Abstract

Title of Document: ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH LIMITED OR INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION: RISK AND RESILIENCE IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

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This dissertation examined the educational outcomes of high school English learner (EL) students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) to evaluate theories that explain their educational resilience. School system data and survey results from 165 high school ELs were analyzed to determine the degree to which ELs' homeland schooling had influenced their academic outcomes in the U.S. Educational outcomes included English proficiency attainment and gains as well as scores on standardized tests of algebra, biology, and English language arts. Limited formal schooling (LFS) was operationalized with three indicators for students on arrival in the U.S.: (1) gaps in years of schooling relative to grade, (2) low self-reported first language schooling, and (3) beginner-level English proficiency. Bivariate and multivariate regression analyses were used to estimate the relationships between the LFS indicators and the educational outcomes as well as the degree to which school-based protective factors and personal risk factors had influenced the relationships. Protective factors included perceived pedagogical caring, social integration with non-immigrant peers, ESOL classes, out-of-school help, and extra-

curricular activities. Risk factors included high social distance, past traumatic experiences, a lack of authoritative parental support, separations from loved ones, and hours spent working in employment. This study also examined the role students' academic self-concept played in mediating and moderating the influence of protective and risk factors in the resiliency process. The findings showed that SLIFE had lower achievement on the standardized tests, but that it was largely due to having lower English proficiency at the time of the test. Lower English proficiency at the time of the test was mainly attributed to arriving with lower English proficiency and lower first language literacy. ESOL classes appeared to help students acquire English faster. After controlling for differences in English proficiency, students' perceptions of social distance appeared to predict their academic achievement on standardized tests better than their academic self-concept and the other protective or risk factors. This study contributes to our understanding of risk and resilience among SLIFE and may help inform interventions to support them better.