different paces during his/her acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). There is limited educational research as it relates to the many degrees of acculturation (Salamonson et al., 2008).

The study of the individual process of acculturation is called psychological acculturation (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Psychological changes to acculturating individuals has been perpetuated by increasing intercultural contact (Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008). Individuals may experience a more dynamic acculturation process than the ethnic group (Pires & Stanton, 2000). Individuals experience acculturation in a variety of ways with some finding the process more difficult than others (Wang, Schwartz, & Zamboanga, 2010). Adjusting to the host culture can be achieved with minimal conflict when an individual engages in the acculturation process successfully (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008).

Variations in language, ethnicity, and culture affect ease or difficulty associated with the acculturation process (Schwartz et al., 2010). Different populations of people react in varying ways to cultural transition (Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013). When a pattern of conflict is experienced and a proper fit between the acculturating individual and the host culture is not met, the result is acculturative stress (Berry, 1997, 2005). As people encounter expectations that are contradictory to their values they experience different levels of acculturative stress (Lee & Padilla, 2014). It is important to note that not all people experience acculturation as stressful (Du & Wei, 2015). Acculturative stress is manifested most commonly through depression, anxiety, and uncertainty (Sam & Berry, 2010). The symptoms of acculturative stress may be compared to that of culture shock if the acculturating individual cannot easily enfold into the host society (Berry, 1997). According to Smith and Khawaja (2011), language and education are frequently documented acculturative stressors for ESL college students.

### **Acculturation Strategies**

The process of acculturation is universal and occurs regardless of minority or majority status (Rudmin, 2003). The concept is often interchanged with other similar processes, such as assimilation (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008; Sam & Berry, 2006, p. 11; Organista et al., 2009; Siatkowski, 2007). However, Sam and Berry (2010) made the distinction that acculturation entails multiple processes and outcomes; groups and individuals within groups adopt ways to deal with the experience of acculturation, only one of which may be assimilation. In an effort to indicate how one acculturates, psychologist John Berry introduced four strategies that are considered to be multiple points in the acculturation process: assimilation, integration, separation, and

marginalization (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008; Berry, 1997). Assimilation is the process in which a person adopts the culture of the host society and does not tend to maintain his/her original culture. Integration is the strategy implemented when a person desires to maintain his/her original culture while having daily interaction with the host society. Separation involves a strong desire to preserve the original culture and not establish ties to the host culture. Marginalization is the decision not to either maintain one's original culture or engage with the culture of the host society (Berry, 1997; Nekby, Rodin, & Ozcan, 2009; Sam & Berry, 2010). Integration will be a significant focus of this dissertation study.

### **Integration**

RN-BSN ESL online nursing students engage in acculturation along a continuum that begins first with language and progresses to interpersonal interactions and attitudes toward cultural heritage (Chou & Chen, 2009; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Smith, 2010; Speece, 2012; Tapanes, Smith, & Whites, 2009). The acculturation strategy of integration is found to be the most successful at promoting mutual accommodation and pluralism (Berry, 1997; Boski, 2008; Nekby et al., 2009; Organista et al., 2009; Rafieyan, Orang, Bijami, Nejad, & Eng, 2013). Integration allows for a person to coexist simultaneously with their own culture while engaging consistently with their new culture (Boafo-Arthur, 2013). Those persons who pursue integration experience less stress than assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 2005). Integration is a choice and therefore considered subjective. The act of being or becoming integrated into the host society would be best described from a personal report. The exploration of the process of integration is crucial to understand how ESL students fair in higher education

environments, and more specifically online programs. The exposure to second cultures happens at a rapid pace throughout the world; however, the role this exposure plays in shaping socio-cognitive skills has received little theoretical attention (Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009). Having an appreciation of a student's level of acculturation by way of integration could assist educators to identify those ESL students who may have increased risk of poor academic performance and to provide them with the support necessary for success (Salamonson et al., 2008).

### **English-Language Integration**

The concept of integration in the area of higher education not only encompasses cultural norms but language and communication. Language acquisition is a significant part of the acculturation process and is often the result of long-term accommodation (Berry, 2005). Salamonson et al. (2008) and Wang et al. (2010) shared that language is most commonly used as a proxy measure in acculturation research and is frequently used as an indicator of cultural adaptation. Language plays a significant role in how acculturation is operationalized (Gee, Walsemann, & Takeuchi, 2010). Learning the language of the host society is a form of integration and part of the acculturation process (Jiang, Green, Henley, & Masten, 2009). Second language acquisition requires a certain amount of linguistic and cultural competence, which comes from a high level of positive integrative attitude toward the target language culture (Rafieyan et al., 2013). Language is considered the most common experience that occurs following contact between two cultures (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008).

Integration within the host culture may offer a sense of belonging and emotional security providing the psychological capacity to cope with acculturative stress during the

second language acquisition process (Jiang et al., 2009). Schwartz et al. (2010) shared that when ethnicity is held constant, migrants from countries who speak English or who are competent in English may encounter reduced stress and resistance in the US than migrants who are not familiar with the English language. Brown (2008) advocates the importance of examining the challenges that ESL nursing students face both culturally and linguistically.

### **Higher Education Integration**

Academic success of nursing students is closely related to their ability to communicate with their patients and families in the clinical setting (Rogan & San Miguel, 2013). ESL nursing students have unique challenges in that they are expected to learn the basics of communication that incorporate medical and nursing terminology as well as provide culturally competent care (AACN, 2008a; Abriam-Yago, Yoder, & Kataoka-Yahiro, 1999; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). A hindrance to effective learning engagement for ESL nursing students is related to higher level academic language required in higher education coupled with the technical language of health care (Crawford & Candlin, 2013a). The ability to communicate effectively and be understood by faculty, peers, patients, and staff is essential for ESL nursing students (Brown, 2008).

Salamonson et al. (2008) indicated that English language acculturation among ESL nursing students is related to academic performance. Nekby et al. (2009) further affirmed that an integrated identity has shown to be conducive to positive school performance. There is a direct link between academic challenges and language challenges (Guhde, 2003). Scheele et al. (2011) shared that communication differences affect

learning outcomes and educational experiences in nursing students. Low academic performance leading to attrition is often times a byproduct of students entering higher education with low levels of English language proficiency (San Miguel et al., 2013). Boshier and Bowles (2008) found that the linguistic modification of examinations was shown to increase comprehensibility for ESL nursing students. Although modification may provide some relief, nursing students need to be able to effectively navigate complex theories in English and produce acceptable written work (Weaver & Jackson, 2011).

Common challenges for ESL nursing students include reading, writing, comprehension, and communication (Starr, 2009). Academic writing skills can be a challenge to acquire for ESL students (Salamonson, 2010). Lack of skill in written and oral academic English is the cause of significant anxiety among ESL nursing students (Choi, 2005). Writing style differences along with methods of communication between different languages can make second language integration difficult (Alhasiany, 2014). Wang, Singh, Bird, and Ives (2008) suggested that universities and their faculties may not fully understand the needs of ESL nursing students and are consequently inadequately prepared to provide them with a quality personalized educational experience.

**Social and academic language.** The Cummins model (Cummins, 1980) of language acquisition is a two-tiered model that indicates that language is developed in both social and academic environments. There are two language skills that create the model: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS include social interactions, daily face-to-face conversations, and basic vocabulary (Campbell, 2008; Koch et al., 2011). CALP is literacy and vocabulary knowledge that develops through schooling (Cummins, 1999)

and allows students to communicate more advanced ideas in the English language (Choi, 2005). Proficiency in BICS takes approximately 1 to 2 years while CALP takes significantly longer (5-10 years) with mastery needed to be successful in academic settings (Cummins, 1999; Koch et al., 2011). Immersion and repeated exposure is required to obtain proficiency in academic communication (Starr, 2009).

The ability to speak higher level English and convey abstract thoughts and ideas to peers and faculty is an important aspect of English-language integration for ESL nursing students (Crawford & Candlin, 2013a). Although most ESL nursing students are able to exhibit proficiency in basic interpersonal communication (Hansen & Beaver, 2012), some struggle to make new meanings and connect concepts on a higher level because they lack cognitive academic language proficiency, which leads to academic difficulty and challenges (Guhde, 2003; Salamonson et al., 2008).

### **Online Integration**

Online education is a viable alternative to face-to-face instruction on a college campus (Capra, 2014). Over the last several years the demand for online courses on college campuses has increased rapidly (Capra, 2014; Edmundson, 2007) as students seek flexibility and freedom in their educational choices. All students who engage in online learning initially have to adapt to a new culture and shift away from teacher-centered instruction to a more learner-centered approach (Edmundson, 2007, p. 118). Additionally, students who identify as ESL bring their own learning traits influenced by cultural heritage to the online learning environment (Chou & Chen, 2009; Ku & Lohr, 2003). The ability to integrate into the online learning environment and engage in the mutual learning process with peers and instructors from multiple cultural backgrounds may pose

a challenge to some ESL students.

Al-Harhi (2005) and Liu, Liu, Lee, and Magjuka (2010) both shared that cultural and language differences can have a negative impact on students' engagement in online courses and lead to poor acculturation. Learning styles are developed from cultural patterns and affect a student's approach toward and inclination to specific modes of online learning (Speece, 2012). Online education moves students from reliance on verbal communication to that of written and non-verbal engagement; this change is considered to be a more difficult language-production task than speaking particularly for those who come from cultures in which verbalization is engrained (Al-Harhi, 2005).

Chou and Chen (2009) proposed that the non-native English speaker brings his/her individual learning traits to the online classroom as one form of culture while the nature of distance education programs is another form of culture, both meeting to formulate an individual learner's acculturation process. How cultural differences and student perceptions affect online learning that could inform the production of cultural awareness, ultimately influencing education. This understanding could influence educators to become more responsive to the needs of diverse students thus promoting more effective educational practices (Tan et al., 2010).

Engaging in coursework online is a form of collaborative learning (Choo, Kaur, Fook, & Yong, 2014). In the process of collaborative learning, students are expected to actively work together in joint intellectual efforts building interpersonal processing skills and critical thinking abilities (Sandahl, 2009). Through shared goals and responsibilities collaborative learning provides a sense of equality, however, some students assume more passive or dominant roles thereby influencing the quality and quantity of learning

opportunities for themselves and their fellow peers (Austria, Baraki, & Doig, 2013).

### **Cross Cultural Differences**

To examine the lived experiences of RN-BSN ESL nursing students and how they integrate into the online learning environment, it is valuable to have a cross-cultural perspective with the guidance of the commonly used Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework (Al-Harthi, 2005; Edmundson, 2007; Lee, 2011; Liu et al., 2010; Speece, 2012; Wang et al., 2008). Hofstede's cultural dimensions is a four-point model of cultural difference among societies centered on work-related values (Hofstede, 1986). The components of this model (see Appendix A) include individualism versus collectivism, high versus low power distance, strong versus weak uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity (Hofstede, 1986).

Individualism relates to societies, such as America, United Kingdom, and Canada (Al-Harthi, 2005; Lee, 2011), in which the tendency of members is to look after oneself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism is the opposite of individualism and pertains to societies such as those in Africa, South America, Caribbean, Asia, and the Middle East in which people from birth are integrated into strong cohesive groups that are based in unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 92; Lee, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). Online students from collectivist cultures appreciate authentic student-student dialogue and group work while individualist cultures may not have a preference (Speece, 2012).

Power distance is defined as the degree to which less powerful members of society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Those persons in a society with higher social status are seen as more powerful and are easily deferred to (Hofstede et

al., 2010, p. 61; Speece, 2012). Countries that scored high on the power distance index indicated that inequalities of power and wealth exist while a low power distance index indicated equalization and de-emphasis of power (Speece, 2012; Tas, 2013). Student from a high power distance society would more broadly accept the “sage on the stage” traditional style of teaching and are more likely to withhold questions that threaten that distance (Speece, 2012; Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

Uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which a society can tolerate risk and ambiguity (Hofstede, 1986; Ku & Lohr, 2003). Students from a society with high uncertainty avoidance expect organized and clear articulation of required tasks because formality and rules of order provide stability (Al-Harthi, 2005). An online classroom with clearly instructed assignments and due dates would reduce anxiety and stress for this type of student. Those from a low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more tolerant to differences and function better where rules are minimal (Tapanes et al., 2009). These students have a more relaxed demeanor and are able to accept changes as they arise. Tapanes et al. (2009) found that cultural differences do have an effect on how students perceive uncertainty in the online classroom. Additionally, the design of an online classroom can have a significant effect on a student who is on either side of the uncertainty avoidance spectrum (Speece, 2012).

Hofstede et al. (2010) defines masculinity versus femininity as the degree to which a society applies gender roles. Masculine cultures strive for distinction of the male role to be assertive, ambitious, and competitive (Hofstede, 1986). Feminine cultures define overlapping social roles for both sexes in which men pursue weaker, smaller, and slower qualities of life (Hofstede, 1986). Exploration of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

as it relates to the integration of RN-BSN ESL nursing students into the online learning environment is an important part of the journey to understanding their individual lived experiences.

### **Cross Cultural Communication**

High-context culture and low-context culture is a concept based on a continuum introduced by E. Hall (1976) to describe how people from different cultures use implicit and explicit communication to express themselves. In high-context cultures, meaning is implicit and dependent on non-verbal cues such as voice, body language and periods of silence where most of the information is either in physical context or internalized in the person (Al-Harthi, 2005; Hall, 1976; Speece, 2012). Low context cultures communicate in a more explicit form (Hall, 1976) with reduction of omissions in messages. Linear and explicit communication is easy to understand in the absence of additional context (Usunier & Roulin, 2010).

The contexts in which messages are sent are closely related to the cultural dimension in which a person is born into or raised in. Students from high context Asian countries (including the subcontinent of India) are generally collectivists with a high uncertainty avoidance and power distance. Conversely, low context US, Canadian, and British students are individualistic with low uncertainty avoidance and power distance (Tapanes et al., 2009; Usunier & Roulin, 2010). Liu et al. (2010) shared that as online learning programs continue to grow, it is imperative that online education designers have a foundational understanding of the different educational values and cultural expectations of the participants and the impact of differences on learning.

### **Diversity in Nursing Education**

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) called for an increase in the diversity of nurses at the bedside, which includes the ability to provide culturally relevant care. This call is in direct correlation with the changing face of the US. The growth rate of Hispanic and Asian persons was 43% from 2000 to 2010 (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Additionally, from 1980 to 2012, the percentage of the foreign born population who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 70.2% to 84.6% (Gambino, Acosta, & Grieco, 2014).

The profession of nursing over time has seen a change in the demographics of registered nurse graduates entering the profession (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], Health Resources and Services Administration [HRSA], 2010). HHS reported an increase from 3.7% in 2004 to 5.6% in 2008 of nurses who were educated outside of the US (HHS, HRSA, 2010). These findings signify the steady growth of nursing professionals from other countries. ESL nurses add to the diversity of not only the health care organization but also the profession as a whole.

Having studies about ESL students from varying disciplines in higher education has provided insight into the successes, challenges, and barriers that these diverse students face in the traditional classroom (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; L. He & Shi, 2012). Tan et al. (2010) shared that ESL students from multiple disciplines who engage in coursework in countries different than their home face challenges related to lack of knowledge and values, which perpetuate stereotypes that create hindrances to learning. Myles (2009) conducted a study with ESL engineering students who participated in a 16-month internship, which indicated that learning technical and colloquial language, idioms, and

slang were parts of conversational communication that posed a challenge. In a study of accounting students, Morris and Maxey (2014) found that English language competency by way of TOEFL scores were more highly associated with academic success than the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).

Brown (2008) found that nursing research studies specific to ESL students focused on Hispanic, Aboriginal, and Asian students with few studies found giving attention to the rise in enrollment of native African students, and for nursing education research related to ESL students, researchers have particularly focused on those students in entry-level programs with regard to their classroom adaptation, language acquisition, test taking, and critical thinking challenges (Choi, 2005; Olson, 2012; Scheele et al., 2011). Although the literature related to this population of nursing students is relatively abundant, the specific exploration into the lived experience and acculturation of those in degree completion programs who chose completely online or hybrid learning as an option is non-existent. The generalized characteristics of the students who choose online learning, such as gender, age, discipline of study, and student outcomes when compared to the face-to face learning environment, have been explored (Leasure, Davis, & Thievon, 2000; O'Neil & Fisher, 2008).

There are multiple factors that contribute to a student's success or challenges in the online environment. Cultural attributes can affect a learner's perspective and his/her presence in the online environment (Wang, 2007). The number of qualitative research studies focusing on nursing education are growing and allowing for a better understanding of the student perspective. The iterative exploration of the lifeworld of

students in nursing education allows for improvement in the educational system and ultimately effective preparation of competent diverse nurses.

### **Problem Statement**

Recent growth and change in nursing education has included the gravitation of diverse students to distance and online learning. This growth includes students who speak English as second language. The focus of research to date has been mainly from an empirical perspective on the challenges these students face when attempting to integrate into the traditional classroom (Crawford & Candlin, 2013a; Olson, 2012; San Miguel et al., 2013). There is no data available in which the integration experiences of RN-BSN ESL nursing students into the RN-BSN online classroom from a qualitative perspective have specifically been explored. Integration is the most commonly used strategy in the acculturation process and allows for students to interact with their peers comfortably while maintaining their own cultural heritage and identity. The concern that drives this inquiry is if RN-BSN ESL nursing students as a group have a challenging time integrating into the traditional nursing classroom (Brown, 2008; Crawford & Candlin, 2013b; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Mulready-Shick, 2013; Scheele et al., 2011), and what if any effect does the online environment have on their learning experience?

The exploration into the lived experiences of RN-BSN ESL students and their integration into the online environment is a vital step in the forward movement and growth of online learning in nursing education. Nurse educators need sound indicators about integration and learning approaches of ESL students; these indicators will guide instructional design to ensure students are being prepared adequately for the increasingly diverse workforce (Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2009).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the dissertation study was to explore the lived experience of RN-BSN ESL nursing students who are integrating into a completely online or hybrid program. Exploring the integration experience from a student's personal perspective provides indispensable insight about their journey. There are no studies to date that provide the qualitative viewpoint of this unique group of students. The dissertation study explored the meaning of existing as an online nursing student who speaks English as a second language as well as revealed insight and understanding related to the students' development of nursing knowledge while navigating the English language and cultural differences. The identification of themes from participant responses to interview questions helped to build a thick description of the RN-BSN ESL nursing student's experience that will ultimately help develop resources for future online course design and faculty preparation.

### **Research Question**

The research question that guided this inquiry was the following: What is the lived experience of the English as a second language RN-BSN degree completion student as they integrate into the online learning environment?

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Nursing Education**

The significance of the dissertation study to nursing education relates to the growth of RN-BSN degree completion online programs in the last several years (AACN, 2012). Not only are for-profit colleges and universities forging ahead in the online education market, traditional brick and mortar institutions are providing online options in

greater volume (Kinneer, 2014). Nursing faculty are having to rapidly adapt to changing online teaching strategies and curriculum development (Beitz & Snarponis, 2006; Capra, 2014; Cuellar, 2002; Stanley & Dougherty, 2010). With the increased workload that facilitating an online course often brings (Mancuso-Murphy, 2007; Smith et al., 2009), faculty must also balance the cultural dynamics and individual needs of the students in their courses to maintain positive student outcomes.

Nursing faculty play an important role in the integration process of ESL students. They guide the way to promote acculturation, cultural competence, and ultimately preparing diverse nurses to lead the profession (Brown, 2008; Olson, 2012). The online learning environment in many ways forces not only student interaction with peers but also faculty interaction with students. Faculty feedback is considered an integral part of the online experience and allows students the opportunity to acquire skills, such as self-reflection (Bonnel, 2008). This interaction lends itself to enhanced opportunities for faculty to learn more about a student's individual cultural backgrounds and certain multicultural differences in the way that he/she learns (Tapanes et al., 2009). Choi (2005) shared that the appreciation of different learning strategies is an important teaching tool for ESL nursing students.

Faculty support as well as awareness of the needs of ESL students comprise a significant factor in the success of this population of students (Hansen & Beaver, 2012). A critical component of effective instruction of ESL nursing students is the educator's understanding of his/her student's cultural background (Choi, 2005). Understanding of the learning experiences of nursing students who come from international backgrounds and speak ESL will assist these students' integration into nursing programs and enable

faculty (whether online or not) to provide effective support (Lee, 2011). As health care disparities continue to be of growing concern in the US, it is important that schools of nursing examine admissions criteria. Nursing programs should embrace diversity in their applicant pools so the program in turn meets the needs of a more culturally diverse patient population (Gilliss, Powell, & Carter, 2010).

### **Nursing Practice**

Cultural competence and diversification at the bedside are no longer a gentle suggestion but a strong mandate (IOM, 2010). A nurse who speaks a language in addition to English or second language is an asset to the health care organization. Having an established understanding of transcultural nursing concepts and translating them to practice by way of acculturation is one of the keys to nurses meeting the needs of an ever-changing patient population (Buscemi, 2011). Nurses who identify as ESL can communicate with patients using the patient's same mother tongue, providing a comfort that ensures patients have someone who understands them both verbally and culturally. ESL nursing students will graduate and become ESL nurses, providing an important contribution to the diverse health care team. Improving the outcome success of ESL nursing students will ultimately provide racially and ethnically diverse practitioners who can improve patient outcomes, which will be achieved when the health care team is able to bridge the gap of language barriers. ESL nurses spending the most time with the patient and family serve as a key resource to providing culturally competent health care (Olson, 2012).

**Health care disparities.** The Institute of Medicine's report, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*, opened the eyes of many

Americans about inconsistencies in health care with regard to race and ethnicity (IOM, 2002). These health care disparities could be traced to health care provider biases, prejudices, and uncertainty when treating those from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Becham, Askew, & Williams, 2009; IOM, 2002). The National Health Care Disparities Report released in 2013 showed that there has been no significant change in disparities from the Institute of Medicine report in 2002; Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans routinely receive worse care than Whites in multiple quality measures (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [AHRQ], 2013). Health care and education leaders are being urged to reduce these disparities by increasing the number of ethnically diverse providers in the clinical setting (Banister & Winfrey, 2012).

Health care organizations across the US are experiencing challenges in trying to meet the cultural and language needs of their patient populations (The Joint Commission, 2007). Hospitals have indicated difficulties in providing culturally and linguistically appropriate care secondary to staff lacking competence in the aforementioned areas (The Joint Commission, 2007). In 2006, the HHS concluded non-English speaking patients experience improved interpersonal care, greater medical comprehension, and greater likelihood of keeping follow-up appointments when they saw a language-concordant practitioner. The focus was limited to physicians but recommended future studies examine the impact of concordance between patients and other health professionals, particularly nurses (HHS, 2006).

The health care education of ESL students in the online classroom will have a direct impact on the current state of health care disparities that minorities face today. The findings from this dissertation study will benefit nursing practice by contributing to the

body of educational knowledge focused on the integration and ultimate success of students in online learning programs. These students will eventually take this knowledge to the bedside supporting all practitioners and acting as a change agent for the improvement of care to patients.

### **Nursing Research**

The concept of integration has not been explored as it should be in nursing research, more specifically in the area of ESL students in online courses. Most of the focus related to culture and language has been on ensuring nursing students are culturally competent and understand transcultural theories (Becham et al., 2009; Calvillo et al., 2009; Mareno & Hart, 2014; Munoz, DoBroka, & Mohammad, 2009). The ESL nursing student experience has been explored but mostly from an empirical perspective that highlights mainly the challenges and other negative experiences related to language and comprehension. Qualitative inquiry of the lived experience of these students can reveal the positive experiences as well as possible barriers to their successful education. As online nursing education programs continue to gain momentum and achieve increased enrollment, it is prudent to take a deeper look at how the RN-BSN ESL nursing student integrates into this learning environment.

The National League for Nursing, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, and The Sullivan Commission have each presented research priorities and recommendations as it relates to diversity in nursing education and the workforce. The NLN (2012) shared that an evaluation of methods to recruit, retain, and graduate diverse students in both undergraduate and graduate programs are a research priority related to increasing the diverse workforce. The AACN (2008a) recommendation includes the

development of collaborative relationships to recruit diverse students and improve their learning outcomes. The AACN (2008b) shared that professional nurses who practice in a multicultural environment must possess the skills to provide culturally appropriate care. With a greater level of diversity expected in coming years, nurses should demonstrate a sensitivity to and understanding of a variety of cultures to provide high quality care (AACN, 2008b). The study of a second language included in liberal education facilitates the development of an appreciation for diversity (AACN, 2008b). In 2008, the AACN provided a framework to facilitate the attainment of cultural competence by baccalaureate nursing graduates. The AACN made the recommendation of the institution of a foreign language prerequisite for nursing students on admission to a nursing program in an effort to foster a learning environment that supports cultural competence within students (AACN, 2008b). This recommendation is not currently a requirement for nursing school accreditation and is most often a student option in meeting general education criterion (Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing [ACEN], 2013; Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education [CCNE], 2013).

The Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Health Care Workforce recommended increased funding for research about racial disparities in health care, culturally competent care, and the measurement and elimination of racial bias (Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Health Care Workforce, 2004). The Commission also recommended the setting of measurable goals to increase the number of multilingual students as well as staff. The focus of this dissertation study will add to the advancement of the science of nursing education as well as provide much needed qualitative research

insight into the lived experiences of RN-BSN ESL nursing students, particularly related to the integration of these students into academic settings.

### **Public Policy**

Nurse educators and clinical practitioners have often shied away from the public policy arena secondary to lack of understanding of the process (Duncan, Thorne, Van Neste-Kenny, & Tate, 2012). Gardner (2015) pointed out that nurses need to develop skills in public discourse in order to bridge the political divide and influence local, state, and national policy. With over 3.7 million nurses in the US (NCSBN, 2015a), it is important that nurses are a part of public policymaking. As the population of the US continues to grow and change, it will be imperative that nursing students who speak a primary language other than English enter into a higher education system that is prepared to provide culturally competent instruction (Douglas et al., 2009). As these students graduate and enter into the workforce, it will be vital that transcultural nursing knowledge and cross-cultural practice be a component of their professional growth and development (Douglas et al., 2009).

Although the drive for workforce diversity is at the forefront of discussion in the health care system, it is essential that the attention of higher education remain on the recruitment and graduation of a diverse nursing student body. In 2014, the federal policy agenda set by the board of directors of AACN advocated for a more highly educated and diverse workforce by way of seamless academic progression and inter-professional education (AACN, 2014b). Seamless academic progression that promotes diversity includes the development of multiple entry points and assuring that educational costs remain affordable for nursing students (NLN, 2011a). RN-BSN programs providing

online options have been increasing because of the affordability and the flexibility it provides the students (Gilmore & Lyons, 2012; Hart & Morgan, 2010; Morgan & Hart, 2013).

ESL nursing students face significant challenges and barriers while trying to pursue their academic dreams and aspirations. It is essential that policymakers whose efforts affect higher education work with nursing educators to institute policies that address the means of reducing these barriers (Erisman & Looney, 2007). The exploration of the integration of RN-BSN ESL nursing students and their lived experiences in the online environment is an emerging area of study. The findings from this dissertation study provide greater understanding and insight into the perspective of these students and their journey through higher education. Additionally, results provide educators within regulatory boards and the Department of Education with the indicators needed to promote change focused on support in improving educational options for students who identify as ESL. The use of research findings coupled with improved practice outcomes is vital to the successful petition for change (Hall-Long, 2009).

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

The foundation and philosophical underpinning of this dissertation study integrates the paradigm of constructivism, which is a process that learners use to construct their knowledge by building on previous experience and create their own meaning (Creswell, 2013; Richards & Morse, 2013; Sternberger, 2012). The structure of the learning environment to promote the building of understanding is used in constructivism (Kala, Isaramalai, & Pohthong, 2010). Jean Piaget (1972) believed that the individual constructs knowledge based on his or her personal experience and at his or

her own pace. A learners' engagement in creating personally meaningful knowledge is an important aspect and foundation of constructivism (Adams, 2004). Social constructivism is an extension of the constructivism learning theory and asserts that learning is dependent upon collaboration, interaction, and social exchange that take place in the context of learning (Ward, Peters, & Shelley, 2010).

Cooperative learning is an integral part of creating a deeper understanding and a social constructivist learning environment with students through interacting with instructors and each other (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Simmons, 2011; Stanley & Dougherty, 2010; van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). A constructivist understanding provides learners with the opportunity and freedom to select and coordinate their learning experience with other learners (Huang, Rauch, & Liaw, 2010). Constructivism theory is student focused and supports the perspective that the educator should function as facilitator, fostering self-direction (Huang, 2002; Huang et al., 2010; Kala et al., 2010; Mancuso-Murphy, 2007; Moule, Ward, & Lockyer, 2010; Sternberger, 2012; Wang, 2007).

Self-direction in learning emerged as the first assumption of the learning theory andragogy that indicates that as adults mature, they move from a dependent state to that of self-directedness (Fisher & King, 2010; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Pryce-Miller, 2010). Online education is a learning design approach that caters towards the self-directed, non-traditional, adult learner (Chen & Jang, 2010; Cuellar, 2002). For many ESL students, the act of integrating into the online environment requires the ability to embrace independence and self-direction (Duff & Quinn, 2006; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Maple, Jarrott, & Kuyini, 2013; McDermott-Levy, 2011). This independence includes the

ability to seek out answers to questions and critically think without the constant guidance of a teacher or instructor. Exploring the experiences and self-directed knowledge construction that facilitates the integration process for RN-BSN ESL students enrolled in coursework online lends itself to a constructivist approach.

### **Sociocultural Theory**

Psychologist Les Semyonovich Vygotsky is a pioneer in the introduction of learning as a social process and introduced sociocultural theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). He theorized that peer collaboration enhances cognitive development by increasing a student's ability to problem-solve and process topics (Meseke, Nafziger, & Meseke, 2008; Sandahl, 2009). One of his most salient foci is the role that others play in the learning process, including educators, supporting adults, and peers (Meskill, 2013). Vygotsky saw the sociocultural context of learning as an area of importance and that learning does not happen in isolation but in interaction (Adie, 2014; Huang et al., 2010). Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2011) explained how sociocultural theory underscores Vygotsky's resolute focus on the relationships between the individual physiological aspects and the social and culturally produced contexts and artifacts that transform the individual's cognitive or mental function. It is important to note, although sociocultural theory may have some differing constructs to the constructivism paradigm, it should not be seen as contradictory but rather complimentary and supportive (Hall, 2007; Mercer & Howe, 2012).

The sociocultural perspective focuses not on the individual but on the individual's surroundings (Behroozizad, Nambiar, & Amir, 2014). Knowledge is not an individual possession but also the shared property of members of a community who use cultural

tools, such as spoken and written language, relationships, and institutions like higher education for that purpose (Mercer & Howe, 2012). The most important sociocultural tool is language (Hall, 2007). Whether that language be written in the online environment or verbalized, meaning is derived through language use within a social context (Behroozizad et al., 2014). Mercer and Howe (2012) shared insight that sociocultural theory has one of several distinctive strengths in that it explains how individuals learn from interaction with others but also how collective understanding is garnered from interactions amongst individuals.

Sociocultural theory is commonly used as an explanatory conceptual framework within the broad field of research related to learning, culture, and social interaction (Mercer & Howe, 2012). The theory has become increasingly influential within developmental psychology and educational research, helping researchers to understand the nature of thinking, learning, and development by taking into account the collective, historical nature of human life (Anderman, 2009; Mercer & Howe, 2012). The influence of the sociocultural perspective on research in the area of teacher-student interaction and collaborative learning amongst students has been strong (Mercer & Howe, 2012). Unfortunately, there is little research in the approaches to online learning design (Hall, 2007) or specifically to the integration of students who speak ESL and pursue education online.

Research in the area of online education and second language student integration aligns to Vygotsky's philosophy of sociocultural teaching and learning. In an effort to expand the general body of knowledge as it relates to nursing education, it is paramount

to take an in-depth look at the integration process of RN-BSN ESL nursing students who engage in coursework online.

### **Definition of Terms**

To foster clarity and understanding of this phenomenon of interest, it is necessary to define terminology that will be used throughout this study.

1. Integration. Bringing into equal participation. Joining another group while maintaining individual cultural characteristics and routines.
2. Acculturation. Culturally unique individuals coming into continuous contact with subsequent changes in either or both individuals.
3. ESL. Acronym for English as a second language, indicating that someone speaks a language other than English as his/her primary way of communicating.
4. Diversity. The range of human variation, including race, gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, political preference, economic status, and language (AACN, 2008b).
5. Higher education. Education that takes place in a controlled setting beyond high school, more specifically in a college or university setting.
6. Online learning environment. An online learning environment is not bound to location and can be accessed from anywhere that has access to a computer and the Internet. Students engage in discourse and answer questions on assigned topics.
7. Completely online delivery. Educational engagement is solely online without any face-to-face interaction between faculty and students. Eighty percent or more of the course content is delivered online.

8. Hybrid delivery. Educational engagement is accomplished through partly online and partly face-to-face interaction between faculty and students. Thirty percent to 70% of course content is delivered online.
9. Virtual learning environment. Synonymous to the online learning environment.
10. Asynchronous. Not related to time. In the online learning environment, a student can engage in course work without classmates or instructor presence.
11. Synchronous. Related to real time. In the online learning environment, others must be engaged at the same time to provide real-time feedback.
12. RN-BSN program. Degree completion program. Designed for registered nurses who have a diploma or associates degree to complete course work and obtain a bachelor of science in nursing degree.
13. Self-directed learner. The individual takes the initiative and responsibility in his/her learning process.
14. Culture. The way of life for a group of people. Includes language, dress, food, living arrangements, social interaction, and so forth.
15. Lived experience. Being aware of an experience while experiencing it, a reflective process. It is the starting and ending point of phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1990).

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter one provides an overview of the barriers and cultural differences that ESL students face as they integrate into the higher education classroom. These challenges include language, reading, writing, and social isolation (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Crawford & Candlin, 2013a) often leading to attrition from academic programs. In particular, ESL

nursing students struggle with understanding medical terminology along with verbal communication within the health care system.

Online education has advanced significantly over the last several years, allowing students who speak ESL an opportunity to engage in coursework from a different perspective. RN-BSN degree completion programs have grown as well (AACN, 2014a) with the majority of schools offering courses online; however, there are no data exploring the ESL nursing students' choice to pursue their education online. The aim of this dissertation study is to use the findings to develop recommendations for online course design, educate online nursing faculty, and promote student success. The information gathered from this research will add to the body of knowledge within nursing education specific to the needs of ESL nursing students. As diversity in health care continues to be a topic of discussion, this focused dissertation research will provide educators with new understanding that leads to equitable academic and practice environments for all students (Mulready-Shick, 2013).

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

Performance of a literature review is an important aspect of the research process. The goal of the literature review is to provide the reader with current up-to-date information on a phenomenon of interest and offers justification for future research (Cronin, Ryan, & Coughlan, 2008). The researcher seeks experiential descriptions of the phenomena or the meaning ascribed from a different perspective; it is part of the existential investigation to provide a deeper understanding (Munhall, 2012). This literature review seeks to delve into current research related to academic integration as well as further explore the language, cultural, and online experiences of the ESL student particularly those enrolled in nursing programs in higher education.

The databases Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL), PubMed, ProQuest, Medline, ERIC, Google Scholar, and other historical text were used as resources to develop this literature review. Interdisciplinary areas of study, including education, business, and engineering, were probed for parallels and experiences encountered by ESL students engaged in academic integration. Key terms used to develop this review included both in combination and singularly were English as a second language, ESL, higher education, language acquisition, acculturation, acculturative stress, English language acculturation, integration, integration stress, diverse learning styles, Western pedagogy, Eastern pedagogy, collaborative learning,

constructivism, faculty support, online learning, online communication, Cummins model, and Hofstede's theory.

### **Language and Culture**

Culture plays a key role in everyday interaction of students in higher education. Those students who speak ESL make a choice to integrate into their institution through language and social experiences. To prevent attrition and promote retention, Fergy, Marks-Maran, Ooms, Shapcott, and Burke (2011) suggested that social and academic integration become a key imperative in the university setting. The process of integration can occur for people at different rates and with different outcome goals (Berry, 2005). For the ESL nursing student, the challenge of integration both from a language and social perspective can be very stressful (Crawford & Candlin, 2013a, 2013b; Jeong et al., 2011; Malecha, Tart, & Junious, 2012; San Miguel et al., 2013; Starr, 2009; Suliman & Tadros, 2011). Language is possibly one of the most important dimensions of integration, especially when exploring its relationship to the academic performance of students in higher education (Salamonson et al., 2008). ESL students enter the classroom with knowledge and experience built in their first language and culture, which often is subtle but can influence learning (Alhasiany, 2014; Donnell, 2015; Jeong et al., 2011; San Miguel et al., 2013). Understanding and adjusting to Western culture can be difficult for students and is a common theme in research studies focused on the ESL student experience.

In a review of the literature focused on ESL nursing students, Olson (2012) shared insight into the cultural barriers and bridges to success. The barriers included the differences in the way American students communicated with faculty with little regard

for the authoritative role, issues of racism, and the differences in providing therapeutic communication to patients. Bridges to success included the cultural awareness of faculty, support for students, and the encouragement of integration (Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Olson, 2012; Ooms, Fergy, Marks-Maran, Burke, & Sheehy, 2013; Salamonson, 2010; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) reported that a qualitative exploration of the adjustment experiences of Saudi Arabian women studying in the US was performed and indicated the main cultural differences experienced were the treatment of women, attitudes toward religion and morality, social mores. Rafieyan et al. (2013) conducted a study of Iranian undergraduate students who sojourned to the US for one academic semester and found that these students tended to have close contact with the host culture while maintaining their original culture. These students adopted the acculturation strategy of integration to cope with the cultural barriers they experienced.

### **Cultural Stress**

Some individuals experience acculturation with limited stressors while others may view the process as a challenging and stressful event (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008). The process of acculturation involves changing attitudes toward host and home cultures. As individuals encounter contradicting expectations and values in their everyday lives, they may experience different levels of stress (Lee & Padilla, 2014). Integration is the least stressful of the four acculturation strategies (Berry, 2005; Lee & Padilla, 2014; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). Acculturative stress is a complex construct that is not contingent on one predisposing factor (Cano, Castillo, Castro, de Dios, & Roncancio, 2014). In the US, this unique form of stress mainly

operates among non-native English speakers; however, it can also relate to individuals who are proficient in the language but struggle with cultural barriers (Wang et al., 2010). For many newly arrived immigrants and long-term visitors to the US, acculturation requires major psychological and behavioral adjustments (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Cano et al., 2014; Chavez, 2014; Du & Wei, 2015; Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013; F. He, Lopez, & Leigh, 2012; Lee & Padilla, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Mackay, Harding, Jurlina, Scobie, & Khan, 2012; Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011; Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero, & Anderson, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tung, 2011; Yakunina et al., 2013). Acculturative stress is a reaction in response to events of life, rooted in and induced by the acculturation process (Berry, 2005; F. He et al., 2012; Tung, 2011).

In a descriptive, quantitative study, F. He et al. (2012) determined that stress was significantly different, depending on a student's year in his/her academic program when investigating cultural stress and the sense of coherence (willingness to use adaptive coping resources) of Chinese nursing students who were studying in Australia. First year students did not have the same concerns or worries as second and third year students. Sense of coherence was negatively correlated with the students' level of stress (F. He et al., 2012). In a qualitative literature review regarding the challenges faced in nursing education for students who identify as ESL, Starr (2009) found that in academics, culture transitions cause stress, less than acceptable grades, and emotional turmoil and that these issues led to low self-image and shame, resulting in difficulty engaging with coursework.

Limited English proficiency is a factor related to acculturative stress and can have a significant effect on students' cultural adjustment process and academic performance

(Chavez, 2014; Du & Wei, 2015; F. He et al., 2012; Lee & Padilla, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Rice et al., 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tung, 2011). In a qualitative study of Chinese international student's academic stressors, Yan and Berliner (2009) found that students felt their academic capabilities were crippled by their inability to communicate effectively. The participants demonstrated high levels of academic stress secondary to cultural and education disparities, language deficiencies, ineffective interaction with faculty, and a high motivation to be successful. Reynolds and Constantine (2007) conducted a study about international college students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to confirm that higher levels of acculturative stress predicted lower career aspirations and expectations.

Using a qualitative framework, Wang et al. (2008) engaged in semi-structured interviews of 21 Taiwanese nursing students studying in Australia; they found that isolation was an issue for some participants. The authors reported that the Taiwanese students reported maladjustment and feeling like a stranger. Students shared that different attitudes to health, approaches to nursing, and differences in the role of the nurse were all difficult to grasp. In a qualitative study of eight female Nigerian nursing students enrolled in a baccalaureate program, Sanner, Wilson, and Samson (2002) found that social isolation was a major theme. Students resorted to verbally retreating/silencing due to feelings of non-acceptance from their non-ESL peers. Similarly, Boafo-Arthur (2013) identified multiple studies in which Black-Africans enrolled in higher education reported issues of prejudice and discrimination leading to experiences of stress. These students like others in similar studies reported feelings of alienation, anxiety, rejection, and confusion (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Chavez, 2014; Crawford & Candlin, 2013a; Du & Wei,

2015; F. He et al., 2012; Lee & Padilla, 2014; Malecha et al., 2012; San Miguel et al., 2013; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Talley & Hui-ling, 2014; Tas, 2013; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

Mexican and Mexican American college students who perceived a lack of fit between their cultural values and the values of the Eurocentric academic environment reported more stress with that association serving as a pathway for higher symptoms of depression. (Cano et al., 2014). In a mixed methods study of (86) Korean and Korean American university students, Lee and Padilla (2014) reported that Korean students displayed higher levels of stress than Korean American students. Further inquiry indicated that international Korean students experienced discrimination not only from non-Koreans but also from Korean Americans whom they felt ought to be more supportive. The authors recommend that length of stay in the US is an important consideration for understanding how racial and ethnic minorities cope with cultural difficulties in academia. Zheng et al. (2014) indicated that there are no studies to date that explore the academic performance of ESL students based on their status as international versus domestic.

In a quantitative study of 336 international students, Yakunina et al. (2013) explored the assumption that international students are encouraged to cope with acculturative stress by relying on personal and multicultural strengths. The authors tested personal growth initiative, hardiness, and universal-diverse orientation as predictors of stress and adjustment. It was determined that greater levels of personal and multicultural strengths predicted less cultural problems, thus leading to better adjustment (Yakunina et al., 2013).

### **Academic Integration and Self**

In a quantitative study of Cuban American college students, Wang et al. (2010) found that American cultural orientation, Hispanic cultural orientation, and ethnic identity are all associated either directly or indirectly with self-esteem. The researchers reported that individuals who were highly oriented toward Hispanic culture described increased levels of self-esteem. The authors contended that high levels of cultural connectedness to the receiving society were beneficial to one's feelings of self-worth (Organista et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2010).

In an exploration of the difficulties of college integration for first generation, nontraditional Hispanic women whose first language was Spanish, Chavez (2014) found through interview that resilience and self-initiative was fundamental to each participant's success. Participants shared a strong commitment to their educational goals. The researchers reported that family relationships and social networks with other Hispanic college women helped participants create an important sense of belonging (Chavez, 2014). Rice et al. (2012) tested whether the interaction between self-critical perfectionism and stress accounted for different directions of effects and variability in depression among a group of Chinese and Asian Indian students attending university in the US. For Asian Indian students, the interaction of the two variables was significant, indicating worse depression for those who were most self-critical and stressed.

### **Eastern and Western Pedagogy**

Students from differing cultural backgrounds who are enrolled in a Western pedagogical learning system are expected to integrate and adjust to the multiple nuances related to cultural interaction (Al-Harthi, 2005; Foster & Stapleton, 2012; Mackay et al.,

2012; Tsai-Hung Chen, Bennett, & Maton, 2008). Eastern pedagogy is rooted in Confucianism that values focus on learning, respect for the instructor, and strong work ethic while Western Socratic pedagogy promotes explicit questioning, personal expression of hypotheses, and desire for self-directed task (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Foster & Stapleton, 2012; Mackay et al., 2012; Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

In a study of Saudi Arabian nurses studying in an Australian (Western pedagogy) university, Clerehan, McCall, McKenna, and Alshahrani (2011) found that one of the common issues encountered by participants was the adjustment to different types of learning. Students expressed that their foundation being a didactic teacher-led learning environment and the stark difference in the Western classroom confounded their learning expectations (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Clerehan et al., 2011; Crawford & Candlin, 2013a, 2013b; Deng, 2014; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Mackay et al., 2012; Malecha et al., 2012; Rice et al., 2012; San Miguel et al., 2013; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Talley & Hui-Ling, 2014). Examining the attitudes and opinions of Chinese students enrolled in Western (Socratic-influenced) business courses toward specific pedagogical tools, Foster and Stapleton (2012) found that Chinese (Confucian-influenced) students have a desire to prepare for class and are not averse to participation and desire assistance both academically and socially. Western cultures generally value individualism while Eastern cultures are typically collectivist in nature (Boafo-Arthur, 2013; Kim-Jo, Benet-Martinez, & Ozer, 2010; Scheele et al., 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Speece, 2012).

### **English-Language Integration**

In a qualitative study of first year ESL nursing students, Weaver and Jackson (2011) identified two major areas related to academic writing: issues understanding

course information in English and problems expressing that content in English. Participants described challenges understanding the words used in assignments, especially nursing language (Clerehan et al., 2011; Crawford & Candlin, 2013a, 2013b; Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013; Jeong et al., 2011; Johnston, Massa, & Burne, 2013; Koch et al., 2011; Lum, Dowdoff, Bradley, Kerekes, & Valeo, 2015; Rogan & San Miguel, 2013; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). Language being a barrier to achievement was one of four themes that emerged from a qualitative study of ESL nursing students studying in Australia (Koch et al., 2011). Study participants also noted that having the ability to focus on pronunciation through spoken word exercises increased their capacity for interaction (Alhasiany, 2014; Koch et al., 2011; Rogan & San Miguel, 2013).

Second- and third-year nursing students reported that ongoing exposure to the English language would be most effective in helping develop listening and speaking skills (Crawford & Candlin, 2013b). Participants reported challenges with listening comprehension during conversation with patients and colleagues along with feeling aware of their own accent and grammar (Crawford & Candlin, 2013b). In a critical exploration of how ESL learners experienced nursing education, Mulready-Shick (2013) reported that students dedicated additional time and effort to learning English as well as specific terminology related to health care. Participants shared times of discouragement when pedagogical practices and acts of power and dominance from faculty thwarted their learning progress. Learners expressed a sense of wholeness and determination to succeed no matter the cost. Study participants reported feelings of frustration, panic, rejection, and embarrassment secondary to their inability to understand the language in the lecture and

clinical settings (Jeong et al., 2011). Although these ESL students reported negative feelings, they were able to remain resilient and take responsibility for their success.

### **Faculty Support**

Nursing students who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are more inclined to be engaged and participate in coursework when they feel welcomed and safe in the learning environment (Fuller, 2013). Mutual respect between students and educators with cultural differences enhances learning (Fuller, 2013; Scheele et al., 2011). One of the hindrances faculty members have in cultivating a nurturing and culturally inclusive environment for ESL students may be secondary to their own personal deficits in knowing how to engage with this population of students (Bosher & Bowles, 2008; Brown, 2008; Crawford & Candlin, 2013a; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Koch et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2010; Olson, 2012; Salamonson et al., 2008; Scheele et al., 2011; Speece, 2012; Starr, 2009; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Tan, 2009; Tan et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2008).

### **Faculty Cultural Competence**

Nursing faculty need to become more culturally competent and foster a learning environment that is sensitive to diversity and inclusion (Du & Wei, 2015; Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Jeong et al., 2011; Malecha et al., 2012; Mareno & Hart, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Scheele et al., 2011). Campbell (2008) shared that faculty should not only be cognizant of various learning styles of students but be empathetic to some students' reluctance to question authority due to cultural norms. In a qualitative inquiry into the learning experience of Asian nursing students studying in

Australia, Wang et al. (2008) found faculty lacked cultural sensitivity and have an inability to engage with ESL nursing students.

Brown (2008) shared that approaches to learning, to health care, and to the relationship between a student and instructor varies amongst cultures. As ESL nursing students navigate the demanding and often time stressful curriculum, support from culturally competent faculty is essential for success and a positive outcome (Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Suliman & Tadros, 2011). Students feel their cultural needs are underappreciated and the lack of faculty support were barriers to their success (Olson, 2012; Starr, 2009). Students often do not find the encouragement and support they need and expect (Choi, 2005; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Sanner & Wilson, 2008; Sanner et al., 2002; Suliman & Tadros, 2011). In the aforementioned study, Wang et al. (2008) found that the need for personal counseling and academic support was regarded as highly important to ESL nursing students.

When multiple factors, including cultural biases, assumptions, knowledge of barriers, and challenges, were measured by self-report of faculty following a development program, Greenberg (2013) found that faculty members who participated improved their cultural competence in mentoring ESL nursing students. The faculty members were expected to complete modules based on self-identified needs. The four modules discussed were (a) the cultural, language, and academic barriers of ESL nursing students; (b) the strategies to increase cultural competence of faculty; (c) the implementation of strategies to help ESL nursing students overcome language barriers; and (d) the strategies to help students achieve academic success (Greenberg, 2013).

## **Instructional Strategies**

In a literature review related to issues surrounding education of ESL nursing students, Choi (2005) provided insight into how nursing faculty members should develop instructional strategies and engage with their students. Choi (2005) also reported that nursing faculty members should be aware of their language usage and provide abundant visual, tactile, and culturally neutral context when teaching their courses, greatly facilitating comprehension among ESL nursing students of the plethora of cognitively challenging concepts in the discipline. The development of innovative teaching strategies that support the cultural needs of ESL students and embraces their unique diversity is the beginning step towards faculty cultural awareness (Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Koch et al., 2011; Suliman & Tadros, 2011). The implementation of active engagement with ESL nursing students through specific support systems like mentoring will help foster positive outcomes (Wang et al., 2008). Koch et al. (2011) concluded from their study using Web-based learning activities for nursing students who speak ESL that culturally competent and theoretically informed instructional strategies are appreciated and valued by this population of students. Formal and informal contact, encouragement, and support from faculty also influenced second language Hispanic college students toward academic success (Chavez, 2014).

In a study to identify language needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students and evaluate an English language support program, Crawford and Candlin (2013b) reported themes that focused on the need for faculty support in the area of instructional strategies. Students suggested lectures speaking more slowly, paraphrasing dialogue from other students, providing lecture notes prior to class, reducing

colloquialism and idioms, and engaging on a personal level. These suggestions mirror the literature regarding the need for a focus on the broader learning environment and the radical rethinking of how students from diverse populations are educated (Fuller, 2013; Ooms et al., 2013).

### **Faculty Bias**

In a qualitative study of ESL nursing students' experiences in a baccalaureate program, Sanner and Wilson (2008) found that language was not the primary reason for program difficulty and failure but rather the discrimination and stereotyping they experienced. Students reported feeling the need to prove themselves in the classroom and personal relationships. There was a great divide between the participants' learning style of rote memorization to the faculty teaching style of self-directedness. Self-concept was negatively affected as participants tried to live up to faculty expectations and conform to their American peers (Sanner & Wilson, 2008).

The strong common attitudes within nursing and the subculture of nursing education make it difficult for nursing educators to work effectively with cohorts of diverse students (Bednarz, Schim, & Doorenbos, 2010). One particular attitude stance is to treat everyone the same regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, which is a poor approach that creates significant obstacles to recognizing the realities among today's diverse nursing students and places barriers to student success (Bednarz et al., 2010). Malecha et al. (2012) reported four common themes interdependent among foreign-born students attending nursing school in the US: (a) language and communication issues; (b) peer and faculty discrimination; (c) prejudice; (d) lack of support, cultural issues, loneliness, isolation, and alienation. In a focus group to discuss

foreign-born nursing students stress and perceived faculty support, students reported faculty were incompetent in terms of understanding their values and traditions although cultural awareness was addressed in the curriculum, the actions of nursing faculty were not sensitive to students' cultural needs (Junious, Malecha, Tart, & Young, 2010).

### **Online Classroom**

ESL students report their online experiences are similar to traditional face-to-face classrooms (Liu et al., 2010; Speece, 2012; Tan, 2009; Tan et al., 2010). In a study of ESL students in an online MBA program, Liu et al. (2010) found that participants had a difficult time with reading material presented in English and desired the professor to provide visual and audio supplements for the lecture. Most institutions do not have a requirement regarding who can take a course online nor do students have a choice if a course is built around online technology, so many students with multiple learning styles find themselves in the same environment (Bates & Khasawneh, 2007). There is very little research focused on the experiences of online students and, more specifically, those experiences of the ESL student.

### **Personal Learning Preferences and Attitudes**

In a study of online learning styles, Speece (2012) shared that students' approach to online education can be affected by their personal learning preference and attitude. In a qualitative inquiry seeking to understand the lived experience of international graduate students in the online learning environment, Tan et al. (2010) interviewed a variety of participants who spoke ESL. The students reported that culture and language were barriers in their online learning situations (Capra, 2014; Liu et al., 2010; Speece, 2012; Tapanes et al., 2009). Students found that vocabulary was difficult to understand

especially when acronyms and slang were used to express thoughts (Fuller, 2013; Myles, 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Overall, the students felt that cultural knowledge and understanding could not be properly promoted in the online environment (Tan et al., 2010).

Tan (2009) shared a personal reflection based on his first online experience as an ESL student. The author shared that his unfamiliarity with acronyms, initials, and abbreviations caused confusion, stress, disorientation, and embarrassment. He stated he felt more comfortable in the face-to-face classroom because of the immediacy of interaction, which the asynchrony of online learning removed. The ability to formulate friendships was stifled in the online environment; however, with time and critical reflection, he was able to integrate.

Keller and Karau (2013) in an online survey examined the relationship between personality dimensions and specific online course impressions (engagement, value to career, overall evaluation, anxiety/frustration, and preference for online courses). Of the overall participants, 24.6% were nursing/health care students. The authors reported that conscientiousness was a consistent predictor of an individual's impression of online courses. Participants' work experience was positively associated with engagement.

### **Online Participation**

In a phenomenological research study of Arab Gulf students enrolled in distance education in the US, some participants reported a reduced sense of social embarrassment due to the decreased need for social presence in online courses (Al-Harthi, 2005). Due to low English language proficiency, students struggle with the rigorous amounts of reading and writing required for online learning (Al-Harthi, 2005; Boling, Hough, Krinsky,

Saleem, & Stevens, 2012; Capra, 2014; Kang & Im, 2013; Tsai-Hung Chen et al., 2008; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Lack of physical gestures and body language can prove difficult for students (Speece, 2012; Tapanes et al., 2009). Boling et al. (2012) and Mancuso-Murphy (2007) found that interaction online was essential for positive group dynamics and allowed students to feel connected to both faculty and peers.

Students have different reasons why they choose to enroll and participate in an online class (Artino, 2010; Chen & Jang, 2010). In another study, participants indicated that they worked harder in an online course than in a traditional course (O'Neil & Fisher, 2008). The positive perspective that students share is the ability to see their American peers' communication in writing and have time to reflect and understand before submitting a response (Al-Harthi, 2005; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

### **Online Cultural Norms**

In an effort to understand the acculturation process of online students who are non-native English speakers, Chou and Chen (2009) interviewed Chinese graduate students and obtained insight into the students' learning styles. The researchers found that the students had a strong reliance and respect for the teacher, and when compared with Western students, the participants saw their interactions as non-critical and euphemistic. The students also reported that they were not prepared for the self-directed nature of online learning. Student-led learning activities, such as online discussions and/or readings, are common in the online learning structure of the US (Boling et al., 2012; Chen & Jang, 2010; Kang & Im, 2013; Keller & Karau, 2013; Krish, Hussin, & Sivapuniam, 2010; Tapanes et al., 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

Tapanes et al. (2009) surveyed online instructors and students and found that students' cultural dimensions related significantly to some of their perceptions of culture in the online classroom, specifically as it related to individualist and collectivist societies. Collectivists felt their instructors who identify with individualist societies were not usually aware of cultural differences in the online classroom and that their culture was not being considered to make learning relevant. Tapanes et al. (2009) found that cultural differences have an effect for how students perceive the online classroom.

Power distance index is a common cultural dimension found in the learning environment when the instructor is seen as one holding a position that is superior or inferior to the learner's position (Hofstede, 1986; Wang, 2007). Wang (2007) studied multicultural multidisciplinary online students in which power distance was measured determined that the American students had a lower power index score while those students from Asian countries had a higher power index score. Liu et al. (2010) studied Asian students in an online course, and they indicated that a heavy reliance on instructors and textbooks are signs of higher power distance.

Chinese students studying in the US who engaged in their first online learning experience shared preference for seeing pictures of their instructors and classmates, indicating their desire for building an online community (Ku & Lohr, 2003). This preference is consistent with Hofstede's (1986) collectivist cultural dimension. One participant reported equality in the online classroom because he/she did not feel the need to defer to his/her American peers due to lack of confidence in English language communication as he/she did in the traditional classroom setting (Ku & Lohr, 2003). Students reported feelings of isolation and a desire to have face-to-face interactions with

their American peers to practice and improve their English and learn about American culture (Boling et al., 2012; Capra, 2014; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

Zhang and Kenny (2010) explored the learning experiences of three international students who were enrolled in an online master's program, and they indicated that previous education, especially language proficiency, strongly influenced the learning of students. ESL students required significant more time to process readings and postings and to formulate their own discussion posts. The admitted lack of familiarity with North American culture and colloquial language made for a difficult time following course discussions. Students were inclined to avoid socialization and interaction in the course, which left them at the sidelines during course activities (Zhang & Kenny, 2010)

### **Online Integration and Self**

In a study of perceived self-efficacy and its effects on online learning acceptance and student satisfaction in two culturally different groups of students, Lee (2011) found that perceived self-efficacy was a significant predictor of positive behavioral intention toward online learning acceptance and satisfaction for Korean but not U.S. students. Additionally, the researcher found that perceived ease of use was a significant predictor of positive behavioral intentions toward online learning acceptance and satisfaction for U.S. students but not Korean students. Individualistic cultures generally have students with high self-efficacy while cultures that are more collective in nature have a wider range of self-efficacy (Lee, 2011). Online learning self-efficacy positively influences online learning acceptance. Previous success with online learning and adequate supportive feedback from faculty may be a critical factor in the fostering of self-efficacy and attitudes about online education (Artino, 2010; Bates & Khasawneh, 2007). In a

study to test self-determination theory in an online learning environment Chen and Jang (2010) found that the mediating effects of the students' need satisfaction positively affected online students' self-determination. The researchers further implied that effective support strategies are those that address online learners' needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competency. These implications are important for explorations into the lived experience of the ESL nursing student in the online learning environment.

### **Faculty Support Online**

In contrast to traditional face-to-face instructions, faculty members who teach and facilitate courses online are limited in how they are able to support student learning. A steady presence within the course, prompt email responses, and timely grading do not necessarily produce high-quality learning experiences (Boling et al., 2012; Capra, 2014; Mancuso-Murphy, 2007). Faculty who engage in online teaching must be experienced in leading a conversation and directing a group in order to promote active communication and reduce feelings of isolation ultimately leading to success in distance education (Bedford, 2014; Elliot, Rhoades, Jackson, & Mandernach, 2015; Mancuso-Murphy, 2007). Students in the online learning environment benefit from faculty implementation of strategies that foster emotional support and the building of community among their peers (Bedford, 2014; Boling et al., 2012; Bonnel, 2008; Speece, 2012; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Faculty members should take into account the needs of the culturally diverse students in their online classrooms. Recognizing that the ability to understand written communication, discerning plagiarism, and discomfort with lack of immediacy in interaction can all be cultural barriers to success (Liu et al., 2010).

Faculty members should be continuously aware of the design of their online courses in an effort to eliminate or at least alleviate identified and perceived challenges and consequent stresses of online learning (Al-Harthi, 2005; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Speece, 2012; Tan et al., 2010; Tapanes et al., 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). The consistent implementation of audio and visual technologies, development of very detailed syllabi, and guidance for all students in the use of proper English with the avoidance of slang are steps faculty can take to assist ESL student to integrate into the online community and build trust (Tan et al., 2010). In a study assessing social presence in online nursing courses and its relationship to student satisfaction and perceived learning, Cobb (2011) found that the means of communication within the online classroom was less important than the relationships, comfort, and community fostered within the environment.

### **Chapter Summary**

Cultural integration in the academic setting is a unique experience that requires students to overcome multiple pedagogical barriers along with balancing the ability to cope with stressors that impact their success. Although there is educational research available regarding the culturally diverse student experience from various disciplines, there is a lack of research specific to the RN-BSN ESL nursing student and, more specifically, those who study online. RN-BSN online nursing programs are growing in enrollment each year (AACN, 2014d), and there is a need for reputable research related to how ESL students integrate into these learning communities.

The observation that cultural barriers, such as language, writing communication, peer interaction, and faculty support, does exist for ESL nursing students who seek to integrate into the online learning environment, which is supported by the literature

presented. It is not known if these same barriers and experiences exist for the more advanced RN-BSN nursing student who has clinical and life skills in his/her favor. Researching the lived experience of this population of nursing students is essential for future success of RN-BSN programs and positive ESL student outcomes.

It is evident from the literature that nursing faculty could benefit from the personal insight of online RN-BSN ESL nursing student's shared experiences. Some faculty lack of cultural competence, and knowledge of adaptive instructional strategy acts as a barrier to student success as indicated by the research that is available. This dissertation study will add to the body of knowledge within nursing education research that will inform nursing educators and higher education administrators about the personal lived experiences of online RN-BSN ESL nursing students, which in turn provides awareness of the needs of these students and encourage change among faculty both in student engagement and online instructional design.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods**

The process of exploring a phenomenon of interest begins with the statement of a problem, explanation of the purpose, and the development of a research question. After these steps are completed the researcher determines the most effective way to obtain data and present it to the consumer. Quantitative methodology seeks to use numerical data to show relationship between variables (Hedges & Williams, 2014) while qualitative methodology uses the narrative experience to elucidate individual meaning and understanding (Hedges & Williams, 2014; Munhall, 2012). A qualitative approach using the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy was used to gain insight into the lived experience of RN-BSN ESL nursing students enrolled in a completely online or hybrid program. The meaning that an RN-BSN ESL nursing student ascribes to his/her online educational experience can have an effect on his/her overall success in higher education and professional nursing career. Providing each students' subjective experience with a platform and a voice will inform those in nursing education leadership and may ultimately help in the development of improvements in online instructional strategy and design.

### **Phenomenology**

The explication of an individual's lifeworld is the foundation of phenomenological research. The desire to understand the lived structures of meanings and how one experiences the world around him/her is the goal of the phenomenology

researcher (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological inquiry is a qualitative form of research that seeks to explore phenomena that are perceived or experienced (Flood, 2010; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). The researcher sets out to explore the essence of a phenomenon and how an individual interprets that experience. The goal is to discover more of the lived quality and less of the factual status of instances (Flood, 2010; van Manen, 1990). The goal is to elucidate meaning and the implications of that meaning (Munhall, 2012).

Phenomenology is a human science that is explicit and inter-subjective (van Manen, 1990); it provides a research tradition for the study of topics that are fundamental to the life experience of human beings (Polit & Beck, 2014). There are two main phenomenological approaches that examine subjective human experience. These approaches are descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. The primary difference between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology is how findings are described and how findings are interpreted respectively. Van Manen (1990) posited that “thoughtfulness” is a word that aptly characterizes phenomenology. In this dissertation study, the act of listening to RN-BSN ESL nursing students and providing an opportunity for them to put their feelings into words connects them with their experience in a profound and meaningful way.

### **Descriptive Phenomenology**

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher, was the first to introduce descriptive phenomenology. He believed that the subjective and perspective should be important to researchers seeking to describe the motivations of humans because human actions are influenced by what they perceive to be real (Flood, 2010; Lopez & Willis,

2004). In Husserlian phenomenology, the phenomenon is believed to be a truth that exists as an essence and can be described by an individual (Converse, 2012).

Descriptive or transcendental phenomenology emphasizes depicting the human experience while insisting on the careful portrayal of everyday life as people experience them (Polit & Beck, 2014). Transcendental subjectivity is the goal of the phenomenological researcher seeking to constantly assess disclosed biases as to not have an influence on the study (Lopez & Willis, 2004). A notable process in the completion of descriptive phenomenological research that aids in the presenting of an individual's objective description is the use of bracketing, epoche, or phenomenological reduction (Converse, 2012; Munhall, 2012; Polit & Beck, 2014; Tuohy et al., 2013; Vagle, 2014; Van Manen, 1990). Bracketing is the act of suspending one's collection of beliefs and biases in order to study the essential structures of the world (Van Manen, 1990). The use of bracketing in phenomenological research allows for the discovery of the essence of the phenomenon that exists independent of the researcher's preconceived assumptions, attitudes, prejudices and other influencing factors (Converse, 2012; Tuohy et al., 2013).

Philosophers, such as Merleau-Ponty, Sarte, Giorgi, Gadamer, and Heidegger to name a few, were students of Husserl who contributed to the tradition of phenomenology and later provided their own unique perspective in the crafting of phenomenological research (Dowling, 2007). Giorgi, for example, suggested a modified philosophical method to that of Husserl's original idea; emphasizing the importance of obtaining the descriptions of others through interviews and writings about experience, assuming the attitude of the phenomenological reduction and searching for an invariant psychological meaning (Vagle, 2014). The researcher who chooses to pursue descriptive

phenomenology must do so, knowing that choice will achieve most effectively the proposed inquiry and add substance to what is already known about a phenomenon of interest (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

### **Interpretive Phenomenology**

Interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology was first introduced by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger was a student of Husserl who over time began to disagree with some of his phenomenological traditions. His critical concern was interpreting and understanding not just describing the general characteristics of an individual's experience (Polit & Beck, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Tuohy et al., 2013). From this perspective, interpretive phenomenology became more about manifestation and dialogue with meanings and less about essence (Vagle, 2014). Heidegger's philosophy was to explore the lived experience or "dasein" (the situated being of an individual in the world) and discover the wisdom and understanding found there (Flood, 2010; Polit & Beck, 2014; van Manen, 1990).

Interpretivism was developed as a critique to the controlling and predictive traditions of positivist natural science research (Mack, 2010; McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2011). Realities are manifold and are both socially and individually constructed while what is known and the knower are intricately linked (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Interpretive methodology seeks to bring forth understanding through discourse that leads to the emergence of themes. Interviews and observations are common ways of obtaining insight from the knower. Through a dialectical process, a more informed and refined understanding of the social world can be created (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

In a brief overview of Heideggerian phenomenology, McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) shared that within this approach there is no intent to generalize, theorize, or predict outcomes but rather to respect the concept of self-knowing and personal truths, specifically how an individual sees and experiences it. The intent within interpretive research tradition “is not to develop a procedure for understanding, but to clarify the conditions that can lead to understanding” (Holroyd, 2007, p. 1). The human experience is unique in that each individual has a personal story even when found in an identical situation. The ontological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm are that social reality is seen by multiple people and interpreted by these people differently producing multiple perspectives of one incident (Houghton, Hunter, & Meskell, 2012; Mack, 2010).

Interpretive phenomenology differs from descriptive phenomenology in that a hermeneutic approach appreciates the presupposition that the researcher brings to the study. Heidegger was of the belief that the observer could not separate himself or herself from the interpretation process; they existed with the phenomena (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Lopez and Willis (2004) explained that presuppositions on the part of the researcher are valuable guides to inquiry and add meaning to the undertaking of the study. The idea of having a “presuppositionless” stance is unrealistic in interpretive phenomenology (Holroyd, 2007); the researcher’s preconceived knowledge led him or her to the need for the research in a particular area (Flood, 2010; Lopez & Willis, 2004). McConnell-Henry et al. (2011) suggested that in order to ensure congruency with the hermeneutic philosophy of a study, it is important that all members are open about their personal experiences and presuppositions before and throughout the interpretive process.

## **Research Design**

Interpretive phenomenology was chosen as the methodology of choice to gain an understanding of the lived experience of the RN-BSN ESL online nursing student. This qualitative inquiry is emergent with a cross-sectional design collecting data at one point in time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2014). The investigation of the lifeworld of this unique student population and observation of theme emergence is critical to telling his/her story and understanding their experience.

Although complex, phenomenology provides the nurse researcher with in-depth insight into both nursing education and practice concerns (Converse, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). As an approach, phenomenology is being used widely in nursing; more specifically, the hermeneutic method is becoming increasingly popular (Tuohy et al., 2013). The study of the lived experience gives meaning to each person's perception of specific phenomena (Polit & Beck, 2014). Lived experience is the breathing of meaning and the starting and end point of phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). A story or personal narrative relays the lived experience of the teller, which allows the narrator and the interpreter to identify meanings from the experience shared (Chan, 2008). Van Manen and Gadamer are well known for providing guidance in how to practically approach interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological research methods.

### **Gadamer**

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2000) drew foundational influence related to hermeneutic phenomenology from the work of Heidegger. He authored the book *Truth and Method* (1989) that expanded on his position that understanding is derived from the personal involvement of the researcher, ultimately developing dialogue (interview)

whereby fusion of horizon is created by the interpreter and the phenomenon (Dowling, 2007; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Gadamer proposed an alternative to the traditional way of understanding in the human sciences, believing understanding is first a mode of being before a mode of knowing (Holroyd, 2007). His philosophy of hermeneutics has inspired an interpretive method, enabling the uncovering of meaning and understanding between the text and the researcher (Converse, 2012; Dowling, 2007). Engaging in the process of the hermeneutic circle is an example of uncovering meaning by which continuous interpretation through understanding is accomplished by a circular process and movement (Converse, 2012; Dowling, 2007; Flood, 2010; Holroyd, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Tuohy et al., 2013).

According to Gadamer (1989), detachment from prejudices that both facilitate and obstruct understanding ironically happen in the process of understanding. The process of understanding is an ever moving effort basic to our being in the world (Holroyd, 2007). Gadamer's ontological position maintained that researchers act on their way of being in the world secondary to traditional deep influences of their culture (Converse, 2012; Sherratt, 2006). Gadamer opposed bracketing because he felt the researcher is continuously interpreting through his/her personal experience (Converse, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014)

Gadamer helped others to see the limits of methods and ushered language to the fore (Vagle, 2014). Phenomenology is the application of language and thoughtfulness (logos) to a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). It is in language that our lifeworld is disclosed to us (Holroyd, 2007). Language imbues and informs experience. It generates and constrains the human lifeworld (Munhall, 2012). The use of language, cultural, and

social practices along with the interpretation of meaning are important assumptions that are central to hermeneutic phenomenology (Munhall, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Language reveals being with historical and cultural context and is not independent of the world. Language is only real because the world is represented in it (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Meaning is found in the experience when the researcher properly articulates it by the use of language.

### **Van Manen**

This dissertation study implemented the Max van Manen methodology that uses a holistic, selective, and detailed approach with the data that allows for essential themes to be discovered (Polit & Beck, 2014). Max Van Manen viewed phenomenology as a philosophy of being as well as a practice within the human sciences (Munhall, 2012). Influenced both by the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl and the interpretive hermeneutic assumptions of Heidegger, his work acts as a guide throughout the interpretive phenomenological research process (Dowling, 2007). Van Manen's approach to qualitative research methodology is rooted in the everyday lived experience of human beings in educational situations (van Manen, 1990). From his perspective, any methodic starting point can give a view of experiential understanding by inquiring about lived experience through reflective writing (Munhall, 2012).

Van Manen (1990) believed that scholarship made up the hermeneutic phenomenological human science research method and not a systematic set of procedures one must follow to reach a prescribed end. He established six methodological themes as a suggestion of how to practically approach human science research (van Manen, 1990).

The six research activities listed below were incorporated into the research process of this dissertation study:

1. Turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Phenomenological research is the project of a person who sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence (van Manen, 1990). The process of bracketing was not something embraced by van Manen. He believed that one should make explicit our understandings, biases, and assumptions in order that they do not appear in our reflections (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). This investigator believes that a person cannot truly put aside the factors that have influenced his/her understanding and beliefs. Prior understanding of phenomena provides the impetus for the exploration.

According to van Manen (1990), reflection on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon should be guided by four existential categories: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived other (relationality or communality). He posited that these existentials pervade the lifeworlds of all human beings irrespective of their cultural, social, or historical situatedness (van Manen, 1990). Lived space or felt space refers to how a person feels in a certain location. Lived body relates to embodiment or the physical presence of the body in the world.

Lived time is the subjectivity of time and how a person perceives it in the past, present or future. Lastly, lived other signifies how one communally experiences the world through relationships. These four existentials help to define and shape a person's lived experience (Tuohy et al., 2013).

### **Research Assumptions**

Assumptions are ideas that are accepted as truth but are not validated. The divulgence of assumptions prior to engaging in research allows for the opportunity to encounter new possibilities. Assumptions in this dissertation study were the following:

- RN-BSN ESL nursing students are able to express their experiences openly and tell the truth.
- RN-BSN ESL nursing students will find the descriptions of their experiences as meaningful and significant.
- RN-BSN ESL nursing students will allow themselves to feel vulnerable.
- RN-BSN ESL nursing students will share a balance of positive and negative experiences.
- RN-BSN ESL nursing students will trust the research process.
- Saturation will validate themes that emerge.

This investigator's personal encounter with ESL nursing students who expressed personal experiences within higher education, including engagement in online coursework, prompted the exploration of the cultural, linguistic, and support barriers to integration and ultimately success.

## **Setting**

The settings for this study were three RN-BSN nursing programs located across the Southeastern US. These universities run fully accredited and well-established RN-BSN completely online and hybrid programs. All participants were local to their institutions but remote from the investigator.

## **Sample Plan**

### **Sampling Strategy**

A convenience sampling strategy was used in this dissertation study. Polit and Beck (2014) stated that convenience samples are often used when researchers desire for participants to identify themselves as being familiar with the phenomenon of interest. After institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained from Nova Southeastern University (NSU, see Appendix B), this investigator approached, randomly and via email, the deans and program directors of 29 colleges and universities who lead completely online or hybrid RN-BSN programs. The email shared information about the study and requested the leadership's support of the study and permission to approach the IRB of their institutions. Many emails went unanswered; however, there were deans and program directors from seven colleges and universities who expressed support and offered assistance with informing students once approval was granted from their institutions' IRBs. Three institutions offered their RN-BSN program completely online while the remaining four offered a hybrid component to their degree completion program. Approval and permission to proceed was ultimately granted by the IRB offices of the University of West Georgia, Miami-Dade College, and Broward College (see Appendix B).

Recruitment flyers (see Appendix C) were sent via email to the dean and program managers of the academic institutions along with a one-minute recorded video of the investigator explaining the purpose of the study and the need for volunteer participants. Each agreed to email the flyer and video to the students as well as post it in their learning management systems as an announcement. It is unknown how many total students received the recruitment flyer and video as the institutions did not provide that information.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

**Inclusion criteria.** The inclusion criteria to participate in this study were limited to students who were enrolled in a completely online or hybrid RN-BSN program, spoke English as a second language, and had completed at least one semester of online coursework within the program. The recruitment flyer and video asked students to contact the investigator via email if they believed they fit the criteria. A screening process was completed to ensure prospective participants met the criteria as stated in the flyer. This screening process was an email response to the student, asking if he/she met the three inclusion criteria specifically. If students answered yes to each inclusion criterion question, they were emailed the information for the next steps in the process.

**Exclusion criteria.** Students who did not respond yes to all three of the inclusion questions were excluded from the participating in the study. Additionally, students who were not able to communicate in English were excluded from the study.

### **Sample Size**

Phenomenological inquiries use a small sample size of participants, usually 10 or fewer (Polit & Beck, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013). Being dogmatic to this suggestion

can limit the emergence of new data. However, it is prudent to establish guidelines. The guide for sampling in qualitative inquiry is generally data saturation or the repetition of information and cessation of theme emergence. The nature of qualitative research is one of meaning making so that high frequencies of occurrence is rarely important such that more data does not necessarily lead to more information (Mason, 2010). The scope of the research can be a deciding factor in the number of participants needed to reach saturation (Polit & Beck, 2014).

In this dissertation study, the initial goal of participant interviews was 10 to 12 persons with saturation being the ultimate guide. After each set of two interviews was completed, the investigator analyzed the data to determine preliminary coding and repetition of participant experiences (Clearly, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). With each set, the investigator observed that similar instances were being shared even after inductive probing of participants' unique experiences (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). At the sixth interview, saturation was noted; however, an additional four participants were included to validate the saturation of findings. By the tenth interview it was determined that no new questions were being generated (Chenail, 2009), and the investigator was confident that the data had reached saturation. At the conclusion of the interview process, the study included 10 participants.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

It is imperative that strict ethical guidelines for any research studying human subjects be followed and adhered to throughout the entire process (Munhall, 2012). The investigator informed the dean and program director of four institutions about IRB approval and provided a copy of the IRB permission letter. The remaining three

universities did not require a formal IRB approval process after being informed of the studies exempt status granted by NSU (see Appendix D).

The informed consent document consisted of a standardized template from NSU that included detailed information about the purpose of the study, risk versus benefits of participation, honorarium, confidentiality, and right to withdraw (see Appendix E).

Interviews were not scheduled until the participant acknowledged via email that he/she read the consent, did not have any questions, and agreed to proceed. It was the investigator's goal that each participant be free from any feelings of pressure or coercion related to participating in the study. At no time were participants pressured to respond to the emailed information. Participant privacy and confidentiality was strictly guarded. All emails were immediately moved to confidential folders. Each participant was given a coded number that was then used to identify data generated to ensure confidentiality. The investigator made sure not to state the participants' names in the recorded interviews, and if they stated their own named or other identifiable information, it was censored in the transcript.

**Risk and benefit of participation.** There were limited risks to participating in this dissertation study. The investigator was mindful that some probing may have created levels of distress for the participants and was ready to change the course of the conversation if needed. Each interview went well per the participants' comments, and they each expressed gratitude for being able to share their stories. A \$25 American Express gift card was mailed to participants as an honorarium for their time commitment. There were no unfair gains involved in participation in this dissertation study; however,

participants provided insight and understanding that will benefit future online ESL students and inform nursing educators as well as other leaders in higher education.

**Data storage.** In an effort to maintain confidentiality, recording devices and printed transcriptions were kept in the investigator's home in a locked file cabinet. Emails and electronics forms of transcription remain password-protected and secured and will be destroyed along with any printed material within 3 years after the completion of this study.

### **Procedures**

Twenty minutes before the scheduled interview, an email containing a one-time use link was provided to the student to enter the Join.me video-conferencing meeting room where the interview took place. Two audio recording devices were used, one serving as a back-up in case of malfunction. The investigator reminded the participants that the interviews were confidential and nothing they said would be link to them or their names. On average, the interviews lasted about 45 minutes. Each interview was transcribed within 24 to 48 hours. Participants were given an opportunity to review their individual transcripts to ensure that the transcription was accurate. None of the participants wanted to make changes to the data, and each approved his/her transcript within one week of receipt. Field notes were used during each interview to jot down body language and other nuances that would not be captured on the recording. An audit trail was maintained in the form of an Excel spreadsheet that contained every school that was approached; deans and program manager's names and emails; participant information, including dates of first emailed interest and date of interview; codes used to

identify transcripts; and dates approved. A personal journal was kept of reflections and review of how each interview went and how to make improvements.

After the completion of 10 interviews, the transcripts were read as a group. A second read of the data involved coding manually in the margins of the printed transcript. The third review took place after the investigator entered the data into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), entitled Dedoose. This software assisted with better visualization of codes and ultimately the emergence of themes. The dissertation committee was kept informed throughout the entire process and offered guidance during the coding and theme emergence process.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The interview process is the pathway to gathering robust lived experience material. It is a process that is used to explore and gather experiential narrative material that provides a richer and deeper meaning of a phenomena (Flood, 2010; Lopez & Willis, 2004; van Manen, 1990, p. 66). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the participants reflectively recall their experiences with prompting from the researcher to bring to light the meaning of the experience (Converse, 2012). Any story or anecdote that the individual is willing to share will enrich a study (Munhall, 2012, p. 150). When available, face-to-face interviews can take advantage of social cues, such as voice, inflection, and body language of the interviewee (Opdenakker, 2006). When face-to-face interviews are not an option due to participant location, videoconference is a suitable alternative. This tool allows for verbal and visual interaction in real time via an Internet connection (Sullivan, 2013). Eight participants were interviewed via the video conferencing tool Join.me. This free, video-conferencing option allowed the investigator to provide the

participants with a one-time use link to enter a virtual meeting room and communicate via a Web camera. The limitations in using this form of data collection are technical issues, standardization of the environment (Opdenakker, 2006), and the additional steps in ensuring privacy. The remaining two participants were not able to connect to Join.me at the time of the interview, so a phone interview was conducted.

### **Demographic Data**

Demographic data was collected prior to the start of the interview (see Appendix F). This information provided a broad understanding of who the study participants were. The participant's gender, age, country of origin, country of pre-licensure education, semester in the program, years of experience in nursing, and primary language spoken at home were ascertained. This information was used in determining if the study participants had commonalities based on specific demographic information, which was also important in establishing transferability of findings.

### **Interview Questions**

Interviewing in interpretive phenomenological research has its foundation in conversational dialogue. It is imperative that the researcher approach the interview process with discipline related to the fundamental research question that prompted the need for the interview in the beginning (van Manen, 1990). Staying close to the lived experience is vital to ensure the interview is effective and not a waste of the participants or the researcher's time.

Drawing from the literature related to the experiences of ESL students in higher education, ESL nursing students, and ESL students who engage in coursework online, the following questions were used to explore the lived experience of the participants:

“Talk about your experience with learning in the online RN-BSN classroom.”

- “Talk about your interactions online with other nursing students in your class.”
- “Talk about your interactions with nursing faculty.”
- “Do you feel that language and culture affects your interactions in the online classroom?”

### **Data Management and Organization**

#### **Transcription**

Transcription is the transference of oral language into writing. It can involve hours of listening to audio recordings and typing exactly the words that are heard without the ability to edit based on assumptions of the words the participant “meant to say.” The investigator chose to transcribe each of the 10 interviews. Munhall (2012) shared that although transcription is time intensive, the benefit to the researcher is a close intimate connection with the data. Jotting was implemented during the transcription process in order to gather and share fleeting and emergent reflections (Miles & Huberman, 2013). Jotting adds substantial meaning to the analysis of the data and can strengthen the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 2013).

#### **Category Scheme**

The beginning of analysis in qualitative research is the development of a method to classify and index information as it is obtained (Polit & Beck, 2014). The lived experience narrative information from online RN-BSN ESL nursing student participants was categorized after discovering underlying concepts. These concepts were placed into

categories that differentiate them from one another. The end result was several categories that were condensed further based on similarities.

### **Coding Data**

Coding takes place after the participant's lived experiences are placed into smaller more manageable categories. Coding is the reading of narratives in its entirety and determining which category is most appropriate (Polit & Beck, 2014). Miles and Huberman (2013) shared that the coding process drives ongoing data collection while working through iterative cycles of induction and deduction to power the analysis. This dissertation study was coded manually in addition to using Dedoose software. The disadvantage to the use of software is that the visualization of data on a computer screen can inhibit conceptualization of data (Noble & Smith, 2014). Manual coding allows the researcher to remain close to the information as well as gain deeper understanding in the process of meaning making (Zamawe, 2015). Categories were created and merged several times before progressing to theme emergence.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the coding process is complete, the identification of themes can begin, which is a labor-intensive process that requires the researcher to compare the responses of participants and identify similarities until saturation is achieved. It is inductive and constructionist in nature (Polit & Beck, 2014). The phenomenological tradition is interpretive and, therefore, requires the researcher to make meaning of the information provided by the participants.

## **Thematic Analysis**

There are varying methods to engage in phenomenological data analysis. During thematic analysis, each participant's interview was read several times and lines of inquiry were identified from the theoretical background that grounded the dissertation study and from themes consistently emerging in the data (Benner, 1994). Using van Manen (1990) lifeworld existentials as a guide to reflection, phrases in the text were examined line-by-line then highlighted or underlined, and tentative theme names are indicated (Cohen et al., 2000). Documenting the movement from raw data to final themes allowed for transparency of data analysis (Noble & Smith, 2014). The grasping and formulating of thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of discovering meaning that gives order and control to our research and writing (van Manen, 1990). Writing and rewriting is an essential aspect of interpretive phenomenology. The process is reflective and the goal is to have the researcher interpret and write a rich description of the participant's experience (Munhall, 2012).

## **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

The worth and ability to distribute qualitative research findings is based on the trustworthiness, rigor, and integrity in which data was obtained. If trustworthiness in a study is questionable, a study is for naught (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Establishing trustworthiness is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher. The researcher must be able to persuade his or her audience that the findings from the inquiry are worthy of attention and dissemination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Lincoln and Guba's framework of quality criteria is often considered the gold standard for establishing

trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2014). These four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the truth of shared participant views and the authentic interpretation and representation of these views by the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2014). Credibility is supported by the demonstration of prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and the inclusion of participants in the research process through member-checking (Carlson, 2010; Cope, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although member-checking is seen as one of the steps toward building credibility in a study, there are concerns about methodological usefulness and ethical dilemmas that can arise from its implementation (Carlson, 2010; Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011; McConnell-Henry et al., 2011).

Participant involvement in the review of transcripts and data interpretation can lead to embarrassment, self-consciousness, lost information due to editing, and possible breach of confidentiality (Carlson, 2010; Goldblatt et al., 2011; Jaffe, 2011). This investigator found the act of emailing each participant his/her complete transcript within 48 hours of the interview was a significant step toward fostering empowerment and ensuring credibility. The final data analysis and interpretations were not shared with students as the investigator believed it would not be beneficial to the outcome of the study and in line with interpretive phenomenology if changes were suggested and incorporated (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011).

Peer debriefing is another step in establishing credibility. Peer debriefing allows for a neutral party to explore aspects of the inquiry that the researcher may not be able to appreciate. The process keeps the researcher honest and fully aware of his or her posture

during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A peer of the investigator reviewed transcripts and provided feedback regarding observed themes and possible assumptions. Additionally, a doctoral-prepared nurse with experience in qualitative research also reviewed transcripts as well as the thematic analysis providing in-depth feedback and suggestions.

### **Transferability**

Transferability, analogous to generalizability, is the extent to which qualitative findings can have applicability to other groups and settings (Polit & Beck, 2014). This criterion is met if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study, and readers can relate the results to their own experiences (Cope, 2014). The researcher's responsibility in transferability is to provide sufficient descriptive data in the form of a rich, thick description, so the consumer can evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The design of this dissertation study lends itself to transferability secondary to the growth of online education and its accessibility to multidisciplinary ESL students. Demographic data was collected in this dissertation study to establish transferability of findings. A thick description of the research setting, transactions, and processes observed was the final product of this inquiry.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and conditions (Polit & Beck, 2014). It is not possible to have credibility in the absence of dependability. Dependability can be achieved when another researcher concurs with the decision trails at each stage of the research process (Cope, 2014). A step-wise replication is one approach

to assessing data dependability in which two independent inquiries are conducted and conclusions compared (Polit & Beck, 2014). Carefully maintained documentation of the complete research process in the form of an audit trail is often used to allow an independent auditor to come to conclusions about the data (Polit & Beck, 2014; Schmidt & Brown, 2015). Field notes, reflective journals, raw data from interview transcripts, and all drafts of decision-making were maintained throughout this dissertation study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the potential for congruence and objectivity (Polit & Beck, 2014). Confirmability is called into question when potential biases are not recognized or accounted for (Schmidt & Brown, 2015). The qualitative researcher has the responsibility to present the views and experiences of the study participants in a way that is free from personal motivations and perspectives. Audit trails and self-reflection journals were maintained throughout this dissertation study and aided in the confirmability of the findings.

### **Chapter Summary**

This interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological study is timely and appropriate. ESL students face significant barriers to their learning in the traditional classroom, and it is important to explore their experience from the online perspective. There are no robust qualitative studies to support instructional strategies of nursing educators that engage with RN-BSN ESL nursing students online. Exploring the lived experience helps researchers to understand the essence of the phenomena of being ESL in higher education and the process of integration. Phenomenological inquiry is intimate and brings the

researcher very close to the experience. How the researcher understands, interprets, and makes meaning of a lifeworld shared is the essence of phenomenological research.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Engagement in the in-depth interviewing process opened up layers of dialogue that provided insight into the lived world of the ESL completely online or hybrid nursing student. Each participant was ready and willing to share his/her individual experiences about continuing his/her nursing education in the online learning environment.

Participants expressed feelings of wanting to bring understanding to this phenomenon both for themselves and future ESL students. This dissertation study is not comparing the experiences of completely online students to that of hybrid students but rather exploring the online experience of both regardless of format.

Using van Manen's (1990) phenomenological methodology, participant responses were interpreted to elucidate meaning for the RN-BSN ESL completely online or hybrid nursing student experience. It is through this phenomenological reflection that five major themes and subsequent subthemes emerged from the data (see Appendix G):

- Understanding the online classroom.
- Expressing culture online.
- Alone but not lonely.
- Writing as a surmountable barrier.
- Faculty role in the online journey.

Through analysis of the data received from students, it became apparent that the opportunity to learn online was an isolating experience that required time and dedication

to be successful. Students maintained a strong awareness of their own culture while being in regular contact with peers and faculty. The act of writing and expressing themselves in another language was a consistent challenge that each worked very hard to overcome.

The findings from participants are presented in this chapter.

### **Participant Demographics**

The participants in this study included 10 nursing students who were enrolled in three RN-BSN nursing programs across the Southeastern US. Two programs were delivered in the hybrid format while the remaining offered its program completely online. These students all self-identified as speaking English as a second and/or third language. Nine of the participants were female and one male. Nine participants spoke two languages: English and their native mother tongue, and one participant spoke English as well as two other languages. Participant ages ranged between 25 and 50 years of age. All participants completed their RN education in the US. Seven of the participants immigrated to the US when they were adults. Three participants, having received their early education through college in the US, fell into the Generation 1.5 category. The time living in the US ranged from 9 years to 45 years. Participants represented Spanish-, African-, Russian-, French-, and Filipino- (Tagalog) speaking countries. All identified with a collectivist society and high-context culture in which loyalty and cohesiveness is paramount and meaning is inferred from non-verbal communication.

The participants' years of RN experience ranged from 2 years to 21 years. All but two participants were in the last term of their RN-BSN program of study. Identifying information has been changed to protect each student's confidentiality, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. For clarity, the format of study that each participant

was enrolled was designated by (H) for hybrid student and (O) for completely online student.

### **Understanding the Online Classroom**

Continuing their education online was both a convenience and a challenge for participants. The ability to engage in coursework at one's leisure while maintaining a household and full-time job was needed to be successful. The required time to complete the copious amounts of reading was compounded by the additional step of translation into their native language to enhance understanding. Participants shared memories of initial fears and anxieties from their first online course due to not knowing the expectations and lack of immediacy that they were used to in the traditional classroom. The subthemes that emerged in relation to understanding the online classroom were *Time*, *Missing Face to Face*, *Trying to Figure It Out*, *Getting Used To It*, and *Making the Choice*.

#### **Time**

Participants directly and indirectly addressed time as a factor in his or her online experience. The flexibility of pursuing an online education required dedicated time at a computer. Time was mentioned as a benefit of online learning for these ESL students because it allowed the participants to engage in the course material without feeling rushed. Linda (O), a middle-aged woman of Spanish decent, who has been in the US for more than half of her life shared these sentiments.

Online has been good and bad, more good definitely than bad, especially with the situation that I am working full-time and I have a family and kids . . . I can take my time doing the assignment and knowing that I take as long as I do doing an assignment; I actually don't have to feel rushed.

Participants described needing more time to read and write discussion post and essays because the English language was a barrier. Natalia (O) is from Central Asia and

speaks Russian as her primary language. “I do find as non-primary English speaker difficulties sometimes writing essays . . . I feel like I need more time.” Greg (H) has been living in the US just over a decade and speaks with a prominent African accent. He expressed that the reading assignments delayed him because of his challenges with reading English at a fast pace.

I am not a very fast reader so of the English language . . . even though I comprehend well I just don’t read fast [pause], so it takes me a little while to read the assignment and the assigned readings. The average person might do quite fine.

Being proactive and beginning assignments early in the week helped students with balancing time and still meeting the deadlines within their courses.

***Time spent waiting.*** The nature of online education is having to communicate with classmates and faculty via email. Participants particularly found the need for continuous email exchange with faculty to delay their understanding and ultimately progress in a class. Angie (O), having been in the US just shy of 10 years, described the experience as “. . . you get delayed with the assignment cause maybe that day you can’t complete the assignment because you have to work so it just delays things.” Her tone showed the angst she experienced while waiting to get the response she needed to progress forward with her assignment.

Michelle (H), a primary Spanish speaker, who has been in the US for 25 years, shared her experience with waiting for email responses.

I think that the online class . . . it wasn’t that bad it was just you know the emails back and forth and waiting till . . . for someone to respond back to you.

Linda (O) provided insight into the process it took to draft an email only to wait to have it answered. She reflected on her experience with learning in a traditional face-to-face classroom and the difference in response time.

Umm sometimes you have tons of questions and you know it takes a little bit to be able to word it and put it into writing so that you can ask them and sometimes if they don't answer . . . you have to go through the back and forth.

Rosie (O) is a primary Spanish-speaking woman who moved to the US when she was a toddler offered a very similar sentiment.

If you email a professor you have to wait for them to respond, whereas if you're in class you get a chance to actual speak with the professors.

Simone (H) is a French-speaking immigrant from a West African country who has been in the US for just over 13 years. She had resolve in her voice when she stated, "I hate doing you know emailing back and forth, but hey, it is just the way to go and you just got to do it."

### **Missing Face to Face**

In frequent moments of reflection, participants shared about their experiences in face-to-face courses prior to enrolling in their RN-BSN program. They saw the traditional classroom as the place in which they could get immediate responses to questions and interact with their classmates and faculty. Hope (H) is East African and has been in the US for over 20 years. She shared her thoughts related to not consistently being in the same physical space as the faculty when learning, "For me I think I miss having the interaction with the teacher, the language, just to discuss." Rosie (O) reminisced on the ability to "actually speak with the professors."

Angie (O) expressed how learning online required the student to engage in the learning process alone. She appreciated face-to-face learning because of the ability to engage with classmates and ask questions about classroom activities occurring in real time. That immediacy of response was helpful to her.

In class you're able to just ask your neighbor "What does she mean about that?" "Oh that's what I have to do!" or "What was that paper about?" So in online you really don't have that . . . that is definitely the other side of being in [the] classroom versus being online.

Michelle (H), who described herself as a social butterfly, explained how the two environments differed for her. "I think online it is harder to relate to a student than face to face . . . I think there is better communication on like face to face than online classes."

I miss like . . . I feel like the connection as far as communication, as far as events, activities different other programs in the school I really didn't hear too much about . . . I didn't like that.

In a moment of reflection, Michelle (H) offered her appreciation and preference for the face-to-face environment.

I honestly I have always been a better face to face learner . . . I think it is better that way for me and I think as a student I think after doing online classes I really do appreciate face to face classes better.

### **Trying to Figure It Out**

Participants expressed how their initial concerns about engaging in online learning caused them to feel overwhelmed and uncertain. Insecurities about English language communication and the workload produced anxieties and fears. Janet (O), a forty-something immigrant from the Philippines shared, "That is one of my fears in my anxiety on day one of my online class . . . how can I communicate with them how can I you know . . . my English is not good." She went on to elaborate that her fears were rooted in her lack of confidence in navigating online. She expressed that she was scared that she would "miss some assignments . . . some homework . . . and I don't like that."

Simone (H) echoed a similar sentiment. "Well the fear of not being able to do well or missing something." She continued more specifically about her encounters with faculty and their expectations for proper writing.

All they want is you to write the way American English is or whatever they are looking forward to, period. So I am focusing on doing what is needed at the time . . . or what the teacher expects.

Hope (H) admitted that she was ignorant to what online learning entailed and the expectations of how to navigate her classroom. She explained the following:

Well I did not know how this was going to run . . . just trying to figure out . . . and how to get the papers in on time and how you communicate to the teacher.

Linda (O) expressed her exacerbation when reflecting on the required amount of writing in her online courses.

I know it's a little more tedious than the associates degree program you know especially with the formatting and umm the writing of the papers . . . Oh My god! Just the thought of it would just . . . Whooooo!! Anxiety!!

The desire to do well and meet the course and faculty expectations was a common feeling among the participants.

As Hope (H) put it, "You want to make sure you are not second guessing and, hopefully, you are following the directions of what they wanted you to do."

### **Getting Use to It**

Participants shared that their comfort with the online program and the expectations improved over time. They shared feelings of getting used to the process as they advanced in the program and understood how to balance the workload and utilize the resources. Simone (H) shared, "In the beginning it was a little bit challenging . . . once I start being organized and knowing what I need to do, when is the due date and all that yeah it went pretty well." During her first online class, Hope (H) had periods of frustration and confusion as she attempted to navigate her class. However, she persevered and had these sentiments, "I feel now that this is my last semester that I like it now because I have gotten used to it. I know what to expect now."

Janet (O) described how her initial fears about being an online student made the experience very difficult but she “got used to it.” She shared that her ability to keep up with the homework gave her confidence to believe that she could be successful. With pride and confidence, she expressed the following:

Now that I am use to it . . . I can navigate it easily . . . I can understand, and all you have to do is follow the instructions, and it is OK, and it’s a lot easier now. I can do the homework; I can write it well . . . I feel more confident now tackling things about nursing. I feel more knowledgeable now.

### **Making the Choice**

Participants’ verbalized that their decision to enroll in an online RN-BSN program was based mainly on convenience and flexibility. Greg (H) expressed it as being “a better option . . . it is not easier but it is convenient.” The students expressed that cultural needs did not influence their decision; however, language did have some impact. Natalia (O) shared that the online classroom allowed her to feel comfortable as it relates to interacting with her peers. She shared this example.

You have to participate in weekly discussion board and its mostly written, so I don’t have to worry that people misunderstand me because I mispronounce the words or umm just because of my accent some people have difficult time understanding . . . I don’t have this uncomfortable feeling . . . like I use to have in regular class . . . I felt comfortable.

Natalia (O) went on to share the following:

I wasn’t always willing to speak-up because of my accent or the language limitations so I feel like online classes give me more opportunity to participate in discussion.

With the obligation of family and financial responsibilities, participants saw online as the only choice that they had to complete their education. Michelle (H) stated, “I was forced” when asked about her reason for enrolling online. Rosie’s (O) home life was challenging with a sick relative, so she found the option “a lot more economical . . .

also umm it's cheaper.” Simone (H) shared that her income and insurance coverage is her primary source of support, and sitting in class was not an option. Hope (H) found the ability to balance school, work, and family appealing. She expressed, “you work at your schedule so you're able to flex your time . . . you have time to get your work done to fit with your lifestyle . . . with family and work so that you don't get overwhelmed with class work.”

### **Expressing Culture Online**

Participants were proud of their cultural heritage and background. When asked about culture and language and how it played a role in their online experience, they did not focus on anything negative but expressed feelings of trying to relate with their peers and hoping their peers related to them. Having been exposed to higher education in the US as they completed their RN degrees, it seemed that participants had comfortably integrated and had a grasp on the American cultural norms and cognitive academic language proficiency. The subtheme that supported expressing culture online was *Cultural Encounters Online*.

### **Cultural Encounters Online**

When asked if language and or culture had an impact on their online learning experience, all participants expressed some level of agreement. Simone (H) indicated that a person's accent might provide additional context to the words they are saying or trying to say. “If you don't hear me and you don't get my accent, you may not put all of that together.” Simone (H) also shared how one's culture may simply be ignored online. She shared a hypothetical example of the inadvertent inclusion of French words that maybe

read as incorrect spelling of an English word while in actuality it was a language translation mistake.

You don't have much of a culture [online] . . . somebody may read and say hmm that is a lot of mistakes . . . I may write a word in French instead of English . . . the person may not even think that it is even a French word.

Nancy (O), a woman of Hispanic origin, recalled having to share with her classmates the importance of cultural sensitivity and how certain statements can be rude in certain cultures. In her case she was not offended but offered feedback to her peers via the discussion board. "I wanted to bring awareness that sometimes it is just not funny anymore." Michelle (H) felt strongly about the role language and culture played in communicating with others.

What one person may seem appropriate another person may not or it could be like cultural distinctions you know as far as the way you handle something or speak about something.

Hope (H) expressed mixed feelings as it pertained to how culture and language influenced her online learning experience. She shared, "When you identify yourself as English as a second language, it means for me they identify that this person does not get what we are talking about." She went on to add, "When you communicate where you are from it shares the different things that are going on because how I perceive a thing somebody else may not perceive it the same way."

In Greg's (H) experience, he found that his peers were interested in learning more about him and his culture. Greg is East African, speaks in a soft tone, and is guarded in his speech. "They want to know or understand you know how things work in that culture." He found that the sharing of personal information on the discussion boards was not something he was comfortable with and attributed it to his cultural norms and

practice. “When I am discussing things . . . I think it is a cultural issue . . . a lot of people tell personal stuff. I am not very good at telling my personal stuff you know in a discussion.”

Janet (O) felt that culture had an impact on her experience. Her Filipino culture and values played a significant role in the way she approached her education. She seemed quite surprised and shocked at the use of slang in the online classroom. She believed the academic environment and any engagement with a professor should be formal. She shared “Yeah . . . they answer slang but I cannot be . . . I am not used to that.” Natalia (O) shared her perspective on how American students differed from students of other cultures online.

I do notice that students from some other cultures answer in a like a different way than let’s say from American students . . . I feel like Americans are more open . . . students from other cultures are more careful . . . maybe more polite in their answers, not to other people but in their answers . . . so you can actually say [see] that a person is from a different culture . . . by the way they respond.

In her explanation of how she has adapted to the cultural differences she has experienced online, Natalia (O) shared she has embraced that there are different cultures represented online. Although proud of her culture she found it necessary to adapt to the practices of her mostly American classmates.

I came from different culture, and we like to argue about things, especially if it is like little bit even politically related and here [I] learned more be patient and more respectful to others opinion listen and not to read between the lines.

### **Alone but not Lonely**

Regular interaction with peers online was a program expectation for each participant. Although they found themselves working alone without anyone physically beside them, they had the ability to communicate with their peers through discussion

board postings and group work. Participants offered and received support from peers beyond the online classroom through email and text communication. Those participants who were enrolled in hybrid programs appreciated the ability to put a face with a name when their classes met in person. Participants spoke candidly about the development of cultural affinity connections with peers based on name identification, which created a feeling of comfort knowing that someone in the course could relate to them both from a language and cultural perspective as an ESL student. Four subthemes came to light to develop the theme of alone but not lonely. The subthemes included *No Real Connection*, *Comradery in Group Work*, *A Hybrid Connection*, and *Cultural and Language Familiarity*.

### **No Real Connection**

The ability to connect with peers on a deeper level was difficult for participants.

Simone (H) described it as a task.

In the discussion board you don't do a lot of back and forth, you know, you post yours or you respond to someone and you try to understand the person at your best.

In explaining the difficulty in getting to know her peers she stated, "I think it is hard because you know you are not seeing the other person . . . so you are more focused on the reading or what is being written than seeing who is talking to you." She appeared disappointed that her classmates did not take the time to seek clarification if they did not understand her response or point of view in a discussion. Nancy (O) shared that she felt the interactions between her and her peers was mainly focused around "academic success."

Greg (H) preferred limiting his interactions with his peers to what was required of him. He stated he likes to keep his discussions general and seek clarification when needed. To him it was not a cultural thing, “I think it’s just the way I am.”

I do participate in the required . . . minimal required participation...write this . . . answer this question in three paragraphs and respond to two or three of your peers. I do that and nothing more than that.

Angie (O) felt that online learning did not provide much of an opportunity for engagement. However, she acknowledged that being from a different culture and speaking a second language allowed for more detailed conversation with her peers. “I probably would [not have] if I just didn’t have that different point of view or different traditions or something like that.”

In her desire to create connection with her peers, Michelle (H) used a proactive approach of connecting via telephone to discuss assignments. She found that to be a positive experience. She appreciated the discussion board participation requirements. “I appreciate it because I learned so much more in the class about different cultures . . . so that forcing us to read other people post and then discuss or respond back to them I think it made the class better.”

Hope (H) described her experience interacting with her peers as “tough.” She did not like the inability to read their facial expressions. Her approach to overcoming the toughness was “I think that for myself is just trying to do the best that I can and make sure I am able to communicate well and make sure I get my message across correctly.” When asked how culture and language influenced her interactions with her peers, she shared feelings of exclusion.

I can notice a group that pick particular student who they will reply to. They will not reply to some because they don't know you that well. I think if you are going to post discussion you should interact with everybody not just your friends.

When asked how that made her feel, her reply was “Well [sigh] as I think that is just the way society is so yeah.”

### **Comradery in Group Work**

Group work seemed to be an added benefit for most participants. The opportunity to connect with peers beyond the discussion boards offered a chance to engage on a deeper more meaningful level. Janet (O) found online learning to be enhanced when placed in a group. “The interaction is better online honestly when you form a group.” She described the process as being hassle free.

In online it benefits me because there is no hassle all you have to do is pick your group mates and that's it and then as far as the language is concerned I can communicate with them and I can easily tell them what I want . . . you know . . . what I feel.

Natalia (O) shared that the division of students into small groups allowed for consistent interaction with the same group of people. She felt like she came to “virtually know” the people in her group and agreed it was similar to developing an online community. Angie (O) echoed a similar sentiment when it came to seeking peer support from people she knew from previous group projects.

I've had several classmates that have taken the same classes as me throughout the whole program . . . I haven't had to but if I did have a question that I should specifically ask a classmate through email I would go to them cause we've done group projects and I feel like they would help me out a little bit faster than others

Linda (O) expressed her appreciation for group assignments because it gave her a feeling of safety when it came to submitting assignments for grading. She openly shared how she waited for group members to submit the assignment in order to “grasp a better

understanding” of the assignment. She did not see this as an issue as all students could decide to do the same thing. She thought the group format provided for a better means of interaction especially with the ability to take conversation offline with texts and phone calls to remain in constant contact with one another.

### **A Hybrid Connection**

The hybrid experience was unique for a few participants. They had the chance to physically interact with their classmates at scheduled points throughout their program. Michelle (H) explained that she liked the opportunity to meet her classmates “because it kind of was able for us to kind of meet together and kind of speak to each other.” She found it to be an easier way to ask about things that were maybe confusing or concerning than trying to connect via the strictly online setting. Greg (H) shared that the hybrid component of the program helped with his ability to communicate online. He explained that he would find himself responding to classmates that he met in person over those he had not had any physical interaction with. He summed up his preference for the hybrid experience this way: “I am able to interact with people. I can see who has been saying what online.”

### **Cultural and Language Familiarity**

Participants were honest about their approaches to connecting with classmates who they could relate to culturally. When asked how she identified her classmates, Michelle (H) explained the following:

By ethnicity, language, you know I’m pretty sure if I see somebody’s last name whose *Jennifer Gonzalez*, I’m assuming [laugh] that because of their last name that they are Hispanic . . . I guess I don’t know if that is prejudice [laugh] or not . . . if it seems more you know of a Hispanic origin I may relate to them as far as you know writing errors or grammar issues to kind of see if they are having the same issues as me.

Nancy (O) echoed a similar approach. “You never talk to them so . . . of course sometimes you go by last name . . . [laugh] . . . so you go oh that’s a Latino.” Linda (O) explained that looking for last names that are similar to those of her culture is something that she does as soon as she gains access to the class. “Of course my last name is very common so I look for people that share my last name.” She likened it to a feeling of safety, knowing that there were people in her class the she could relate to.

Greg (H) described it more of a process. He preferred to reach out to the people he knew were from his cultural background and spoke his language first and resorted to other classmates if he was not able to resolve his issue. He said it made it “easier for me to start communicating.” He shared, “When I join an online class, I look at names and I look if they are a familiar person.” He offered additional insight.

See, if there is someone from my culture in my class for example . . . I can email them; I can talk to them using different languages. Usually if I find it easier when I am talking to somebody on the phone I just naturally use my language . . . our language . . . you know . . . before I use English. It works better that way.

### **Writing as a Surmountable Barrier**

Participants described the writing requirements within the online program as difficult and overwhelming. There was a considerable amount of time dedicated to formulating thoughts, developing ideas, translating from one language to the next, looking up words, figuring out sentence structure, and finally submitting a final paper or discussion post that they could be proud of. Participants lamented on the anxiety that this process produced week after week. They often compared themselves to their primary English language peers and expressed feelings of embarrassment and stupidity for their lack of language proficiency. Many of the participants used their school’s resources, such as the writing center, on a regular basis and offered high praises for the confidence they

gained from seeing an improvement in their writing. In conjunction with the school resources, some participants shared how family members served as proofreaders to ensure they were submitting quality work. *Understanding of Language, Working Through the Writing Process, Comparison of Self to Peers, and Resources for Writing* were the subthemes that developed through data analysis.

### **Understanding the Language**

Although all participants completed their RN education in the US, the majority of them expressed some level of difficulty and fear when it came to communicating in the English language. They described the translation of English words to their native language and back as hard work and tedious. They described the need to “look things up” as a hindrance. Many found it challenging to express themselves in English and hoped that what they were sharing both in discussion posts and formal assignments was being understood clearly.

Nancy (O) shared that she felt English being her second language was a “handicap” at this level of education. She went on to add “You are in a higher educational level, so obviously, words get harder anyway for anybody you know who doesn’t have a degree. So for me it’s still a little harder.” She reflected on occasions in which a certain word that she had never heard of or used before was on a test, it caused her to put the wrong answer because she did not understand the word. Natalia (O) described it as having a “vocabulary limitation.” She explained “even though it has expanded over the years I still feel like I don’t have enough knowledge on English words.”

Rosie (O) attributed her challenges with language and writing to her frequent moves as a child. She expressed “It’s different when you speak and read one language to then learn in another one and moved a lot.” When asked about how language affected her experience online, Simone (H) shared “I always get scared you know throughout the time that I have been here that my language barrier was going to hold me back.” Linda found that she had to “Google a lot” to gain complete understanding of a topic that was not familiar to her. Angie (O) described a similar process: “I had to look up a lot of things in order to get something done.” She felt like if she was born here this would not be a problem for her.

### **Working Through the Writing Process**

Participant consistently referred to the writing process as the most difficult part of their online education. For most participants the act of writing a paper required many hours of thinking through thoughts and ideas in their native language and translating them into English when they typed. Janet (O) described the process as “a lot of work.” She expressed that thinking of the text was especially difficult. At times she was able to find the words in English straightaway, and other times she had to translate it to Tagalog and then to English in order for it to make sense. Janet (O) described the process this way:

Of course what to write sometimes gives you a hard time because being having a second language it is hard for me like I have to do it what I say does not come naturally in English . . . I have to translate it from my language to English and that is what makes it more difficult for me . . . because from my language to the English and sometimes it’s different. What I mean in my language maybe different when I translate it in English . . . so I am working double time when I write paper.

Janet (O) continued

I start typing it in English as I translate it in my mind. In my mind, this is what I want to say and then I will type it in English and then I will reread it several times . . . it is a lot of work you know because there are things that we can't really translate in English what we feel.

Greg (H) shared a similar process of translation. "When I read things, I have to process them in my language first as I go . . . not by writing them but I look at [a] word and I look for the meaning in my language and then . . . and I do the same for when I am speaking things." Linda (O) became animated with her disdain for the writing process. She described her feelings for the process as hateful.

Ohh I hate it! I really, really hate it with a passion! I mean it is it's terrible. First, even finding a topic you know it's difficult, but finally when I do, you know, I go through the process of trying to understand what the topic you know what is it that they are really asking [of] me . . . You know and I go through all of my papers . . . I read samples of different papers . . . I huff and I puff and I whine and I cry . . . I mean it is like a whole process [laugh] that I go through each and every time . . . you know anxiety and all that.

She also explained her method for translation. "I go through a process, I read it, I say it in my head, sometimes I translate it a few words you know into Spanish and translate the whole thing before I get it. So it's a process; it took me a while."

In a more somber tone, Rosie (O) expressed how the writing process made her feel. She described feelings of discouragement and denoted that writing was her "weakest link" on her educational journey. She offered these feelings.

Like just being able to write . . . I just have that in my mind that that's just one of my biggest down falls and my pet peeves . . . I guess I feel like if I would've learned like even though I came here very young, we went back to Puerto Rico and I learned most of my writing there, and so I guess I just feel like if I was a stronger writer I would be a better student if that makes sense.

Hope's (H) perspective of the writing process came from her experience and knowledge of British English and the lessons she learned over time related to the importance of not writing based on how she spoke. With confidence she stated, "They

may think you don't know what you are writing, but it is just the way pronunciation is different." Natalia (O) reflected on when she first came to the US and how bad her writing was. "I could not even write a couple of sentences." She continued

I can tell you that in the beginning, when I was just started taking online classes, it was difficult about how people would react to my writing because I was new for like in English writing it was new for me.

She has overcome that barrier but admits to having troubles with sentence structure and the use of grammatical articles in the proper manner. She shared that writing short and long essays take her a longer time because she struggles with her writing. The way she approaches the writing process echoed that of her peers.

When I start writing it's mostly . . . it looks like a mess (laugh) . . . because I throw English words and Russian words and after that I have to come and kind of organize everything and translate some words into English and make sure that sentences sound correctly.

She credits online classes for helping her improve in her writing.

### **Comparison of Self to Peers**

Unlike the traditional classroom, participants were able to see the writings and interactions of their peers on a consistent basis. This experience caused some to compare their writing abilities with that of their peers. Janet (O), who had a bachelor's degree from the Philippines, found the writing style of her peers to be very casual and did not meet her expectations from bachelor's-level students. "I am used to write formal paper . . . but it's very casual as if they are talking to like a friend or something . . . and I don't [know] if I have to do that because I don't know how to do it."

She found herself asking questions about the caliber of students she was in class with.

Is [are] these people taking bachelors? That was my big question. I thought they are English how come they could not even form the sentences in the right way. You know . . . some of them grammatically wrong. I am not saying I am perfect . . . my English is not perfect, too, but I know my paper compared to their paper is . . . is you know is much better because I have not yet to this point received any correct from the teacher.

Over time, Janet (O) felt that she was actually having an influential effect on her peers. “I noticed I have influenced other students with my writing.” She believes that because she did not assimilate to the casual way her peers were writing and remained committed to her foundational knowledge of writing and academic engagement that she saw changes in her peers. “I see them writing the same way as I write kind of like a little bit formal and address the people the right way.”

Rosie (O) did not share those same sentiments. Her voice became low and her facial expression changed as she expressed these feelings.

When you have issues like that in terms of writing, it’s like almost like embarrassing . . . you kind of feel like inferior to everybody else . . . and you’re like wow you know like everybody else’s writing styles is so . . . it almost makes you feel like you’re at a lower level . . . so it’s kind of embarrassing.

Angie (O) found herself admiring her peers who had a handle on the English language. “Sometimes I do feel like, whoa that person is very educated ‘cause the way they . . . you know . . . the very formal discussions.” She encouraged herself, stating “Maybe I can write something like that, too, I just don’t notice that I am doing it.”

### **Resources for Writing Success**

Participants described the availability of learning resources within the program as an added benefit. Some participants who lived near the campus used these resources in person. The online writing lab was convenient for students to submit their written work and receive feedback for improvement. The majority of participants consistently used the

writing lab as they matriculated through the program. Family added another layer of support as students would ask them to review their written work for grammatical errors.

Simone (O) expressed that from the beginning she knew she would need to use the writing resources provided through her program. “I knew I was going to need help because I was scared of writing papers, and BSN is about writing.” She recalled that it was after having a conversation with her professor about her challenges with writing that she started to see more information about the online writing lab [Smarthinking] come through emails. She learned the requirements quickly and structured her schedule to be able to write her assignments ahead of time in order to submit them for feedback and turn it in before the deadline.

I always kind of do my papers ahead of time send it to Smarthinking and they go over it and send it back to me and then I get to modify through it and that’s kind of what helps me a lot.

She found her experience with the resource to be positive. “[It] really helped me stay up and know yeah I got it . . . I can do this! You know. Not worry about . . . Oh my God! . . . I may not be able to do well on this paper. I take it very serious.”

Linda (O) shared that along with her professors reminding her about the resources available to her to assist with writing, there was a dedicated space in her learning environment that directed her to the resources she needed.

They have a little tab on the side of the class that has you know library resource and writing resources and you just click on it and there is someone there always available so you just speak to them directly . . . ask them questions and then they come back and shoot you a little email and answer all your questions.

Janet (O) shared that she used the available resources at her institution. With her proximity to the campus, she visited the library in person to obtain assistance in completing her research.

I used the library a couple of times for my research . . . every time I realized that I am having a hard time doing a Web site at home . . . taking a Web site at home I have to go there personally, and they're very helpful in the library.

She had limited experience using the writing center. She desired to have someone to proofread her work for her; however, she expressed some concern that if she sought the help of the writing center with every assignment that they may become displeased.

I wish I could have somebody I trust to proofread my paper.  
Do I have to go to the Writing Center? But I am not going to go every module [laugh] . . . No! I think they are going to be annoyed with me if I do that.

Michelle (H) made good use of the array of resources available at her institution. She described using them as her main source of assistance throughout the program.

I use a lot of the resources at the school, which were great umm as far as like tutors . . . nursing tutors . . . umm they have a lab there that we can use, and I use that thoroughly . . . there is always someone there in the library that can kind of proofread a paper for you . . . so that helped too . . . I always feel like I need to get proofread because English isn't my first language.

After a referral to a specific librarian at her institution, Rosie (O) solely used this connection as she worked her way through the program. "He has been absolutely amazing at helping to guide you through the whole process being able to bring up articles and so forth . . . so that I've used quite a number of times, but I haven't used the writing center."

**Family as a resource.** Rosie (O) described the role her daughters played in ensuring that the written work she submitted was satisfactory.

She basically will like proofread . . . one of them will actually proofread before I submit because like I said I do feel embarrassed about it and so forth, and I'll just ask them you know can you proofread this before I post it and so forth so that's really my resources.

Janet (O), whose husband is of the same nationality, shared how he has adapted to the American way, so she often asks him for his input as it related to her writing.

“Sometimes I ask my husband ‘do I have to write this like this?’ or ‘Hey, do I need to put this like an -ed, or is it past tense or plural or something?’ When explaining an experience she had with a poor grade on a written assignment, Linda (O) included her children in the proofreading process to help her understand where she went wrong. “I even had my children . . . my teenage kids read it, and they said, ‘Oh Mom you have a lot of grammar errors here.’”

### **Faculty Role in the Online Journey**

Participants found their faculty members to be kind and professional for the most part. However, they found that the lack of personal interaction meant that faculty did not recognize their challenges with language. Participants expressed if they did not share their ESL status with the faculty member, it is highly likely that they did not know or were not concerned. Those participants who did identify their struggles with English to their faculty member felt that they were supported and pointed toward beneficial resources. Subthemes that emerged were *Faculty Support and Feedback* as well as *Faculty Cultural Awareness*.

### **Faculty Support and Feedback**

Simone (H) shared she had “no problem” when it came to her interaction with the faculty in her classes. She described the process as “pretty smooth.” Feedback from faculty was appreciated and received as part of the learning process. After sharing her writing struggles with one of her professors, she was happy to receive additional information about available resources. She recalled the resources being accessible to all students but appreciated the professor bringing it to her attention and encouraging her to

use them. Angie (O) expressed that faculty were very quick to respond and willing to go the “extra mile” to provide additional explanation. “I feel like I get a lot of support.”

Michelle (H) shared an experience of how support from her professor helped her deal with the struggles of writing in a second language.

I mean I did tell one of my teachers online that you know I was having issues with writing her papers, and she addressed it . . . she found a solution to the problem, which was maybe I turn in the papers a little bit earlier than everybody else just so she can kind of review it and give me feedback prior to me submitting the paper. . . I did appreciate that accommodation . . . because not only am I taking her time umm but she acknowledged the fact that I may be having issues because of a language . . . for the fact that English isn’t my first language.

Similarly, faculty feedback and direction on how to improve was “very clear,” according to Greg (H). He acknowledged the professionalism of his professors and the comments included with each grade. He observed that faculty was accommodating to other students that he knew to speak ESL.

I have seen people struggle with understanding assignments . . . and the instructors always try to you know like get in touch with them . . . usually at the beginning of the program they usually state what resources are available if somebody is struggling.

Although she had a challenging encounter in her very first semester of the online program, Janet (O) found her experience with faculty to be overall positive.

The teachers are very nice and very good except for the first semester . . . only one professor and the rest of the professor I was so happy . . . there were very professional. They are very prompt. They are very helpful. They are very encouraging and only on that first semester that I had . . . Maybe because I am new or I don’t know anything but I think up to this time so far that is the only bad experience I’ve had and other than that no.

Linda (O) explained how asking for additional feedback on her assignments was helpful to her. She expressed that a comment of “good job” was not enough to let her know “what was good” about the work. She desired to learn from the feedback and apply

it to future assignments. She acquiesced, “but you know sometimes they don’t . . . I know they have a lot of assignments that they have to grade, but I do . . . I enjoy the feedback and . . . and I don’t take it personal.”

As in most online courses, there is a dedicated place for students to ask questions of their faculty members in an open forum, so their peers can benefit from the answer. Linda (O) shared that because she was so self-conscious of her English, she avoided using that forum and chose to “wait and see if anybody else will ask.” She explained that she is always concerned about “my ands, my ifs, my buts, my on, my in [laugh] . . . and don’t know if I word them correctly, so I just don’t. I go ahead and I email the teacher directly.”

Natalia (O) did not feel like she received any extra benefits because she had language limitations. However, she did feel confident that the faculty in her program would accommodate her needs if requested. She recounted a time a few semesters back in which she encountered an issue with a timed test that required a quick written response. She shared with her professor that she was having difficulty with the test and accommodations were made.

We had a quiz that I found difficulty for me, especially as a English second language student; we had questions that we had to elaborate and answer not just pick one answer; you have to actually write answers, and I felt like there was not enough time for me to answer these questions, and when I brought it up, it was actually addressed, and more time was added, so I feel like they do listen to our concerns.

Rosie (O) had high praise for a particular professor who showed a true interest in her success and directed her to the proper resources she needed to be successful as an ESL student. “She was excellent, excellent, excellent professor.” When reflecting on this professor’s role she stated,

There was like [a] research assignments, and so she actually prompted and was the one that initiated saying listen reach out to [resource name] [they are] going to be your library assistant and so forth, and I definitely made use of that and I found that it was a great tool . . . a great resource.

Rosie (O) added, “I find that if they did reach out or and state ESL, and this is available and that’s available then I think that people would be able to use that you know.”

### **Faculty Cultural Awareness**

Michelle (H) shared her feelings as it related to faculty not being aware of her ESL status. She felt that a student basically had to bring attention to himself or herself instead of the faculty members being able to discern the situation for themselves after a face-to-face interaction.

You are basically a name on a list and unless you say something . . . you kind of feel awkward . . . why do you have to announce yourself to the class and say, ‘hey I know this is an online class, but so you know, I have English wasn’t my first language’ . . . you kind of have to announce that versus you being in a class with a teacher, and then the teacher can maybe notice your accent or notice your ethnicity and then maybe can understand why you maybe having a couple of issues grammatically or writing a paper.

Hope (H) felt that the online environment did not allow for nursing faculty to get to know the student well. She expressed, “They just see a student as a student.” She hoped that faculty could maybe identify students and offer some customized guidance.

I think they need to know everybody’s background and where they are coming from. Maybe they can identify them and realize. . . you really can’t treat people differently but everybody’s learning style is different.

After several moments of reflection and recalling previous encounter with a faculty member, Natalia (O) expressed, “I think sometimes faculty don’t realize that they’re dealing with a student who is English as second language that they have like more

expectations.” These expectations include a certain writing level and quick comprehension of the material presented to the class.

Linda (O) shared that she thought faculty should probably be able to tell that she struggled with English as her second language; however, she did not feel they were mindful based on her statement, “they are not aware of it.” Angie shared a similar sentiment, “I don’t know if they even know.” She added the following:

I don’t know if they even know that I don’t . . . that English is not my first language cause I’m sure they don’t go by any introduction then read my email. They probably just don’t notice that.

### **Revealing the Lived Existentials**

Van Manen’s (1990) four existentials of “lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other” were evident in the experiences shared by participants. Reflection on the meaning and essence of each participant’s lived experience with these existentials as a guide is an important step in interpretive phenomenology. The raw data and themes shared in this chapter provide an opportunity to show how space, body, time, and relationship influence the overall lived experience of the RN-BSN ESL student who is integrating into a completely online or hybrid program.

Lived space is a significant area of reflection related to this particular study. Online learning is designed to create an educational environment that provides flexibility and convenience; however, the resulting feelings of distance and disconnection has an effect on a student’s experience. There is a difference in how a person feels and responds while in one space compared to another (Tuohy et al., 2013; Rich, Graham, Taket, & Shelley, 2013). Not having a real physical connection with classmates had an impact on

some participant's online experience. Finding classmates of the same or similar cultural background created a safe space for students to connect with others they could relate to.

Lived body existential is how we communicate, feel, interpret, and experience the world (Rich et al., 2013). The absence of body language as a communication tool in the online classroom ultimately influences students' experience with their peers and faculty. As people, we reveal and conceal things about ourselves both unconsciously and consciously (Tuohy et al., 2013). Some participants expressed feelings of anxiety and fear related to the work load of the courses and their challenges with English; however, it could not be observed by faculty or classmates.

Lived time was evident in participant's experience as captured in the subthemes *Time* and *Getting Used to It*. Participants reflected on the time expended engaging in course assignments, translating words and meaning from one language to another, and waiting for responses from faculty and peers. Lived time was also demonstrated when some participants expressed a feeling of comfort with the online classroom after a period of time had passed. Lived time had an impact on students' preference toward the traditional classroom versus online. Participants often reflected on the time they spent in the traditional classroom and used it as a point of reference when speaking of their online experience. Tuohy et al. (2013) shared that the way we ascribe meaning to events that occur at a particular time in life may influence our understanding or perceptions.

Lived other is demonstrated throughout the findings in this dissertation study by how participants described their relations with others in their lifeworld: communication with classmates in the discussion boards, engagement with faculty, and the support received from family. How some participants compared themselves to their peers

provided insight to how they communally experienced the world and how they were influenced by others (Tuohy et al., 2013).

### **Chapter Summary**

The narrative provided in this chapter along with thematic analysis answered the research question for this study: What is the lived experience of the English as a second language RN-BSN degree completion student as they integrate into the online learning environment? The findings from these interviews provided insight into the emotions and feelings that each ESL nursing student experienced while learning online. Participants were candid with their responses, which allowed the investigator to interpret and share their experiences with the reader. Six major themes emerged: *Understanding the Online Classroom*, *Expressing Culture Online*, *Alone but not Lonely*, *Writing as a Surmountable Barrier*, and *Faculty Role in the Online Journey*. Subthemes developed as well, which contributed to the complete analysis and interpretation of the participant's lived experiences.

Understanding the nuances of learning online and using the lifeworld existentials as a guide to reflection played a part in interpreting each participant's experience. Participants understood that additional time would need to be factored into their lives for studying in a second language and receiving responses to their questions from faculty and peers. Many spoke about the traditional classroom in a reflective manner but appreciated the convenience of attending classes online. The role that culture and language played in each participant's online experience could not be diminished. Students observed the cultural differences between themselves and their peers but were respectful in their approaches in understanding and learning about others. Language was a significant

challenge that affected writing and feelings of self-worth; however, participants showed great resolve to use the resources available in order to be successful. Faculty responsibility in guiding these participants in their online journey was evident by the praises students shared. It was very clear these ESL students desired for faculty to notice them and what they brought to the online classroom.

The opportunity to capture the thoughts and sentiments of each of these ESL online nursing students helped to shed light on this phenomenon of interest. Explicating a person's life world is the process of breathing meaning (van Manen, 1990). The data collected not only inform online nursing education but also the development of beneficial learning experiences for all ESL students in higher education.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Summary**

This chapter will present a discussion and summary of the findings; links to published literature; and implications for nursing education, practice, research, and public policy. Expected and unexpected limitations will be presented as well as a discussion of future research related to this topic.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Online education has changed the landscape of academia. Today students can enroll in a class and have the choice as to their learning location and environment whether they would like to engage completely online, face to face, or learn in a hybrid format. With this change in the delivery of higher education, second language students find themselves in an environment that requires them to engage with faculty and peers on a much deeper level than before. They are asked to read, write, and express themselves in English, which is not their native tongue. This shift in learning expectations marks the beginning of the higher-education acculturation process for the ESL student.

In Chapter One, this dissertation research began with a focus on the concept of integration, which is one of the four acculturation strategies used by individuals when they desire to maintain their original culture while remaining in daily contact with the host culture (Berry, 2005). With data collection and analysis, it became evident that participants in this study were consistently choosing to integrate into their completely online and hybrid classrooms. This choice was evident in the sharing of their cultural

pedagogical customs, learning expectations, and a desire to understand the way their American English speaking classmates engaged in learning online.

This dissertation study produced findings that offered insight into the experiences of RN-BSN ESL nursing students enrolled in a hybrid and completely online program (see Appendix H). Participants shared candid responses about their challenges and about the resources they used to achieve success. The use of online classroom technology did not seem to have much bearing on the participants' experiences. Each had been living and working in the US for at least 10 years and did not indicate technology as a barrier to their success. Participants openly admitted to missing the traditional classroom environment and saw the immediacy of responses from faculty and peers as a plus. They found the opportunity to engage in group work as a chance to develop more intimate connections with their peers. Participants were not afraid to share a desire to connect online with people of their same culture. Many resorted to searching the class roster in an effort to recognize last names, which gave them a feeling of safety, knowing there were others online that they could relate to.

Participants evaluated their instructors highly for the support they provided through feedback and pointing them to institutional resources available for writing challenges. An area of concern that was shared was participant's perception that faculty only saw them as a student on a list and not as a unique individual with different learning styles and needs. The most universal challenge among participants was writing. While writing caused the most angst, participants proactively sought and used resources available to them through their institution.

There was no connection noted between time spent in the US and participants' online experiences. Participants who spent the longest time in the US had the same or similar experiences with language and writing as those who were in the country for shorter periods. No connection was determined between years of nursing experience and online lived experience. Overall, participants had very similar experiences regardless of age, language spoken, culture, years of nursing experience, or format of online program.

### **Integration of the Findings with Previous Literature**

ESL students reported online experiences similar to those of the traditional classroom for difficulty with writing, understanding the English language, and cultural barriers to success (Liu et al., 2010; Speece, 2012; Tan, 2009; Tan et al., 2010). The comparison of the findings from this dissertation study with those presented in Chapter Two allowed the opportunity to show convergence or divergence of the research. As stated previously, there is a lack of research specific to the ESL student enrolled in online nursing programs. Due to the limited research on this topic, concept, and participant group, the challenge was to align findings to the existing research. The lived experiences presented in this dissertation study unlock valuable insight and lead the way for further exploration in this area.

### **Understanding the Online Classroom**

Pursuing education online requires the student to engage in the use of different social skills that were not utilized in the traditional classroom. The findings from this dissertation study do not fully support research indicating ESL students have a similar experience online as face-to-face students (Liu et al., 2010; Speece, 2012; Tan, 2009; Tan et al., 2010). RN-BSN ESL online students in this dissertation study identified challenges

with time and immediacy of responses, missing the face-to-face setting, and meeting online expectations, which indicated a unique experience for completely online and hybrid ESL nursing students.

### **Time**

There is research that emphasizes the significant role that time plays in the journey toward academic success for all ESL students (Al-Harthi, 2005; Mulready-Shick, 2013; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Al-Harthi (2005) reported that challenges with communication in the online classroom extended the time it took to complete assignments and ultimately made the learning process time consuming. There is also evidence to support that immediacy of faculty responses to students has an impact on instructional effectiveness (Melrose & Bergeron, 2007). Liu et al. (2010) shared that lack of immediacy in online interaction is seen as a cultural barrier to success for ESL students who are from different cultural backgrounds.

The available research underscores the difficulty participants in this dissertation study shared with balancing their lives around the time needed to read and understand assignments, formulate discussion posts, and write papers. Multiple email exchanges with faculty caused delays in their progress. Participants found the time spent waiting to receive an answer imposed on the extra time they needed to understand and complete the course work. The influence of culture on the perception of time was evident with this group of participants. Seven out of 10 participants shared how time engaging with course work as well as spending time waiting for faculty responses affected their online experience. Participants brought their culturally influenced learning expectations to the

online classroom, and it was evident that their individual cultural expectations played a key role in their concerns with time.

### **Missing Face to Face**

Several researchers have compared the completely online and hybrid learning environment with traditional classroom (Adams, Randall, & Traustadottir, 2015; Al-Harthi, 2005; Arispe & Blake, 2012; Artino, 2010; Ball, Mosca, & Paul, 2013; Bedford, 2014; Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, & Stevens, 2012; Capra, 2014; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Hall & Villareal, 2015; O'Neil & Fisher, 2008; Tan, 2009). It was common for students' preference for one particular format over the other to be displayed in the findings. In a study of Chinese students engaged in online studies in the US, Ku and Lohr (2003) found that not all students enjoyed engaging in coursework online and would rather return to the traditional face-to-face classroom. Tan (2009) shared that for the ESL student, there is a comfort in the traditional classroom that is not felt online.

Missing the ability to consistently interact with peers and faculty was a sentiment expressed by a few participants in this dissertation study. Students who come from collectivist cultures in which a sense of cohesiveness and community undergirds their value system tend to have difficulty integrating into the online environment (Speece, 2012). Although learning as a social construct is dependent on interaction and socialization, it was not evident that participants who expressed a preference for the traditional classroom experienced a diminished learning experience as a result of being enrolled in the online or hybrid RN-BSN program.

### **Trying to Figure it Out**

Feelings of anxiety and fear of the unknown prior to enrolling in an initial online

course is commonly reported by students regardless of their language (Al-Harthi, 2005; Capra, 2014; Chen & Jang, 2010; Duff & Quinn, 2006; Hall & Villareal, 2015; Harrington, 2010; Ku & Lohr, 2003). Specific to the ESL online student, this fear generally stems from insecurities about proper communication and the lack of social cues to provide guidance (Harrington, 2010). In a study of Arab Gulf students enrolled in an online course, Al-Harthi (2005) reported that students experienced high levels of anxiety, fear, and reservation about taking an online course due to uncertainty and lack of knowledge about the format.

A general ignorance about online learning was the initial experience of some of the participants in this dissertation study. They worried about their inability to navigate within the learning management system and submit their work in a timely fashion. Their desire to do well became a catalyst to understand and meet the expectation of their online course. While cross-cultural differences generally have an affect on how students approach uncertainty and fear (Hofstede, 1986), it was not evident that RN-BSN ESL participants perceived their initial fears of the online environment to be a hindernace to their progress and ultimate success in the program.

### **Expressing Culture Online**

Culture and language were reported to be barriers in online learning experiences (Al-Harthi, 2005; Capra, 2014; Chou & Chen, 2009; Harrington, 2010; Liu et al., 2010; Speece, 2012; Tapanes et al., 2009; Tan et al., 2010; Tsai-Hung Chen et al., 2008; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Lack of proficiency in the English language and limited understanding of North American cultural practices led to students appearing “invisible” online with limited participation and interaction beyond the minimum requirment (Zhang & Kenny,

2010). Tan et al. (2010) reported the expressed shock of ESL students when their American classmates shared personal experiences, opinions, and feelings on the discussion boards, which was something ESL students were not accustomed to and saw the classroom reserved solely for academic purposes.

Similar to the findings of Zhang and Kenny (2010), some participants in this dissertation study shared feelings of their culture being ignored or not being observed online. However, there were efforts by both ESL and American native speakers to learn about the cultural practices of their classmates. Shock with the causal nature of communication between students and toward faculty was a finding in this dissertation study that echoed that of Tan et al. (2010). These findings provided insight into the participants' commitment to their own cultural values and their ability to integrate into the online classroom while maintaining their personal pedagogical expectations.

### **Alone but Not Lonely**

Isolation and lack of social connection is a sentiment reported by ESL students enrolled in both completely online and hybrid courses (Al-Harthi, 2005; Boling et al., 2012; Harrington, 2010; Speece, 2012; Tapanes et al., 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). The RN-BSN ESL online students in this dissertation study expressed feelings of disconnection; however, engagement in group work and developing relationships by way of cultural familiarity offered an opportunity to connect and collaborate. Socialization, collaboration, and interaction with peers in the context of learning are the foundation of social constructivism and an intricate part of online education (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Constructivist learning appeal to collectivist cultures (Speece, 2012).

### **No Real Connection**

Learning in an online environment can stymie the development of academic relationships and connections for the ESL student (Al-Harthi, 2005; Harrington, 2010; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Speece, 2012; Tsai-Hung Chen et al., 2008; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). These findings were no different than those found in studies of primarily English-speaking American students studying online (Adams et al., 2015; Boling et al., 2012; Capra, 2014; Duff & Quinn, 2006; Helms, 2012). Chavez (2014) reported that female Hispanic ESL students who formed social networks with other Hispanic women within their institution found the process helped to create an important sense of belonging. Hispanic women made up 50% of the participants in this RN-BSN ESL study. They candidly spoke about their approach to finding other Hispanic students in the course that they could establish a connection with. Collectivist values are an important aspect of the Hispanic culture (Hofstede, 1986; Tapanes et al., 2009).

The inability to see their peers and observe body language was a challenge for many of the participants in this dissertation study. They felt that the online classroom did not foster an opportunity for personable engagement. The hybrid students in this dissertation study shared the same feelings even though they were able to see their peers at some point during the program. It was evident that that time was not enough.

### **Comradery in Group Work**

Positive group dynamics online allow for student connection and a sense of community with peers (Boling et al., 2012; Mancuso-Murphy, 2007). Along with developing group connections, online ESL students appreciate the ability to observe how

their American peers approach an online discussion or other activities (Al-Harthi, 2005; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

Participants in this dissertation study also appreciated the comradery that came with working in groups. There was an expressed feeling of security knowing that there were others for whom assignments could be modeled after. The consistency of interaction with the same people was an opportunity to become acquainted with their peers. Participants often took their communication with group members offline as well as looked to peers for guidance throughout the course and program.

### **A Hybrid Connection**

The hybrid learning environment provides a social connection for students and creates a balance between the isolation of completely online courses and the ability to engage with classmates in person (Davidson et al., 2014; Hall & Villareal, 2015; Harrington, 2010; Helms, 2012; Sowan & Jenkins, 2013). Instant responses to questions and valuable encounters with peers make the hybrid format a benefit to some students (Hall & Villareal, 2015). Harrington (2010) suggested that hybrid instruction for ESL students could result in fragmented and incomplete identity development because students do not remain in a community long enough to establish their identity, resulting in muting and poor academic discourse. Conversely, hybrid students in this RN-BSN ESL dissertation study appreciated the ability to engage with peers in person during the designated times throughout their program and saw it as an opportune time to discuss class topics and concerns. Additionally, there was a comfort in communicating online after meeting peers in person, which was mentioned as beneficial to their learning process.

### **Cultural and Language Familiarity**

Cohesiveness, community, and affinity are primary characteristics of collectivist cultures (Al-Harthi, 2005; Hofstede, 1986; Lee, 2011; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; R. Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Speece, 2012). Social support has the ability to enhance sociocultural adaptation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Students often seek out classmates of similar cultural backgrounds to provide academic support (Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Zhang and Kenny's (2010) found that searching for classmates with culturally identifying names offered the hope of connecting with someone who shared a common language and cultural values. Similarly, multiple participants in this study sought to find classmate with last names akin to their own by scanning the class roster. They likened it to a feeling of safety and comfort, knowing that there was a possibility of connecting with someone who they could relate to.

### **Writing as a Surmountable Barrier**

Low English language proficiency is a major cause of the struggles that ESL students face with reading and writing in online programs (Al-Harthi, 2005; Boling et al., 2012; Capra, 2014; Kang & Im, 2013; Tsai-Hung Chen et al., 2008; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Writing in the academic setting can be a challenging skill to acquire for ESL students (Salamonson, 2010). Researchers agree that knowledge obtained through the first language experience can significantly affect an ESL student's learning progress (Al-Harthi, 2005; Donnell, 2015; Jeong et al., 2011; San Miguel et al., 2013). In a qualitative study, Yan and Berliner (2009) reported participants' academic capabilities were hindered by the inability to effectively communicate. Language being a barrier to academic success was a theme that emerged in a qualitative study published by Koch et

al. (2011). ESL students find it difficult to understand vocabulary when slang and unknown acronyms were used (Fuller, 2013; Myles, 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Findings from this dissertation study converged with these research findings with additional insight obtained about the tedious writing process, self-comparison to peers, and the use of familial and institutional resources that aided in ESL students' academic success.

### **Understanding the Language**

Difficulties understanding and writing in the English language can be a significant obstacle for ESL students in an online classroom (Al-Harthi, 2005; Harrington, 2010; Ku & Lohr, 2003; Tapanes et al., 2009). Tapanes et al. (2009) reported that the inability to understand languages influenced self-reported participation in an online course. Al-Harthi (2005) and Ku and Lohr (2003) reported that ESL students' engagement in coursework online was an advantage due to not having to speak or listen but rather read, follow, and learn how their peers incorporated academic language into their course work. Learning online accommodates and influences ESL students to develop vocabulary and the use of standardized English (Tan et al., 2010). Participants in this dissertation study described the challenges they had with understanding language and incorporating vocabulary into their writing but also liked that engaging in coursework online removed the need to be self-conscious about their accent and proper pronunciation. The statement "look it up" was commonly used to indicate the additional steps ESL students must more prevalently take to clarify a word or phrase during the completion of a discussion post or the writing of a paper.

### **Working Through the Writing Process**

Writing can be a difficult and exhausting process for ESL nursing students in the traditional classroom (Crawford & Candlin, 2013a, 2013b; Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013; Malecha et al., 2012; Ooms et al., 2013; San Miguel et al., 2013; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). There was no difference in the writing experience when the learning environment was changed. Online ESL students experience the same challenges with writing as do traditional face-to-face students; however, many benefited from the opportunity to reflect and edit themselves prior to submitting their assignments (Tan et al., 2010; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). The writing process described by RN-BSN ESL study participants included many hours of thinking in their native language and having to translate to English. There was expressed disdain for the higher level of English writing along with feelings of inadequacy; however, students maintained a strong persistence to improve and progress forward.

### **Resources for Writing Success**

Access to learning resources within an RN-BSN program, such as the library and writing center, are important tools for students to achieve successful outcomes (Beitz & Snarponis, 2006; Davidson et al., 2014; Gilmore & Lyons, 2012; Malecha et al., 2012; Oomset al., 2013; Tsai-Hung Chen et al., 2008). Completely online and hybrid programs share the same learning resources as traditional face-to-face programs (Davidson et al., 2014). ESL students look to family members who displayed a stronger grasp on the English language as an additional resource in the writing process (Zhang & Kenny, 2010). Most of the participants in this dissertation study spoke highly of the library and writing center at their individual institution. ESL students found the resources to be an

added benefit, especially the convenience and availability. Asking their family members to proofread their assignments offered an extra layer of confidence that they were submitting work that they could be proud of.

### **Faculty Support**

Faculty cultural awareness, encouragement of integration, and support for students are bridges essential for the success of all ESL students (Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Olson, 2012; Ooms et al., 2013; Salamonson, 2010; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). When nursing students from culturally diverse backgrounds feel comfortable and safe, they are more inclined to engage and participate in coursework (Fuller, 2013). Nursing faculty members need to foster a learning environment that is inclusive and become more culturally competent as indicated by researchers' findings published in the last 5 years (Du & Wei, 2015; Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013; Hansen & Beaver, 2012; Jeong et al., 2011; Malecha et al., 2012; Mareno & Hart, 2014; McDermott-Levy, 2011; Scheele et al., 2011). ESL students do not feel like their cultural needs are appreciated and a barrier to their success is lack of faculty support (Olson, 2012; Starr, 2009). Crawford and Candlin (2013b) recommended that faculty engage students on a personal level, including assessing the needs of ESL students. Personalized and highly tailored feedback offers a level of academic support that is appreciated by ESL students (Brown, 2008; Choi, 2005; Fuller, 2013; Koch et al., 2011; Suliman & Tadros, 2011; Weaver & Jackson, 2011). Students appreciate when faculty implement strategies that foster support and activities that help build community among peers (Bedford, 2014; Boling et al., 2012; Bonnel, 2008; Speece, 2012; Zhang & Kenny, 2010).

In the completely online and hybrid learning environment, nursing faculty members have the responsibility to mediate the online space and be aware of the cultural learning needs of all students (Chou & Chen, 2009; Krish et al., 2010; Tan, 2009; Tan et al., 2010; Tapanes et al., 2009; Zhang & Kenny, 2010). To understand the integration process of the online ESL student, faculty must confront the challenge of interpreting learners' emotions from a cultural perspective (Chou & Chen, 2009). For some students, online learning carries the advantage of anonymity from a heavy accent and language mistakes. Faculty ought to capitalize on this knowledge to close the gap between culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Krish et al., 2010). Faculty cultural awareness and sensitivity can be exhibited by creating a learning environment that fosters cohesive engagement by requiring the use proper English by all students (Tan, 2009).

The RN-BSN ESL students in this dissertation study seemed satisfied with the level of engagement and support provided by faculty. The students were well aware that the online environment created a barrier in order for the faculty to become acquainted with them on a personal level. However, some participants expressed a hope that faculty would take the extra step to become acquainted and recognize that they may have challenges because they speak a second language. Participants found faculty members to be accommodating of academic needs whether faculty member was aware of the students' ESL student or not. Faculty feedback was clear, professional, and offered insight into areas of the participants' work that needed improvement. Some students believed that unless they announced themselves as ESL, faculty might not make the connection to offer additional assistance.

## **Implications of the Findings**

### **Nursing Education**

With the significant growth of RN-BSN nursing programs across the US, it is important that attention be paid to how these programs are achieving student success. The inclusion of a completely online or hybrid component within the curriculum offers students flexibility and convenience; however, some students may need more support than others. Findings from this dissertation study confirm the need for additional support for ESL students as they enroll, integrate, and matriculate in a completely online or hybrid RN-BSN program. Nursing education program directors and faculty should make an effort to gather as much information as possible about a student as it pertains to his/her first language and culture. Inquiry about second language should not end at the TOEFL admission prerequisite. Participants in this dissertation study expressed their desire for faculty to know who they are and not see them as a name on a list.

Cultural competence and awareness of integration strategies are important steps toward faculty becoming facilitative rather than impeditive in the learning process (Rice et al., 2012). Faculty may need additional training about how different students who have different pedagogical values learn (Fuller, 2013; Greenberg, 2013). It is not expected that faculty members have in-depth knowledge of each student's learning needs, but they should at least observe and assess their students and have knowledge of Eastern and Western pedagogical practices and expectations (Fuller, 2013; Hansen & Beaver, 2012). Faculty members must be cognizant of their assumptions and biases and not allow them to dictate how they engage in the teaching process. Fundamentally, aspiring nurse

educators should receive foundational instruction on the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness in the online classroom.

Preparation of nursing faculty to effectively instruct ESL students in an online classroom is necessary to ensure student success. The development of faculty training that offer sessions focused on cultural sensitivity provide educators the tools to create a positive learning environment for ESL students. Training should include best practices in instructional strategies, engagement, and grading. Feedback should be specific and detailed, offering visual examples of the correct way to complete the assignment. Faculty should learn how to balance between praising students' efforts and calling attention to their mistakes. There should be constant review and consideration given to the linguistic modification of announcements and other material shared with students in the learning management system (Bosher & Bowles, 2008). Faculty should work to connect with students beyond just learning their names.

Faculty support and engagement is important to students as indicated by the shared lived experiences of the participants in this study. Faculty recognize students need additional and frequent feedback in the online classroom (Bedford, 2014; Boling et al., 2012; Capra, 2014). Participants in this dissertation study found the writing center to be a significant help in improving their writing and became more confident in the submission of assignments. Faculty should be cognizant of ESL student's needs and encourage the use of university resources, directing them toward these resources consistently.

RN-BSN completely online and hybrid nursing programs need to become proactive in their plan to support ESL students. The time to act should not be when a student is struggling within the program but when the student is admitted and enrolled in

their first online course. It is recommended that prior to enrolling in their first online course, ESL nursing students should be expected to complete a readiness assessment related to cognitive academic language proficiency. The information obtained from this readiness assessment can be used to determine the level of support needed for each student. Some students may need in-depth tutoring and advisement while others may need occasional assistance. The steps that nursing education leadership take to provide an online learning experience for ESL students that is culturally inclusive and supportive will ultimately lead to satisfied students and positive outcomes.

### **Nursing Practice**

Nurses who return to school to obtain their BSN are a benefit to clinical practice. Nurses who speak a second language hold additional value because they are able to understand patients from their same or similar culture. They provide insight into cultural sensitivity and awareness that others may not have given much attention, which is a value to the health care organization and should be an impetus for the hiring of BSN graduates who speak a second language. Health care organizations should encourage their employees to return to school to obtain their BSN because it improves clinical practice. The level of BSN-educated staff enhances quality care and ultimately patient outcomes (AACN 2015; Aiken, 2014).

It is beneficial for health care organizations to partner with RN-BSN programs to provide scholarships to cultural and linguistically diverse students (Clark & Jones, 2011). Health care facilities that seek to recruit culturally diverse nurses should also focus on retention by taking into account job satisfaction. Health care organizations should collaborate with second language nurses to encourage their pursuit of advanced degrees

in nursing. Collaboration could include offering seminars that focus on the benefits of an advanced nursing degree. These seminars could be coordinated and led by current and past ESL nurses within the organization. This focused attention can provide ESL nurses with the motivation and support needed to pursue higher education at a level in which minorities have little representation, which shows the ESL nurses that they are valued and their talents and expertise can be used within the organization.

### **Nursing Research**

There is limited research available that explores the individual experiences of second language students who engage in coursework online. There are even fewer studies that delve into the experiences of ESL nursing students. Furthermore, this dissertation study is the first known study to explore and interpret the lived experience of RN-BSN ESL nursing students in a completely online or hybrid program. Findings from this dissertation study made it evident that more research in this area is needed. Research would be beneficial to compare and contrast ESL student needs in a completely online environment versus hybrid. There is a need for qualitative exploration about the student experience with online learning resources, such as writing centers and library services. It would also be valuable to seek the perspective of nursing faculty when it comes to teaching ESL students in a completely online or hybrid program. These research topics will help to provide insight about future educational design and strategies in the development and construction of completely online and hybrid nursing programs.

Empirical studies can identify if there is a correlation between ESL completely online and hybrid student grades and the use of resources within the program. Additionally, quantitative studies that focus on ESL student attrition from online and

hybrid programs and exploration into the length of time from enrollment to graduation could provide much needed information to inform future program development.

Researchers can also engage in mix method studies that combine faculty preparation to teach online, faculty experience, ESL student experience, and program completion rates.

These types of inquiries will add to the currently sparse knowledge about the online experience of ESL nursing students in RN-BSN completely online, hybrid, traditional, or accelerated nursing programs. These studies will inform students and faculty about student-centered approaches that will support and retain these unique learners.

### **Public Policy**

Seamless academic progression is important to ensure that all nursing students who desire to complete and obtain a BSN have the option to do so. RN-BSN nursing programs have received attention in recent years secondary to the launching of programs with poor student satisfaction and low graduation rates (Morgan, 2012). National nursing organizations, such as the ANA, AACN and the NLN, have voiced their positions regarding the standards for a program to enroll and graduate a baccalaureate prepared student (Tri-Council for Nursing, 2010). It is imperative that RN-BSN programs are continually monitored to ensure all students are receiving a quality education. Completely online and hybrid ESL students may not be monitored as closely in schools with poor student outcomes (Morgan, 2012), so it is advised that a taskforce is developed that reviews the graduation rates and progress of second language students. Funding and scholarships should be sought for RN-BSN students who speak a second language, which has a dual effect in that it offers financial reprieve and it encourages RN-BSN students who speak a second language to pursue degree completion and become a valued asset at

the bedside or wherever they practice nursing. Increasing the diversity of the nursing workforce is an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the IOM Action Coalition as a means to enhance tomorrow's RN workforce. Research focused on ESL student persistence is essential.

The success of completely online and hybrid RN-BSN ESL students will ultimately have an effect on the national faculty and clinical nursing shortage. These BSN-prepared nurses will have the opportunity to pursue greater leadership positions within their health care organizations, which adds to overall diversification. Additionally, those who choose to can enroll in masters- and doctoral-level educational programs and provide culturally and linguistically diverse advanced practice skills to the community and the nursing classroom.

### **Limitations**

The investigator had limited experience in qualitative inquiry and, more specifically, phenomenology. The recruitment process posed some challenges as it related to the investigator gaining access to the participants. Administration at many of the schools of nursing that were approached acted as gatekeepers, which limited the investigator's ability to provide reminders about the dissertation study. The students in this dissertation study attended programs at both two-year colleges and four-year universities, which could have influenced their individual experiences. The colleges and universities from which the students attended were all in the Southeastern region of the US, a densely diverse area of the country. Not having inclusion and exclusion ranges for years in the country may have influenced the theme emergence in this dissertation study. Similarly, all participants received their RN education in the US, which may have

influenced their online lived experience as compared to someone who received his/her nursing degree in another country. Participants' age range may have influenced their experience with technology and overall experience online. Only having the voice of one male participant may have influenced the theme emergence in this dissertation study. Additionally, participants could have limited their responses and not been completely forthcoming to the investigator in order to steer their experiences towards a more positive than negative light.

Due to the distance of each participant from the campus and the investigator, interviews were conducted via the video-conferencing tool Join.me. Half of the participants were able to log in without difficulty while the other half had significant set-up issues. Two participants who experienced difficulties connecting to the video conferencing site resulted in telephone interviews. In retrospect, the investigator should have provided an email with a test link a day before the appointment to ensure that the online conference link would work for the participants instead of using time to troubleshoot. Video conferencing allowed the investigator to see participants' facial expressions, body posture, and observe their surroundings. Having to resort to telephone interviews for two participants removed the ability to gather important social cues.

### **Chapter Summary**

The summary of findings presented in this chapter provided an overview of the lived experiences shared by the participants in this dissertation study. It was evident that although participants had the biggest challenge with writing, they also had support from faculty and institutional resources. While it was difficult to align the findings from this dissertation study to existing studies, it was apparent that there are studies that have

similar outcomes. This dissertation study uncovered and highlighted some important implications in the area of nursing education, practice, research, and public policy. These implications can assist in the development of improvements for ESL nursing students in the classroom, at the bedside, in the development of future research, and in the area of diversity and access to higher educational degrees.

The exploration of the RN-BSN ESL nursing student's lived experience in a completely online and hybrid program offered insight into the lifeworld of each participant and his/her unique journey. Turning to the nature of the experience (van Manen, 1990) allowed the investigator to express thoughtfulness about the meaning of existing in a world in which one's culture and language are different from the majority. What does it mean to maintain your cultural values and pedagogical expectations while integrating into a seemingly transient environment? Investigating the experience (van Manen, 1990) as the RN-BSN ESL students lived it included engaging in interviews that provided detailed experiences of challenges and triumphs while learning online. Reflecting on essential themes (van Manen, 1990) allowed the investigator to interpret the expressed experiences and recognize common themes among participants. The art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990) enabled language and thoughtfulness to be brought to the unique phenomenon of the RN-BSN ESL nursing students' lived experience. Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990) required that the investigator be committed to the interest of the RN-BSN ESL nursing student, interpreting his/her lived experience, and giving it meaning. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1990) was the most important step in this research process because it gives the research significance.

There is no real conclusion to this dissertation study because the lived experience is ongoing. One can explore the lived experience of RN-BSN ESL nursing students from many other perspectives and add to the body of nursing education knowledge and research, which will provide the evidence needed to offer this group of students with the tools they need to achieve their educational goals to be excellent nursing professionals.

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## Appendix A

## Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension	Description
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Degree of cohesion of a society
High versus Low Power Distance	Power distribution among society
Strong versus Weak Uncertainty Avoidance	Extent to which society perceives structure
Masculinity versus Femininity	Differing societal roles by gender

## Appendix B

## IRB Permission Documents



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY  
Office of Grants and Contracts  
Institutional Review Board

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Sonique Sailman  
Health Professions Division – College of Nursing

**From:** Jo Ann Kleier, PhD, EdD, ARNP  
Institutional Review Board Jo Ann Kleier  
Signature

**Date:** November 25, 2015

**Re:** *The Lived Experience of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Nursing Student in an Online RN-BSN Program*

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review. You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** If recruitment procedures include consent forms these must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/REACTIONS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and 954-262-1978 respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.
- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.

**Cc:** Protocol File  
Office of Grants and Contracts (if study is funded)



Office of Research and Sponsored Projects  
Carrollton, Georgia 30118

March 31, 2016

Sonique Sailsman  
Nova Southeastern University  
ss2380@nova.edu

Dear Ms. Sailsman:

This letter is to notify you that your request to conduct the study entitled *The Lived Experience of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Nursing Student in an Online RN-BSN Program* has been approved as an exempt study under category 2. IRB #16\_0179 has been assigned by the UWG Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects.

**Please review and acknowledge your understanding of the following bulleted points, and return this email communication to me within one week after receipt of this approval letter.**

- Exempt studies are subject to continuing review after 3 years. If changes are made to the research protocol before the review, the changes must be submitted for IRB review, prior to implementing these changes.
- Should any adverse event occur or if there are increased risks to participants found, you must suspend your research immediately and notify the UWG IRB.
- You must promptly report any proposed changes to this research activity to the UWG IRB.
- This approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of any serious or continuing noncompliance with Federal Regulations or any aberrations from the original proposal.
- Any change in the study procedures must be reported promptly to the UWG IRB prior to implementing these changes except when it is necessary to eliminate any apparent immediate hazards to the subject.

Please advise the Board when this study is completed or discontinued by completing the *Research Completion Form*.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Date of Exempt Review: 03/31/2016  
Date of Final Review: 03/31/2016  
Date of Approval Expiration: 03/30/2019

Best of luck in your research, and do not hesitate to contact me at (678) 839-4749 if you need any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charla Campbell".

Charla Campbell, MPA, CRA  
Assistant Director  
Office of Research & Sponsored Projects

Office of Institutional Effectiveness  
300 N.E. Second Avenue, Suite 5601  
Miami, Florida 33132-2297



Rita Menéndez, Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
Phone: (305) 237-7488  
FAX: (305) 237-7496  
Email: rmenende@mdc.edu

April 8th, 2016

Dear Sonique Sailsman,

On April 4th, 2016, Miami Dade College's Institutional Review Board reviewed the research proposal referenced below and voted to **APPROVE** the research via exempt review. The CASSC Research and Testing Committee also approved the research.

When gathering participant consent, use the consent forms that are IRB approved and stamped. Signed consent forms must be kept in a locked cabinet for three years or until completion of your study, whichever comes first.

IRB Approval will expire on April 4th, 2017. If more time is needed to collect data, you will need to submit a Change of Study form to request an extension at least 60 days prior to expiration.

You also must submit a Change of Study form if any additions or changes to your procedures or materials arise. All changes must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

If any adverse event occurs during or as a result of your study, or if problems arise regarding rights or welfare of participants, you must submit an Adverse Event report immediately.

Finally, the committee is very interested in the results of your research. Please provide an executive summary of your findings at the conclusion of your study.

Proposal: [Sailsman-01-27-2016](#)

Proposal title: The Lived Experience of the English as a Second Language (ESL)

Nursing Student in an Online RN-BSN Program

Primary Researcher: Sonique Sailsman (NOVA University)

Best of luck in your research.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Rita Menéndez, PhD'.

Rita Menéndez, PhD  
Chair, Miami Dade College Institutional Review Board

*The Mission of Miami Dade College is to change lives through the opportunity of education.*

*As democracy's college, MDC provides high-quality teaching and learning experiences that are accessible and affordable to meet the needs of our diverse students and prepare them to be responsible global citizens and successful lifelong learners. The College embraces its responsibility to serve as an economic, cultural and civic beacon in our community.*



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
 Willis Holcombe Center  
 225 East Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301  
 Phone 954-201-7820/Fax 954-201-7608

March 15, 2016

Sonique Sailsman  
 Doctoral Candidate – Nursing Education  
 Nova Southeastern University

Re: IRB Protocol #020416-01 "The Lived Experience of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Nursing Student in an Online RN-BSN Program"


Dear Ms. Sailsman,

The IRB has reviewed your research protocol entitled "The Lived Experience of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Nursing Student in an Online RN-BSN Program," under an expedited status. On behalf of the IRB, your research protocol has been approved. You may now begin work on this project and start data collection. Your IRB approval is valid for one year and will expire on March 14, 2017.

Please note that if any changes are made to your protocol during the course of the approval period, you must submit an Amendment Form and your revised protocol to the IRB. A Research Closure Form must be submitted to the IRB upon study completion. If adverse events occur during the course of the approval period, you must report these events immediately to the IRB using the Adverse Event Report Form, which can be found at: <http://www.broward.edu/community/irb/Documents/BC-IRB-Adverse-Event-Report-Form.pdf>.

If you should have any questions about the contents of this letter or your approved protocol, you may contact the Acting IRB Administrator, Dr. Sheila Jones at 954-201-7646.

Sincerely,

  
 Dr. Joyce Walsh-Portillo  
 IRB Chairperson

## Appendix C

## Recruitment Flyer



# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

- DO YOU SELF-IDENTIFY AS AN ENGLISH AS A SECOND (ESL) LANGUAGE SPEAKER?
- ARE YOU AN RN-BSN ONLINE STUDENT?
- HAVE YOU COMPLETED AT LEAST ONE SEMESTER OF RN-BSN ONLINE WORK?

*This qualitative research is an opportunity for you to share your story of being an ESL RN-BSN nursing student studying online. This study will provide a greater understanding of the ESL nursing students' academic experiences.*

## WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Private interview
- Confidentiality
- \$25 Gift Card for your time


**If you are interested in participating please contact:**

Sonique Sailsman MSNEd, RN, CPN, CCRN  
PhD Candidate- Nursing Education  
[ss2380@nova.edu](mailto:ss2380@nova.edu)

## Appendix D

### Permission to Proceed Emails



RE: IRB Inquiry\_Follow-Up email



Kamille Chaparro <Kamille.Chaparro@ucf.edu>

3/3/2016

Sonique Salsman; Patria Davis <Patria.Davis@ucf.edu>; Institutional Review Board <irb@ucf.edu>



Reply all

UCF IRB

You forwarded this message on 3/3/2016 9:06 PM

---

Action Items

TO: Sonique Salsman

Thank you for contacting the IRB office.

Here is the way that the UCF IRB handles requests from researchers from other institutions who wish to conduct human subjects research with UCF students or employees as study participants: If UCF is not "engaged" in the research, then the outside researcher must obtain IRB approval from their institution's IRB and not from the UCF IRB. UCF would be "engaged" in the research if a UCF researcher were interacting with study participants or their identifiable information or if the UCF researcher were going to be consenting the study participants.

Per your e-mail, UCF is not engaged and what you would like to do is to recruit UCF students as study participants. This being the case, you must obtain permission from the UCF office, department, college, etc. from which you want to recruit the students and ask for their assistance in informing students of the opportunity to take part in the research. Please provide them with a copy of the IRB approval letter from Nova Southeastern University. If your institution requires UCF permission before they will review your study for approval that's fine, but remember you must obtain permission from your institution's IRB before you can recruit participants and begin research activities at UCF.

Please contact the appropriate UCF office for permission and feel free to contact the UCF IRB, if you have additional questions.

Regards,

*Kamille Chaparro*  
 IRB Coordinator  
 Office of Research and Commercialization  
 University of Central Florida  
 407-882-0889  
 Kamille.Chaparro@ucf.edu

## student recruitment



Weaver, Michael &lt;michael.weaver@ufl.edu&gt;

3/21/2016

Sonique Sailsman ▾


 Reply all ▾

UF URB

You replied on 3/21/2016 5:39 PM.



Action Items



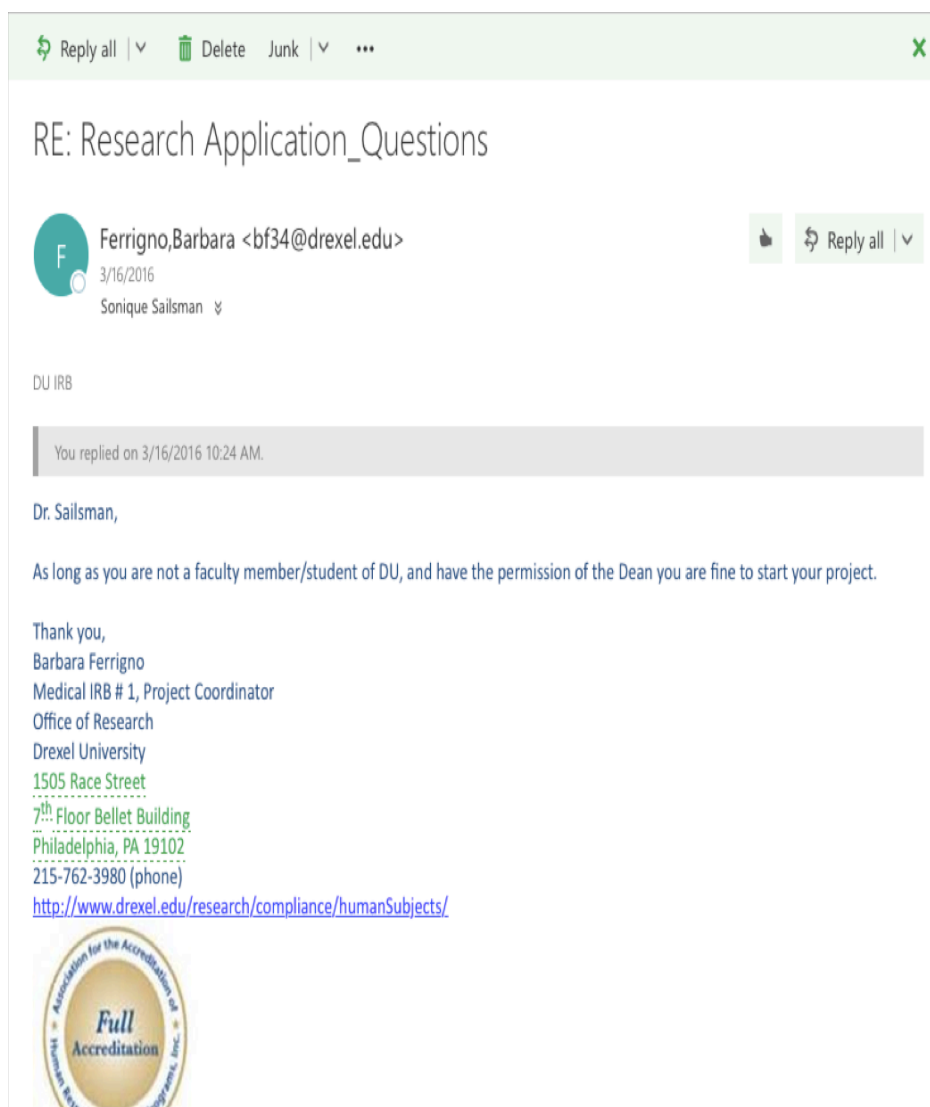
Sonique:

I have obtained the Dean's permission to distribute your recruitment materials to our RN-BSN students.

Please send me an electronic copy of your recruitment material, and I'll pass it along to our undergraduate program director.

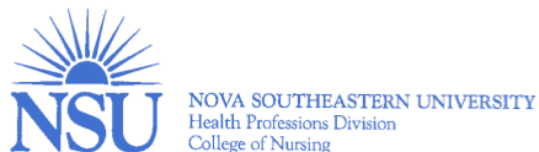
Michael

Michael T. Weaver RN PhD FAAN  
 Professor & Assoc. Dean for Research & Scholarship  
 College of Nursing  
 University of Florida  
 PO Box 100197  
 Gainesville, FL 32610-0197  
 Phone: 352-273-7491  
 Fax: 352-294-8102  
[michael.weaver@ufl.edu](mailto:michael.weaver@ufl.edu)



## Appendix E

### Informed Consent



Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled  
**The Lived Experience of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Nursing Student  
 in an Online RN-BSN Program**

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol #: Kleier 2015-23

Principal investigator  
 Sonique Sailsman, MSN  
 8754 North Crescent Drive  
 Miramar, FL 33025  
 404-861-6193

Co-investigator  
 Marcella Rutherford, PhD  
 3200 S. University Drive  
 Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33328  
 954-262-1813

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:  
 Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)  
 Nova Southeastern University  
 (954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790  
[IRB@nsu.nova.edu](mailto:IRB@nsu.nova.edu)

Site Information:  
 Nova Southeastern University  
 College of Nursing  
 3200 S. University Drive  
 Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33328

**Page 1 of 3**

3200 South University Drive • Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33328-2018  
 (954) 262-1983 • Fax: (954) 262-1036

College of Osteopathic Medicine • College of Pharmacy • College of Optometry • College of Health Care Sciences  
 College of Medical Sciences • College of Dental Medicine • College of Nursing

**Description of Study:** Sonique Sailsman is a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University engaged in research for the purpose of satisfying a requirement for a Doctor of Nursing Education degree. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of ESL RN-BSN nursing students in the online learning environment.

You are invited to participate because you are currently an RN-BSN nursing student enrolled online and you have self-identified as speaking English as a second language. There will be between 10 and 12 participants in the research study. If you agree to participate, you will be participating in a one-on-one private interview with the principal investigator. You will be asked a few questions related to your experience as an ESL RN-BSN nursing student in the online learning environment and be allowed time to provide your answers related to those questions. The interview will be audio recorded however, your name and information will not be recorded. The interview is not expected to last more than one hour however if you need more time it will be provided. Once the interview is complete it will be transcribed and you will be allowed to read the transcription to ensure that what you shared was recorded appropriately in writing.

This research project will include audio recording of your voice during the interview. This audio recording will be available to be heard by Ms. Sonique Sailsman, personnel from the IRB, and the dissertation chair, Dr. Marcella Rutherford. The recording will be transcribed by a third party professional transcriptionist, who will be requested to use personal earphones to guard your privacy. The recording device will be kept securely in Ms. Sailsman's home office in a locked cabinet. Audio-recorded files uploaded to Ms. Sailsman's personal computer will be password protected. The recordings will be kept for 36 months after the end of the study and destroyed by erasing from saved files and removed from the recording device after that time has elapsed. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

**Risks/Benefits to the Participant:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating. Risk to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risk you experience on a daily basis. Being recorded means that confidentiality cannot be promised. Sharing your experience related to being an ESL RN-BSN nursing student online may make you anxious or bring back unhappy memories of certain experiences. If this happens, Ms. Sailsman will make every effort to help you. If you need further help, she will provide the contact information for the counseling center to offer further assistance. If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Ms. Sailsman at 404-861-6193. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the number indicated above with questions about your research rights.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

You will receive a \$25 American Express gift certificate as an honorarium for your time. You will receive the gift certificate once you have read and approved the transcription of the information you provide. Your participation in this study will not cost you anything.

**How will you keep my information private?**

The interview will not ask you for any information that could be linked to you. You do not have to disclose your name to me at any point in this study. The transcripts of the recordings will not have any information that could be linked to you. The recorded information will be destroyed 36 months after the study ends. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, and Dr. Marcella Rutherford may review research records.

**Participant's Right to Withdraw from the Study:** You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

**I have read this letter and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily consent to participate. All of my questions concerning this research have been answered. If I have any questions in the future about this study they will be answered by the investigator listed above or his/her staff.**

**I understand that the completion of this interview questionnaire implies my consent to participate in this study.**

## Appendix F

### Demographic Data

Participant ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Demographic Questions**

1. What is your primary language? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you speak any additional languages? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your family's country of origin? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How long have you lived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where did you receive your RN education (US or outside)? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many years of nursing experience do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What semester are you in your RN-BSN program? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Gender? \_\_\_\_\_ Age? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

## Themes

Major Themes	Key Language	Subthemes
<b>Understanding the Online Classroom</b>	<i>The experience of navigating the demands and expectations of online learning</i>	Time Missing Face-to-Face Trying to Figure it Out Getting Used to It Making the Choice
<b>Expressing Culture Online</b>	<i>The experience of engaging with and learning from peers of various cultures online</i>	Cultural Encounters Online
<b>Alone but Not Lonely</b>	<i>The experience of working physically alone but having the opportunity to connect with others</i>	No Real Connection Comradery in Group Work A Hybrid Connection Cultural and Language Familiarity
<b>Writing as a Surmountable Barrier</b>	<i>The experience of the process of writing in a second language as an online student</i>	Understanding of Language Working Through the Writing Process Comparison of Self to Peers Resources for Writing
<b>Faculty Role in the Online Journey</b>	<i>The experience of receiving faculty support as an online ESL student</i>	Faculty Support and Feedback Faculty Cultural Awareness

## Appendix H

### Conceptual Map

