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# Indigenous Students from Latin America in the United States

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**Topic:** Present and future of immigrant indigenous students from Latin America in American classrooms

**Abstract:** This report provides an overview of indigenous Hispanic students from Latin America in the United States. More specifically, this report provides an overview about the indigenous cultures of Latin America, indigenous Hispanic students in American classrooms, Hispanic indigenous populations in the community, and reflections about the importance of addressing this population within the Hispanic diaspora in the United States, followed by opportunities for future research.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, Hispanic students, Spanish, Latin America, ELs, SLIFE

## Introduction

It is not uncommon for research surrounding the education of Hispanics in the United States to focus on their similarities rather than their differences. Some of the reasons might be to mainstream publications, programs, and services. For example, in K-12 education, identifying all immigrant Hispanic students learning English—known as English Learners (ELs)— as Spanish-speakers serves the purpose of incorporating general approaches to fit all students within this population. As a result, the identities of Hispanics in the United States have been filtered down to common cultural and linguistic traits that omit individualities. However, the truth is that Hispanics from North, Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean, are all different. In many cases, individuals born and raised in Spanish-speaking countries from Latin America do not speak Spanish as a first language or do not speak Spanish at all.

Although determining a specific number of Hispanic indigenous people under the Spanish literacy-emergent category is elusive, a recent publication from the World Bank gives a glimpse of these statistics. According to the World Bank, the self-identified indigenous populations in Bolivia, Mexico, and Ecuador who grew up speaking indigenous languages and who may or may not have proficiency in Spanish are 29%, 7%, and 5% respectively (Banco Mundial 2015). Similarly, in Peru close to 4.4 million people (around 16% of its population) identified as indigenous language speakers with some or no proficiency of Spanish (Banco Mundial 2015). It is important to share that the World Bank's publication

acknowledges that these statistics might be underreported and lower than the actual facts because a growing number of indigenous people—especially the younger generation—do not want to identify themselves as indigenous and/or do not want to disclose in the census their ability to speak a native language (Banco Mundial 2015).

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of indigenous Hispanic students from Latin America in the United States. The report has been divided into four sections that provide specific information about this population in the context of American classrooms and communities. Section 1, titled “Indigenous cultures of Latin America”, provides background information about how indigenous cultures in Latin America are vibrant and how migration is allowing this population to become visible in the United States. Section 2, titled “Indigenous Hispanic students in American classrooms”, looks into the unique realities of this population in the United States as they learn English and become familiar with a foreign culture while immersing themselves in a sub-culture of Spanish-speaking classmates. Section 3, titled “Hispanic indigenous populations in the community”, shares information about five large indigenous populations found in the United States and how institutions are tailoring their services for these populations as they become more visible and empowered. Lastly, Section 4, titled “Final thoughts”, reflects on the importance of further addressing this unique Hispanic population in the American context and the impact indigenous peoples of Latin American have for the perpetuation of the Spanish language in the United States.

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## 1. Indigenous cultures of Latin America

Historically, indigenous peoples from Latin America have been marginalized, massacred, and mistreated by the predominant and dominant Spanish-speaking communities in their native countries (Anderson-Levitt & Rockwell 2017; Oyarce, del Popolo, Martínez Pizarro 2009). As a consequence, they have been born and raised in societies where their indigenous languages, customs and traditions, and ways of being are disapproved and deemed less important. Paradoxically, indigenous people are expected to integrate to and be part of the mainstream Spanish-speaking culture by participating in the social, economic, educational, and political development of their nation. The challenge with this is that their society follows a “civilizing” ideology (Ames & Gomez 2017: 32) that excludes their divergent ways of thinking and requires knowledge of Spanish language and culture as an unwritten requirement for inclusion (Ames & Gomez 2017).

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Migration to the United States has served as an opportunity for indigenous peoples of Latin America to escape the structural discrimination they suffer in their native countries in the form of marginalization, exclusion, and poverty (Oyarce, del Popolo, Martínez Pizarro 2009). It is believed that the first XX century migration of indigenous people from Latin America to the United States took place in the 1940s (Oyarce, del Popolo, Martínez Pizarro 2009; Velasco Ortiz, París Pombo, Olavarria 2014) and it has continued ever since. More recently, an approximate of 140,000 to 150,000 indigenous Guatemalans have migrated to the United States in the last decades (Velasco Ortiz, París Pombo, Olavarria,

2014). The strength in numbers is energetically becoming more apparent in the American workforce (Valdes 2009) as Hispanic indigenous immigrants are starting to identify with their indigenous and/or Native Americans roots instead of their Latino or Hispanic heritage (Baidal 2014).

Today, Latin America continues to be a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual region with over 150 indigenous languages, all of which are endangered (England 2012). “It is estimated there are 671 indigenous peoples in Latin America today, over half of whom are settled in tropical forest areas. The major demographic groups are located in the Andean and Meso-American countries” (Oyarce, del Popolo, Martínez Pizarro 2009: 144). These diverse and migrating populations of indigenous peoples are re-defining the boundaries of Latinx studies and preconceptions of Latinx people in the United States. Sections 2 and 3 of this report will explain in more detail how immigrant indigenous populations are different from Spanish-speaking populations from Latin America and the challenges they have to overcome to succeed in this new economic, educational, and social environment.

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## 2. Indigenous cultures of Latin America

Published works on teaching indigenous populations agree that indigenous students who become literate in their native language (L1) experience a positive emotional, mental, cultural, social, and academic development (Ball & McIvor 2013; Georgiyeva 2015; Scull 2016). In addition, Scull (2016) asserts that for effective literacy teaching of indigenous children, there must be a clear

understanding of the social and communication functions of those indigenous languages, and their lexical and grammatical structures. However, professional development programs in the United States that acknowledge, talk about, or teach American educators about the indigenous cultures, languages, or traditions from Latin America are virtually nonexistent. As a result, remaining an invisible student population contributes to the lack of access to educational resources and support in native languages.

The population of indigenous peoples from Latin America in the United States has been steadily increasing in recent years. New statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice show that three Mayan languages—Mam, Quiche, and Konjobal—were among the top 25 languages used for translation in immigration courts in 2016 (U. S. Department of Justice 2017). In addition, as shown in *Figure 1*, Quiche has been part of this list since 2013 and it has moved up from the 24<sup>th</sup> place to the 10<sup>th</sup> most-used language for translation purposes in immigration courts in only three years. Similarly, other indigenous populations—such as the Ixil and Quechua—from Latin America are starting to become highly visible in United States. Section 3 will share more information about Hispanic indigenous populations in the community. These statistics are an indication that not all immigrant and Hispanic ELs arriving to the United States from Latin America are native Spanish speakers and that, perhaps, it is time for educational institutions to become aware of best practices for teaching indigenous populations of learners.

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**Figure 1.** Top 25 languages used for immigration court cases (fiscal year).

Rank	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish
2	English	English	English	English	English
3	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin	Mandarin
4	Russian	Russian	Arabic	Punjabi	Punjabi
5	Arabic	Arabic	Russian	Creole	Arabic
6	Creole	Portuguese	Punjabi	Russian	Creole
7	Portuguese	Creole	Creole	Arabic	Russian
8	French	Punjabi	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese
9	Korean	French	French	Mam	Mam
10	Punjabi	Korean	Korean	Somali	Quiche
11	Gujarati	Foo Chow	Nepali	Quiche	French
12	Foo Chow	Nepali	Foo Chow	French	Somali
13	Nepali	Amharic	Somali	Nepali	Nepali
14	Amharic	Tagalog	Amharic	Bengali	Bengali
15	Vietnamese	Indonesian	Mam	Foo Chow	Foo Chow
16	Indonesian	Romanian-Moldavan	Indonesian	Korean	Korean
17	Tagalog	Vietnamese	Quiche	Konjobal	Konjobal
18	Tigrigna-Eritrean	Gujarati	Gujarati	Indonesian	Albanian
19	Urdu	Urdu	Vietnamese	Amharic	Romanian-Moldovan
20	Tamil	Armenian	Tagalog	Gujarati	Amharic
21	Armenian	Albanian	Urdu	Vietnamese	Armenian
22	Romanian-Moldovan	Tigrigna-Eritrean	Albanian	Armenian	Tigrigna-Eritrean
23	Somali	Somali	Armenian	Romanian-Moldovan	Urdu
24	Polish	Quiche	Bengali	Albanian	Indonesian
25	Albanian	Polish	Konjobal	Urdu	Gujarati

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In this nascent subfield of the Hispanic diaspora within the United States, scholars (see Jenner & Konkel 2018; Pentón Herrera 2017; Pick, Wolfram, & López 2011) have begun to publish preliminary works with the vision of making this population visible in educational settings, as well as providing the foundation for more in-depth studies. Even more promising, visionary doctoral candidates at

American universities are shifting their focus to Hispanic indigenous students as they are noticing the research gap that exists in the academic experiences and perspectives of these populations in American classrooms (see Pentón Herrera 2018a; Lypka 2017; s.d.; De Felice 2012). These dissertations are paving the way for better understanding the realities, needs, and individualities of indigenous Hispanic ELs in American classrooms; which are different from their non-indigenous Hispanic counterparts. In the sub-sections below, I share information about the academic, literacy and language learning, and social factors experienced by this population in American learning environments.

## 2.1. Academic Experiences

A high number of indigenous Hispanic ELs arriving to American schools are students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). This is due, in part, to the marginalization indigenous people experience in their native countries. Indigenous people currently represent the largest number of poor and extremely poor in Latin America and have the highest percentage of illiteracy rate in the region (López & Hanemann 2009). As a result, ELs arrive to school in the United States not knowing how to read or write in their native languages and/or Spanish—their second (or third) language (Pentón Herrera 2018b). In some cases, even adolescents and young adults who arrive to high school classrooms with no prior formal education have to learn how to write and spell their own names. For more information about the academic barriers this particular group of

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adolescent ELs face in American classrooms upon their arrival, see Custodio & O’Loughlin (2017) and Pentón Herrera & Duany (2016).

Being literate emergent is particularly difficult for adolescent indigenous Hispanic students arriving to secondary schools—ages 15 to 21—who are expected to expeditiously learn English, perform at the same grade and academic level as their American English-speaking counterparts, pass standardized tests, and graduate in four to five years. Many indigenous Hispanic students are not able to complete all requirements within the four-to-five years mark and drop out of school without ever receiving appropriate academic support in their native language or tools on how to use their L1 and Spanish as a bridge to learn English. Thus, they reach adulthood with emergent literacy skills in their indigenous language, Spanish, and English. As a result, by the second or third generation of family members born in the United States, their indigenous native language and Spanish is often lost.

It is important to explain that statistics of indigenous students’ drop out rates in American schools are not available because this population is counted within the Hispanic population. However, although decreasing, Hispanics continue to be the largest student population dropping out of school—10%—and indigenous Hispanic students are part of this population and those statistics (Gramlich 2017). The lack of accuracy and information about Latin American indigenous students’ performance in American classrooms is, thus, a pressing matter for those concerned with equitable and accessible literacy education for minority and

vulnerable populations in the United States (Barillas-Chón 2010; Jenner & Konkel 2018; Pentón Herrera 2017).

## 2.2. Literacy and Language Learning

The literacy and language learning experiences of adolescent indigenous students in high school was recently researched in Pentón Herrera (2018a). Although this study focuses primarily on a particular group of indigenous learners—the Ixil—it does offer an insight into a perspective not researched enough. According to Pentón Herrera’s (2018a) findings, participants understand language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) as separate identities because of how they were used in their educational settings back home. Back in the participants’ native country—Guatemala—Ixil was used for speaking and listening, and Spanish was used for writing and reading. As a result, none of the participants developed complete literacy skills in any of the two languages (Ixil nor Spanish) and, upon their arrival to the United States, they were expected to become fluent in English in all four language domains. The main challenge with becoming proficient in all four language domains in English is that these participants had never had the opportunity to fully define the role that each domain has in a language. Furthermore, because these participants were SLIFE, gaps of content and lack of study skills became additional barriers to school success.

Another important barrier faced by Hispanic indigenous ELs in American schools is the lack of knowledge about the system, practices, and expectations. The

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conflicting differences from the educational settings and practices in Guatemala and in the United States create a cultural dissonance in school—“that is, not understanding the expectations, discourse styles, and modes of school-based ways of thinking and learning in U.S. educational institutions leaving them feeling confused and alienated” (DeCapua & Marshall 2015: 2). Due to Latin America’s traditional teaching style of education, when students arrive to American classrooms they are not familiar with constructivist ways of learning and expect teachers to be the center and guide of the teaching-learning process. In addition, because students identify with their country of origin, educators often categorize them as Spanish-speakers and provide resources to learn English and content (science, math, history, etc.) using Spanish as a linguistic bridge. Similarly, it is not uncommon for indigenous Hispanic learners to be placed in Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes that are above their level. All of these barriers and challenges experienced by indigenous Hispanic ELs in American K-12 classrooms make them uniquely vulnerable to dropping out of school or becoming uninterested in education. These difficult experiences could prove alienating and not being able to connect with school personnel or classmates to ask for support, could also lead to feeling alone and helpless.

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### 2.3. Social Factors

Indigenous people from Latin America continue to experience marginalization and seclusion from the dominant culture (Spanish-speaking culture) in their native countries. As a result, they might not be accustomed to interacting with Spanish

speakers unless it is for trading and/or business transactions (Machado-Casas, 2009). Having limited access to the dominant culture and language, both by force and by choice, disconnects them as people and creates a rift between the Spanish-speaking population and their indigenous community. However, upon their arrival to the United States, indigenous students are identified as Hispanics because of their native country of origin and unconsciously become part of the Spanish-speaking sub-community at their schools and work (Pentón Herrera 2018a). Thus, indigenous students have to take a new role of becoming fluent Spanish speakers to be able to navigate through their daily social activities while learning English to be successful in the United States

As found by Lypka (2017; s.d.) and Pentón Herrera (2018a), it is not uncommon for indigenous students to struggle with adapting to this shocking and abrupt change of culture, customs, and languages. Back in their native country, their indigenous language and traditions were used on their daily lives and Spanish was seen as the language of opportunities because it was used to communicate with the dominant culture for business transactions (Machado-Casas 2009). Nonetheless, upon their arrival to the United States, their indigenous language and culture is used exclusively in their household, Spanish and Spanish-speaking traditions are used in their daily practices at school and work (Pentón Herrera 2018a), and English is seen as the language that provides social and economic power and opportunities. The biggest challenge with these scenarios is that indigenous immigrants often experience marginalization from the Spanish-speaking and the English-speaking communities in the United States (De Felice,

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2012; Lypka, 2017, Unpublished Dissertation; Pentón Herrera, 2018a), which makes the process of acclimatization more difficult. The Spanish-speaking sub-community in the United States often marginalizes and makes fun of indigenous people from not speaking “proper” Spanish, for speaking their indigenous language, and/or for their indigenous physical features (De Felice 2012; Lypka 2017, s.d.; Pentón Herrera 2018a). On the other hand, the English-speaking community makes fun of this indigenous immigrant population because they are seen as Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America who cannot speak English (Barillas-Chón 2010).

Amidst the cultural shock of arriving to a new country, being submerged in the Spanish-speaking community, learning a new language (English), and being exposed to a new school system—the first formal academic experience ever for some—indigenous Latin American students might also face the barrier of connecting with others. In a recent study, Pentón Herrera (2018a) found that his participants—indigenous Hispanic ELs with limited or interrupted formal education—had difficulties establishing and maintaining relationships with their classmates. One of the main reasons for this phenomenon was that the participants stopped attending school in their native countries during their formative years to work in the maize fields. The participants’ daily activities revolved around adults and elders working in the fields and had few opportunities to interact with children their age. Upon their arrival to the United States, they became surrounded by classmates from their same age group but found it difficult to interact with them. As a result, the participants became isolated from

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their peers and lost opportunities to make meaningful connections that could have supported them inside and outside of the classroom.

### 3. Hispanic indigenous populations in the community

Throughout the United States, indigenous immigrants from Latin America are starting to come together as a group and are forming communities that support and enable the preservation of their linguistic and cultural ways of being. In this section, I share information about five resilient and growing indigenous communities residing in the United States: Ixil, Konjobal, Mam, Quechua, and Quiche.

#### 3.1. Ixil

The Ixil, also spelled Ixhil, are an indigenous group from El Departamento del Quiche, a mountainous region in the northern part of Guatemala. In recent years, two established Ixil communities, one in Centreville, VA and another in Dover, OH have emerged, although smaller pockets are also found in Northern Virginia and throughout Maryland.

In Centreville, VA the Ixil population is widely recognized by local newspapers such as the Centre View and The Connection. According to Hobbs (2011, 2013), the Ixil people represent Centreville's biggest day-labor community. Furthermore, Ixiles participate in the yearly Centreville International Music and Dance Fiesta celebrations where they share their traditional dances, clothing, and talents with local residents. In addition to local newspapers, George Mason University has also acknowledged the Ixil presence throughout their academic programs and departments. The Institute for Immigration Research (IRR), at George Mason

University, has a blog addressing different aspects of the immigrant communities around their University. A recent blogpost makes reference to the Ixil laborers as individuals who generally speak Ixil as a first language, have limited Spanish literacy skills, and have not completed elementary education or have no formal education at all (IRR 2016). Rathod (2016) makes reference to similar findings along with the many hardships Ixil laborers experience in Centreville, VA. According to Rathod's (2016) findings, Ixil laborers experience abusive treatment, employer oppression, and unsafe working environments, all of which continue to perpetuate systematic barriers to personal and professional development. Moreover, the obstacles Ixil parents' face in their daily lives as laborers also impact the experiences and reality of their children (Pentón Herrera, 2018a: 20).

Similarly, the Ixil has also become visible in Dover, OH where a large population of students in K-12 schools are identified as Ixil speakers (Ohio Immigrant Worker Project v. Dover City Schools 2016). The Ixil population in Dover, OH became visible in 2016 when they came together as a community to fight for their children's rights of a safe and academically-challenging learning environment. In 2016, Ixil parents filed a lawsuit against Dover City Schools stating that their children were not receiving quality education and were exposed to discrimination from school personnel and the administration on a daily basis. "The lawsuit also state[d] that the Dover City Schools' inability to provide adequate English instruction to their ELs ha[d] interrupted their English language development and ha[d] stopped them from earning credits towards graduation" (Pentón Herrera, 2018a: 19-20). The lawsuit settled in 2017 and Dover City Schools agreed to implement practices that benefit these learners and appropriately use certified

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educators to help Ixil ELs in English and content classes (Ohio Immigrant Worker Project v. Dover City Schools, 2017).

### 3.2. Konjobal

The Konjobal people, also spelled Kanjobal and Q'anjob'al, primarily live in the Huehuetenango Department of Guatemala, but there are also smaller communities found in Mexico. According to Fink (2003), the Konjobal people had been migrating to the United States since before the 1980s and their large numbers continue to migrate to this day (U. S. Department of Justice 2017). A large community of indigenous Q'anjob'al speakers is found in Alamosa, CO. According to Ludwig and her colleagues (2012: 32), over 400 documented and/or undocumented adults and their school-attending children live, work, and raise families in Alamosa, an "economically impoverished, rural, high mountain valley region of Colorado." One of the organizations founded to specifically serve the Q'anjob'al population in the area is The San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center (SLVIRC 2018). Since 1987, SLVIRC has served the Q'anjob'al people and also hosts cultural events on a regular basis to celebrate their culture and bring together their community.

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### 3.3. Mam

Mam is spoken in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala (England 1983) and in the Eastern Central part of Mexico (Simons & Fennig 2018). In the United States, Mam speakers have primarily settled in Oakland, CA and its neighboring regions (Philanthropic Ventures Foundation 2017). However, smaller pockets of

Mam speakers can also be found throughout Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Texas. The steady increase of Mam speakers in immigration court cases is creating problems because of lack of qualified personnel for translation (Carcamo 2016). Similarly, the influx of Mam ELs at Oakland Unified School District, CA is leading the way for this population to become more visible as a unique indigenous ethnic group that is different from their Spanish-speaking counterparts (Kamiya 2016). As a reflection of the strength and resilience of the Mam community in Oakland, CA, the organization *Fuerza Indígena* was created by Mam women to sell their handcrafted products and as a channel to celebrate their culture while empowering their community.

### 3.4. Quechua

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Quechua, also spelled Quichua, is one of the most-widely spoken indigenous languages in Latin America and it is found throughout the Andes region including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. In the United States, one of the most visible Quechua communities is found in New York, specifically in the Metro Area (All Peoples Initiative 2010). According to All Peoples Initiative, the Quechua people “started making their way to New York in the late 1970s and early ‘80s due to economic problems in their homeland” and their numbers have increased to over 10,000 estimated speakers in the area (All Peoples Initiative 2010: 1). The increasing numbers and cultural richness of the Quechua population in New York is positively impacting local institutions in their community. The Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies from New York

University (NYC) has included Quechua as one of the languages offered at their department.

In addition to NYC's Quechua program, the Quechua Collective of New York is another example of the resilience and strength of the Quechua community in New York. The Quechua Collective of New York "was created by a committee of like-minded individuals comprised of native Quechua speakers, heritage speakers, and students from the New York area. [Their] mission is to preserve and diffuse Quechua languages through workshops, cultural events, and educational programming" (The Quechua Collective of New York 2018). This organization is highly involved in the community and promotes the Quechua language and traditions through expressive forms of art as well as social events and cultural celebrations. It is their desire "to support [with their events and celebrations] those Quechua speakers living in NYC and allow the language to be shared with the greater community and generations to come" (The Quechua Collective of New York 2018).

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### 3.5. Quiche

The Quiche people, also spelled K'iche', constituted 11% of the Guatemalan population in 2011 (INE 2011). Perhaps one of the most well-known Quiche leaders in the world is Rigoberta Menchú, recipient of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her social justice work for the rights of indigenous peoples. During The Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996) thousands of "Quiche refugees fled to the United States in search of safety and work, and more than 100,000 (5

percent to 10 percent of the total Quiche population) live in the United States today” (Danver 2013: 156). However, new migration of Quiche speakers in recent years (U. S. Department of Justice 2017) is contributing to a steady increase. A growing and visible population of Quiche speakers has been found in Southeastern Massachusetts around the New Bedford (BPDA 2017) area.

In New Bedford, MA, the Quiche people founded *Organización Maya K’iche* in 1996, a cultural and advocacy organization whose explicit mission is to promote and preserve their Mayan culture both within and outside the Maya community (Knauer 2011). *Organización Maya K’iche* (OMK) adopted a strongly indigenist stance since its foundation. “Early on they developed strategic alliances with local Native American communities, especially the Mashpee Wampanoags, who have allowed the Maya to hold ceremonies on their sacred land” (Knauer 2011: 194). However, OMK and the Quiche community in New Bedford have encountered a few challenges recently, including becoming the target of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Capetillo-Ponce & Abreu-Rodriguez 2010; Knauer 2011) and the founder of OMK being sent to jail for sexual assault (Rios 2013).

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#### 4. Final Thoughts

Throughout the years, educational research of Hispanic ELs in the United States has evolved and its focus has shifted from Mexican American ELs to a broader term that acknowledges other ethnic groups, known as Spanish-speaking population or Hispanics/Latinos (Pentón Herrera 2018a). However, throughout this time, educational research on immigrant populations from Latin America has

yet to meaningfully research a minority group that continues to be seemingly invisible: the indigenous Hispanic EL population. The number of indigenous immigrants from Latin America continues to increase every year in the United States (U. S. Department of Justice 2017). Nonetheless, there is still a necessary need for educators, policy makers, and stakeholders at all levels to know, learn, and understand the social, cultural, linguistic, and educational impact of not acknowledging this underserved and invisible population at American institutions.

It is my hope that this report sheds some light on who indigenous immigrants from Latin America are and how they are becoming more visible in the United States through resilience, hard work, and intelligent community partnerships. It is also my hope that this report can serve as a foundational text for the proliferation of intellectual research studies surrounding these vibrant communities within the Hispanic diaspora in the American society and classrooms. Furthermore, as an educator, I worry the most about students, who need and deserve the most support. It is important to remember that the majority of indigenous immigrant children from Latin America arrive to American classrooms with limited or interrupted education (López & Hanemann 2009), both in their native indigenous language and in Spanish. Arriving to elementary, middle, and, specially, to high school as a SLIFE brings particular challenges and socio-educational needs that are not being addressed under our current educational system. The problem with remaining invisible and unacknowledged is that these immigrant indigenous SLIFE ELs continue to be oppressed to a social and educational system that

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prevents them from accessing equitable education and hinders any opportunity of emancipation and success (Freire 2014) in the American society.

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