

Chapter 1

Introduction: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education in K-12 and Adult Education



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Abstract My vision with this edited volume is to continue elevating the conversation and knowledge about students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in English-speaking environments and how to best support them. More specifically, in this edited volume, I bring the SLIFE population front and center by collecting high-quality contributions that shed light, advance, and educate readers on how to best support SLIFE in learning settings (K-12 and/or adults), and organizations. Contributions included in this volume are theoretically sound and provide practical techniques, frameworks, approaches, practices, considerations, and useful insights that any stakeholder, at any level, can learn from and implement in their institution. Lastly, the intended audience for this book includes teacher educators, pre-service and in-service English and literacy educators, first language (L1) language professionals, graduate students, tutors, facilitators and instructors working in community organizations, and administrators with SLIFE populations at their institutions.

Keywords ELs · ESOL · K-12 schools · Literacy · LESLLA · Refugees · SIFE · SLIFE

This edited volume embraces two topics that have been lifelong passions of mine: (1) literacy and (2) the education of refugees and immigrants. I was born and raised in Cuba, a country often known for its high literacy rate and its focus on literacy education. While many mistakenly believe Cuba's history of literacy education began after 1959, the reality is that early in the twentieth century, many educators were already leading the fight to combat and eradicate illiteracy on the island. Among those teachers was Dr. Ana Echegoyen de Cañizares, the first Afro-Cuban woman to hold a tenure position as Professor of Education in *La Universidad de La*

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Habana (the University of Havana) (see Pentón Herrera, 2018). I first learned of Dr. Echegoyen de Cañizares's works during my doctoral studies, and I became impassioned about her incessant fight against illiteracy and injustice in Cuba (Pentón Herrera, 2019).

From 2016 to 2018, I extensively read and studied the works of Dr. Echegoyen de Cañizares. Her vision of freeing Cuba and the world from illiteracy invigorated my pedagogy and my career, and I quickly became interested in literacy and its power to free the individual and transform societies. By immersing myself in the works of Dr. Echegoyen de Cañizares, I learned that, in Cuba, print literacy was used as a weapon against those who could not read or write. For example, powerful individuals would often use their ability to read and write to persuade *güajiros*—farmers who lived and worked in rural parts of the country planting in the fields and who could not read or write—into signing away their lands without informed knowledge of what they were signing for. At the same time, I also learned about the stories of many wealthy Cuban refugees who migrated to the United States after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and how they were able to use their robust formal education backgrounds to succeed in this new society.

Certainly, literacy contributes and has the power to transform lives and individuals in all societies around the world. This statement is even more true for today's immigrants and refugees who arrive in a new social, cultural, and linguistic environment and must quickly adapt to survive. However, more often than not, to succeed in a developed nation, immigrants must have print literacy skills in their first languages to help them function in these text-driven societies. Although much has changed since the twentieth century when Cuban *güajiros* were misled into signing away their lands, some things have remained the same. Today, language and literacy continue to be used as a mechanism to manipulate individuals who are not able to access the host country's dominant language or print (Reed, 2019). Today, in the twenty-first century, language and literacy continue to be a tool used by the powerful to control, disincentivize, and exploit individuals with emergent print literacy skills. Once again, we see the most vulnerable—refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, individuals with limited or interrupted formal education—being abused by those with power and control over the constructs of language and literacy. It is my hope that books like this one will help our global societies understand the effects that language and literacy have had over those who have been marginalized for so long.

My vision with this edited volume is to continue elevating the conversation and knowledge about students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) in English-speaking environments and how to best support them. More specifically, in this edited volume, I bring the SLIFE population front and center by collecting high-quality contributions that shed light, advance, and educate readers on how to best support SLIFE in learning settings (K-12 and/or adults), and organizations. Contributions included in this volume are theoretically sound and provide practical techniques, frameworks, approaches, practices, considerations, and useful insights that any stakeholder, at any level, can learn from and implement in their institution. Lastly, the intended audience for this book includes teacher educators, pre-service and in-service English and literacy educators, first language (L1) language

professionals, graduate students, tutors, facilitators and instructors working in community organizations, and administrators with SLIFE populations at their institutions.

English and students with limited or interrupted formal education: Global perspectives on teacher preparation and classroom practices has been divided into five parts:

- Part I. Setting the foundation: How we want to frame our conversations about students with limited or interrupted formal education
- Part II. Overview of students with limited or interrupted formal education
- Part III. Pre- and in-service teacher preparation
- Part IV. Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in K-12 learning environments
- Part V. Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in adult learning environments

In the first part of the book, *Setting the foundation: How we want to frame our conversations about students with limited or interrupted formal education*, Browder, Pentón Herrera, and Franco (Chap. 2) frame and advance the conversation of the term SLIFE within this edited volume and beyond. More specifically, the authors problematize the label of SLIFE, its use, and propose future directions for the words *interrupted* and *limited* in formal education. In their chapter, Browder, Pentón Herrera, and Franco hope to become part of a growing conversation about the implications of using the label SLIFE in education. In addition, the chapter's arguments contribute to pushing exchanges towards using more asset-based vocabulary and avoiding labels to conglomerate a large, heterogeneous group of learners without benefits connected to its use.

The second part of the book, *Part II. Overview of students with limited or interrupted formal education*, shares an overview of the SLIFE population in K-12 and adult learning environments and also looks at important topics that stakeholders should consider when supporting this population of learners. Pentón Herrera (Chap. 3) shares an overview of SLIFE in K-12 learning environments in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as six significant challenges SLIFE encounter at the primary and secondary levels in these four countries. Harris (Chap. 4) provides an overview of adult SLIFE—also known as literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) learners—in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, outlines four main challenges these students face, and summarizes relevant contributions these adult learners provide to the communities in which they live. Linville and Pentón Herrera (Chap. 5) explore the importance of advocacy for SLIFE and provide resources and suggestions schools can use to support the access, acquisition, and development of literacy for this group of learners. Montero and Al Zouhour (Chap. 6) weave personal and professional experiences to discuss educators' roles when faced with a student's trauma story.

The third part of the book, *Pre- and in-service teacher preparation*, takes a close look at opportunities pre- and in-service teacher preparation programs have to effectively prepare educators to meet the needs of SLIFE. Custodio and O'Loughlin

(Chap. 7) provide an overview of state-level requirements for pre-service teachers in the United States and conclude with suggestions for training current in-service educators teaching SLIFE. DeCapua and Marshall (Chap. 8) propose detailed practices teacher educators can use in their courses to address the unique needs of SLIFE. Ledger and Montero (Chap. 9) narrate a teacher's journey toward a student-centered professional knowledge base within an English literacy development (ELD) program rooted in early literacy pedagogy in Canada. Marrero Colón and Désir (Chap. 10) shares best practices teacher education programs and practitioners should know to effectively teach and support the adolescent SLIFE population.

The fourth part of the book, *Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in K-12 learning environments*, proposes considerations, strategies, and practical applications educators of SLIFE in K-12 can use to serve this student population. Casanova and Alvarez (Chap. 11) make practical recommendations teachers can use to support underprivileged students, such as Latinx SLIFE, through the lens of community cultural wealth. Trinh (Chap. 12) introduces *queer SLIFE youth*, a little-known population, and argues that as sexuality and language education intersect, the affective domains and emotional aspects of this student population require special attention prior to, or in conjunction with, the teaching of language and literacy. Cruzado-Guerrero and Martínez-Alba (Chap. 13) focus on elementary-age SLIFE and discuss the potential of wordless books and literacy events to develop children and parents' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in their native language or in English. Aker, Daniel, and Pentón Herrera (Chap. 14) propose problem-based service-learning (PBSL) as an effective instructional framework to support SLIFE at the middle school, high school, and community college levels.

The fifth part of the book, *Effective support for students with limited or interrupted formal education in adult learning environments*, proposes consideration, strategies, and practical applications educators of SLIFE in adult learning environments can use to serve this student population. Frydland (Chap. 15) reports on three Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®) projects implemented with adult SLIFE at a non-governmental organization (NGO) and a community-based-organization (CBO). Friedman, Laitflang, and Pilosoph (Chap. 16) advocate for the use of explicit instruction for adult SLIFE and identify the curricular support and training that teachers require to adopt explicit methods of instruction. Lypka (Chap. 17) proposes the use of four participatory digital visual methods (PDVMs)—Photo-elicitation, PhotoVoice, VideoVoice, and Community Filmmaking—to support adults with limited or interrupted schooling in the classroom through multiple means of expression, modalities, and digital technologies. Mocciano and Young-Scholten (Chap. 18) explore the wealth of research on the acquisition of grammar by post-puberty immigrants with and without formal schooling to aid practitioners in understanding how learners' errors are a natural and encouraging sign of learners' progression towards higher levels of second language competence. Kidwell (Chap. 19) reflects on a four-month program in the United States offering English classes to adult refugee women from Afghanistan and Congo with emergent literacy to share promising strategies that practitioners and stakeholders should consider to adult SLIFE populations.

Final Comments

I would like to end the introduction of this edited volume by acknowledging some points that may create tensions for scholars reading this volume and that reflect the current inquietudes experienced in scholarly conversations in the field. Those points include: (1) in some chapters, the writing might appear as to create a “literate/non-literate” dichotomy which is not the objective, (2) the terms “education” and “schooling” might appear at times as interchangeable in the context of *formal education* and *formal schooling*, (3) the term “formal schooling” and “literacy” might appear at times as interchangeable which is not the objective, and (4) terms such as “limited literacy” and “low literacy” might appear at times as the normalization of a deficit terminology which is not the objective. In an effort to address these and other points of tensions throughout the edited volume, my colleagues Browder, Franco, and I have framed the conversation about SLIFE in Chap. 2 from an asset-based perspective while also acknowledging the tensions the acronym may cause from some readers.

My goal as editor of this volume is not to force a specific vocabulary or mindset on the contributors, but to advance the conversation about this particular student population by sharing the voices of practitioners in diverse contexts from around the world. This goal is also evidenced by the divergent views on appropriate pedagogies found throughout the volume where, for example, some contributors rely on liberatory and progressive approaches while others identify traditional practices as more appropriate. There is, certainly, much work that remains to be done in the theorization and application of literacy as both a construct and practice. My vision is that this edited volume advances this conversation further.

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