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Immigrant Origin Undergraduate Students' Experiences Building Leadership Skills through Volunteering

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Spring Arbor University, 2014

BS, Lincoln University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Student leadership development programs have expanded in higher education; however, limited efforts have been made to understand the leadership development experiences of immigrant origin undergraduate students. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore immigrant origin undergraduate students' experiences building leadership skills while volunteering at a nonprofit community service agency. The Higher Education Research Institute's social change model of leadership and Astin's input-environment-output theory comprised the conceptual framework. The research questions addressed immigrant origin college students' leadership experiences and the skills they developed as well as the types of support they identified as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering with a nonprofit community service organization. Data were collected in semistructured interviews with 10 undergraduate participants who self-identified as immigrant origin. All the participants were Muslim and represented six different countries. Data analysis through open coding resulted in the identification of three themes. The first two themes addressed the first research question: Participants described their leadership experiences as facilitating consciousness of self, and they gained skills and in communication and teamwork. The second and third themes addressed the second research question: They perceived that support for these gains came from teamwork and peer leaders. Findings could lead to positive social change by suggesting ways higher education professionals could design culturally sustaining spaces in higher education and foster a well-qualified diverse pool of graduates ready to step into leadership roles.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the women who struggle to find balance between marriage, motherhood, sisterhood, and career.

To all my children, I offer the words of the U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Judge Kentanji Brown Jackson:

> I know it has not been easy as I have tried to navigate the challenges of juggling my career and motherhood. And I fully admit that I did not always get the balance right. But I hope that you have seen that with hard work, determination, and love, it can be done. I am so looking forward to seeing what each of you chooses to do with your amazing lives in this incredible country. I love you so much.

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I would first and foremost like to thank the amazing students and organization who impacted my desire to highlight their work. Working with you has been a life changing experience. Secondly, Dr. Mullinix, your patience and insight have been instrumental in this process. Lastly, Dr. Keen, you have been a light since the beginning of this journey. I am inspired and humbled that you took my success personally.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Leadership is among the top five skills most valued in college graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). Many higher education institutions hold students' leadership development and community engagement central to their mission, vision, and values (Downing, 2020; Dugan & Komives, 2010). The need for higher education institutions to strengthen the undergraduate leadership development student experience is linked with the need for accountability for workforce preparation (Ashby & Mintner, 2017; Peck, 2018).

Budiman (2020) referenced the Pew Research Center, projecting that immigrants and their descendants will account for 88% of U.S. population growth through 2065, driving future growth in the U.S. working age population through at least 2035, and estimated a jump from 173.2 million to 183.2 million first, second, and third-generation immigrants. Globalization and steadily increasing immigration rates require a diverse, inclusive workforce. Thus, this research can add to the literature needed to help create a diverse, career ready workforce. Research investigating the leadership development of these students can lead to socially informed data that are important to consider in the design of college leadership development programs and culturally sustaining spaces (see Fox, 2018).

Access to leadership opportunities by diverse populations still presents a major challenge in the United States (Haddad et al., 2020). There is also limited research exploring leadership development for students of color (Haddad et al., 2020; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Khalifa et al., 2016; Pendakur & Furr, 2016). Higher education's

leadership development for diverse students has typically focused on a Black-White racial binary (Baughman & Bruce, 2011; Hotchkins, 2017) although there have been a few studies that have addressed the contexts that contribute to Latino leadership development (Brooms et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2017; Haber-Curran & Tapia-Fuselier, 2020). There are less studies focused on the leadership development experience of university students with other immigrant origin backgrounds. Although student leadership development is a priority of higher education institutions (Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Rosch et al., 2017, Van der Meer et al., 2019), the leadership skills development experiences of immigrant origin undergraduate students who volunteer with a community service organization have not been well researched. Hernandez et al. (2019) noted that immigrant origin emerging adults are the largest new student population across the United States, and yet there is a dearth of literature about how their needs are to be met by U.S. higher education.

In this chapter, I address the background, problem statement, purpose, conceptual framework, nature of the study, operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of this study.

Background

With first- and second-generation immigrant students accounting for 58% of the increase in the number of students in higher education in the United States from 2000 to 2018 (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020), this group is of particular interest to U.S. policymakers, higher education administrators, and advocates (Hopp, 2018). The Migration Policy Institute (Batalova & Feldblum, 2020) reported 5.3 million immigrant

origin students in higher education in 2018, with 68% being U.S. citizens by birth and 16% being citizens by naturalization. A better understanding of the specific leadership development support needs of diverse students can help with the development of programming and curricula to support such students (Barnes, 2020). Although student leadership development in higher education is in strong demand by students, and such demands have institutional support (Kuchinke et al., 2018), very little is known about immigrant origin undergraduate student experiences of leadership development. More inclusive student leadership opportunities integrated into the student experience could lead to a positive impact on leadership skills development, including cross cultural understanding, adaptability, and global citizenship (van der Meer et al., 2019; Wambu et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

In 2018, immigrant origin students accounted for 28% of all students in higher education in the United States and 60% of the increase in all postsecondary students from 2000 to 2018 (Batalova & Feldbum, 2020). Immigrant origin students comprise a significant part of higher education enrollment, yet their experiences are not reflected proportionately in the literature. Leadership is among the top five valued skills in college graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). The history of student leadership skills development shows an evolution from a static paradigm of leadership focused on a model of hierarchy to a leadership orientation focused on relationships, trust, and ethics (Zafar et al., 2020). Until more is known about the leadership development experiences of immigrant origin students, the number of

immigrant origin graduates achieving leadership roles in the United States may be limited. The dearth of information that addresses the possibly unique experiences of these students in leadership development can hinder further leadership program development that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the underresearched area of immigrant origin undergraduate students' experiences building leadership skills while volunteering at a nonprofit community service agency. This research could enable educators and higher education student relations administrators to identify challenges and investigate accommodations to improve the leadership development experience of immigrant origin undergraduate students. Application of the research findings could promote positive social change as immigrant origin students are provided with a wider range of opportunities to build leadership skills that could support the retention and graduation rates of this diverse student population and help graduates to be prepared to acquire leadership roles in the workplace.

Research Questions

Research Question (RQ)1: How do immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service organization?

RQ2: What types of support do immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The social change model of leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) and Astin's (1999) input-environment-output model served as the conceptual framework for this study. I used these two models as a framework to guide the interview questions and interpret the findings. The social change model of leadership, developed by a collaborative group of 10 leadership specialists and student affairs professionals from across the country, is a nonhierarchic approach to leadership uniquely designed for the college undergraduate. The model is based on the following key assumptions: Leadership is collaborative, leadership is a process, leadership is based on values, each student can lead even without a leadership position, and leadership is about change.

Astin's (1999) input-environment-output model, the second model in the conceptual framework, was used to analyze how the inputs and environment affect student outcomes in higher education. Inputs are personal qualities that students bring initially to an educational journey, while environment refers to students' actual experiences, and output is the students' talent/characteristics and outcomes after their college experience.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative research design (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to investigate the phenomenon of immigrant origin undergraduate student leadership development. This basic qualitative research focused on interviewing a diverse group of immigrant origin undergraduate students. In this study, I explored the experiences of immigrant origin college students who developed leadership skills as volunteers. I

collected data through semistructured interviews with 10 college students from the Midwest region of the United States who had or have been volunteering with a nonprofit agency. I inductively analyzed the interviews to identify codes and themes.

Definitions

The following terms are used in this study:

Cocurricular activities: Experiences that occur, either by design or by scheduling, alongside or with curricular activities (Soria et al. 2019).

Extracurricular activities: Nonacademic endeavors that are not part of the formal curriculum and may occur inside or outside of an educational institution (Winstone et al., 2020).

Immigrant origin: All individuals who are identified as or who self-identify as immigrating from another country, and for this study is inclusive of first generation students who were born outside of the United States, second generation students who were born in the United States to at least one parent who was born outside of the United States, and third generation students who were born in the United States to two parents born in the United States and who self-identify as an immigrant (see Hernandez et al., 2019; Katsiaficas et al., 2013).

Leadership: As defined in the conceptual framework, leadership is a process involving participants jointly working together to positively impact change, thus furthering social equality, democracy, and justice (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996).

Service learning: Experiential learning that provides learners the opportunity to enhance understanding through a practical environment. Its strong academic connection and reciprocal nature distinguish it from other experiential learning approaches (Barton et al., 2019).

Volunteerism: Serving in an area of need without consideration for compensation, personal preference, or personal inconvenience. For the purpose of this research, volunteerism is a way of giving back to the community while developing important social skills and gaining valuable work experience (see Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020).

Assumptions

This qualitative study was based on two assumptions. One assumption was that the participants would answer all interview questions honestly and truthfully and share their true experiences. Secondly, I assumed I could withhold my subjective ideas about the research problem and focus instead on how the participants describe their experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study focused on immigrant origin undergraduate students from the Midwest region of the United States. Delimitations refer to the narrowness of a study, which in this case was most relevant when considering study participants. While the participant recruitment was open to any undergraduate immigrant origin student, not every immigrant group had a similar approach and/or experience with leadership. In this research, I focused on traditional aged college students who were emerging adults.

Participants had volunteered at a nonprofit agency or organization that promoted community engagement.

Limitations

Qualitative research is concerned with deepening the understanding of a given problem, yet limitations remain (Queirós et al., 2017). This study was limited to the personal perceptions and experiences of immigrant college students at a single site in a single state in the Midwestern United States. Their perceptions may not fully represent the experiences of other immigrant college students. Because this study focused on students who volunteered with the organization by choice, the results may not be transferable to students who volunteer because of curriculum requirements. The students also self-selected to participate in the study, so the findings may not pertain to students who did not respond with interest. In my experience as a long-time volunteer for local organizations serving immigrant persons and families, there may be potential bias that could lead to inaccurate presumptions as I listened to and interpreted participants' experiences building leadership skills through volunteering.

Significance

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018) identified leadership as one of eight career readiness competencies. Moreover, Mackes (2017) reported that more than 70% of employers have consistently reported leadership as a key resume attribute. Thus, research on diverse institutional approaches to leadership development is needed (Owen, 2012). Leadership development through active learning experiences may help improve student engagement, retention, and graduation (Blessinger, 2020).

Exploration of how undergraduate students of immigrant origin develop and refine leadership skills can help higher education institutions investigate new methods of leadership and skill enhancement. In 2018, approximately 18 million Americans under age 18 lived with at least one immigrant parent, accounting for 26% of the 69.5 million children under age 18 in the United States (American Immigration Council, 2021; Batalova et al., 2020). Leadership development programs that recognize the needs of university students born of immigrants are essential to the maturation of a diverse workforce in the future (DeVries et al., 2020; Montes & Choitz, 2016; Torres, 2019). Insights from this study may provide positive social change through the development of strategies and actions that promote the leadership skills development of immigrant origin students, particularly at the collegiate level.

Summary

Students and employers expect graduates from a higher education institution to have transferable leadership skills. Higher education's student population is ever changing, and institutions need to be able to support all student populations. This research addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the patterns, characteristics, and details of immigrant origin undergraduate students who have identified themselves as experiencing leadership skills development while volunteering.

Student leadership programs are an integral part of higher education institutions. As higher education institutions continue to invest in diverse, inclusive, and equitable spaces, their programming should be reflective of their commitment. Experiential learning provides a space for students to learn transferable leadership skills. Researchers

have suggested that student leadership programs that include peer mentoring, service learning, and volunteerism are associated with leadership skills development (Milton & Meade, 2018; Salam et al., 2019, Van der Meer, 2019). Researchers have also explored the engagement of underrepresented students in higher education institutions and have found evidence that supported higher expectations and higher levels of persistence among immigrant origin students (Orupabo et al., 2020).

In Chapter 2, I discuss the conceptual framework of this research. After explaining the literature research strategy, I analyze empirical literature pertaining to higher education and the leadership development of immigrant origin students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore immigrant origin undergraduate students' experiences building leadership skills while volunteering at a nonprofit community service agency. This research into student leadership development can add to understanding how to build a culturally plural pool of graduates who are ready for leadership. Leadership learning refers to an interactive and engaging phenomenon involving elements of education, training, observation, development, and metacognition (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Jenkins & Cutchens, 2012).

My review of the research literature revealed three major threads regarding students' experiences building leadership skills through volunteering: higher education and career readiness, student leadership programs, and experiential learning. The relationship between higher education and work readiness is strongly influenced by the institutions' accountability and student expectations (DiBenedetto & Willis, 2020), but there is a gap between this accountability and graduates' actual preparedness (Gehman, 2018). Student leadership programs have taken many forms, and researchers have suggested that programs that feature experiential learning opportunities most often result in greater leadership skill development (Milton & Meade, 2018; Salam et al., 2019, Van der Meer, 2019). Studies have addressed the experiences of students in student leadership programs to measure efficiency, impact, and motivation. However, there is a gap in the literature documenting the experience of diverse students, highlighting the different frames of educational success and its connection to cultural frames of reference (Orapabu

et al., 2020). Researchers have found that ethnicity influences educational aspirations and goals (Khattab, 2018).

In this chapter, I review the search strategies used to locate relevant scholarly sources. I discuss the conceptual framework that I used to guide the design of this study, including construction of interview questions and probes. Next, I analyze empirical studies regarding student leadership development and the impact of experiential learning including the barriers to more widespread experiential leadership development programming in higher education. Finally, I present the state of immigrant origin students in U.S. higher education.

Literature Search Strategy

My literature review began with a thorough search for peer-reviewed articles in electric databases in education, social, and psychology. Databases included EBSCO, ProQuest Central, Education Source Search, Multi-Database Search, and Sage Premier. The scope of this literature review search dated from 2017 to 2022. The following key words effectively led my search of the literature: *student leadership development, leadership development, students, higher education* OR *college immigrants, experiential learning, community service, service-learning, peer leader*, peer mentor**, and *volunteer*. I realized that there were few articles about immigrant origin undergraduate students; however, there were a limited number of articles related to the experience of Latino/a undergraduate students and none related to Muslim students.

Conceptual Framework

The social change model of leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) is one of two models that informed the design of this study, including the interview questions, and was used to interpret the results. In addition, Astin's (1970) input-environment-output model informs the relationships between students' leadership development experiences and students' input and learning environments. The social change model of leadership describes the values of a positive social change leadership journey, whereas Astin's input-environment-output model describes how students' characteristics and their interaction with the volunteer site (environment) can affect the learning outcome. In this section, I analyze key elements of the social change model of leadership and input-environment-output model.

The Social Change Model of Student Leadership Development

Socially responsible leadership is a core higher education outcome (Dugan & Komives, 2010). The social change model of leadership is grounded in social responsibility and change. Emerging from a gathering of education scholars in the late 1990s, the social change model of student leadership arose to address social issues, the need for ethical leadership, and the need to recognize the ability of all people to learn and nurture leadership skills (Komives, 2016). The model has two main points: to assist students in their leadership competence and to facilitate social change (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). Skendall (2016) indicated that the social change model of leadership integrates current leadership development concepts by outlining a collaborative and deliberate process of training leaders. This model recognizes leadership

as a process involving participants jointly working together to positively impact change, a fundamental obligation of every leader.

The social change model of leadership addresses three broad spheres: individual, group, and society. These three broad domains further break down into seven values, the seven C's: citizenship, collaboration, self-consciousness, commitment, common purpose, civility, controversy, and congruence. The goal of this model is an eighth value, social change. The values of commitment, congruence, and self-consciousness are related to the individual. In the group domain, the model suggests that an individual must engage in collaboration towards a common purpose and engage in controversy with civility. Regarding the third domain, the society, a leader needs to commit to the greater good and engender citizenship. The model suggests that good citizenship causes a positive change in the community and acknowledges all the people are affected or involved in interdependence efforts. This model has been used in a variety of applications in higher education, such as a recreational sports living-learning community (Halper et al., 2020), student employment (Peck & Callahan, 2019; Tugas, 2019), and student liaison programming (Milton & Meade, 2018).

Considering feasibility and focus when conducting this research, I narrowed my application of the social change model of leadership to focus on only one value from each of the three model domains: congruence from the individual domain, controversy with civility from the group domain, and citizenship from the societal domain. I chose these three values because they were most relevant to the purpose of this research. These three

values from the model contributed three key concepts to this study's framework that guided the interview questions and probes as well as the interpretation of the findings.

Astin's Input-Environment-Output Model

The input-environment-outcome model (Astin, 1984) explains how students' outcomes are influenced by their characteristics and educational environments. In this model, inputs are students' characteristics prior to attending a college or university. Inputs include student demographics, social identity, and high school grades. The educational environment characteristics occur during students' time at college/university. These characteristics can include the institutional culture, curriculum, school standards and expectations, and teaching. Finally, outputs are the student outcomes. This framework was used to explore the connections between students' experiences while volunteering in the environment and the perceived outcome of leadership skills development.

Later, Astin (1999) expanded his theory and presented his student involvement theory. He posited that the more involved a student is in college, the more likely they are to succeed. Astin explained, "A highly involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a significant amount of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 518). Astin claimed that external factors have less influence on the students' ability to succeed than student involvement. Student involvement theory places the student at the center of student success. Astin's student involvement theory has provided a framework for modern student connectedness and retention theories. I used both the

social change model of leadership and input-environment-output model to guide the interview questions and the probes for the study.

Literature Review Related to Key Factors and Concepts

In the following section, I provide a review of the empirical literature related to student leadership development in higher education: higher education and career readiness, student leadership programs, leadership programs for diverse populations, experiential learning, including the barriers that instructors face in programming, peer mentoring, service learning, volunteerism, and immigrant students in higher education in the United States.

Higher Education and Career Readiness

The demand for colleges and universities to prepare students for careers is not just a political push. Workforce and career preparation are also on lists of students' expectations of a higher education institute. DiBenedetto and Willis (2020) found that after holding themselves responsible for pursuing workforce and career readiness skills, undergraduate students held their higher education institution responsible for teaching workforce and career skills. Stone and Lewis (2012) posited that there are three kinds of skills needed to make students career-ready: academic knowledge, soft skills (employability), and technical skills. Soft skills include personal qualities like responsibility, self-management, and integrity. The relationship between higher education and workforce readiness may rest on institutions' ability to be held accountable for graduate readiness to become employed. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (n.d.), career readiness is the attainment and demonstration of

requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace. Some colleges are making career readiness an integral part of the undergraduate experience. For instance, The College of Liberal Arts of the University of Minnesota defined career readiness as the development of 10 core competencies: analytical and critical thinking, applied problem solving, ethical reasoning and decision making, innovation and creativity, oral and written communication, teamwork and leadership, engaging diversity, active citizenship and community engagement, digital literacy, and career management (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (n.d.) established eight career readiness competencies, which included leadership as a component.

Gehman (2018) found a disconnect between higher education and the workforce. In a mixed-methods study that explored the extent to which recent college graduates were perceived to be prepared for the workplace, they found that participants with experience supervising recent college graduates reported that few skill and attitudinal proficiencies were found to exist in recent college graduates. Participants spoke of a need for university programming to match workforce nuances. Those findings aligned closely with Wilkie's (2019a, 2019b) research that revealed that ill-prepared graduates entered the workforce.

Student Leadership Programs

Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) defined the six aspects of leadership learning as knowledge, development, training, observation, engagement, and metacognition. Metacognition is a goal of leadership learning because it allows students to make

meaning and adapt what they have learned. Previous studies have shown that leadership program experience during college is connected to students' greater leadership capacity. Dugan and Komives (2010) found that students who participated in short, moderate, and long-term formal leadership programs reported greater leadership efficacy and socially responsible leadership capacity than nonparticipant students. The results of this research supported the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership Report, which reflected key findings from over 50,000 students across 52 campuses. Another study based on 10 higher education institutions in the United States found that students with experience in leadership programs demonstrated higher levels of leadership understanding and commitment, leadership skills, personal and societal values, civic responsibility, as well as multicultural awareness and community orientation than those without such experience (Cress et al., 2001). Additionally, a few program evaluation studies also reported the effectiveness of leadership education programs. For example, based on the values reflected in the social change leadership model, Rosch and Caza (2012) found that students showed greater leadership capacities after joining the voluntary short-term leadership programs in their commitment to serving collectives, working with a common purpose, handling controversy with civility, and citizenship.

Some research has revealed a gap between leadership development pedagogy and skills development. Findings from Rosch et al.'s (2017) research showed the need for commonly accepted good practices for leadership development in universities and colleges. In a literature review, Dopson et al. (2018) echoed that the literature base is small-scaled and fragmented, with notably few published large-scale empirically

informed studies that address practices, content, and the long-term impact of leadership development programs in higher education. Data from Reyes et al.'s (2019) meta-analytic evaluation of leadership development programs spanning from 1951 to 2018, with a specific focus on higher education programs for students, identified that educators may be paying too much attention to learning outcomes and overlooking how to teach students about how to effectively transfer their leadership skills. Researchers have recommended that higher education educators and scholars focus their attention on embedding experiential components in leadership development programs (Soria et al., 2019). Heinrich and Green's (2020) research findings also called for a shift from pedagogical approaches and a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach that leverages students' experiences and backgrounds. The demand for student-centered experiences that allow knowledge transfer is critical to understanding how instructors and educators can best prepare students for the future. Among the multidimensional challenges that face embedding experiential components in leadership development programs are the barriers that prevent leadership educators from teaching in these recommended ways.

Researchers have suggested that numerous factors prevent faculty, instructors, and teachers from executing experiential learning. Exploring these barriers is important for the sake of digging deeper into culturally relevant leadership learning. Wurdinger and Allison (2017) surveyed 295 faculty teaching in undergraduate programs from 4-year institutions across the country and found that although 97% of the participants believed that experiential learning enhanced life skills and was extremely effective, faculty were using experiential learning sparingly in their classes. Faculty

reported not enough money, having to cover required amounts of curriculum, large class sizes, and university bureaucracy as challenges that made it difficult for them to implement experiential learning. In a systematic literature review, Salam et al. (2019) also claimed that educators reported issues with implementing experiential learning in the form of service-learning. Collegiate course instructors reported that the amount of preparation required to teach a service-learning course and the development of clear connections between learning objectives and course content outcomes was challenging. Nevertheless, Salam et al. found that even with mounting practical and logistical issues, educators were interested in incorporating service-learning in their curriculum. Furthermore, Oberg and Andenoro (2018) found that time and resistance to change were barriers to implementing best practices in leadership learning environments. In contrast to Salem et al.'s more positive finding, Oberg and Andenoro found that faculty respondents reported that implementing change would require too much time. Evidence exists to connect leadership learning instructor barriers to the present lack of collegiate leadership learning programs that integrate experiential learning facets.

Few studies have addressed the leadership development experience of students with immigrant origin backgrounds. However, there is research on Latinx students. Lozano (2015) studied how Latinx students defined leader language and how they experienced leadership development at a predominantly White institution. Lozano found that participants defined leaders as role models who motivate and inspire others to act. Participants also agreed that leaders did not need a title but needed only to assert their role by the time and energy that they dedicated to certain activities. Participants reported

the challenge negotiating between the leadership they value as a Latino community and type of leadership valued by the university. Lozano argued that institution administrators need to first understand how Latinx students understand their leadership journey to be able to offer culturally relevant support and resources. Similarly, in a qualitative study with 16 participants of varying Latino ethnicities participating in one-on-one face-to-face semistructured interviews, Haber-Curran and Tapia-Fuselier (2020) found Latina student leaders focused on community, a commitment to making a positive impact, and a nonhierarchal approach to leadership.

In a single case design study of 15 American Korean high school students engaged in a project aimed to help community members affected by COVID, researchers Song and Hur (2022) found that a community-based approach and culturally relevant practice helped Korean American youth develop leadership and inspired them to be change agents in their communities. After participation in a 12 week-long hybrid leadership program, Korean American students reported that through community involvement they were able to practice important leadership skills such as decision-making, teamwork development, and problem-solving skills. Similar to Haber-Curran and Tapia-Fuselier's (2020) findings, participants in Song and Hur's study defined a leader as one who is able to share the voice of the team, resolve conflict, and listen to others.

Experiential Learning and Student Leadership Development

There is evidence that students learn better by doing, including in the area of leadership skills. The impact of experiential learning in higher education can be traced

back to the foundational scholarship of Dewey (Dewey, 1938; Pérez-Ibáñez, 2018). When learning opportunities allow students active practice of leadership skills, they cultivate students' leadership capacity (Lehane, 2020; Morris, 2019; Park et al., 2020). Bradberry and DeMaio's (2019) survey research at a large 4-year institution showed that 76% of 74 Model United Nations program participants reported acquiring leadership skills through their involvement in the program. Likewise, Milton and Meade (2018) found that students who engaged in an experiential library-student liaison program honed their leadership skills. The benefits of involvement in a student experiential learning program were also found in the survey study conducted by Van der Meer et al. (2019). Two hundred thirty-nine undergraduate student leaders with identifiable roles of facilitation or guidance with their peers in a program at four Australian universities and one New Zealand university were surveyed online using the International Survey of Peer Leadership. Eighty-one percent of the students perceived an increase in their leadership skills because of participation in a student leadership experiential program. There are many types of leadership learning programs that incorporate experiential learning, including peer mentoring, service learning, and volunteerism.

Peer Mentoring

Peer mentoring can be a valuable tool for student leadership development. Lee et al. (2020) found that being a student mentor positively influenced students' leadership development. Allowing students to serve as a mentor can be an intervention tool to teach leadership skills and facilitate leadership development both in and out of the classroom.

Lee et al.'s qualitative study explored the essence of the shared mentor experience to describe the phenomena of mentors' perceptions of growth in generativity. In a leadership mentoring program at a large American Midwestern university that selected and trained freshman students to mentor a K-12 student for 3 years. College student mentors reported that exposure to leadership theories and the opportunity to apply them was the reason that they experienced growth and success in their leadership development.

Service-learning Experiences

Empirical studies demonstrate the positive impact of service-learning on student leadership development. In a systematic literature review, Salam et al. (2019) found that both Snell et al. (2015) and Ryan and Grotrian-Ryan (2016) reported that undergraduate students in business courses that include service-learning pedagogy developed business, civic, and leadership skills. In a survey of 295 faculty from undergraduate programs of 4-year institutions across the nation, Wurdinger and Allison (2017) found that service-learning was being used the least of other teaching methods and suggested that this finding was because of the significant time needed to design and implement experiences for students and the need to set up partnerships with local, regional and global organizations.

Manning-Ouellette and Hemer (2019) found that over 96% of the first-year students enrolled in a leadership service-learning course reported that the service-learning supported their leadership development. Through qualitative analysis of student journals, researchers found evidence that students experienced self-reflection, identified values to

lead, and engaged in collaboration and teamwork. Service-learning experience has long term impacts. Research suggests that the positive impacts of service learning extend post-graduation. Pritchard and Bowen (2019) found that student leaders in service-learning differed significantly from their undergraduate peers at graduation in values and career goals. Using survey results of former student peer leaders 1-5 years after graduation, service-learning alumni reported higher interest in working towards social change, less interest in income potential, and more interest in leadership potential. Evidence shows that service learning is a credible path to leadership development. Volunteerism can produce like results.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism has been found to play a significant role in the leadership development of students. Harris and Beckert (2019) conducted conferencing interviews with five high school youth, researchers to explore the RQ: What qualities do emerging adolescent leaders possess? The researchers found six themes: involvement, passion, confidence, skills, ownership, and mentoring others. Researchers suggested that youth programs facilitate a mechanism for mentorship to better facilitate the emergence of leadership through volunteerism.

The benefits of university student volunteering are multidimensional. Through a qualitative design, Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020) conducted a study that focused on the expectations and benefits of student volunteering for three key stakeholders in Australia: students, universities, and non-profit organizations. When they first volunteered, students self-reported that they expected to make a difference, develop their

careers, and make friends. Researchers found the benefits to students included employability, career development, personal and life skills development, and global citizenship development. Undergraduate student volunteering was also found to benefit the university because it presents an opportunity to build university/community relations, giving the institution a positive reputation. Community-based experiential learning experiences were found to grow students' leadership when involved in a qualitative study that explored the leadership development outcomes associated with experiences in a one-year, intensive leadership program at a large American university. Using the data drawn from interviews with 11 students, Strawn et al. (2017) found four leadership development subthemes from the experiential learning experience: being pushed, networking, community involvement, and relationship skills.

Research suggests that volunteering positively impacted students' employability and postgraduate options. In a qualitative study, both undergraduate and graduate students from a U.K. university were asked about the impact of volunteering on their psychology degree, and their perceptions of their volunteering, and its impact on their employability. Barton et al. (2019) found that volunteering increased student satisfaction and increased the participants' employability skills. Participants' responses addressed direct benefits of experience such as being able to transfer a skill that gives them an advantage over other job applicants to indirect benefits such as gaining the confidence to take advantage of future opportunities. In a study with French third-level students in voluntary activities, Khasanzyanova (2017) found that volunteer activities contributed to students' acquisition of soft skills many of which are associated with leadership skills.

Through questionnaires and interviews, the researcher found that volunteer activity was a way to gain useful experience in a professional field. Students at a Polish university also reported that participating in volunteer activities impacted the leadership skills of the group leaders (Kulig-Moskwa et al., 2018).

Engagement and Underrepresented Students in Higher Education

Research suggests that educational success has many different frames for students of immigrant origin. Researchers Orupabo et al. (2020) investigated whether and how cultural resources are converted into advantages in higher education. In a Norwegian context, using cross-sectional survey data and in-depth interviews with Norwegian students of immigrant origin, researchers found that students' dual frame of reference influenced their interpretations of educational achievement. Students of immigrant origin refer to the sacrifices that their parents made for them and the privileges that they have that are not typically available in their parents' home country as a dual frame of reference to gauge their academic success. Furthering the literature, in a study that aimed to analyze second-generation youth undergoing vocational training, in the Norwegian context, Ljunggren and Orupabo (2020) found that descendants of immigrants associated higher education achievement with a sense of belonging.

Highlighting the theory of immigrant optimism, Khattab (2018) examined the various aspects of how ethnicity influences the role of aspirations, expectations, and beliefs in overcoming disadvantage through higher education. Khattab found that the anticipation of labor market discrimination and the historic value of higher education as a means for social mobility led ethnic minorities in Britain to over-invest in education.

Kirui and Kao (2018) also used the theory of immigrant optimism and found more evidence supporting an association between immigrant origin students' higher expectations and higher levels of persistence and attainment. Kirui and Kao's study used the 2004-2009 wave of the *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study* to examine generational differences in the relationship between educational expectations, academic achievement, and college persistence among native-born immigrant youth in the United States. Researchers found that second-generation students have higher degree attainment rates, lower withdrawal rates than their non-immigrant peers, and hold higher academic expectations than their non-immigrant peers. The present study has the potential to fill a gap in the literature by adding meaningful data about a growing population that is underrepresented.

Summary and Conclusions

I analyzed the literature about student leadership development in higher education. Higher education institutions are committed to producing career-ready graduates. Leadership skills are an integral factor of career readiness. There is a dearth of literature about the experiences of immigrant origin students and the leadership skills development. The dynamics of undergraduate student populations will continue to become less static as the dynamics of the United States is projected to become majority-minority by 2045. The research about Latino students' experience with leadership development is available. Leadership programs that include experiential learning are desirable but there remain many barriers to making such programs available and common place. I analyzed the literature around experiential programs including peer mentoring,

service-learning, and volunteering. Very little research exists concerning the relationship between student leadership development and immigrant origin undergraduate students.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research approach and design to demonstrate alignment with the RQs discussed in Chapter 1 and the literature review presented in Chapter 2. I also discuss the data collection and data analysis plan along with trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore immigrant origin undergraduate students' experiences building leadership skills while volunteering at nonprofit community service agency. In this chapter, I discuss the research design for this study as well as the rationale for the chosen design, and I describe my role as researcher. In this chapter, I also discuss my methodology, sampling selection logic, instrumentation, data collection, and a data analysis plan, as well an explanation of the trustworthiness of the plan.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQs that guided this study were as follows: How do immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service organization, and what types of support do immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering? A basic qualitative design best suited this study. Basic qualitative research is used to understand how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they give those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The basic qualitative design allowed me to explore social and environmental facts as they related to leadership skills development.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to create an interview guide, recruit and interview undergraduate students who identified as a person of immigrant origin, and analyze participants' responses to determine how they perceived their leadership building experiences while volunteering. As a community leader, mentor, and nonprofit executive,

I work with both high school and college students in college readiness and career exploration programs. I was a volunteer at the research site from 2015 to 2018. From 2019 to 2020, I was employed to direct the education department at the study site. I knew three of the 10 participants because their outstanding work with the community-service organization was brought to my attention in my role as an organization executive. However, I was never in a supervisory or authority position to any of the participants. I managed any possible research or ethical conflicts with a clear statement in the research consent form, informing participants that while they may have known me in my former role as I directed the education department, I was no longer an employee of that organization, and this research was separate from that role. I managed potential biases by adhering to reflection through journaling. After each interview, I journaled about my experience while interviewing, my thoughts, and my opinions in an effort to create more transparency and objectivity during the research process.

Methodology

In this methodology section, I explain the details of the participant selection, interview guide, participant recruitment, and data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

Participant selection criteria were in line with current research conducted with immigrant origin student populations. Hernandez et al. (2019) presented the following criteria for immigrant origin children and youth, which I used: born outside of the host country (first generation), or at least one foreign-born parent (second generation), and/or third generation immigrant with two U.S. born parents who were second generation

immigrants in the host country. The invitation letter included this description because students self-identified; no other proof of identity was requested. Other selection criteria were that each participant was an undergraduate student, proficient in English, and had volunteered or was volunteering with a community service organization.

In determining participant sample size, Patton (2015) suggested that saturation occurs at six to 12 participants. I planned to interview eight to 10 undergraduate, immigrant origin students, from at least three different countries, who volunteered with a community-based nonprofit organization. I contacted volunteers at a nonprofit community service organization. Lacking response, I also contacted university clubs and organizations and asked for permission to email their diverse group of students and post my recruitment flyer on their social media. Interested students emailed or texted me to express interest. I sent the research consent form to the first 10 persons who met the qualifications. In Chapter 4, I explain how I adjusted my goals in recruitment.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this basic qualitative study was a researcher-developed interview protocol. Patton (2015) listed interviewing as a primary data collection method for a basic qualitative research study like this one. I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews guided by an interview guide, which I developed (see Appendix). Semistructured in-depth interviews are widely used to create meaning with interviewees by reconstructing perceptions of events and experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The 10 questions aligned with the conceptual framework and RQs. Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, and 8 listed in the Appendix addressed RQ1. Interview

Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 addressed RQ2. I drew from the empirical literature review for probes. During the interview, participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences and elaborate on the development of their leadership skills while volunteering. Participants were asked follow-up questions to help prompt more developed responses where necessary.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited participants from a local nonprofit community service organization and student organizations and clubs at a local community college and state university in the Midwest region of the United States. The first 10 persons to express interest in participation via text message or email were sent the consent form. All 10 persons signed and returned the consent form and continued to the interview process. Because I chose the first 10 people to respond, I did not try to meet the planned criteria of having participants from three different countries. The timing of the invitation with holidays raised my concern about deselecting some interested participants based on their country of origin.

Consenting participants were then invited to schedule an interview time through Doodle, a free online scheduling tool. I requested that participants plan for a 45- to 60-minute interview window. Participants were asked to schedule their interview at a time that they would be uninterrupted.

I conducted interviews via Zoom due to the busy schedules and limited transportation options of undergraduate students as well as the current safety concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and possible surges and variants. This was

consistent with other research practices where it was reported that participants using Zoom or another video conferencing software appreciated seeing the interviewer, online participants were open and expressive, and the interview experience did not differ significantly from in-person interviews (see Gray et al., 2020; Howlett, 2021).

Participants were emailed a Zoom link for the online interview. I conducted semistructured, one-on-one interviews. One-on-one interviews were the best choice for this study because in this context, participants may more willingly share personal and sensitive information, compared to focus groups (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I used the interview guide to interview participants, along with follow-up questions and probes. Loosely structured interviews provided a space for a natural flow of responses and organic dialogue (see Miles et al., 2014). I emailed each participant a $25 Amazon gift card in appreciation. At the conclusion of each interview, I journaled my thoughts about the interview process. Self-reflective journaling helped me to examine my personal assumptions and goals.

Zoom interviews were recorded on the Cloud. Transcripts were generated with otter.ai software. I downloaded the transcriptions and checked the transcriptions' accuracy with Sonix, an online audio transcription software. I used a naturalized transcription approach, with the goal of presenting data in a natural and objective manner (see McMullin, 2021). Once transcript accuracy was confirmed, I sent it to the relevant participant to review for accuracy. This review continued the voluntary involvement of participants, inviting them to review and confirm their responses, adding clarification if they choose. This review represented their final contribution to the study. Each

participant will receive an emailed brief summary of the study results once this dissertation is published in ProQuest.

Data Analysis Plan

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, I performed my first round of coding by open coding the transcriptions with notes written in the margins of the transcripts as I found responses that addressed the RQs. I used a hierarchical coding frame to organize the codes. From the codes, I identified themes according to how they related to each other. Significant codes allow the researcher to examine and explore understanding a subject or the denotation of an occurrence (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). I grouped the codes into categories, and from those categories, I derived themes. I also performed the second round of coding by placing verbatim interview transcripts and marginal notes into the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software tool, NVivo. I ran a word frequency query using the data gathered from each interview question to confirm the codes that I found from open coding. The word query results from NVivo aligned with the results from my open coding. NVivo requires the researcher to code the data and develop themes, allowing the researcher to engage in a more meaningful analysis process (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study relies on its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As a researcher, I planned to ensure the integrity of my research by meeting these four criteria.

Credibility

Patton (2015) advised a systematic, in-depth approach to ensure creditability and limit research bias. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews lend to the credibility of this research. The layered coding analysis allowed for immersion into the data. After the transcriptions were complete, participants were asked to check the transcripts for accuracy. I present participants' responses as quotations in combination with paraphrasing when presenting findings in Chapter 4.

Transferability

Transferability or external validity is grounded in the researcher's ability to offer a detailed research process so that others who follow can relate their own research efforts to the researcher's study and further the work of the researcher using a comparable participant pool (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To help ensure transferability, I provided a masked description of the participants' attributes and how I gained access to the limited number of participants.

Dependability

Establishing dependability, or reliability, of a research study by being able to replicate the study and achieve the same results or interpretations of the data is difficult in a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Having a sole researcher conduct and complete the interview process established consistency in the interview process. There was alignment between the RQs and the interviews. I also kept detailed records of the how and when the data were collected. Consistent use of the same structure

encompassing the semistructured interview guide, questions, transcription process, and data analysis tools ensured dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability of the study is presented through the researcher being honest about their intentions for this study, recording methods used for interviewing and biases perceived as the study progresses, and eliminating the desire to force the data to show preconceived or expected results (Patton, 2015). I presented the research process in previous sections. In addition, I used reflective journaling for each interview and conducted three layers of data analysis.

Ethical Procedures

I completed Walden University's Institutional Review Board standard application (approval #12-21-21-0594802). Upon approval, I began recruiting participants and conducting interviews. Participants received information regarding the purpose of the study, a description of the interview process, and logistics in the confirmation of participation and consent form. All recorded interviews, signed consent forms, and transcripts of the interviews were secured on my password-protected laptop to ensure the confidentiality of the research and participants. Participants could withdraw from participation at any time. Participants were identified by pseudonyms, and all necessary steps have been taken to mask participants' identities.

All data, audio and written, will remain private and confidential for 5 years. All Cloud-based files and online files have been downloaded to my personal laptop and deleted from the Cloud. I use password protection on all such files. The files are secured

on a personal laptop that is only available for my use and are also password protected. Files will be deleted after the term of 5 years.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership development experiences of immigrant origin undergraduate students who volunteer. In this chapter, I outlined the basic qualitative research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. In this study, I used open ended interview questions. Participant recruitment began with students receiving an email invitation to join the study and ended when data saturation of the participants' responses had been reached. I performed three rounds of layered coding. In Chapter 4, I present the results of the study as well as the methodology followed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore immigrant origin undergraduate students' experiences building leadership skills while volunteering at a nonprofit community service agency. Two RQs addressed how immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service organization and the types of support that immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering. In the following chapter, I provide the results of the study. I begin with a description of the setting where I conducted the study and the group demographics. Next, I describe the data collection and data analysis process.

Setting

This data collection for this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, so each of interviews were conducted via Zoom. I recruited participants from volunteers at a nonprofit community service organization. The organization served a predominately immigrant clientele in the Midwest region of the United States. I also recruited participants by posting the recruitment flyer on my personal social media pages and community college and university student clubs and organizations' social media outlets. I also asked participants to share the recruitment flyer with friends and peers that they knew who met the participant criteria.

Demographics

I interviewed 10 participants who self-identified as undergraduate students who volunteer/volunteered at a nonprofit community service organization. Nine of the

participants attended a 4-year university. One participant attended a 2-year community college. Eight of the participants self-identified as female and two as male. Three participants were first generation college students. All the participants were Muslim and represented six different countries. This was not intentional, but the findings did show a connection between Muslim volunteers and the desire to serve low-income Muslims, as the community nonprofit organization did. To keep the 10 participants' identities confidential, I created pseudonyms that align with the participants' gender identification (see Table 1). Nation of origin and other demographic variables are not included to insure confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant Pseudonyms and Gender

Pseudonym	Gender	Generation
Ahmed	Male	1st generation
Aya	Female	2nd generation
Boushra	Female	2nd generation
Henry	Male	2nd generation
Malak	Female	2nd generation
Melanie	Female	2nd generation
Mona	Male	1st generation
Nourah	Female	2nd generation
Obeid	Male	2nd generation
Summer	Female	2nd generation

Data Collection

I conducted all 10 interviews using Zoom. Participants chose an interview time that was best for them any day of the week, anytime from 8am to 6pm EST. I did not use

an appointment setting application as planned because participants reached out to me and asked about my availability, and I always responded with “anytime.” Participants participated in one-on-one audio recorded interviews. Each interview lasted an average of 50 minutes, ranging from 30 to 75 minutes. I reached saturation by the seventh interview but continued with the other interviews because they were already scheduled and to further confirm saturation. Each participant answered all the interview questions and probes, and there was no need to request follow-up interviews.

Each interview was transcribed using otter.ai. I reviewed each transcript and revised mistakes made by the automated system. Participants had the opportunity to read the transcripts and review for accuracy, offer feedback, or elaborate on a response. All participants responded by email noting that they did not have any revisions or additions. I electronically sent nine participants a $25 Amazon card in appreciation for their participation in the study. One participant declined the gift card. The data that I collected from the 10 interviews were rich. I used the data to create the themes.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the data collection was to answer my two RQs. I used Braun and Clarke’s (2013) 6-step approach to thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is used to find repeated patterns in a data set. During each interview, I took notes and used the inductive approach, allowing the patterns and themes to emerge from the interview responses. With those notes, I started Step 2 of Braun and Clarke’s steps of coding by identifying phrases and words that stood out in the transcripts. I performed my first round of open coding using the transcripts and the notes written in the

margins. I then used a hierarchical coding frame to organize the codes into themes. Then I uploaded all the transcripts into NVivo 11. I ran a word frequency query to confirm the results of my open coding and to analyze the broad feel of the themes. Using both the frequent words and the results of the open coding, I then generated a spreadsheet organized by interview questions and participants' responses. Similar and related quotations were categorized in a code, and codes were further categorized into group codes. Thirty-five codes were developed, which were further categorized into five code groups based on answering the RQs. There were no discrepant data.

Each theme and subtheme was associated with a RQ and then given a descriptive name. Three themes were identified: (a) consciousness of self, (b) gaining communication and teamwork skills, and (c) peer leaders. These codes, subthemes, and themes are represented in Table 2. The first theme pertains to the RQ1, the second theme pertains to both RQs, and the third theme pertains to RQ2.

Table 2

Overview of Thematic Structure

RQ	Theme	Subthemes	Codes
RQ1	Consciousness of self	N/A	Individual, services, education, association/organization, society, grandparents, cultural values, monetary value, collaboration, Muslims, Islam, culture, youth, club, advertising, organizations, Arabian, family, Somali generation, refugee, first generation, culture, understanding
RQ1 RQ2	Gaining communication and teamwork skills	Communication, Teamwork, Confidence in skills application	Character influence, job opportunities, community, communication, decision making, technology, teamwork, social media, understand, connections, language practice, adaptability and openness, shared experience, personality traits, collaboration, opinion, language barrier, ideologies, resolution approaches, resources, interfaith relations, public speaking skills, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, listening skills, motivational skills
RQ2	Peer leaders	N/A	Engagement, trust, capacity, community, leadership skills, motivations, expectations, experience, program commitment, inclusive interpersonal building, reflective, opinion, client relationships, vital skills, advocacy, executive committee, alumni, independent

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers are charged to ensure the trustworthiness of their research and study findings. The value of trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Each interview provided rich detail regarding participants' experiences volunteering. In the following sections, I describe each of these criteria and their applicability to my study.

Credibility

Triangulation is used to establish credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), triangulation is achieved through different

methods of data collection, collecting data from participants with different perspectives, and comparing and crosschecking the data. I interviewed a total of 10 participants and reached saturation by the seventh interview. I compared and crosschecked the interviews during both the transcript review and the data analysis process. I wrote journal notes during and after each interview to record my observations and reflections and to manage any possible research bias. I was benefitted in my analysis process from journaling. Building on the journaling I did, I began coding.

I maintained consistency in the data collection process by asking the same interview questions and journaling during the process. This ensured credibility. The interview guide ensured that the interview questions were clear and answered the RQs. After the interviews, I downloaded the transcripts from otter.ai and checked the transcripts for accuracy while listening to the recorded audio from the interview. Participants received a copy of their transcripts electronically and were asked if they had any revisions or additions that they would like to make to their interview. Each of the participants replied to the email stating that they had no revisions or additions that they wanted to make. Lastly, my dissertation chair reviewed my analysis to ensure I correctly represented the participants' perspectives.

Transferability

According to Patton (2015), transferability is the inclusion of enough detail for the results of a qualitative research study to be transferred to other contexts with other respondents. A researcher facilitates transferability through thick description and

purposeful sampling (Bitsch, 2005). I utilized thick descriptions of the setting and participants and provided a detailed description of the findings and data analysis.

Dependability

Dependability is established using an audit trail, triangulation, and peer examination. I verbally discussed my data collection process with my dissertation committee chair throughout the data analysis time.

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, I wrote in my reflective journal during and after each interview. The reflective journal documented the data collection process and allowed me to reflect on my own values, interests, and bias. During the interviews, I made notes about statements that stood out to me and when I felt it important to capture my feelings towards a participant's response. After the interviews, I wrote notes about the connections that I was able to identify in the data.

Results

Three themes emerged from the data analysis. These three themes, summarized in Table 2, address the two RQs of this study: How immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service nonprofit organization and what types of support immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering. The themes and subthemes were identified as follows:

- Theme 1: Consciousness of self
- Theme 2: Gaining communication and teamwork skills

  - Communication
  - Teamwork
  - Confidence in skills application
- Theme 3: Peer leaders

In the following section, I discuss each theme with representative quotes from the data collected from the 10 interviews.

Theme 1: Consciousness of Self

The first theme, consciousness of self, reflects the first RQ. The first theme is titled the same as the first of the seven Cs of the social change model of leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) due to closeness of the data to the model. Consciousness of self pertains to how participants' awareness of their personal relationships impacted their experience. In this study, the majority of the participants reported associations between their relationships and their zeal to engage in a volunteering program. Participants mentioned family relationships, relationships with friends, and relationships with a higher power. The data revealed that the previous life experience of participants played a major role in engagement in the volunteer program. I present this as the first theme because of the repeated references to the impact of relationships echoed through the entirety of every interview. The most common words or phrases used when participants were asked about the reason for wanting to volunteer were a family member and faith. For instance, Aya reported the impact of family background as an indispensable factor towards the decision to engage in a volunteering program:

> The recent death of my grandfather. He was someone who's very giving. My grandparents from both sides, they're very good. I grew up with my dad's side of family. They were pretty well off. And my mom's side family was like the opposite. And so it's kind of nice to like, have the best of both worlds. And even seeing my grandparents from both sides and how they both were so giving, even though one had a lot and one had nothing, was almost insane. It was very inspiring. I'm very thankful for what I have, it makes me feel good.

Mona also highlighted a family member as the reason she volunteered: her sister:

> You know, I have older siblings, and they've always been the people obviously, I've looked up to and so when my older sister kind of dragged me with her, I was very reluctant to go, I was like, "No, I want to sleep, leave me alone." But then I don't know how she convinced me once. But I was like, "You know what, she's doing a good thing. Let me go for one day."

Peer influence was also a factor in not only volunteer recruitment but volunteer retainment. The word *friend* was coded frequently. Boushra was explaining why she did not feel at home during a volunteer experience and shared, "It was not the same camaraderie that we had at the pantry all of the time." When asked about a time when she felt at home while volunteering, Aya said, "It doesn't matter the experience, I would say always volunteering with friends. Knowing that we're all here for the same cause is very comforting. We all work together for the greater good." Friends also played an important part in Mona's attraction to a volunteer experience. Malak reflected and shared,

> I made a lot of friends. I was actually very shy before this experience. Now I am a part of a community that wants to help people; like that's one of the things on their minds all of the time. I am happy to be a part of a cause where they're dedicated to helping people and pushing Muslim youth to be a part of things like this.

Mona shared that volunteering with peers of her own age made a real difference for her. She said,

> And that was really a game changer, you know, seeing my community members working to better their community was very inspiring. And these were my friends. You know, these were people I went to school with, they were my age, they were going through the same things.

Participants reported various factors as influencing their level of engagement. Some of the participants said that shared similarity or experience such as culture or language with colleagues, altruistic concerns for others and community, fulfilling one's dreams, skills acquisition especially leadership building skill, hope for future financial gain or employment, and family norms towards volunteering as factors embedded in the decision to engage in volunteering program. For instance, Malak said of family norms,

> My dad was also someone that would encourage me to go. He always would want me to do volunteer work because he did. He does it a lot every single day. And it does feel like, you know, you're sort of following your parent's footsteps when you're volunteering in those settings.

Obeid spoke of the influence that his father had over his decision to participate in a scholarly or service program in college. He said,

> [My dad advised] because education wise, you'll get that regardless through your schooling, like through your classes, you'll get that educational part out of the way, but you won't really get the growth experience. Because when you do service, you're interacting with different populations. You have to work with them, develop team skills, people skills, so he's like that part is a lot more important than you know your educational part. That is why I wanted to volunteer.

Participants also spoke of religion as a reason that they wanted to volunteer. Aya said,

> We always just grew up with the notion to give back, in our religion, it is always something that is prominent. Giving back to people who are less fortunate. Always using the ability that God gave you to reciprocate good energy. I was always taught that when you give back, Allah gives you a lot more. He rewards us. A domino effect.

Summer shared a like statement about how her religious belief was the reason that she volunteered. She said,

> For me in the general sense, I would say it's just being Muslim. The reason that I started was because it was Ramadan. One of the best ways to spend your time during Ramadan is to do the things that Allah loves, and that includes service.

> That's what led me to the [volunteering site], it was simply just the deen (religion).

Ahmed said about his religious motivations,

> I'm just doing what a Muslim should be doing. Giving back to the community; these are the deeds that are going to be counted, that are worth more than some materialistic things. Making an impact in someone's life, helping them to get pass pain and struggle is really an investment in yourself and afterlife.

Mona was inspired by an organization that was Muslim led. She shared, "Because that was the first Muslim led volunteering organization thing that was happening. And that was really a game changer, you know, seeing my community members working to better their community was very inspiring."

When asked specifically if their background as a person of immigrant- origin impacted their experience, each of the 10 participants responded affirmatively. Boushra's response was unapologetic. She replied,

> I think, first of all, my experience as a first-generation college student, and as children of immigrants, [the volunteering site] had the kind of roles I was seeking out in the first place. Me wanting to be around those refugee and immigrant populations is like, almost all because that's how my parents were when they first got here. I understood those needs at a deeper level than others might.

Ahmed shared an intimate response as a first-generation immigrant and said,

> that touches somewhere very, very deep. When they're [refugees] coming into, you know, their host country or host state, you know, most of the thoughts are

> negative, where, you know, it's not new that this notion of, "oh, they're coming to take a job, they're coming in to take, you know, something they're coming to add to the crime", that's not a new conversation. You know, that's been in place, you know, for generations. And after a certain time, you get this terrible idea of the melting pot. Because everyone's coming together and contributing, but really, not everyone [is coming together and contributing]. Certain individual groups, communities slip away from that melting pot, and assimilate into the larger White community, [while]some people don't get that privilege. There are always those stigmas that support that discrimination against immigrants, Black immigrants. And once I help them prove those stigmas wrong, it feels really good.

Obeid spoke about how his parent's journey to the United States as immigrants influenced him:

> Considering my family's background, now, I didn't have to go through the migration process or any of that. But my grandparents, you know, my father's generation did. And knowing that background and seeing other family members in my family having to go through the struggle, like currently, I have family members who are refugees in Lebanon. I have family members who've lived this experience are in this experience right now. When I go into the pantry, and I meet these people [immigrants and refugees] in these populations in the United States, speak with them, and a lot of them are from the older generation to, like, from my father's generation or grandfather's generation, especially considering the fact that there's this connection, or I feel like they're my family.

Mona also talked of her parents' experience:

> And it is full circle for me because the same thing happened to my mom, she was once a refugee. She's a survivor of war. And it [this experience] was incredibly meaningful, because she told me as a kid if it wasn't for [an international Islamic relief organization], she would have been starving. She and everyone else [in that situation] received humanitarian assistance. And that is what kept them alive for 3 months. I was like, "wow, that's incredible". I'm so honored to be able to complete that circle. I am privileged enough to be able to pass good forward.

Theme 2: Gaining Communication and Teamwork Skills

Theme 2 addressed both RQs: How immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service nonprofit organization and what types of support immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering. Three subthemes also emerged: communication, teamwork, and confidence in skills application. Each of the participants attested being supported in their gaining various leadership building skills during their volunteering assignment. Among these were communication and teamwork skills, such as public speaking skills, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, listening skills, and motivational skills. Students also described increased cultural competency, trust, and decision-making as leadership skills developed. One participant, Ahmed reported an assortment of leadership building skills as a result of his engagement in volunteering, "Leadership skills like conflict resolution, interpersonal

building, interfaith relations, and relationships. [I developed] skills like public speaking, being influential, and being a motivational generational curse breaker."

Communication Skills

Participants said communication was a vital skill acquired during voluntary service. For instance, Summer discussed acquiring communication skills:

> The most prominent, most important skill, I feel I developed would be communication, whether that was communication with the clients, or that was communication with my fellow volunteers, I would say that being able to communicate is a leadership quality. The big skill I gained was [the ability to] communicate with people who may not speak the same language as me.

Nourah learned how to better understand people. She said, "I learned communication [skills] and just simple skills to be able to better understand people."

Participants experienced the impact of communication on their decision-making process. Decision making was a skill that participants developed while volunteering. Boushra said, "I think making decisions quickly, on the spot, but also logically, definitely was honed through out the experience. A lot of times people were just asking a lot of questions. It was hard to just be quick on your feet." Mona shared her experience having to make decisions. "There were times when people my age, were looking to me for answers. I was like Whoa. It was terrifying."

Technology aided in the participants' ability to communicate. Both Summer and Malak spoke about how they developed skills in technology because of their volunteer

experience. Summer said, “When I first started working with a team, I learned how to use Slack and use all of those technology things to put the vision together.

Teamwork Skills

The second most developed leadership skill was teamwork. Participants reported that they experienced teamwork through trust. Participants mentioned two dimensions of trust. Fellow volunteers developed the ability to trust other volunteers. They also mentioned how they felt supported when fellow volunteers trusted them to do their job. Obeid, an executive leader volunteer, developed the ability to trust the people he worked with. He said,

> I had to develop this trust with my volunteers, with my team members, that they will take care of it. And I have to trust that they can handle the operations. I have to believe in their ability to do it, and actually express my belief in them. You just have to trust in someone and express to them that you trust them. And that’s when they actually do what you need them to do.

With no knowledge of Obeid’s statement about how he trusted each volunteer to do their job, Mona shared her response to the trust that Obeid spoke of. When asked about who or what supported her in gaining teamwork and leadership skills, she said, “It was trust. The trust that they placed in me and the creative freedom that I was allowed to have. We were a collective.”

Volunteers found that their exposure to people of different races and creeds increased their cultural competency. For example, Boushra said, “The group that I worked with was so diverse: people from Palestine, people from Iraq, Americans who are

not Muslim. It was all there, and I think the social aspect was just knowing how to interact with everyone." Summer shared the same sentiment about the value of working with a diverse group of clientele,

> Being able to interact with people from different backgrounds and have a sense of all the different types of people that are out there is really, really helpful. I walked away from that [experience] felling like I was closer to all these different people that I had maybe never met before that experience. I would say that it just made me open to new people.

Malak mentioned that her skill development was enriched by serving clients whose religious belief was different than her own. She reflected on her experience serving non-Muslim clients and said,

> But knowing how to interact with people from different backgrounds are different. Because some of the clients aren't always Muslims. So just trying to smile and say "Hi", and just interact. It helped me a lot in general communicating with people at work because we don't always work with Muslims. So it's just interacting with everyone, that's the thing it [this experience] taught me a lot.

It is worth mentioning that seven participants, including those who spoke of how they developed the skill of working with people from different backgrounds and creeds, said that they felt like they did not belong or were uncomfortable when they contributed to volunteer projects or with organizations where the majority was nonimmigrant or non-Muslim. For example, Malak said, "In other settings, where I've volunteered, where

there's just like a lot of White people; It feels kind of awkward I guess." Aya spoke about her experience volunteering with a Christian mission,

> Just the environment wasn't comforting. Everyone was kind and stuff, but it was just I couldn't relate to it as much as I wanted to which is fine because sometimes you have experiences like that. I just had to wait for the time to go by.

When asked about a time that she felt uncomfortable while volunteering, Melanie shared that, "somewhere that wasn't majority Muslim, there might be discomfort, because it's not around people that I'm comfortable with or that I grew up with because I did not really grow up in America." Summer said that she felt excluded while volunteering at an organization when the committee members each shared a common ethnicity other than hers. She felt excluded.

Confidence in Skills Application

Each of the participants considered their volunteer experience a success because they gained confidence in skills application and defined their place as a leader. This experience helped participants define leadership and what a leader is. Obeid defined a leader as

> someone who actually is able to motivate others to do their job willingly. And to motivate them to go above and beyond what they're initially supposed to do without me having to do it or be involved in it myself. And that's not an easy skill to develop. I think because it's a struggle to be able to motivate people to do something and to do it above and beyond without [the leader] being personally involved in the process.

Like Obeid, Mona's definition of a leader was someone who inspires. She said, "a leader is inspiring others and delegating where it's needed; finding peoples' strengths and pointing it out to them and telling them, Hey, you could be good at [this]. Let's use that strength and that sort of thing."

Participants were asked how they feel that they were impacted by the leadership skills development experience. Obeid responded,

> I think it taught me a lot. The biggest impact was understanding how to work with others and the importance of trust in other's abilities. That was honestly like moving forward in my life. That was the biggest impact affected me, because now whenever I look at other organizations, looking at offices, even jobs. [I realized] the simple things that I learned in my volunteer experience are essentially the keys to success in any organization, any job, any position that I take, every time I look at a different position, I just reflect back of this experience and how that really showed me what it's like to work in the real world.

Boushra said that the success of this experience has influenced how she views other volunteer experiences. She said, "It's now the standard that I hold all future experiences to. This was the greatest volunteer experience that I'll have."

Theme 3: Peer Leaders

Theme three addressed the second RQ: What types of support immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering. While every participant considered their volunteer experience a successful leadership development opportunity, eight of the 10 students attributed their skills

development to the support of peer leaders, particularly those who were on the executive committee of volunteers and its alumni. Many of the volunteers who served more than one year served as mentors for the executive committee of volunteers. When asked about what or who supported their leadership skills development, participants explained that the site volunteers had formed an executive committee of volunteers. Several years ago, alumni volunteers, well before the participants of this study, had formed an executive committee that focused solely on their initiative. The scope and purpose of the executive committee continued to evolve. At the time that participants in this study volunteered, available committee members positions were advertised on the initiatives Instagram page and through the WhatsApp group. Interested persons submitted an online application and then would be invited to an interview with the standing committee members. The executive committee included the following positions: director, operations supervisor, treasurer, fundraising coordinator, volunteer coordinator, social media coordinator, outreach chair, client relations coordinator. Not every participant in this study volunteered at the same, nor did every participant hold a position on the executive committee.

Participants reported that the director of the volunteer team supported them. A few of the volunteers were volunteering at the same site over the span of two different directors. The first director was reported to be always on the defensive for the whole team, serving as the point of contact for the volunteers and the organization's Executive Director. Three participants reported that a positive turning point in their leadership skills development happened when the succeeding director came to office and shared that all of

the volunteers would work as a collective with less rigid limitations on what they can do and how they help to shape the success of the project.

Four participants felt supported by the inclusive procedures. After every day of service, all the volunteers gathered for 10-15 minutes and reflected on the day's service. Mona shared how the reflection exercise made her feel included:

> I was able to feel comfortable around the coordinator even though she was sort of the authoritative figure. She didn't make me feel like I was a lot smaller than her. Because she knew everything about [the volunteer site], and I didn't at the time, um, she'd make me feel like I was completely welcome to insert my ideas, or to do something the way that I wanted to do it.

Boushra felt supported by the free exchange of ideas during the reflective exercise. For instance, she said,

> We would talk about our plans and our thoughts about what we could do to improve the pantry. We acknowledged each other's good ideas, also expanded on them. We never shut anybody down. Everybody's ideas were always circulated and talked about thoroughly. And then even implemented after that. So, it was really a supportive environment.

Participants also felt supported by their team. Participants were asked who or what supported them in gaining their leadership. When asked about who or what supported her while developing her leadership skills, Summer responded,

> I would say my committee members. I had to meet with all the volunteers before service started. I would explain things to the volunteers. I had to address the entire

> crowd. If I was not able to address all the concerns, I always had committee members around me that were apart of the conversation and would step in if I needed that. Whether that was just like physically being there as a supporter involving themselves as support; both of those ways I would say is how they helped support me.

Boushra, like Summer, expressed an appreciation of her team members and said, "I think having the whole team around me and the older volunteer directors definitely encouraged me to be more confident in my own leadership skills. Having a team was super important in that regard."

Summary

In this study, I interviewed 10 undergraduate immigrant origin students who volunteered with a community service nonprofit agency. Using Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis strategy, three themes emerged, with three subthemes for Theme 2.

- Theme 1: Consciousness of self
- Theme 2: Gaining communication and teamwork skills
    - Communication
    - Teamwork
    - Confidence in skills application
- Theme 3: Peer leaders

Overall, students reported gaining communication and teamwork skills from their volunteering experience. Participants shared that they developed leadership skills such as

the ability to address large audiences, collaborate, and make decisions. Participants expressed that they felt confident applying the leadership skills that they developed. One participant said that the experience was the highlight of her undergraduate experience. Other participants reported that it shaped their expectations for life and work. Each participant identified their leadership skills building experience through volunteering as a success.

Theme 1 focused on participants' consciousness of self and reflected the first RQ: How immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service nonprofit organization. Participants' awareness of self, and personal relationships impacted their volunteering experience. Data revealed that participants' life experience was a factor in their engagement in the volunteer program.

The second theme focused on gaining communication and teamwork skills and reflected both RQs: How immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service nonprofit organization and what types of support immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering. This theme also had two subthemes. Participants attributed the development of leadership skills to their volunteer experience. Participants also identified various reasons that they felt supported while gaining leadership skills.

The third theme discussed the college students' experience with peer leaders and reflected the second RQ. Participants' experiences suggest a link between peer leadership

and student leadership skills development. Participants reported a change in volunteer leadership that provided more support and more trust was the turning point in their experience.

In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings using the conceptual framework and empirical literature presented in Chapter 2. I also discuss the limitations and implications of the study, as well as the recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore immigrant origin undergraduate students' experiences building leadership skills while volunteering at nonprofit community service agency. Three themes and related subthemes emerged from analysis of the 10 interviews with immigrant students regarding the two RQs: How do immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service organization and what types of support do immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering? Key findings from this study centered on the following three themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis: consciousness of self, gaining of communication and teamwork skills (with subthemes of communication, teamwork, and confidence in skills application), and peer leaders.

In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the findings of this study and present the limitations and recommendations for future research. I conclude the chapter with the study's possible implications for positive social change for the increasingly diverse student bodies in higher education.

Interpretations of the Findings

The findings from this study are consistent with the studies and theories associated with the social change model of leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) and Astin's (1970) input-environment-output model and with empirical research related to the development of student leadership through volunteerism. The following interpretation of the findings is organized in response to the three themes:

consciousness of self, gaining communication and teamwork skills, and peer leaders. I first interpret the three themes in relationship to three values from the social change model of leadership model (congruence, controversy with civility, and citizenship) and Astin's input-environment-output theory. In the subsequent section, I interpret the study's findings in the context of the empirical literature.

Interpretations in Light of the Conceptual Framework

The findings of this study confirm the social change model of leadership (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996) as participants responded to interview questions indented to evoke reflection on each of the three values. The social change model of leadership recognizes student leadership as a purposeful, collaborative, values-driven process instead of just a title or position. In Chapter 2, I explained that for the purposes of this study, I narrowed my application of the social change model of leadership to focus on only one value from each of the three model domains: congruence from the individual domain, controversy with civility from the group domain, and citizenship from the societal domain. I chose these three values because they were most relevant to the purpose of this research. I will interpret the findings in light of each of the three values of the social change model of leadership.

The social change model of leadership explains congruence as thinking, feeling, and behaving with consistency, genuineness, authenticity, and honesty towards others (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). In the first theme, participants reported the impact of self-identity on their drive to volunteer. Participants expressed the importance of their immigrant origin background and life experience on their connection to the

clients at a community service organization. Congruence leads to actions that are consistent with individual's most deeply held beliefs and convictions (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). Participants reported that their increasing self-awareness led to feeling empathetic towards other immigrants because of their belief that the immigrants' financial situation and their need to use the pantry was a consequence of world issues over which they had no control. Participants also reported caring about the clients because of the clients' likeness to their own family members and their experiences. Participants mentioned that they were driven to volunteer because of their deeply held religious convictions. Participants shared that giving back to the community and volunteering was just the thing that they were expected to do as religious believers and privileged children of immigrants.

Controversy with civility refers to two fundamental realities of any group effort. It confirms that differences in viewpoint are inevitable and that such differences must be aired openly but with civility (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). Civility implies respect for others, a willingness to hear each other's views, and the exercise of restraint in criticizing the views and actions of others. Communication and teambuilding skills were gained through participants' ability to deal with controversy with civility. Controversy with civility requires trust amongst the group members; conflicts need to be resolved but also integrated into the common purpose (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). Participants mentioned the things and actions that they felt supported them while they were building leadership skills. Participants shared that they navigated controversy with civility by participating in a reflection circle, led by peers, after every

service day. They learned together as peers. Participants shared that each volunteer was invited to a reflection circle where each volunteer was given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions like, What did we do well today, what should we continue to work on, and what can we do to make sure that you return next week?

Trust was also an important factor in participants' successful navigation of controversy with civility. Participants spoke at length about trust. Findings showed that trust was important among the volunteers; they reported they needed to trust that each individual volunteer was doing their job without constant supervision or interference from anyone else. Participants also spoke about how they felt supported by the trust of the volunteers who were on the executive committee. Participants also spoke about the bonds of trust that they were able to build with clients. Boushra said,

> After developing some of the bonds that I had with the clients, they began to trust me a lot. They knew that I was interested in medicine so they would tell me about their family members who were going through a dangerous surgery or that they just had a baby. They were involving me in their lives and their medical issues because they trusted me.

Participants in this study noted that they were able to develop leadership and interpersonal skills. This echoes the findings from Van de Meer et al.'s (2019) study that suggested that the benefits of peer leadership include interpersonal skills development.

Findings from the study confirmed the value of citizenship in the social change model of leadership. Citizenship is defined as the process whereby an individual and the collaborative group become responsibly connected to the community and the society

through the leadership development activity (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). The social change model posits that to be a good citizen is to work for positive change on the behalf of others and the community (Skendall, 2016). The findings of the study align with the model. For instance, participants spoke in depth about how they felt that their volunteering contributed to the betterment of a community and how their strong connections with clients kept them committed to the initiative. Mona shared, "I'm playing a role in alleviating people's pain, people's suffering, people's symptoms of something bigger. It wasn't addressing the root and I was aware of that but I was still content and felt fulfillment from it." Participants reported being so responsibly connected to the community because they saw their loved ones and family members in the clients.

The second theory I used in the conceptual theory was Astin's (1970) input-environment-output model to explain the influence of the college environment on students' leadership skill development. The input-environment-output model is used to assess the impact of student's experiences under various environmental conditions. Participants mentioned that family members, family norms, peers, and religion influenced their decision to volunteer. This study's findings confirmed the concept of Astin's (1970) model that students' experiences precollege, before volunteering, are inputs that contribute to the volunteering environment and the student outputs. In Chapter 2, I also reviewed how Astin (1999) expanded on the input-environment-output theory and presented the student involvement theory. The student involvement theory claimed that the more involved a student is in college, the more likely they are to succeed. A highly involved student is considered one who "devotes considerable energy to studying, spends

a significant amount of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (Astin, 1999, p. 518). Astin posited that students' involvement has greater influence over their success than external factors. The results of this study suggest some confirmation of Astin's (1999) theory on student involvement, as eight of the 10 participants who reported a strong bond with the organization, fellow volunteers, and clients shared that they had volunteered with the same organization in the same capacity for more than a year. Participants shared that they attended weekly meetings, and Saturday service. When asked about his time volunteering at the community service organization, Obeid said, "Maybe 10 or 15 hours distributed between the meetings, truck unload, and service time. I did not really track my hours; it was more so whatever the pantry needed. We gave time for it." Participants' involvement seemed to be an important predictor of their leadership skills development.

Interpretation in Light of the Empirical Literature

In Chapter 2's empirical literature review, I analyzed research on higher education and career readiness, student leadership programs, experiential learning and student leadership development, and engagement and underrepresented students in higher education. In this next section, I interpret each of the three themes in light of these topics in the empirical literature presented in Chapter 2.

Consciousness of Self

The social change model of leadership defines consciousness of self as the awareness of beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate one to take action (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996). The social change model of leadership

provided the conceptual framework for this study. For the purposes of this study. I only used three of the seven Cs described in the model: congruence, civility of conflict, and citizenship. While this study used the value of congruence in the conceptual framework, the findings confirmed the value of consciousness of self, also from the same sphere of individual values in the social change model of leadership. These findings suggest confirmation of the balance in design of the social change model of leadership.

The results support the research about the importance of cultural resources for immigrant origin students' aspirations and mobility. Orupabo et al. (2020) found that students deployed a dual frame of reference when they compared their situation with the poorer conditions in their parents' home countries. Participants in this study reported that having heard about their parents' background growing up and migrating from an undeveloped and war-torn country drove them to volunteer with an organization that served a large immigrant/refugee population. For instance, Mona shared how her mother's stay in a refugee camp made her empathetic to the clients' conditions.

In a study about how Latinx students defined leader language and how they experienced leadership development at a predominantly White institution, Lozano (2015) found that participants defined leaders as persons who motivate and inspire others to act, with no absolute need for a title. Participants in this study reported an increased awareness and defined leadership as an act of inspiring others. Obeid shared, "A leader is someone who actually is able to motivate others to do their job willingly. And motivate them to go above and beyond what they're initially supposed to do without having to do it or be personally involved." Mona shared a like statement defining a leader: "Being a

leader is inspiring others and delegating where it's needed; to finding people's strengths and pointing it out to them."

Gaining Communication and Teamwork Skills

The participants in this study all described volunteering as a successful leadership skill development experience. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (n.d.) established leadership as a career readiness competency along with nine other core competencies: analytical and critical thinking, applied problem solving, ethical reasoning and decision making, innovation and creativity, oral and written communication, teamwork, engaging diversity, active citizenship and community engagement, digital literacy, and career management. The results of this study indicate that volunteering in a community service nonprofit organization can aid the development of leadership skills among immigrant origin undergraduate students. Participants reported gaining communication and teamwork skills such as decision making, engaging diversity, and active citizenship and community engagement.

The study's findings are consistent with the research on community-based experiential learning experiences of undergraduate students that has found that participating in volunteer activities can positively impact the acquisition of leadership skills (Barton et al., 2019; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; Khansanzyanova, 2017; Strawn et al., 2017). Strawn et al. (2017) found a connection between leadership growth and three programmatic elements: mentoring, a weekly seminar, and experiential learning. The volunteering experience at the community service nonprofit agency where this study's participants volunteered also had each of the three programmatic elements:

alumni volunteers mentored new volunteers, a weekly reflection circle after service, and experiential learning as volunteers worked with little or no direct supervision to fulfill their duties.

Some researchers have suggested that higher education may be placing too much attention on learning outcomes and not enough attention on how to teach students about how to effectively transfer their leadership skills (Reyes et al., 2019). Participants in this study reported that they were able to apply and develop leadership skills such as communication skills, increased cultural competency, decision making, and teamwork skills. Findings from Heinrich and Green's (2020) research called for a shift from teacher-centered pedagogical approaches to student-centered approaches that leverage students' experiences and backgrounds. Findings from this study confirmed Coelho and Menezes's (2021) findings. Coelho and Menezes found that by focusing students' learning on real world problem solving, service learning projects foster powerful connections between theory and practice and support students' capacity to transfer skills, building bridges between academia and community. Service learning typically combines service with reflection, and the participants all mentioned the importance of reflection.

Findings from this study also confirmed the findings from Song and Hur's (2022) study of 15 Korean American high school leadership program participants. The Korean American students reported communication skills development as one of the most important lessons they had learned. Participants from this study shared that they experienced communication skills development through their ability to reach and engage with diverse audiences and large groups. For instance, Summer said that she was able to

develop her communication skills because she was responsible for recruiting new volunteers and that often meant that she presented and trained a new group of individuals every week.

Peer Leaders

Researchers have found that students are able to cultivate their leadership capacity when they are allowed active practice of leadership skills (Lehane, 2020; Morris, 2019; Park et al., 2020). Participants reported the impact of being allowed active practice of their leadership skills, Summer, for example, reported the impact of being a leader during her experience by saying, “Before this experience, I had not played any leadership role like I did there. I was never as committed in anything else before that.”

Van der Meer et al. (2019) revealed that 81% of students with identifiable roles of facilitation or guidance with peers in a student leadership program at four universities in Australia and one in New Zealand reported an increase in their leadership skills because of their participation in the program. All participants in this study reported that they worked with peers with identifiable roles of facilitation and responsibility and developed leadership skills. Findings from this study confirmed the value of peer mentoring as a tool to student leadership development. Lee et al. (2020) explored the phenomenon of mentors’ perceptions of growth in generativity through a qualitative study that explored a leadership mentoring program at an American university that trained freshman students to mentor a K-12 student for 3 years. Lee et al. found that student mentors reported the opportunity to apply leadership skills was the reason that they experienced growth and success in leadership development. Participants in this study reported like experiences.

Obeid said that while he had an open invitation to reach out to volunteers who previously held the same position as volunteer committee directors and access to their notes, he was left alone to perform and execute his duties, thus giving him an opportunity to develop and apply his leadership skills.

In Chapter 2, I analyzed three types of leadership programs that incorporate experiential learning: peer mentoring, service learning, and volunteerism. This study explored immigrant origin students' experiences building leadership skills through volunteering. Haski-Lenenthal et al. (2020) found that students who volunteered expected to make a difference, develop their careers, and make friends. Participants in this study reported having achieved all three of those expectations. Participants spoke of their desire to learn skills that will benefit them in their future careers. Nourah, an aspiring nonprofit organizer, said,

> I would say [I wanted to volunteer] mainly due to the fact that I also want to build my own business. I decided that I even before I start the business, I need to embrace myself, and that is going out to different places, talking to different people, you know, just being more part of the community.

Participants were able to make friends during this experience. Four of the 10 participants said that they gained friends while volunteering. Boushra said, "I think that it [the volunteering experience] was probably the most impactful thing that happened to me throughout college. It was the foundation of the friend group that I had, that I leaned on for support all throughout college." In Theme 1, I shared how participants reported that friends were the reason that they volunteered.

Findings from this study confirmed the value of peer mentoring as a tool to student leadership development. Lee et al. (2020) explored the phenomenon of mentors' perceptions of growth in generativity through a qualitative study that explored a leadership mentoring program at an American university that trained freshman students to mentor a K-12 student for 3 years. Lee et al. found that student mentors reported the opportunity to apply leadership skills was the reason that they experienced growth and success in leadership development. Participants in this study reported like experiences. Obeid said that while he had an open invitation to reach out to volunteers who previously held the same position as volunteer committee directors and access to their notes, he was left alone to perform and execute his duties. The peer leader mentored Obeid with advice and guidance but still gave him autonomy and independence to develop and apply his leadership skills. He remarked about such growth and said, "She was a great mentor because she was always available and shared a lot of information and insight about what she did when she was in my position but in the end, I had to do the work."

This study's findings brought light to the importance of self reflection in leadership skills development. Through a qualitative analysis of student journals, Manning-Oullette and Hemer (2019) found evidence that students experienced self-reflection, identified values to lead, and engaged in collaboration and teamwork. All participants from this study expressed that they also experienced like results. Participants experienced self-reflection as they empathized with and compared the clients' circumstances with those of their family members who are refugees or immigrated or

wish to immigrate to the United States. Participants also reported self reflection through the small group reflection circles after each service day.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited to the perceptions and experiences of 10 Muslim students and may not fully represent the experiences of all immigrant origin students who have volunteered. The findings may not be transferable to similar populations due to the small sample size. The participants in this study also may not be reflective of the full spectrum of immigrant origin persons in the United States. This study focused on students who volunteered on their own accord, the findings may not be transferable to students who volunteered to fulfill curriculum or graduation requirements. The study was limited to the perspective of students who volunteered in a particular period and may not be reflective of students' experiences in other years. Another limitation is that participants had the ability to self-select for this study, a common limitation in qualitative studies. Students both volunteered to participate in this study and self-identified as immigrant origin.

Recommendations for Future Research

Results of this study serve as an addition to the scholarly literature regarding immigrant origin students' experiences building leadership skills. This qualitative study explored the immigrant origin students' experiences building leadership through volunteering. Researchers could possibly use a preservice and post service survey to quantitatively look at how participants self report their leadership skills development over time. Future studies could examine participants from particular immigrant groups and

provide a more exclusive look at the perspectives of specific background or cultural group members.

Additional research could explore the different factors that emerged from the findings. For instance, higher education leaders might benefit from studies that examine the influence of the life experiences of refugees on their drive to positively impact social change. Participants revealed that they felt connected to immigrants and refugees because of their own personal and family history as immigrants or refugees. These life experiences were a motivating factor for their desire to volunteer. A mixed method study could be designed to look at how inviting students into community engagement intersects with the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Further research is also needed to explore how immigrants from collectivist societies define and execute leadership skills. Finally, many participants talked about feeling uncomfortable in all White spaces. Further research is needed to investigate the immigrant and refugee perspective of experiential learning in predominantly White spaces.

Implications for Social Change

Research into immigrant origin student leadership skills development can add to understanding how to build a culturally rich pool of college graduates who are ready for leadership. Leadership learning refers to an interactive and engaging phenomenon involving elements of education, training, observation, development, and metacognition (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2012, 2018). Implications for positive social change based on the results of this study may include the development of strategies and actions that promote the leadership skills development of immigrant origin students, particularly at the

collegiate level. The goal of this study was to provide higher education professionals information on the factors that may contribute to more diverse, inclusive, and equitable practices student leadership opportunities integrated into the undergraduate student experience. The positive impact could include cross cultural understanding, adaptability, and global citizenship (van der Meer et al., 2019; Wambu et al., 2017). Based on population projections, the United States is projected to become majority-minority by 2045. Higher education institutions need to offer programs that acknowledge and appreciate the changing dynamics of student population. Preparing leaders to contribute to the maturation of a diverse work force is an investment.

Based on the results of this study, higher education institutions could place more focus on relationships with the communities and organizations that represent students' identities as well as recognize students' cultural plurality. Higher education institutions should be opening channels to the communities that they serve and make community outreach intentional and targeted. Students could benefit from being placed in spaces where they feel connected and purposeful. When that is not available, more attention could be paid to creating a greater sense of hospitality and teamwork. Programs may benefit from a focus on student self-exploration and reflection to provide students with more opportunities to reflect and apply the information they have learned.

Conclusion

As higher education institutions' student populations continue to diversify, institutions need to offer a range of programs that aim to provide an equally transformative undergraduate experience for all students. Findings from this research

could increase access to leadership opportunities for all students. Salam et al. (2019) claimed that educators reported issues with implementing experiential learning, in the form of service-learning. Yet, Salam et al. found that even with mounting practical and logistical issues, educators were interested in incorporating service-learning in their curriculum. Higher education institutions can be more intentional about their community engagement. Community service nonprofit organizations already serving culturally plural populations can provide an opportunity for immigrant origin college students to develop leadership skills through volunteering.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Research Questions:

How do immigrant origin college students describe their leadership experiences and skills developed while volunteering with a community-service organization? (Addressed by interview questions #1,2,3,8)

What types of support do immigrant origin college students identify as reinforcing their leadership experience and skills while volunteering? (Addressed by interview questions #4,5,6,7)

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to share your experiences with me. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. I am interested in hearing the story of how you came to volunteer with a nonprofit community service organization. Thinking back over the course of your life, what are some of your experiences that influenced your choice to volunteer?
    a) How did you learn about this volunteer opportunity?
    b) Have you volunteered at or with another organization before this time?
    c) Are there any other life experiences that stand out as encouraging you toward volunteering?

2. Tell me about your time volunteering at the community service organization.
    a) How often did you volunteer at the community service organization?
    b) What were your responsibilities while volunteering?
    c) What role did you serve in while volunteering with the community service organization?
    d) Have you ever been in what you consider a leadership role?

3. Can you tell me about any leadership skills that you developed while volunteering? Any others? (Probe for ability to persuade, ability to motivate, ability to inspire, serve as role model, plan, initiate, manage, evaluate)
    a) How do you think you developed those leadership skills?
    b) Who or what supported you in gaining leadership skills?
    c) What was one thing that stood out about how you were supported?

4.Please describe a time when you felt “at home” while playing a leadership role as a volunteer?
    a) What supports can you recall that helped you feel “at home” during this experience?

b) Is there anything regarding being an immigrant that you think impacted your experience? Can you tell me about it?
c) What role did language play in feeling “at home”?

5. Tell me about a time while volunteering that you did not feel like your authentic true self?

a) Did you experience any conflict while volunteering? If so, how did you navigate conflict as a leader when you were volunteering?
b) What supports, if any, helped you to be better able to handle conflict?
c) Describe a time when you and the group members had different ideas?
d) Can you tell me more about how you handled it?
e) How do you think that the challenges of difference might have been handled better??

6. How did your experiences collaborating with the other volunteers lead towards positive change on the behalf of others and the community?

a) How would you describe the neighborhood and community that your volunteer work serviced?
b) Describe an occasion where you worked as a team with the other volunteers

7. How do feel you were impacted by this volunteering experience?

a) How would you describe your most memorable experience while volunteering?
b) Would you consider this leadership experience a success or failure? Can you tell me why?
c) What influenced the success or failure of this experience?
d) What would you say supported this success or failure, if anything?
e) How might you perceive if the experience was beneficial for you? For the team? For the organization?
f) Describe to me the way you measure your success.

8.Tell me about things you might change to make the relationship more rewarding for volunteers.

9.Is there anything else that you think I should have asked about?