2020-01-01

The Digital Literacy Practices Of Transfronterizx Esol College Students: Los De Esol

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THE DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES OF TRANSFRONTERIZX ESOL COLLEGE

STUDENTS: *LOS DE ESOL*

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Dedication

#bordersdontdivide

THE DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES OF TRANSFRONTERIZX ESOL COLLEGE

STUDENTS: LOS DE ESOL

by

LAURA ENRIQUETA MENDOZA-FIERRO

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2020

Acknowledgments

Ms. Minnie, thank you for the encouragement to apply and for the many drafts reviewed during my Ph.D. path.

Agradezco muchísimo a mi comité por su profesionalismo durante mi recorrido de la disertación. Dra. Mein y Dra. Núñez-Mchiri, gracias por compartirme sus perspectivas. Dra. de la Piedra y Dr. Esquinca, gracias por todos los "¿aquí qué quieres decir?", por todos los "no" y, sobre todo, por todos los "¡muy bien!", sin su apoyo y dedicación no habría logrado este nuevo paso en mi vida profesional. Son unas figuras académicas a seguir incomparables.

También agradezco a mis amigas por sus constantes muestras de cariño en estos años. Lidia, Mariana y Diana, gracias por guiarme y siempre tratar de hacer mi camino mucho más sencillo. Los consejos, las horas de plática y las lágrimas que compartimos durante nuestro recorrido en el doctorado han significado mucho para mí. Raquel y Helena, *morras*, gracias por la fe incondicional que me tienen en lo profesional. Siempre me hicieron las preguntas más difíciles, más críticas y extrañas. Gracias por siempre ayudarme a mejorar. Nos esperan un sinfín de conferencias, proyectos y demás.

Y por supuesto, gracias incondicionales a mi familia. Ma' y Marianísimomiamor, son lo máximo. No tengo palabras para agradecerles todos los *paros*. Esto es por ustedes y gracias a ustedes. ¡Los amo!

Abstract

This dissertation aims to contribute knowledge to the literature about ESOL students' digital literacy practices related to educational purposes. I studied the varied digital literacy practices the students used as mediating tools to perform their university activities (e.g., crossing to come to school, communicate with classmates/instructors about assignments, completing assignments). This study takes place on the U.S. side of the borderland area of El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The participants were 43 transfronterizx ESOL college students, who were young adults between 18-25 years of age enrolled in the ESOL program at Sun University. I draw on ethnographic and netnographic methods to explore how the participants used their digital literacy practices for identity-making. Using sociocultural perspectives (Gee, 2000; Gee, 2005; Gee, 2014; Guerra, 2004; Guerra, 2016; Moran, 2020), I paid particular attention to how Transfronterizx ESOL College Students (TECS) used their digital literacy practices for learning English. TECS were constantly experiencing hybridized linguistic elements and diversified social and cultural practices, given their geographical context. Findings from the present dissertation demonstrated that participants heavily relied on their digital literacy practices to remain *interconectados* with their loved ones on both sides of the border, simultaneously. Through transculturally repositioning (Guerra, 2004; 2016), participants could mobilize themselves virtually from one side to another using their digital literacy practices.

TECS mobilized their knowledges, experiences, and linguistic repertoires. I found digital practices including their constant use of social media sites and the Blackboard app. Participants heavily relied on their digital literacy practices to navigate their English learning processes. Furthermore, findings also demonstrated that in their continuous processes of

becoming and belonging to multiple communities, participants use their dualistic orientation

(Lam & Warriner, 2012) as a way of making sense of their experiences in their communities.

Some of these communities were *Los de ESOL* community, border-crossers, and young people

from Juarez. Participants shared several affinities, which also helped them to navigate their

different communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: THE DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES OF ESOL COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR TRANSFRONTERIZX IDENTITY MAKING IN EL PASO/JUAREZ AREA

Transnationals confront marginalization, discrimination, and segregations in their migration processes as they traverse different frontiers (López et al., 2015). Transnationals' multilingual practices, ethnicities, and social affiliations grant or limit their access to a world, particularly an academic world, where they can feel respected, valued, and supported by mainstream society (Despagne & Jacobo, 2016; Galván, 2011; Hamann, Zúñiga, & Sánchez García, 2017; Skerrett, 2015). For this reason, a way to address the disadvantageous circumstances of transnationals might be to research in order to understand the linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical (Despagne & Jacobo, 2016) inequalities they face as they traverse a variety of communities (Guerra, 2016). Despagne and Jacobo (2016) have previously focused on the inequalities transnationals live, showing that these disparities are not exclusive of young adults and are also evident with younger students. Paying attention to the fluidity of literacies among transnationals, other authors have also focused on students' everyday literacy practices (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Wang, 2016). In this dissertation, I focused on the many practices, primarily digital literacy practices, which allowed ESOL transfronterizx students to better navigate their communities. I decided to focus on the practices, given the limited available literature focusing on ESL transfronterizx students.

What has been considered as a frontier/borderland area must be reconsidered. Meneses (2015) notes that these conceptions of the border as a dividing line must be reevaluated because these ideological processes of delimiting a border are only securitization processes, which reproduce ideologies and social pressures that are exclusive. Despite these artificial separations

imposed by the political border and institutions like the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, about 22, 046, 772 authorized individuals crossed the El Paso/Juárez borderland area during 2017 (Convertino, 2018). Many of these commuters are transfronterizx students, like the present dissertation participants, who are crossing daily or weekly to attend an educational institution in the United States. These students' identity-making processes are based not only on their diversified educational experiences and lifestyles on both sides of the border but mainly on their physically traversing two countries (Convertino, 2018; Falcon, 2013; Semuels, 2016). In this sense, transnational students are not physically nor emotionally tied to just one country. However, their *vivencias* require active cyclical participation in different worlds that force them to have a constant identity shift (Kleyn, 2017), which is worth exploring. Understanding the lives of those transnationals who are continually navigating diverse cultural practices is needed. Exploring the lives of transnationals can inform educational researchers, educators, as well as policymakers to improve the experiences of those physically crossing by creating a more welcoming environment within these areas –ports of entry-. Authors have noted the unfortunate normalization of the mistreatment while crossing the border (Sabo et al., 2014). Nevertheless, understanding students' struggles when they are physically crossing the border is not sufficient to inform educators, researchers, and those in charge of education, of the changes required in the transnational classroom. More importantly, authors (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) have also noted how research focused on students whose home language is not English are commonly represented as struggled students, contributing to the deficit perspectives about them. Gutiérrez and Orellana (2006) noted that students' cultural and linguistic differences are interpreted as deficits, reinforcing the idea that these students are different from mainstream

students. In this sense, students whose primary language is not English are seen as a problem, instead of as an asset for the community.

For this reason, it is essential to understand their practices as they are continually traversing different communities. Furthermore, because transnationals are not only attached to one place but many communities simultaneously, some authors have started to explore how their literacy practices are now frequently linked to digital practices (Darvin, 2016; Darvin & Norton, 2014; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009). The present dissertation contributes to this literature because it focuses on how transfronterizxs access and navigate their different communities, primarily by employing digital literacy practices.

1.2. THE CONTEXT: CIUDAD JUÁREZ/EL PASO SUN UNIVERSITY

"Las fronteras no son inmovibles ni pueden ser presentadas como si fueran producto de la fatalidad o de una catástrofe natural. Son más bien resultado de decisiones humanas que responden a arraigados intereses y de las que derivan beneficios para unos y perjuicios para otros" (Velasco, 2016, p. 19).

Meneses (2015) reminds us of the importance of understanding the life at the border as borders "organizan el espacio sin obstáculos, al tiempo que intercomunican el territorio con el espacio social que buscan regular" (p. 42) – "they organize the space without obstacles, while they intercommunicate the territory with the social space they seek to regulate." Borders offer researchers a rich environment to explore their commuters' lives because their relations go beyond the geography and schematize the social, economic, and cultural ambiances of their community members.

The context in which this study takes place is on the U.S. side of this borderland area, El Paso, Texas. Data came from transfronterizx or border-commuter students attending Sun University. The university is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). In this dissertation, I used

several interchangeable terms to refer to the participants: transfronterizx ESOL College Students/TECS/*Los de ESOL.* As I further develop in detail in other chapters, I refer to my participants as transfronterizx ESOL college students as a descriptive way to identify them as I am writing. From this identifier, I developed an acronym for the same name, which is TECS. Besides, I also refer to the participants as Los de ESOL because that is how they name themselves. However, I am always referring to the same group of participants. ESOL stands for the English language teaching and learning program at Sun University: English for Speakers of Other Languages. In this HSI institution, the Hispanic/Latino undergraduate's population represented 83.3%, about 17,088 students, and most Mexican or Mexican Americans. In contrast, the White population represented 6.3%, about 1,292 students during the study, and other ethnicities contributed to this university's diversity, including African Americans and other international students, according to the university's website.

1.3. ADULT ESOL STUDENTS AT THE BORDER

This dissertation attempts to highlight the diversified digital literacies of ESOL adult students as a way to understand how they used them to not only learn English but, in general, to traverse the different communities to which they belong. Historically, it has been noted that the term ESL makes direct reference to those students who come to the classroom speaking languages distinct from English (Gunderson et al., 2013). Mein et al. (2013) suggested the importance of studying the digital literacies of ESL students as "adult ESL education in the United States has historically mirrored immigration patterns," the authors continued, "moreover, while the traditional focus of ESL has been print literacy, in recent decades, the integration of technology into ESL classrooms has become imperative" (p. 3). Consequently, understanding these transfronterizx ESL students' digital practices remains an important issue because these

digital practices resemble their frequent back-and-forth movements while giving them opportunities for language learning. I used the term ESOL because it is the name Sun University uses.

This dissertation aims to build knowledge regarding ESOL students' digital literacy practices primarily related to educational purposes. I hope to inform college professionals about teaching practices, which, in turn, might benefit the educational experiences of transfronterizx students. Furthermore, with the present dissertation, I hope to understand transnationals' identity-making within their various communities as they engage in various border-crossing communicative practices digitally. By writing this dissertation, I expect to contribute to the literature by providing additional details of the practices that transfronterizx college students engage in when in the ESOL classroom and completing education-related tasks outside their ESOL classroom. Understanding ESL students' digital literacy practices remains relevant because many schools in the United States are more frequently serving students whose primary language is not English (Reeves, 2002).

Furthermore, more specific to the college level, ESL students have unique language learner issues, including struggling with academic writing (Roberge et al., 2009). Literature (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013) has noted how ESL students are commonly placed in developmental classes and how often the scholarly discourse reinforces them as deficient or problematic without considering them as an asset (Crumpler, Handsfield, & Dean, 2011; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Shapiro, 2014). Both, ESOL programs and scholarly discourses, are often guided by deficit perspectives. For this reason, I aim to contribute to the literature by gaining a deeper understanding of the assets ESOL students brought with them to the ESOL classroom. I study the varied digital literacy practices they use as mediating tools to perform their university activities

(e.g., crossing to come to school, communicate with classmates/instructors about assignments, completing assignments). Similar to Cueva Esquivel's (2017) study participants, the present dissertation aimed to examine how transfronterizx ESOL college students, who were young adults between 18-25 years of age and who also were enrolled in the ESOL program at Sun University during the time of the study, used their digital literacy practices for identity-making. I paid particular attention to how TECS used their digital literacy practices for learning English.

The purpose of this dissertation is to inform other educators who might also be in constant contact with transnational students or whose decisions might highly impact transnational education about the digital literacy practices that transfronterizx college students perform concerning the ESOL classroom. Furthermore, I want to inform educators and researchers about how these practices influenced TECS' identity-making processes and their relation to language use/learning. With this dissertation, I aim to present information to academics and ESL educators, primarily those working on the border, about the importance of belonging to multiple communities at once for transfronterizx students. Besides, by gaining additional information on their identity shifts and using digital literacy practices as transfronterizx ESOL students, I wanted to understand better how they position themselves and are positioned by others while engaging in their daily digital practices. Understanding belonging and becoming among transfronterizxs is relevant because, as I will demonstrate as part of this dissertation, TECS continuously belong to several communities at once (Guerra, 2004). This is relevant, because for example, belonging aided their language learning as TECS constantly supported those in similar circumstances to theirs and who were also part of their same communities. To illustrate, whereas Sun University as institution labeled this community of students using deficit perspectives (ESOL students), TECS as a community, navigated their

processes of becoming and belonging by switching this label into the name of a community which was meaningful for them, Los de ESOL. More importantly, these becoming and belonging practices are essential for transnationals because they highlight how their identity-making processes are always present (Moran, 2020). By starting to call themselves Los de ESOL, the participants in this dissertation started an identity statement which signified trust and support among the members of this community. For this reason, this dissertation enabled me to understand how their multilingual, multicultural, and multimodal literacies influenced their identity as they were becoming transfronterizx ESOL college students (TECS). By writing this dissertation, I expect to raise awareness among educators, programs, and academics about how TECS use various resources and practices, specifically digital literacy practices, to successfully navigate an array of communities to which they belong or want to belong.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"The emergence of hybrid digital forms, such as wikis, blogs, databases, and online news, calls for new understandings of genre and textual features. New technical proficiencies with computers and other communication devices must be constantly learned for the rapid production, processing, and transmission of electronic texts."
Mills, 2010, p. 248

The purpose of this ethnographic case study, with netnographic features, is to identify the varied digital literacy practices that transfronterizx ESOL college students, TECS, use to mediate their identity-making, inside and outside the classroom within their various communities of belonging (Guerra, 2016). As I fully explain in chapter 3, the netnographic features (Kozinets, 2020) of this dissertation allowed me to analyze and understand the ongoing virtual communities and net groups that TECS participated in. The digital literacy practices of TECS are, unquestionably, part of their daily lives as they are continually traversing various worlds (Bartlett, 2007; Wiggins & Monobe, 2017). As previously mentioned, participants lived on the

El Paso/Juárez border area, were ESOL college students during the study, and had experiences attending schools on both sides of the border, Mexico and the United States.

The literature on the digital literacy practices of transfronterizxs remains limited. Falcon (2013) noted that existing literature directly on transfronterizx college students, policymakers, and student affairs professionals in universities located at the border is scarce. Moreover, although others (Convertino, 2018; Convertino & Mein, 2017; Mein et al., 2015; Villa et al., 2015) have explored transfronterizx college students, their emphasis is not exploring the digital literacy practices of such students. For example, Convertino (2018) focuses on four Latinx engineering students who developed a robot called *La Migra* based on their border-crossing activities, which could streamline the process of physically crossing the border. Convertino and Mein (2017) also worked with engineering undergraduate students to understand the social interactions within pre-calculus groups. The authors used bridgework to understand better what diversity and collaboration mean for STEM undergraduate students. The authors defined this new theoretical concept as the existing norms and rules when completing teamwork, and more importantly, how are the individuals performing the teamwork positioned to engage among them. Mein et al. (2015) demonstrated how beneficial it might be for undergraduate engineering courses to provide authentic opportunities for learning these future professionals. The authors relied on sociocultural theories of teaching and learning. Last, Villa et al. (2015) noted that future engineers need to develop their technical skills and professional skills. Furthermore, the author argued that the students could benefit and use their engineering leadership skills outside of the classroom.

Although these studies were conducted with transfronterizx college students, the studies' context was not within an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classroom. Whereas

some authors (Chávez Montaño, 2006; Falcon, 2013; Relaño Pastor, 2007; Rocha Romero & Orraca Romano, 2018) have already explored transborder college students, their focus has been on the San Diego/Tijuana area. Furthermore, the ones who have explored transnationals on the El Paso/Juárez borderland area (Convertino, 2018; Convertino & Mein, 2017; Esquinca, 2012; Esquinca, 2013; Mein et al., 2015; Villa et al., 2015) had not explored their digital literacy practices nor the ESOL college classroom. Focusing on the ESOL college classroom is relevant because students are continually traversing several communities, mainly when the classroom includes mostly transfronterizx students. The students in these classrooms are constantly traversing these many communities physically through their constant back-and-forth within countries and emotionally and virtually. In the ESOL classroom, the students bring their many communities with them at all times because they have shared experiences with others, as this dissertation will further explain. Therefore, the present dissertation adds to this literature focusing on using digital literacy practices of transfronterizxs when learning English in the ESOL classroom and their daily lives as border crossers.

Exploring the digital literacies of TECS was relevant as they were already constantly experiencing hybridized linguistic elements and diversified social and cultural practices, given their geographical context. Mills (2010) argued, "youth are involuntarily developing hybrid genres, textual features, vocabulary, and practices that are tied to original purposes for engaging in new literacies using digital media" (p. 256). Similarly, this dissertation's purpose remains important because TECS's digital literacy practices helped them connect their many communities while simultaneously traversing identity-making processes. Consequently, by continually using their different digital literacy practices, they could navigate different communities using their hybrid identities.

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Additionally, Mills (2010) noticed that while some studies do not pay attention to their participants' different socio-economic backgrounds, others exclusively pay attention to those whose economic circumstances are precarious. For this reason, exploring the digital literacy practices of TECS remained a relevant contribution to the literature as their membership in a more affluent bicultural society (Mendoza, 2016) might have enabled them to produce and engage in different types of digital literacies.

Literacy practices among students is another topic that has been extensively researched in the last decade as students might continuously be using their out-of-the-classroom practices inside their classroom. Even though academic literacy practices have mainly been researched (Behrman, 2006; Bloome et al., 2000; Grubb, 2002; McCarty, 2006; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Morrison et al., 1998), digital literacy practices deserve special attention given today's globalization and simultaneity. Currently, literacies explore the many multimodalties (e.g., Internet, videogames) that literacy practices involve, not exclusively reading and writing (Ajayi, 2011; Gee, 2003). Moreover, because we are currently living in a digitalized world, understanding the digital literacy practices of transfronterizxs represents an asset as they are continually traversing their worlds numerous times during their day thanks to technology. In other words, through the use of various digital channels (texting, social media sites, Blackboard), TECS mediated their connectedness with both sides of the border.

Lately, some authors (Ajayi, 2009; Kasper, 2000; Mills, 2010) have started to pay attention to the students' digital literacies in the ESL classroom. Using multiliteracies, Ajayi (2009) analyzed how ESL high schoolers interpreted different advertisements. The author found that students tended to situate the meaning of the advertisement to specific contexts. Kasper (2000), also focusing on the multiliteracies of ESL students, noted that acquiring these abilities is

useful for ESL students not only within the context of the language classroom but, most importantly, outside of it. Furthermore, Mills (2010) did not conduct a study, but a review of the literature, the author, also presented information linking the digital literacies used currently with the ESL classroom. Mills stated that by allowing ESL students to rely on all their multiple modes (e.g., digital modes, vast linguistic repertoires), they are more likely to succeed academically. Understanding that allowing ESL students to use all their practices at hand, whereas digital or linguistically, also guided me to notice how narrow the literature was linking digital literacy practices to transnational students' identity-making. Mills (2010) highlights that such digital literacy practices have been primarily explored for specific social classes. The author states: "New Literacy Studies focuses on the digital practices of the dominant middle-class" (p. 246). Perhaps literature has focused on them as their digital practices inside and outside the classroom might mirror each other compared to those literacies from others who might be less affluent.

Although in-print literacy practices in the classroom have been commonly researched (Behrman, 2006; Bloome et al., 2000; Grubb, 2002; McCarty, (Ed.)., 2006; Morrison et al., 1998), digital literacy practices deserve special attention given our globalized and digitalized current environments in the classroom. Paying attention to transnational students, this dissertation analyzed how TECS used (or not) such literacies. de la Piedra, Araujo, and Esquinca (2018) reminded us that exploring the literacy practices of transfronterizx students is extremely valuable as these represent a different view from the one which is generally described in the mainstream classroom. In this sense, the authors remind us of the importance of paying attention to transfronterizxs' literacies. These may represent examples of resistance from such students where they do not necessarily represent where institutions have positioned them (e.g., having limited linguistic abilities in English). These digital literacy practices were studied to understand

better how TECS used them to navigate their different communities in their learning English processes at Sun University, which prompted them to navigate identity-making processes to belong to these communities mentioned above.

By understanding TECS's digital literacy practices, I aim to inform educators and academics who teach and work with transnationals and transfronterizx students about the different ways to create a more welcoming environment by connecting transnational academic and non-academic digital literacy practices. I also aim to inform those whose teaching ideologies, styles, and methods could be affecting transnational and transfronterizx students. As Skerrett (2015) has noted, although many educators work daily with transnational students, they do not possess the knowledge about their transnational students' experiences, which unfortunately lead them to have an inappropriate response to students' absences, preferences, and knowledges.

1.5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Understanding transnationals and transfronterizxs' practices, primarily their digital literacy practices, remains relevant as these helped them successfully navigate their different communities simultaneously, whether they easily can belong, or not, depending on various systems of power. De la Piedra, Araujo, and Esquinca (2018) explain: "Transnationals develop these practices 'from below' as survival mechanisms and as a response to situations of marginalization experienced from below" (p. 16). Thus, paying attention to their various practices, particularly their digital literacy practices, might show that their practices are an asset to the literature. These findings will inform the role that such digital literacy practices play in the lives of transnationals and transfronterizxs given the intensity in which they are continually traversing their worlds not only physically, but also digitally, and emotionally.

The purpose of this ethnographic case study, with netnographic features, is to identify the digital literacy practices that transfronterizx ESOL college students used to mediate their identity-making, mainly while performing tasks related to their college education, given my access to observational data. Another goal of the study was to understand how TECS within the El Paso/Juarez border area used their digital literacy practices to navigate their multiple physical, emotional, and virtual worlds. Particular attention was paid to their digital literacy practices while using the cellphone, given the accessibility of smartphones.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question guiding the study is: *How do transfronterizx ESOL college students use their digital literacy practices for identity-making?*

The sub-questions are:

1. How do TECS use digital literacy practices for traversing their communities?

2. What digital literacy practices do TECS engage in?

3. How do TECS use digital practices for language learning?

1.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

I conducted the dissertation using ethnographic approaches, and although I conducted trustworthiness processes, the inferences that I can draw are specific to this study. Besides, it was limited to the U.S./Mexico borderland area and exclusively includes data from one higher education setting. The observations, one of the data sources, were performed while these transfronterizx students were constrained to a classroom area, or if anything, outside the classroom but in an educational environment (e.g., a college cafeteria, college laboratories, college meetings). Given their fluidities in cultures, languages, and experiences (de la Piedra, et al., 2018), it was necessary to consider how their digital literacy practices were used outside

school. Having access to transfronterizx' lives and out-of-school contexts could have provided me with a deeper understanding of how the students navigate their communities. I could have observed and analyzed how daily tensions and events (e.g., physically crossing the bridge, setting a schedule for each side of the border) might contribute to their identity-making while continuing using their digital practices. Unfortunately, I could not fully access their lives out-of-school, but what they shared, and I observed on campus, given time constraints and IRB limitations. Furthermore, the ages of the participants were limited to the ages of the students who were, back then, currently enrolled in the ESOL program at the university. Thus, considering non-traditional students and their relation to digital literacy practices could also provide insightful information for academia.

It is also worth mentioning that whereas I used purposeful sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015) as part of the recruitment efforts for the dissertation, there is a possibility that all participants in the study were, are, or will be my students given the structure of the ESOL program they are/were in. However, during the investigation, I ensured that none of the participants were enrolled in my classes. In this particular program, most of the courses are co-requisites (e.g., a grammar class is a co-requisite of a writing class). Consequently, although I performed the observations in different courses, it is reasonably likely that most of the participants were familiarized with me, which might have presented specific ethical issues, for instance, coercion or pressure to participate.

1.8. DEFINITIONS OF APPLICABLE TERMINOLOGY

The section below presents some of the most used terms throughout the study, such as *transfronterizx, transnational students, hybrid identity, literacy practices, digital literacy practices, transcultural repositioning, and dualistic orientation*. However, these terms present

just brief descriptors to provide the reader with an idea of what is defined later as part of the subsequent chapters. Additional relevant terminology is provided and adequately defined as needed in the following chapters.

Transfronterizxs

Relaño Pastor (2007) observes that transfronterizx students live their lives in two different worlds and whose linguistic and cultural repertoires resemble those from the two countries they are continually traversing. Following other authors observations (Convertino, 2018; de la Piedra et al., 2018), I prefer the term *transfronterizx* instead of transfronterizo/a as this one stays away from binaries and remains respectful, open, and inclusive to whichever gender the individuals portrayed in this study might prefer.

Transnational Students

To better understand who transnational students are, de la Piedra et al. (2018) state: "Transnational students are those who have affiliations in school in both countries and build cultural roots in both contexts" (p. 19). Additional characteristics of transnational students are presented in the following chapter.

Hybrid/fluid/in-between Identity

It is relevant noting that whereas I started framing my concepts and theories based on Holland (2001), as I continued my research, I discovered the value of framing my dissertation using others' lenses, which were more closely related to the population I explored. Holland (2001) explains hybridity in terms of the constant reconstruction of transnationals' identities, their negotiations, and positionalities. I started drawing from Moran's (2019) perspectives, a researcher who used the term *hybridity,* mostly referred to as having a *fluid* or *in-between* identity. I also draw my concepts from Guerra (2004; 2016), who understands

transnationals identities as fluid and hybridized, just like their communities. Guerra (2016)

understands identities as interactional negotiations constructed through different dynamic

relations, including similarities and differences. Like Anzaldúa's (1987) position, Guerra

highlights our efforts to overcome dualities by presenting ourselves in a non-static way where we

are not either in one place or another.

Literacy Practices

In this dissertation, I use the term *literacy practices* as it is defined by Gee (2014). As I

have explained earlier, as part of the dissertation I distinguish between literacy practices and

digital literacy practices. Gee (2014) states:

> We can say that a literacy practice is any social, cultural, or institutional practice that
>
> contains written language or is relevant to written language even if it contains none.
>
> There is a lot more to literacy and a lot more literacy practices than one might have
>
> thought when we started with literacy as the simple ability to read and/or write (p. 61).

Gee's definition of literacy practices is relevant to my dissertation as it encompasses the new

digital literacy practices that participants in the present dissertation frequently engage in inside

and outside their ESOL classroom. As part of my dissertation, I paid particular attention to the

instances in which it was evident that TECS were bringing their previously learned digital

literacies to their lives in The United States.

Digital Literacy Practices

From a New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective, scholars explore literacy practices and

their relationship globally. Authors following this perspective (Gee, 1989; Gee, 2005; Gee, 2014;

Street 2003; Street, 2005) recognize the large number of practices that literacy includes today.

Gee (2014) defines NLS as the "practices involving technologies other than print (such as digital

technologies), to so-called "digital literacies" (p. 55). These practices are relevant because they encompass the practices related to our constant use of technology as a mediating tool for our varied social practices. Consequently, understanding transnationals' digital literacy practices represent an addition to the literature as these newer social practices and skills required, still, further understanding. The digital literacy practices which were included as part of the present dissertation were, for the most part, the practice of the use of the cellphone as TECS were connecting their different communities, commuting to Sun University, and throughout their processes of becoming English learners.

Transcultural Repositioning

Following Guerra's (2004) views, I use the term *transcultural repositioning* to analyze the many ways in which TECS are continually positioning themselves in more than one place at a time. Guerra (2004) states:

Transcultural repositioning is a rhetorical ability that members of our community often enact intuitively but must learn to self-consciously regulate if they hope to move back and forth more productively between and among different languages and dialects, different social classes, different cultural and artistic forms, different ways of seeing and thinking about the increasingly fluid and hybridized world emerging all around us (p. 16).

Los de ESOL frequently repositioned themselves physically, emotionally, and virtually to navigate their lives as they are becoming TECS. For this reason, I used the term transcultural repositioning to refer to the instances where TECS repositioned themselves, both physically and virtually and emotionally, as they were committed to their many communities on both sides of the border.

Dualistic Orientation

Additionally, I used the term *dualistic orientation* by Lam and Warriner (2012). The authors explain the concept as the "tendency of migrants to compare life experiences and situations from different points of view of their native and adopted societies" (p. 195). I used the concept repeatedly as part of the findings to better explain how the participants were continually comparing and contrasting their previous experiences from Mexico with the ones they were experiencing as they were becoming TECS.

1.9.ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This dissertation includes six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the statement of the problem, the rationale, and the context of the study. Chapter 2 includes the literature review and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Specifically, I review prior relevant studies highlighting the main findings concerning transfronterizxs and transnationals within the academic setting. I also address the literacy practices and digital literacy practices among transnationals and the ESOL classroom. Chapter number 3, *Methodology: Transfronterizxs at The El Paso/Juarez Borderland*, provides the methods, data sources, analyses, and procedures used in the dissertation. I highlight the importance of their lives and present each of the stories individually to guide the reader to understand the focal participants' lives better as I frequently refer to them to demonstrate my findings. As part of chapter three, I also provide details about the research setting. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings divided into two main sections. The first one, chapter 4, presents findings primarily related to the identity-making of TECS about their constant processes of becoming as they turn into college students in The United States. This chapter starts by answering the general question. *How do transfronterizx ESOL college students use their digital literacy practices for identity-making?*

Nevertheless, Chapter 4 intensely focuses on answering: *How TECS use digital literacy practices for traversing their communities?* Chapter 5 presents the findings strictly related to their ESOL classroom and the digital literacy practices involved in their learning process. Chapter 5 answers the questions: *What digital literacy practices do TECS engage in?* Moreover, *How do TECS use digital practices for language learning?* Both chapters present general information, which helps to answer the main question. Chapter 6 presents the discussion, conclusion, and implications for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The border can be a bridge, a wall, or both at once, depending on a person's ability to cross it (Campos Delgado & Odgers Ortiz, 2012, p. 9).

This literature review aims to make clear the interconnectedness that literacy practices might have with transnational identities. Most importantly, I present a review of studies that are relevant to my research questions. I review literature and theories about transnational students, digital literacy practices, and identities. I pay particular attention to the relationship between digital literacy practices and identity. Because the literature offers us the importance of technology in transnationals' lives, technology is another theme that will be discussed throughout. It is worth noting that when referring to technology, I am exclusively considering the digital literacy practices of the transfronterizxs studied in this dissertation. I will discuss the theories that guided my analysis of the data in this study. I discuss transnationalism's primary theoretical constructs, digital literacy practices, transnational students' identities, and becoming and belonging processes. The purpose of this review is to give context to the lives of transfronterizxs as they commute to attend school in another country and understand what happened as they entered their ESOL classrooms.

The present literature review summarizes and analyses transnationals' digital literacy practices as these might inform academics, educators, and curriculum creators, among others, about the diversified digital literacy practices of transnational students. Although the digital literacy practices explored here occur in diverse contexts, this dissertation pays special attention to students' digital literacy practices in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms where students are frequently in their processes of becoming as they are navigating a variety of communities at once. Their digital literacy practices are also essential because our technological societal constructions might be related to language and how it is negotiated (Tedre

et al., 2006). Consequently, in the cases of transfronterizxs', these practices are relevant as TECS are continually renegotiating their identities, but most importantly, because transfronterizxs engage in these practices as part of their everyday lives (de la Piedra, 2012).

2.1. TRANSNATIONAL STUDENTS AND DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES

2.1.1. Transnational Students and Transnational Borderlanders

Transnationals are those individuals whose constant mobility (physical and virtual) across different communities goes beyond geographical spaces, cultural knowledges and expectations, languages, and connections (Brochin Ceballos; 2012; de la Piedra and Araujo, 2012; de la Piedra et al., 2018; Kleyn, 2017; Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Soto, 2012; Warriner, 2007) and whose social spaces and relations cannot be understood or divided by political borders (Hernando-Lloréns & Blair, 2017). Different from some authors' notions, the present literature review considers the borderland area as a continuum. "While transnationalism is often described as a *line* separating the national and the global, more recently some scholars have theorized it as a zone where institutions, cultures, practices, and discourses are created, and much contestation and uncertainty is produced" (Hernando-Lloréns & Blair, 2017).

The lives of transnationals are very fluid and hybrid and represent different complexities. I use the following definition of transnationals throughout the dissertation based on Skerrett (2015):

> For them [transnationals and their families], home is both here and there because of the deep and varied attachments and activities (familial, cultural, educational, and economic) they maintain in and across two or more countries (p. 5).

Because these students are continually negotiating their belonging to new communities, their hybrid identities are just one representation of their dual lives. For this reason, although many

people consider them as outsiders, transnationals themselves usually perceive themselves more as insiders of diverse cultures. Skerrett (2015) explains that transnationals are not always physically with their nuclear family because some family members live in another country (e.g., Mexico) while they are left behind in the United States to improve their ability to earn money and gain an education. In other instances, it is their own decision to stay in the United States, although transnationals continue in contact with relatives and friends.

Transnationals are then continually moving and whose movements include mobilizing themselves and goods, food, media, and language (Jimenez et al., 2009; Portes et al., 1999). The transnational students in this study might not have necessarily been sent to the United States to contribute to their households in Mexico, but on the contrary, they were sent by their parents to increase their academic opportunities. Some authors have already noted that not all transnational students are necessarily from a modest background (Fong, 2011; Waters & Brooks, 2012). Thus, although many of them also arrive in the United States without their parents, their experiences, expectations, and social circumstances vary drastically.

The educational experiences of transnationals are also relevant for this literature review, given the dissertation's goal of understanding transfronterizxs' practices. Despagne and Suárez (2016) state that the globalized world that we are experiencing nowadays leads thousands of families to travel the world, cross borders, and educate their children under different educational systems. For this reason, understanding education for transfronterizxs, particularly in the ESOL contexts, is relevant for this study.

2.1.2. Transfronterizxs Living in Nepantla

It is essential to understand that transfronterizxs are to be understood under the broader umbrella of transnationalism because of the intensity and the constant contact in which the

members of such population embark. Furthermore, this is the reason why they have deserved a specific terminology, *transfronterizxs* (de la Piedra et al., 2018). According to Relaño Pastor's (2007) observations, *transfronterizxs* are those trans-border Mexican residents, or U.S. citizens, who cross the border daily -or fairly often- because of school, job, and housing. The author points, "The term *transfronterizx* emphasizes the continuous linguistic and cultural contact that border youth maintain as part of the multiple daily transactions across both sides [of the border]" (p. 264). Equally important is to consider that, different from the circumstances of certain transnationals, transfronterizxs count on their territorial flexibility to traverse both countries physically at their convenience, given their immigration legalized statuses.

Transfronterizxs live in a state of in-betweenness. Ward and Geeraert (2016) explain how the cultural identities of specific individuals who are in the process of acculturation tend to fall in a state of in-betweenness:

> Acculturative changes vary as a function of the acculturation domain, that is, whether behaviors, values, or identities are assessed, with research suggesting that cultural practices are easily modified and change first, cultural values are most resistant to change, and the rate of change for cultural identities falls in-between (p. 100).

For transfronterizxs, living in a state of in-betweenness, or *Nepantla,* represents the norm. This happens because transfronterizxs, as the border-dwellers, frequently reposition their identities regarding different cultures, languages, and policies. According to Chávez (2015), "*Nepantla . . .* is a Nahuatl word for the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds . . . you are in a kind of transition . . . *Nepantla* is a way of reading the world" (p. 339). These perspectives for understanding border identities of having a border identity, just like in the case of transfronterizxs, was initially coined by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), a lesbian working-class

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Chicana who, given her multiple identities and the multiple privileges she was denied, was never able to feel entirely at home (Khalil Hammad, 2010). Feeling like she had no solid home forced Anzaldúa to continually position herself as "ni de aquí, ni de allá." Similar to Anzalduás' circumstances, transfronterizxs live in a state of Nepantla; they are always in-between.

2.1.3. Transnationals' Transcultural Repositioning and Dualistic Orientation

Closely linked to the idea of always being divided but simultaneously connected to more than one place, Guerra's (2004) conceptualization of *transcultural repositioning* represents a similar idea. Guerra's transcultural repositioning construct guided my analysis of data gathered in this study, as the transfronterizx ESOL college students involved in the project were constantly geographically, emotionally, and virtually experiencing their memberships to different communities. For Guerra, the idea of transcultural repositioning explains how students, primarily those who are linguistically and culturally underestimated (e.g., transfronterizxs), overcome a variety of barriers by learning how to navigate their different communities and relying on previous knowledges and expectations from their multiple communities. In his study, Guerra (2016) examined college writing classrooms beyond educational purposes; in other words, Guerra went beyond merely analyzing academic writing and discussed how students socially and culturally navigated them. More importantly, Guerra highlighted how students used their different linguistic and cultural repertoires looking for belonging. For Guerra, the students critically transfer their previous knowledges to intuitively move successfully between different cultures, languages, educational, and government systems (Guerra, 2004; Hendrickson & Garcia de Mueller, 2016).

Another concept that I relied on when explaining how the participants were continually navigating their lives was the term dualistic orientation as they were becoming transfronterizx

ESOL college students. Lam and Warriner (2012) previously used the term to explain how migrants, particularly transnationals, although they are continually moving across countries and cultures, tend to compare both communities constantly. The authors based their conclusions on the concept of the dual frame of reference used by Guarnizo (1997), Suárez-Orozco, and Suárez-Orozco (2001). Like the transnationals who participated in the studies reviewed by Lam and Warriner (2012), the participants in my dissertation were continually negotiating their belonging to a variety of communities by making use of their dualistic orientation, as well as their transcultural repositioning.

2.2. TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES

2.2.1. Literacy Practices

To understand the digital literacy practices emphasized in this dissertation, I first present information concerning literacy practices. To do so, I follow Gee's (2014) definition of literacy practices. Gee (2014) states:

> We can say that a literacy practice is any social, cultural, or institutional practice that
> contains written language or is relevant to written language even it contains none. There
> is a lot more to literacy and a lot more literacy practices than one might have thought
> when we started with literacy as the simple ability to read and/or write (p. 61).

In accordance to Gee's (2014) construct of literacy practices, I understood that literacy practices currently go beyond exclusively reading and writing, mostly as technology plays a pivotal role in our social practices. Street (1993) additionally states: "Literacy is part of the communicative repertoire and like other parts, including oral discourses, registers, codes and dialects with which it interacts and frequently merges, it is a social construction, not a neutral technology: it varies from one culture or sub-group to another and its uses are embedded in relations of power and

struggle over resources" (p.28). Perry (2012) argues, "language is never independent of the social world, as it always occurs within and is shaped by a cultural context" (p. 52). For this reason, I strive to understand the literacy practices of transfronterizx college students from a sociocultural perspective.

Warriner (2007) observes that today literacy practices go beyond reading and writing skills and that these include accessibility, privilege, and social practices. Thus, given the diversified practices of transnationals, it is crucial to understand how their literacy practices better explain their fluid social and cultural exchanges, particularly given today's literacy modalities (e.g., the use of the Internet). As explained earlier, literacy practices go beyond reading and writing skills (Gee, 2005; Gee, 2014; Warriner, 2007), and these practices include accessibility, privilege, and social practices. Thus, given the diversified practices of transnationals, it is crucial to understand how their literacy practices better explain their fluid social and cultural exchanges, particularly given today's literacy modalities (e.g., the use of the Internet).

Gee (2005) argues that "any piece of language, any tool, technology, or social practice can take on quite different meanings (and values) in different contexts, and that no piece of language, no tool, technology or social practice has a meaning (or value) outside of all contexts" (p. 6). For this reason, observing and trying to understand the contexts of transnational students can help us to situate the tools and digital literacy practices that they use to mediate their daily communication. These practices and their tools are crucial for these transnational students because they live a life where communication helps them navigate their communities.

From a historical perspective, the movement of New Literacy Studies, also known as NLS, gains its strength as part of the social turn in the field of literacy studies, which emphasized

that literacy should be understood as a practice embedded in social interaction, and not as an individualistic act (Gee, 1989; Gee, 2005; Gee, 2014; Street 2003; Street, 2005). For example, Gee (2001) situates verbal and written language within a sociocultural perspective where society, culture, cognition, and social interaction are integrated to understand different contexts. Therefore, because language always involves socialization, discourses can be understood as communities of practice (Wenger, 1999); these discourses, Gee (2001) emphasizes, involve social interactions and, most importantly, tend to be exclusively relevant to specific communities. Our cultural ideas are created based on our discourses and our practices. Gee (2014) further explains that practices considered *new* practices are novel because of the following: "first, they very often involve new uses of oral or written language melded with other modalities like images, actions, and sounds. Second, they involve new forms of decoding and producing meaning from symbols or representations" (p. 108). For these reasons, the digital literacy practices that TECS used in this dissertation are relevant representations of how they traverse their communities.

2.2.2. Transnational Literacy Practices

For the present dissertation, we must understand literacy not just as a set of cognitive-linguistic abilities that can be acquired by any person, but instead, as a set of sociocultural practices which mediate the interactions of a given group (Gee, 2005; Gee, 2014; Bloome, et al., 2000; Street, 2003). Similar to other authors' observations (Gee, 2005; Gee & Gee, 2007; Gee, 2014; Street, 2003; Street, 2005), de la Piedra (2011) highlights that the New Literacy Studies or NLS are situated in a sociocultural turn where literacy is not only portrayed as a social practice but also as one which resists the mainstream culture and its practices. Consequently, transnationals' literacy practices must be considered as they are continually learning how to

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resist the mainstream culture by performing literacy practices that are more particular to their context (e.g., using diversified linguistic repertoires).

Here, I rely on Hornberger and Link's (2012) definition of transnational literacy practices. The authors define them as: "Literacy practices whose referents and meanings extend across national borders – perhaps most clearly instantiated in the literacies of transmigrants who move or have moved bodily across national borders while maintaining and cultivating practices tied –in various degrees- to their home country" (p. 264).

Transfronterizx students, as it has been argued here previously, frequently engage with their diversified literacy practices as they rely on such to maintain a duality in their lives. Particularly important to this dissertation is understanding the New Literacy Studies perspective, which allowed me to see how transfronterizxs regularly navigated their different communities mediated by their digital literacy practices. Taking a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1980) particularly emphasizes the usage of mediational tools, which help people engage in various cultural contexts. Through various interactions and the use of these tools, individuals dynamically interact with one another. This happens particularly as individuals are interacting socially with others (Holland, 2001).

Following these sociocultural perspectives, the cultural elements, practices, and transnationals ideas are constantly remade as they must live two or more different lives conjointly. Transnationals' literacy practices vary from those who have access to linguistic systems, cultures, and values related to only one nation as their cultural elements. For transnationals, every day represents the new construction of their ideologies and cultural practices. Transnationals' practices allowed them to adapt in a fluid way to the *other* nation. Richardson Bruna (2016) argues:

The transnational U.S. Mexican experience produced through neoliberal economic policy

is more than just 'membership' in two nation-states. The process of learning to live

transnationally is one that requires U.S. Mexicans frequently to re-create, adapt,

accommodate, and create new meanings in which they live (p. 266).

Richardson Bruna's (2016) observations are essential for the present dissertation as the diverse

experiences transfronterizxs are living are, in no way, comparable to other students who are not

transnationals and are attending the same school. Their experiences are similar to other

transnationals in other parts of the country who have not the flexibility, fluidity, and easiness of

traversing the border physically, emotionally, and virtually at their earliest convenience.

Lam and Warriner (2012) reflected on literacy practices' importance by answering the

following questions: How are literacy practices influenced by and used to facilitate transnational

movement, transnational family networks, and the different resources required and facilitated by

those networks? The article clearly states the position of how Native-Americans more frequently

perceive immigrants as a threat. Authors claimed that ultimately schools might play an essential

role in helping students navigate their lives and careers and how they are always trying to

connect to their roots.

In her qualitative study of a group of Mexican daughters and mothers' literacy practices,

de la Piedra (2011) demonstrates that these formers have an essential need to maintain the

Spanish language and Mexican ways of living and being. The study focuses on keeping their

native language, Spanish, and social relationships across borderlands. It documented the

daughters' and mothers' daily literacy practices. Based on Barton and Hamilton (2005), the

author states that some of the literacies these women use in their own homes may also be used in

different contexts (e.g., professional) and different purposes. The author concludes that these practices nurture the progress of both languages, Spanish and English bilingualism.

Stewart (2014) also examined the different literacy practices that new transnationals, mostly the youth, engage outside of school. Stewart explored the meanings that these particular practices represent transnational students and how these practices represent different social and linguistic resources for the youth. Using a collective case study, the author demonstrates that monolingual practices are no longer suitable either inside or outside the classroom setting. Adolescents search for opportunities to explore their multicultural identities. The study demonstrated that whereas the participants continuously participated in literacy practices outside of their classrooms, such as Facebook's constant use, these practices were not valued in their classroom. Their classrooms' practices only supported academic, monolingual practices, which did not mirror their own.

Similarly, Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009) explained how transnational families and communities negotiate languages depending on the situation. These activities allow the families to actively participate in religious affiliations and job markets in a way in which they can negotiate their practices in their communities. For this study, researchers used interviews and surveys to explore young immigrants and their families' language and literacy practices, paying particular attention to digital literacy practices and social media. Results suggested that in order to activate communication to its fullest degree, transnationals communicated multilingually. Likewise, their findings demonstrated that multilingualism helped keep the bonds with family members and friends regardless of their different locations.

Noguerón-Liu (2014) analyzed how transnational adults construct practices and relationships when attending face-to-face and online classes. The study's main focus was to

clarify the answer to the following question: How do adult immigrant students construct practices, tools, and transnational instruction relationships? The qualitative study analyzed digital literacy practices by first using an open coding of data gathered through observations. The author contended that individuals were able to create concurrent transnational affiliations with both nations. This study contributed to getting a deep understanding of these instructional practices.

De la Piedra et al. (2018) state how important it is to explore the literacy practices of transfronterizxs as the literature's scarceness remains evident. The authors explain how transfronterizx literacy practices represent another instance of their hybridized identities as these literacy practices might not only occur in two different worlds but be founded on the knowledges of two diverse linguistic repertoires. Equally important, the authors noted that those transfronterizx students, who had the opportunity to attend a two-way immersion program, had the opportunity to learn from each other's knowledges and linguistic repertoires while building strong social relationships with their classmates.

Furthermore, in one of Guerra's studies (2004), the author explains how important it is to lead our students, mostly those marginalized through various binaries, to understand that their literacy practices can serve as power structures. Guerra emphasizes how Isabel, one of his students, can use diverse, sophisticated linguistic patterns to provide nostalgic, contradictory, and even critical perspectives of her life despite her misuse of punctuations, which certain institutions of power could perceive as a mostly poor response.

2.2.3. Digital Literacy Practices

Given the multiplicity of literacy practices currently available, considering reading and writing as the exclusive literacy practices would be difficult. For this reason, in this dissertation, I use Gee's (2014) construct of digital literacy practices. Following a sociocultural approach to

literacy, Gee (2000, 2014) explains literacy as cultural practices. The author explains that when we are trying to understand technology, we are trying to understand: "person(s) with a tool(s) in specific practice(s) sponsored by specific sorts of social or cultural group(s) or institution(s)" (p. 103). For instance, for this study, I explored the digital literacy practices of TECS as they were traversing their multiple communities. To explain digital literacy practices, Gee (2014) states: "Talk, text, media, and the world all go together [...]. Today we have many new digital tools to use in new practices to give and take meaning. Oral and written language enter into these practices in new and complex ways" (p. 107). As noted earlier, the digital literacy practices that TECS engaged in were relevant because these demonstrated how literacy practices are now commonly mediated by a variety of digital tools (e.g., WhatsApp and Blackboard).

Similarly, Leu et al. (2017) explain how the New Literacies theory allows us to understand the rapid changes that literacy currently entails, with its complexities and continuously changing definitions. Because the knowledges and understandings of new literacies vary from author to author (Gee, 2005; Gee, 2014; Street, 2003; Street, 2005; Street, 2006; Warriner, 2007), here I follow Gee's (2014) definition of new literacies. Gee (2014) defines these practices as the "practices involving technologies other than print (such as digital technologies), to so-called "digital literacies" (p. 55).

Based on the previous statements and definitions, I will be relying on Gee's (2014) perspectives of new literacies to explore the digital literacies of transfronterizx college students. Leu et al. (2004) identify games and video technologies, communities on the Internet, search engines, and websites, among others, as new literacies. Whereas digital literacy practices are continuously being studied, understanding new means of literacy, particularly towards e-teaching and learning, is taking place (Leu et al., 2004).

As educators, we also have to understand that as our students are becoming more proficient in their new literacies, our teaching/learning styles should be adapted to fulfill needs that had not been considered in the past. For this reason, it is crucial to consider these new literacies with our students. Alharbi (2015) states: "New literacies supports the conventional view of teaching reading and writing skills by integration to meet the demands of today's digital learners" (p. 112). Through these new literacies, then, transnational students can quickly distance (or not) themselves from others. These new literacies can help them incorporate different language dimensions to manipulate to maintain their ties to specific social contexts (Street, 1993).

From my experiences as a transfronteriza student, educator, and now scholar, I have noticed how our constant mobility is present throughout our days, inside and outside the classroom. For example, because of the constant cross-mobility that we experience as transfronterizx, we tend to rely upon, not surprisingly, on digital literacy practices. Darvin (2016) reminds us that "as technology continues to permeate all aspects of human life and transform the social order, it has impacted on language and identity in significant ways" (p. 523). Thus, exploring digital literacy practices is relevant as it helps us understand how we use language and technology as tools for social practices. Our current advancements in technology allow us to interact freely with people from all around the globe without worrying about the physical barriers that going from one place to another may represent. Through instant messaging and various social networks, we have the capabilities of interacting with our most beloved friends and relatives immediately. Below, I will summarize some of the existing literature linking transnationalism and digital literacy practices. Although many of us transfronterizxs can relate to these experiences, this might not be the case for other less privileged transfronterizxs, who,

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although they can cross the border freely, might not share the easiness to communicate with others immediately. However, digital literacy practices in terms of transfronterizxs have not been widely explored.

Some of the authors writing about transnational students (Ajayi, 2016; Kim, 2017; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009; Lam & Warriner, 2012) and transnationals on the border (Monty, 2015; de la Piedra et al. 2018) have noticed how these digital literacy practices, unquestionably, help in the construction of the transnational young students' identities. Using a mixed-methods approach, Monty (2015) examines the intertextuality and multimodality of digital literacy practices. Like other authors (Guzzetti & Bean, 2013), the results indicate that through these multimodal interactions, young transnational students can reflect upon their popular culture knowledges, linguistic repertoires, and many semiotic worlds to reconstruct their identities. Monty (2015) reveals that these young transnationals "use varying communication technologies to develop and sustain daily relationships" (p. 39), and the use of such technological approaches help them to make sense of their lived realities (Ajayi, 2016; Monty, 2015). These circumstances enable transnational young students to constantly reconstruct their identities as transnationals as they use various linguistic repertoires and translocal worlds and reconstruct their identities as users of these new digitized realities. In this sense, their diversified realities (digital and non-digital) let them participate and create communities where social and technology capitals are sometimes resisted and cultivated. This, in turn, helps understand/explain the constant re-construction of identities of transnational young students.

Ajayi (2016), additionally, notices that "translanguaging becomes a sign of bilingual social identity and an affirmation of affiliations with friends and family members in Mexico" (p. 151). In this case, the author notices that not only digital literacy practices represent a factor

when shaping their identities as transnational students, but that translanguaging is also a crucial factor when shaping an identity. The author suggests that the participants built and maintained their social affiliations across borders using digital literacy practices. Findings from Ajayi's (2016) study were relevant because, like the present dissertation, it demonstrated how transnationals heavily relied on digital literacy practices and translanguaging in their identity-making processes.

Most importantly, de la Piedra et al., (2018) observe that whereas some transfronterizx students started using their digital literacy practices due to academic purposes, many of them engaged in such literacies in other settings outside the school context. The authors state that living as they do in a state of betweenness can be mediated by constant transnational digital communication. "Digital literacies provided students with spaces of communication with friends and relatives living in Juárez even when they did not physically cross the border and were able to communicate with their friends and family in El Paso when they moved to Juárez for the day of the weekend" (p. 88). These statements are relevant to the dissertation, as they resemble many other transnational and transfronterizx students' lives.

Lam (2013) highlights that transnational youth's digital literacy practices demonstrate how transnationals navigate their communities. The author explains that transnationals use these practices to expand their identities and position themselves in different communities. Lam (2013) expresses that understanding these practices can help in the understanding of transnationals' mobilities. Additionally, Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009) also explored the multilingual digital literacies of transnational adolescents. Surveying and interviewing 35 adolescents, the authors explored how they mobilized different languages across physical boundaries mediated by technology. Their findings demonstrated that multilingualism through digital literacy practices

facilitated communications across different physical spaces. As part of this dissertation, I develop this idea of mobilizing languages further, as I present instances where TECS mobilizes their languages and their knowledges, experiences, and previous literacy practices -including their digital literacy practices- simultaneously to navigate numerous communities.

2.3. TRANSNATIONAL STUDENTS AND IDENTITY

It has been noted that transnationals' experiences "are rooted emotionally, socially, politically, and economically in more than one context" (Hernando-Lloréns & Blair, 2017, p. 394). Consequently, understanding how their identities are made and which cultural, linguistic, and literacy repertoires they possess is important to understand who transnationals, particularly transfronterizxs, are. This, unquestionably, goes hand in hand with the importance of understanding the pedagogical implications that having transnational students in a classroom may evoke. Considering all the constant negotiations (Lam, 2009; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009) transnationals face, educators, and curriculum developers can create safer spaces for transnationals to freely explore and embrace their cultures, knowledges, and repertoires. Understanding transnationals' constant negotiations would help create better spaces for learning because their affiliations are different from those of national students, and besides, they are more commonly racialized than the mainstream community. Here, these negotiations occur because sometimes transnationals identify themselves as Mexicans, other as Americans, others as Mexican Americans, demonstrating a constant and complex identity formation (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009).

In the past, academics tended to pay special attention to the importance of researching those who were also commuters but who were migrant workers (Escala Rabadán & Briones, 2005; Vega Briones, 2016). Nevertheless, different authors are currently trying to understand the

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lived experiences and knowledges of the commuters who are students, the transnational students. For this reason, it is worth exploring their perspectives and experiences as these are the ones that help them to shape and re-shape their identities continually (Soto, 2012; Warriner, 2007). Soto (2012) explains: "The transnational identities migrants forge through migration also include developing a strong ethnic identity based on their country of origin. Transnational identities, however, are also challenged" (p. 22). In this sense, whereas documented migrants can freely enter and exit both nations, those whose capitals prevent them from having documentation in any of these two countries –U.S. and Mexico – promptly become prisoners of one or the other. For example, Soto (2012) demonstrates that her study's transnationals created a higher sense of *Mexicanness* after starting their mobility process. Soto (2012) notes, "They [Mexicans] experience a Mexican stage first before any assimilation unfolds. This strong Mexican ethnic identity is not part of mainstream American culture" (p. 21).

Noguerón-Liu (2014) claims that "boundaries are not a given, but constructed in a world [that] consists of multiple sets of dynamically overlapping and interacting transnational social fields that create and shape seemingly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes" (p. 431). In other words, the participants were continually making their identity by combining their cultural and linguistic repertoires to belong to different communities at once. Klyen (2017) also notes that whereas transnationals experience some *fractures* due to the diversity of curricula, languages, and expectations from teachers and classmates, they are -usually- able to create new bonds with others who have experienced circumstances like theirs. The present dissertation participants created strong bonds within their community of Los de ESOL as they navigated their many communities similarly. For this reason, special attention must be paid to the pedagogies used with transnational students as these will enlighten their experiences, proving a sense of

easiness and thus belonging, leading them to succeed academically and professionally, which in the end, will not just benefit them. However, it will benefit the borderland area as a whole.

Guerra (2004) predominantly highlights the importance of *transcultural repositioning*, which will be crucial to understand the constant dynamic identity formation of transfronterizxs. The author states:

> Transcultural repositioning is a rhetorical ability that members of our community often enact intuitively but must learn to self-consciously regulate if they hope to move back and forth more productively between and among different languages and dialects, different social classes, different cultural and artistic forms, different ways of seeing and thinking about the increasingly fluid and hybridized world emerging all around us (p. 16).

Based on such views, understanding the constant transcultural repositioning that transnational students face is important because this repositioning helps them navigate their different social communities better. By making different linguistic, cultural, and social choices, transnationals can use their various hybridized identities. The transcultural repositioning process then helped the present dissertation participants to belong to various communities simultaneously (e.g., Los de ESOL, Sun University, young people from Juarez, college students). By using this concept, I understood and explained how the participants of this study use what they learn in each of these communities to navigate the rest of them better.

Duff (2015) observes that experiencing constant mobility may lead to the retention of the first language while also including newer linguistic repertoires; this also can lead to the creation of hybrid identities. Transfrontrizxs, for example, navigate their lives by using all their linguistic resources at hand regularly (de la Piedra et al., 2018). Through recontextualization and their

diverse linguistic practices (English, Spanish, Spanglish), transfronterizxs can tighten social and academic relationships on both sides of the border as they can rely on different linguistic varieties, which help them to construct their own linguistic identities (de la Piedra et al., 2018).

Besides, some authors (Ajayi, 2016; de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012; Kim, 2017) have also noted how important the use of translanguaging among the youth is for transnationals and transfronterizxs. Because translanguaging practices denote the flexibility of the linguistic repertoires transnationals and transfronterizxs possess, it is essential to research them because these linguistic practices bring them together to all their different communities and thus socially make their identities. García and Wei (2013) refer to translanguaging as: "The process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages" (p. 20). Transnational students rely on all their linguistic repertoires as survival kits inside and outside the classroom. As it was discussed previously, transnational students are constantly living two lives at once. Therefore, they can use more than one language to communicate. It was evident for the participants in the present dissertation, for instance, that they used various linguistic repertoires to communicate with others and belong to different communities. They repeatedly used Spanish even in communities where Spanish was not the mainstream (e.g., at the university). Therefore, understanding participants' translanguaging practices was relevant as it was a constant demonstration of their identity-making processes.

This section provided information about how important it is to use a transnational approach to understand identity-making for transnationals and transfronterizxs through the lenses of different sociocultural perspectives. These might be easily linked to the New Literacy studies perspectives.

2.4. THE SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF IDENTITY FORMATION: BELONGING AND BECOMING

The inclusion of sociocultural perspectives to gain a better understanding of identity is not a new endeavor. Authors like Bucholtz and Hall (2005) and Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) have sought to understand identity formation's complexities as a phenomenon of empowerment and disempowerment through various social interactions. Nevertheless, the literature exploring the formation of identity through interactions concerning the lives of transnationals and transfronterizxs remains limited. Sociocultural perspectives, particularly the integration of becoming and belonging, and NLS perspectives, helped me recognize the diversified experiences transnationals and transfronterizxs encounter as they co-construct their knowledge when utilizing their digital literacy practices. However, as I progressed in my process of analyses, I found the theories of becoming and belonging (Moran, 2020; Guerra, 2004; Guerra, 2016) crucial for the understanding of my findings as the authors understand multiple identities, hybrid identities, fluid identities, and those in-between as a whole which altogether theorizes how people belong to one or many communities.

Mills (2018) reminds us that immigrants' identities are "multiple, conflicted, intersectional and self-represented*"* (p. 1). In this sense, transnationals and transfronterizxs happen to understand and make sense of their own realities and identities through the communities they belong to. It is possible that one of the reasons why transfronterizxs are regularly part of a variety of communities is to feel a sense of belonging as their hybridized identities drag them to become outsiders of their two different geographical entities, Mexico and the U.S. Soto (2012) argues, "friends and relatives in Mexico with whom they keep in touch no longer consider them Mexican" (p. 20). They promptly become, *ni de aquí ni de allá.* Moran

(2020) explains that young adults emphasize their similarities and differences with others who already belong to the community in the process of becoming and belonging. These similarities, she refers to as *similarity*. Moran (2020) explains that community creation emphasizes similarities, which are responses to particular social contexts. This construct resembles the previously created construct of *affinity* presented by Gee (2000). Gee (2000) explains that affinities are allegiances towards "a set of common endeavors or practices" (p. 105). Therefore, as I present the many ways in which transfronterizx ESOL college students are trying to belong to many communities at once, I present examples of how their affinities also made them immediate members of specific communities because they are continually navigating similar circumstances (e.g., learning English, physically crossing the bridge).

"The dialect we speak, the degree of formality we adopt in our speech, the deeds we do, the places we go, the emotions we express, and the clothes we wear are treated as indicators of claims to and identification with social categories and positions of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting" (Holland, 2001, p. 127). Similar to Holland's views, Mistry and Wu (2010) suggest that because of their culturally and linguistically diverse background, specific populations (e.g., transfronterizxs) are in constant need of establishing and maintaining a fluid identity which might adhere to more than one commonality or similarity (Moran, 2020) which allow them to better belong to a given community.

Moran (2020) also frequently highlights the different processes of becoming, especially among young adults. Moran (2020) focused on the practices of belonging and becoming of refugee youth, paying particular attention to their interaction with one another in their identity-making processes. In my study, I focused on the different practices transfronterizxs engaged in throughout their constantly changing lives in the process of belonging to their many communities

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(physical, virtual, and emotional). Moran's (2020) understanding of becoming and belonging comes from Bourdieu (1986). For Bourdieu, people establish a sense of belonging to a community by using their 'capital.' As used by Moran, Bourdieu's notion of capital refers to a set of characteristics, including appearance, accent, and preferences, which are recognized and valued by others in a community. For example, in this dissertation, Los de ESOL belonged to this community because all members equally valued their interactions with one another and their commonalities (e.g., physically crossing the border to attend school). For Moran (2020), belonging to a given community highlights similarity as proof of bonding within its members.

Some authors (Chang et al., 2017; Mistry & Wu, 2010) argue that part of culturally diverse communities' cultural means is expertise in navigating different communities. In our case, transfronterizxs traverse different languages, institutions, and educational systems as they participate as agents of their various communities. Mistry and Wu (2010) explain that these navigational practices become more evident and crucial among recent immigrants as they tend to be continuously minoritized. From a transfronterizx perspective, these individuals seem to participate in several continuous power shifts as they traverse such communities. As Guerra (2016) and Moran (2020) demonstrated, participants' identities are certainly fluid as they, themselves, continuously adapt to their contexts and communities. However still, they are also always tied to the perspectives others have about them. Holland (2001) states that individuals tend to accept or reject particular identities given by others because the positionality every individual possesses relies on their acceptance or rejection of specific identities imposed on them by others. Consequently, exploring the different negotiations that transnational and transfronterizx students pass-through should be necessary for educators and academics because these students might have been imposed certain negative features that contradict how they

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position themselves. In my study, the hybrid identities (Guerra, 2016) of the participants allowed them to find ways in which they were able to start embracing the mainstream community at Sun University (e.g., eating at the cafeteria), but conjointly strengthening their bonds with Los de ESOL.

As presented earlier, I used Bourdieu (1986) -as presented by Moran (2020)- construct of capital to understand how transfronterizxs made their identities through belonging. Using the lenses of becoming and belonging to one or more communities at once, I understand how transfronterizxs consistently defied various institutions as a way of navigating the different communities they belonged to.

2.5. OVERALL STRENGTHS AND GAPS IN THE LITERATURE REVIEWED

Relying on sociocultural perspectives, the literature review identified how young people engage in becoming and belonging. I presented information based primarily on Moran (2020), who explained how refugee youth pursued their identity-making processes through belonging to numerous communities. Although this dissertation resembles Moran's (2020) study as it also contributes to the literature of belonging and becoming, my dissertation emphasizes the digital literacy practices of transfronterizx students. Adding to the reviewed literature of belonging, I also explored Guerra's (2004; 2016) studies of identity formation and belonging among young people. With his study, Guerra (2016) attempts to connect the classroom -college classroom- with other students' communities. Like Guerra's, the present dissertation aimed to understand how transfronterizx college students belonged to numerous communities simultaneously. However, different from Guerra's, my dissertation focused on transfronterizxs' digital literacy practices.

By completing this literature review, I found some critical suggestions given on how important it is for educators, researchers, and administrators to create and use newer pedagogies that better fit transnational students' needs. For instance, Jacobo Suárez (2016) suggests: "Sensibilizar y capacitar a profesores respecto a las necesidades específicas de estos alumnos [transnacionales] de la mano con brindarles una educación inclusiva que busque erradicar conductas discriminatorias" (p. 15). "Sensitizing and training teachers regarding the specific needs of these [transnational] students go hand in hand with providing them with an inclusive education that seeks to eradicate discriminatory behaviors" (p. 15). Moreover, Hernando-Lloréns and Blair (2017) advocate, "cooperation between both countries, the United States and Mexico, would facilitate an understanding of the mobility between both countries and educational systems of migrant students in ways that are more inclusive" (p. 403).

Encouraging pedagogies like translanguaging are possible solutions for equity in each of our classrooms. For instance, the literature demonstrates how important it is for researchers to explore the importance of translanguaging (Ajayi, 2016; de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012; Kim, 2017) when exploring the digital literacy practices of transnational students. These authors note that the most crucial contribution to digital literacy practices among transnationals is that they use translanguaging to freely traverse different places and languages. Besides, this review suggests that these digital literacy practices supported the constant making of transnationals' identities (Ajayi, 2016; Kim, 2017; Lam, 2013; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009; Monty, 2015). Authors (Ajayi, 2016; Kim, 2017; Monty, 2015) also present some beneficial suggestions for educators who might incorporate digital literacies in their classrooms, such as empowering students to be both critical thinkers and consumers of digital media (Ajayi, 2016), avoiding the separation of students' practices (Kim, 2017), and promoting students' negotiations of their

writing realities (Monty, 2015). I hope to contribute to this literature, extending these

recommendations to include media that students can analyze individually or as a class (e.g.,

YouTube videos) and promoting the inclusion of translanguaging practices in the classroom. In

this study, I analyzed the digital literacy practices in and outside academic settings and how these

allowed for creating meaningful communication. Further recommendations are presented in the

implications for teaching in chapter 6. In this study, I pay special attention to how

transfronterizxs in an ESOL context used their digital literacy practices to traverse their various

communities, extending this prior literature that did not focus on this particular population in the

ESOL classroom.

While several studies provide information about the diverse cultural experiences and

challenges of transnationals attending school, much of the existing literature is strictly focused

on children (de la Piedra & Araujo, 2012; Despagne & Jacobo Suárez, 2016; Hamann et al.,

2017; Hernando-Lloréns & Blair, 2017; Jacobo-Suárez, 2017; Jensen et al., 2017; Martinez,

2016; Soto, 2016; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2015). Other authors have explored transnationals and

transfronterizxs (Convertino & Mein, 2017; Convertino, 2018; Mein & Esquinca, 2014) who are

adult college students, but their focus has been primarily on understanding transfronterizxs'

engineering education. This study explores the lives, experiences, and challenges of those

transnationals attending school –either side of the border- and whose literacy practices differ

from those previously explored, like transfronterizx ESOL college students.

Finally, this study adds to the literature that explores an equitable education among

transnationals (Jensen et al., 2017; Youssef, 2014). From there, just Youssef (2014) researches

students in higher education. The present dissertation addresses equitable education by

recommending the inclusion of translanguaging practices in the ESL classroom and the inclusion

of everyday digital literacy practices to create a more welcoming community for transnational students.

Particularly important to my study, exploring the digital literacy practices of transfronterizxs attending college is worth it. As Gee (2014) explained, from a sociocultural perspective, the construct of digital literacy nowadays goes beyond exclusively reading and writing in different ways. For this reason, exploring the digital literacy practices of TECS is an asset to the literature as it contributes to understanding how transfronterizx college students use these digital practices in their look for belonging. Considering the factors, consequences, and overall ways, this population uses their digital literacy practices may support me and other educators and academics to serve this population better. By writing this dissertation, I hope to add to the literature by presenting different instances where participants used their digital literacy practices to demonstrate the importance of immediacy for transfronterizxs. They demonstrated how to use them to learn English and also to demonstrate compañerismo. Previous research (Monty, 2015) provides evidence of the use of mobile devices, specifically. However, it would undoubtedly be important for researchers and educators to explore mobile devices among transnationals and transfronterizxs as these might be widely and wisely incorporated in today's curriculum. The present dissertation extends Monty's (2015) research because it presents repeated instances of transfronterizx college students relying on their cellphone for academic and non-academic purposes.

De la Piedra et al. (2018) similarly remind us, "context influences not only research we conduct but also who we are as researchers. Our context is particular. We live on the U.S. side of this border, in el otro lado" (p. 4). For this reason, researching transnationals, particularly

transfronterizx students, is worth it. In my case, my context is denoted not only by my

surroundings but also by my own experiences as a transfronteriza myself.

Chapter 3: Methodology: Transfronterizxs at the El Paso/Juarez Borderland

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Through the opportunity of conducting this study, I confirmed my passion for understanding the lives of students living here, at the U.S./Mexico border. I learned how their unique experiences traversing physical, emotional, and digital communities are the reasons why they are always reconstructing their academic and personal identities. As de la Piedra et al., (2018) state when citing one of their participants, *"[los transfronterizxs] tenemos mucho que contar"* – "[the transfronterizxs] we have lots of stories to tell" (p. 165). For this reason, I decided to explore the digital literacy practices of transfronterizx college students as these demonstrate how they used these practices to continually navigate and belong to their different communities on both sides of the border.

To explore transfronterizxs' digital literacy practices, I conducted my research based on the following guiding question: *How do transfronterizx ESOL college students use their digital literacy practices for identity-making?*

The sub-questions were:

1. How do TECS use digital literacy practices for traversing their communities?

2. What digital literacy practices do TECS engage in?

3. How do TECS use digital practices for language learning?

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is qualitative and includes qualitative tools, such as classroom observations, collections of artifacts, in-depth semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013), informal conversations, study sessions, and a survey that provided me with demographic data that complemented data obtained from qualitative sources. Because of the present dissertation's

scope, I specifically conducted an ethnographic case study, with features from netnography (Kozinets, 2007), to be explained below. I decided to use this design because I am mostly interested in the qualitative data gathered from different sources. I only minimally used quantitative data, a demographic survey, in a supportive role.

Hamann et al., (2017) argues, "there is no best practice for working with transnational students (although some practices are clearly more responsive than others)" (p. 131). Nevertheless, they found it beneficial to use diversified strategies to collect and analyze the data. In their study, these authors explain how important it is to consider having certain sophistication in terms of the instrumentation (e.g., having not only interviews but also surveys) because relying exclusively on one or another might limit the aim of having a complete understanding of the phenomenon. The authors state, "It was clear from the interviews that, in some instances, the answers offered in the written survey were not capturing what a given student had experienced or felt" (p. 126). Subsequently, I also used multiple data sources to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of the transfronterizxs' digital literacy practices.

For instance, Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009) explored the literacy practices and digital networks of 35 transnational adolescents. They noticed that these young transnationals could mobilize various linguistic repertoires to navigate their native and host country through different digital networks. Like the present study, Lam and Rosario-Ramos (2009) engaged in semi-structured interviews with their participants and disseminated a survey to two different populations. Unlike my dissertation, the authors distributed such surveys to two different groups, ESL (169 students) and the mainstream classrooms (362 students). In this case, all students first took the survey, and afterward, they were contacted to schedule an interview. Only descriptive statistics were used for the study, including the students' demographics and comparisons of their

language status, history of internet use, and nationality. The researchers tabulated the responses using organizational matrices. The methodologies used in the previous two studies informed my dissertation because the research included transnational students, emphasized the use of qualitative data, and a descriptive survey to understand this population better.

3.2.1. An Ethnographic Case Study

The present dissertation is designed as an ethnographic case study, with netnographic features. The study's goal is to learn how transfronterizx ESOL college students at Sun University, individually and as a group, understand and use their digital literacy practices to succeed academically while constantly making their identities when traversing different communities. This section first explains the importance of considering the implementation of case studies when conducting qualitative studies, and afterward, the importance of considering the use of an ethnographic approach with netnographic features to complement the first one.

A qualitative case study is recommended when the researcher is interested in understanding a particular phenomenon and uses various data sources. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest using a case study under the following circumstances: "(a) the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study" (p. 545). I considered a case study for the present dissertation because my study responds to similar circumstances. For instance, I wanted to understand *how* the transfronterizxs involved in the study used their digital literacy practices, and more importantly, *why* did they use them in specific ways. Likewise, I observed them using such digital literacy practices in their regular contexts, Sun University and their ESOL classroom primarily, where I did not manipulate nor alter any of their common contextual conditions.

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The study's data do not come from a solely face-to-face (F2F) environment, nor an online environment, but from a blended learning environment. For the participants in this dissertation, learning, language, and technology continuously mediated their experiences inside and outside the ESOL classroom. For example, most physical observations occurred in computer laboratories that served as classrooms where language teaching occurred. During these observations, all students equally had access to computers and the Internet, whereas the lesson required one. The face-to-face observations complemented the rest of my data collection, which included collecting artifacts that students distributed to me via online, in-depth semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013), informal conversations, study sessions, and a survey. As will be discussed in the findings chapters of this dissertation, their lives as transfronterizxs as well as their lives as ESOL language learners were mediated by their constant use of their digital literacies.

The continuous use of the Internet as part of our socialization processes has led researchers to reconstruct research approaches used for decades to study the current phenomena, such as digital literacy practices. Rotman et al., (2012) observe, "the ways of *doing ethnography* have gone through several changes in order to fit the spatial and temporal nature of online research" (p. 1). In the case of transnationals, because their communities also include their virtual spaces, it is essential to consider using an approach that suits such experiences. For this reason, I used ethnographic approaches, with some netnographic features, to explore the different digital literacy practices of transfronterizx ESOL college students as they were continually making their identities looking for belonging. This dissertation's netnographic features included understanding the current dynamic social and technological contexts (Kozinets, 2010). Netnographic features used in this study included using real-time exchanges like text-chats with participants, collecting and sharing live feed (e.g., screenshots of particular experiences), the

creation of field notes from participants' electronic artifacts, as well as a constant reflection of the instances where participants complied with certain practices related to social media research (Kozinets, 2020) like "flipping through a Twitter feed, checking Facebook updates. A Snapchat beep. A WhatsApp message. All of it" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 4). Most importantly, I chose this type of approach because the lives of transnationals and transfronterizxs are not only defined by their physical interactions with various venues but also by numerous digitalized interactions (Lam & Warriner, 2012; de la Piedra et al., 2018).

Hammersley (2007) explains that the work of an ethnographer is: "To participate, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned" (p.2). The ethnographer's work is to collect data and work towards acquiring a deeper understanding of the issues he/she considers of importance through reflexivity. I use ethnography to study the many interactions of my participants in their physical spaces. However, it promptly became evident that their communities were mediated continuously by technology. I decided to use certain features of netnography, such as the ones mentioned previously (e.g., sharing live feed and electronic artifacts), in addition to an ethnographic approach.

Netnography remains a relatively new field in terms of research. Its richness remains well situated by its origins within the school of ethnography. Kozinets (2007) argues: "netnography provides participative guidelines, including advocacy of the research web-page, the inclusion of Skype interviews, and in-person participative fieldwork" (p. 5). In this sense, the features taken from netnography allowed me to understand better how participants' lives were continuously happening within their physical and virtual communities. By using features of this approach,

such as understanding their dynamic social and technological contexts, using real-time exchanges like text-chats with participants, and collecting and sharing live feed with the participants, I was able to gather the cultural information that was relevant for participants, especially focal participants, as they integrated their offline and online communications with others.

3.3. MY POSITIONALITY AND BACKGROUND AS A TRANSFRONTERIZX

Various experiences, readings, and discussions have led me to understand the role educators and academics play in education. I hope to contribute academically as transnational and transfronterizx students' literature is becoming very prominent, given the current political agenda. Additionally, I also hope to contribute positively among my colleagues to promote a safe and welcoming educational space in our classrooms and colleges where students can feel not only respected and valued but supported academically, professionally, and emotionally. At this moment, I believe that I can contribute to the exploration of the (digital) lives of transnational and transfronterizx students because I am not only in constant contact with many of them, I am one of them. Murray (2015) states, "As the digital habitat evolves, a large range of individual interactive possibilities can be offered to encourage both self-directed learning and collaboration" (p. 75). From this, it can be observed how new literacies, in this case, digital literacies, are shaping educational approaches that encourage self-learning and the co-construction of knowledges. Thus, following Sánchez (2001) reflections, I present my personal experiences as a transfronterizx who has lived, attended school, and worked on both sides of the border.

I was born in Ciudad Juárez, though half of my family lived in El Paso, Texas, since years before. Since early in life, I started living as a transfronteriza, often crossing to *el otro*

lado (the other side) to visit family and friends of the family. I come from two families where they celebrate everything, *son transfronterizxs de hueso colorado diría yo* (they are transfronterizxs from the bottom of their hearts). I remember celebrating Halloween and Thanksgiving in Juárez but having *las posadas* (Mexican celebration before Christmas eve) in El Paso, TX. It was not surprising for me to cross several times during the holidays to spend some time in El Paso and to go back to the middle of the night to Juárez to continue celebrating somewhere else.

In terms of education, I also remember starting this constant traveling earlier during my life. When I was seven, we moved to El Paso, Texas, so I started attending school in the United States. It was my very first experience in an academic setting like that, a public school in the U.S. Up to now. I can still recognize the smell of the hall, which was so different from what I remember from my schooling in Juárez; it did not last much. That very academic year, I returned to school in Juárez, and I was placed back in the school year that I was supposed to be attending; in El Paso, I had to repeat the academic year because of my age.

Furthermore, for a couple of years, my mom drove me back to Juárez daily promptly at 6:30 am to continue attending school there, which, from her perspective, was better education. During these traverses, I learned my multiplication tables, several poems, songs, and various riddles that my mother would teach me as she was driving. We had enough time as the school, and my house was quite apart. It was usually an incredible experience as I had time to learn more things, except when we were stopped by the train. I remember crying at the school entrance, as they were extremely strict, particularly with punctuality.

We eventually moved back to Juárez. I continued studying in Juárez up to high school, but then, it was the same story again, crossing daily to attend school. When I started college, I

started crossing again as I registered in school back in El Paso. I must realize, though, that although I experienced varied ways of frustration coming back and forth, being late, missing parts of family reunions, and lack of sleep, these experiences are not comparable to the struggles that undocumented transnationals have experienced during their lives. I must say then that I had always been privileged to have the opportunity and the means of crossing at my convenience, regardless of any frustration that I might encounter in the way.

Before starting my Ph.D., I always considered myself a *fronteriza* (a border person), perhaps even an immigrant, but I was undoubtedly clueless about my identity as a transfronteriza. Moreover, just like Sánchez (2001), it still confuses me to identify myself as binational. The author states: "In many ways, *binational* does not fully describe who I am nor what we live(d). The term itself seems static because it conjures up two specific places (two nations) that you move between: from one side to the border one day, to the other the next" (p. 376). This view does not consider the various mental states (e.g., happiness, excitement, oppression, frustration, to name a few) and digital/physical/imaginary communities that you can traverse being transfronterizx.

Nevertheless, are the previous epiphanies just been retold autoethnographic elements? "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). The authors continue, "in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences" (p. 276).

In her book *Autoethnography as Feminist Method, Sensitising the Feminist 'I,'* Ettorre (2016) makes an essential distinction between autoethnography and autobiography. The author

thoughtfully argues that whereas autoethnographies can include autobiographical components, autobiographies cannot be considered autoethnographies. Autobiographical research is mainly concerned with placing the 'I' within a personal context and developing insights from that perspective. It may be political, or it may not. On the other hand, although 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research,' autoethnography' is all about placing the 'I' firmly within a cultural context and all that that implies (p. 2).

By no means then, this section should be considered an autoethnography as the level of reflexivity, the time, and the outcomes differ in length and depth. This said, the reader should understand this section as an autobiographical sketch, which, although thoughtfully written, mostly aims to position me as a transfronteriza through the different anecdotes retold here. Additionally, this section helps me present the reader with my position as an insider of the border's culture, whose stories can be related to those told by the participants involved in the present study.

Although I understand that being an insider of any culture/community does not guarantee that the stories the participants told were the same as mine, my positionality as transfronteriza researcher, educator, and individual, enabled me to have essential insights into the details presented in each of the stories. I also understand that my circumstances as an educator and researcher could have distanced me from the study participants regarding power relationships and authority. Nevertheless, it was also because of my positionality that I became aware of the needs that transfronterizxs might be facing at the college level in the U.S./Mexico border of El Paso/Juárez. I am exclusively considering myself as *powerful* here because I act conjointly as a researcher and educator, whereas the participants did not participate as researchers themselves. Similarly, it is also due to such positionality that I hope to contribute to academia by

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disseminating their voices, as I understand my cyclical position of insider and outsider, and of course, as I understand my endless in-betweenness.

Sánchez (2001) expresses, "I encourage those conceptualizing transnationalism to consider the hiddenness of transnational realities (as well as their interplay with transnationals' other identities) a groundedness in a community's historical present-past, and a consideration of its generational transmigration (p. 379). By writing this dissertation, I urge researchers, educators, and administrators to pay attention to the lives, experiences, assets, challenges, and, most importantly, the needs of their transfronterizx students because it takes plenty of effort and dedication to get acquainted with the transfronterizx' life at the college level. Furthermore, I also aim to learn from the various experiences presented here, to continue readapting my curriculum as a college educator, and to continue my advocacy work to create, apply and spread the use of transnational and transfronterizx' literacy practices to enhance their/our education and create safer educational environments at the college level.

3.4. PARTICIPANTS

This dissertation exclusively included transfronterizxs from the U.S./Mexico border area, specifically El Paso/Juarez border area. According to their participation in the study, the present dissertation participants were divided into two main categories: (1) general participants and (2) focal participants. Below I present detailed information about each of the groups. I included a total of 43 general participants and six focal participants.

3.4.1. General Participants

A total of 43 transnational/transfronterizx ESOL college students at Sun University agreed to participate in the study. In all the cases, the following considerations served as a selection criterion: These transfronterizxs were current ESOL college students; all of them

ranged from 18 to 25 years, and have had experiences attending school on both sides of the border, Mexico and the United States. A list summarizing the participants is provided below. Pseudonyms were used for confidentiality. Participants in this dissertation were from three different ESOL classes at Sun University: class A, B, and C.

Table 1. List of participants (TECS)

	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Crossing to Juarez Daily	ESOL Class	Cell phone w/Internet Access
1	Ernesto	Male	19 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
2	Elvira	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
3	Armida	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
4	Mario	Male	22-25 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
5	Leonel	Male	19 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
6	Javier	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes
7	Libia	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
8	Vicente	Male	22-25 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
9	Jose	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
10	Orlando	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes

11	Leonardo	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes
12	Ramón	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
13	Idahlí	Female	18 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes
14	Carlos	Male	20 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes
15	Jesus	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes
16	Felicia	Female	19 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
17	Alejandro	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class A	Yes
18	Arturo	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class A	Yes
19	Dennise	Female	18 yrs.	No	Class B	Yes
20	Samuel	Male	20 yrs.	Yes	Class B	Yes
21	Berenice	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class B	Yes
22	Fabiola	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class B	Yes
23	Sonia	Female	18 yrs.	No	Class B	Yes
24	Pablo	Male	19 yrs.	No	Class B	Yes

25	Valeria	Female	18 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes
26	Aranza	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
27	Dorian	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes
28	Rodolfo	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
29	Alan	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
30	Abraham	Male	20 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes
31	Roberto	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
32	Justo	Male	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
33	Nardea	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
34	Alondra	Female	18 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes
35	Irasema	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
36	Claudio	Male	18 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes
37	Lorena	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
38	Humberto	Male	19 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes

					Class	
39	Victoria	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
40	Martha	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
41	Mirna	Female	18 yrs.	Yes	Class C	Yes
42	Beatriz	Female	19 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes
43	Paloma	Female	18 yrs.	No	Class C	Yes

3.4.2. Focal Participants

I decided to contact the students from class B to serve as focal participants. Given their ESOL level, I knew that I would spend more time with them because they had more F2F classes than the other two ESOL classes.

Class B met at least three times a week and corresponded to a six-credit course on the ESOL sequence at Sun University. The information presented here includes Pablo, Berenice, Sonia, Fabiola, Denisse, and Samuel. They all met as part of their ESOL college class and tended to use more Spanish than English for their personal and academic lives. Students enrolled in this course are likely to be part of the *Programa Interamericano Estudiantil (PIE),* which facilitates college enrollment for students whose first language is Spanish. This PIE program helps students whose primary language Spanish to start their new academic path by providing an academic advisor and testing them to see their English level. If students, according to the tests results, do not possess sufficient Academic English, they will be prompted to take the core curriculum classes in Spanish. Students from this program are coming from Mexican high schools, and depending on their citizenship, they might apply to the *Programa de Asistencia Estudiantil*

(PASE) program, which grants Mexican students the opportunity to the same tuition state residents pay. Students who are enrolled as part of the PASE Program must take at least 12-credit hours per semester to comply with the program's requirements. Out of the six focal participants, just one of them applied to the PASE program even though all of them were coming from Mexican high schools. The other five participants are U.S. citizens; thus, they are not eligible to obtain PASE benefits.

3.4.2.1. Case Studies (Focal Participants): The Individual Profiles

To better understand the lives of the focal participants of this dissertation, I present below a brief description of each of the six cases. I present their stories based on their similarities as transfronterizx ESOL college students, but I also highlight and respect their individual differences. By reading these stories, the reader will understand the complexities commonly present in transfronterizx college students' lives, primarily as they use their digital literacies to (re) shape their identities.

Pablo

Born in El Paso, TX., Pablo is the youngest of three siblings who have all attended Sun University. During the time of the study, Pablo was 19 yrs. old. Like his older brothers, Pablo started living during the week in El Paso when he entered college. Although he is very close to his two brothers, Pablo was much closer to his middle brother with whom he lived and had a beer distillation business in Juarez. They usually traversed the border back and forth together. Pablo was inventive, ambitious, and highly digital literate. He enjoyed playing docuseries and streaming content from a variety of platforms, especially YouTube. Pablo had SENTRI[1]

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[1] The Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (**SENTRI**) is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) program that allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the United States. People with SENTRI cross the international bridge faster, allowing them to save 1-2 hours in their commuting.

privileges. He was the only one, out of the six participants, who attended a high school in the U.S. for a year; he did not graduate from there, as he decided to finish high school back in Juarez. Pablo started crossing to El Paso way before attending Sun University. He used to cross since he was a child because his older brothers also attended Sun University and used to take him to campus.

Pablo had experiences attending private and public schools in Mexico. He decided to attend Sun University due to his older brothers' experiences there. Pablo remembered visiting the campus since he was a child. He recognized that thanks to his ESOL classes, they are more used to "listening, comprehending, and interpreting words" (391-571). He highlighted that at Sun University, people tend to be more antisocial than in Mexico, where everybody tells you, "¿qué onda, tú qué andas haciendo?" (965-1204). Pablo had a cat whose name was Chairo. Pablo was planning to graduate from college as an engineer and get a job in the United States like his oldest brother. Although Pablo had access to electronic devices (e.g., computers) earlier during his life, he did not have his cellphone until he was in middle school because he was not allowed by his parents to own one.

Berenice

Berenice was born in El Paso, Tx, but raised in Ciudad Juarez. During the time of the study, Berenice was 18 yrs. old. She was gregarious and friendly. She noticed that the most significant difference from high school to college had been walking to school, as her parents used to drive her to school when in high school. She crossed the U.S.-Mexico border daily. She identified as fronteriza because fronterizos are the people who "comparten su vida en los dos lados y se la pasan cruzando" (121-374). Berenice highlighted that although she considered

herself a fronteriza, she was barely starting her life in the United States. Berenice was the middle child of three. She lived in Juarez with both of her parents and her brothers. She looked forward to getting a job in the United States because her older brother works in the States, "y le va muy bien."

Berenice enjoyed spending time with her family and friends during the weekend. On Saturdays, she often used to go to bars and clubs in Juarez, but on Sundays, she spent the day outside with her family doing *hamburguesas o carne asada*. Although Berenice frequently stated how close she is to her family, I noticed that she was equally reliable and close to her ESOL classmates during the study. She did not drive; however, she used to use Uber to drive herself to different places while in Juarez. During the week, she enjoyed spending time with her ESOL classmates eating, studying, or doing homework. During the time of the study, she had not declared her major yet. Bernice had her first cellphone when she was in elementary school.

Sonia

Sonia was the older of two sisters, born in El Paso, Tx. During the time of the study, Sonia was 18 yrs. old. Sonia recognized that although she had good teachers back in Mexico, the schools' economic resources were, for the most part, limited, especially in comparison to the ones at Sun University. Nevertheless, since high school, Sonia had access to computers at school and her parents' cellphone.

A few months before starting college, Sonia moved to El Paso to live with a family friend. The first thing she said about her experience leaving her home in Juarez was that she started cooking when she moved to El Paso "Antes de venirme ps sabía [cocinar] muy pocas cosas; aquí empecé a experimentar un poco más" (1393-1471). As the semester started, Sonia started living on campus by herself. During the time of the study, Sonia had three roommates

with whom she communicated mostly in English. Before entering college, Sonia used to cross with her mom primarily for doctor's appointments, especially when her little sister was born, and for shopping. Before starting college, she had never lived in El Paso, nor by herself. Sonia was passionate and sincere. She was always willing to help others as much as she could. She presented herself as a practical and feminist woman, but if you got to know her, she was too sympathetic and a person who was always fighting for justice, not just for her but others, too. Sonia had not declared her major yet.

Fabiola

Fabiola was born in New Mexico but was fully raised in Ciudad Juarez. During the time of the study, Fabiola was 18 yrs. old. Empathetic and resourceful, Fabiola was continuously going a mile beyond whichever task she was given in school and outside the school. She served as a youth coordinator in her church. You would always see her with a smile and her long-black hair perfectly combed. Her parents had had different businesses, which included the restocking of food trucks and office-supply stationery stores. Given her parents' businesses, she often started crossing to the United States early in life. She was the oldest of two siblings. During the study, Fabi had a transfronterizx boyfriend living in Juarez. She saw him more during school and work hours in El Paso. During the study, Fabi's boyfriend was not enrolled at Sun University, but his school and work were nearby. From kindergarten to high school, Fabi attended public school in Mexico.

Fabiola's parents daily drove her to Sun University, but still, she considered the process of crossing the bridge as "tedious and stressful." Fabi recognized that crossing the bridge to attend college in the United States, although a struggle represents "a great benefit for her." She wanted to get a job, but she also understood the importance of devoting much of her time to

school. She wanted college to be her focus, as she wanted to pursue a Masters' Degree. Fabiola was studying Engineering. Fabi had her first job interview during the study, and although she was not hired, she felt proud of being able to conduct the interview entirely in English. Fabiola attended private English classes with her younger sister before entering college. She had her first cellphone when she was in elementary school and mentioned that she also obtained her first iPad around the same period.

Denisse

Denisse is the only one of the six focal participants who is not a U.S. citizen. During the time of the study, Denisse was 18 years old. She recalled starting crossing to El Paso early on during her life. "La verdad no recuerdo desde cuándo sacaron mi visa, pero sí desde pequeña, recuerdo que mi papá venía a hacer compras y ya nos traía" (4744-4919). Denisse recognized that although she started crossing to El Paso earlier during her life, she remembered this process as non-stressful or tiring. As a kid, Denisse always crossed by car with her family. Today, she crosses daily during the week by walking and by herself, and then she takes a bus to get to Sun University.

Her older brother was no longer living with them back in Juarez as he already moved to live in the United States. Nevertheless, they were always in constant contact through text messages. She attended school (K-12) in Mexico, and, as of now, she has not felt discriminated against in school in either country. Denisse had always loved school, and in fact, she won many academic awards. I could observe that she was still extremely dedicated to school. Denisse is responsible, respectful, and incredibly thoughtful. She identified herself as *fronteriza* because she has always lived on the U.S./Mexico border. Denisse attended private English classes sponsored by his older brother before entering college. She told me that her parents could not pay for the

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tuition at this English private school and that her older brother immediately decided to support her studies. Denisse was looking to pursue a college degree in the health sciences. Denisse owned her first cellphone during high school but had an iPad since she was in elementary school.

Samuel

Samuel was the oldest of the focal participants, and the rest perceived him as the wisest and most proficient in English. During the study, Samuel was 20 years old and took a sabbatical year before enrolling at Sun University. During this time, Samuel had had one job in Juarez at a children's interactive private learning space. During the time of the study, Samuel applied for different work-study positions at Sun University. He was recently hired. Like Pablo, Samuel also has SENTRI privileges. He crossed daily from Juarez to El Paso. Despite his young age, Samuel was wise and had a profound perspective on life. Samuel was extremely resourceful and had eased, not only socializing with others but also leading them. Given his personality and experiences, Samuel worked as an anchor for the rest of the group. Samuel said he relies on technology for every aspect of his life.

Samuel was born in El Paso. His previous education experiences were in Mexican schools, although his mother wanted him to study in the United States since he started high school. He did not want to attend high school in El Paso because of English; Samuel states that "he was not fluent yet" back then. Although he is "bien aventado, he struggles with big changes such as attending school in another country." Samuel thought that he was more acquainted with accomplishing tasks in school than his brother was because he had had experiences attending private and public schools in Mexico. He compared his experience with his brother, who had only attended private schools in Mexico. Samuel noticed that he often incorporates technology for many of his daily activities. Samuel was studying Engineering.

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3.5. PARTICIPANTS' SELECTION PROCEDURES

Here I present information on participants' selection procedures. First, I present the selection procedures for general participants, and immediately after, I present information regarding the selection of the six focal participants enrolled for participation in this dissertation.

3.5.1. General Participants

The first recruiting session included contacting potential general participants to answer an online survey, which took place in early September of 2019. I recruited participants by visiting three ESOL classes to invite potential participants to the study. General participants did not receive compensation for participation.

3.5.2. Focal Participants

The second phase included contacting six participants already surveyed who served as the focal participants. The six students were selected on the following basis:

1. They were transfronterizx, meaning that they are crossing the bridge daily or almost daily to attend college.

2. They included a variety of males and females.

3. They were enrolled in the ESOL program at Sun University.

4. They engaged in digital practices even before the study had started, as per the general participants' survey results.

5. They were willing to complete a follow-up phenomenological interview, which included three in-depth interviews of about 60-90 minutes each, participated in six study sessions and informal conversations, and participated in shadowing sessions.

6. They had the willingness to share their electronic assignments with me.

As retribution for their time devoted to the study, the focal participants received $90.00 [2]in stipends each, and meals were provided during all the interviews and study sessions. I also provided additional tutoring time as a way to reciprocate their time and effort in the study.

3.6. RESEARCH SETTING: ESOL PROGRAM AT SUN UNIVERSITY

At Sun University, the ESOL program enrolls approximately 500 students per academic year. The classes offered at the program are all credit-courses, meaning that students have a status of degree-seeking. Courses are 3, 6, or 9 credit-hour courses from where 1311 and 1312 count towards the credits needed for graduation. These two courses replace English 1 and 2, respectively. The students enrolled in the program can take core curriculum classes in Spanish. Besides, if desired, the students from the highest proficiency levels can also take classes required by their majors/colleges. This means that to be part of this program, the students are already fully enrolled in the university and can start taking other courses (e.g., core courses major courses) simultaneously as they are taking their ESOL courses. The ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) at Sun University includes six different levels of English proficiency. The first level is ESOL 1910 (Intermediate English for Speakers of Other Languages), but it was no longer offered in the catalog as of Fall 2019; the class used to meet for 9 hours. The students enrolled in this program are primarily coming from Mexican High Schools and must take a placement exam to identify their English proficiency levels. This program enrolls mostly students whose first language is Spanish. During the time of the dissertation, just one student was coming from another Latin American country, but also spoke Spanish as her first language. For a detailed sequence of the levels offered in this program, please *see the table below*.

Table 2. ESOL Level Sequence at Sun University

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[2] Funding came from the Graduate School at Sun University.

Level	Course	Title/Credit Hours
I*	*ESOL 1910**	*Beginner English for Speakers of Other Languages (9 hours)**
II	ESOL 1610	Intermediate English for Speakers of Other Languages (6 hours)
III	ESOL 1406	Basic English Sentence Structure (4 hours)
III	ESOL 1309	Reading and Writing in English for Non-Native Speakers (3 hours)
IV	ESOL 1310	Reading English as a Second Language (3 hours)
	ESOL 1311	Expository English Composition for Speakers of English as a Second Language (3 hours)
V	ESOL 1312	Research and Critical Writing for Speakers of English as a Second Language (3 hours)
VI	ESOL 2303	English for Humanities and Social Sciences (3 hours)

I have been a faculty in this program for seven years. This means that the study participants could have been my students in the past or could be my future students. The structure of the program dictates that the classes must be taken simultaneously according to levels. For example, if the participants enrolled in an intermediate writing class, they also take an intermediate grammar class, and so on. I purposefully did not invite students to participate in the study if they were enrolled in my classes during Fall 2019 to avoid a conflict of interest. The fact

that the faculty number is limited in the program (only four during the study) and that I did not

tap into my students explains that I conducted observations in the only three ESOL classrooms

available for the study. During the time of the dissertation, the students participating in the study

were not my students.

3.7. DATA COLLECTION

I have divided the data collection procedures into general participants and focal

participants. Please see appendix A for a copy of the survey, interview guides, and observation

protocols.

3.7.1. General Participants

For general participants, I conducted observations (face-to-face), informal conversations,

online surveys, and a collection of student artifacts. I visited the following ESOL classes (ESOL

1610, ESOL 1311A, and ESOL 1311C) to invite potential participants to participate in the

dissertation. This occurred after the ESOL instructors signed an acknowledgment letter (see

appendix 1) stating that they agreed that I could visit their classes. In these classrooms, I

explained to potential participants the project's objectives and what it entailed from their part.

Those who decided to participate gave me their signed consent form at my office. After securing

consent, I proceeded to schedule the observation sessions with the different ESOL instructors.

Below I will explain the different data sources:

3.7.1.1. Survey

I contacted the 43 participants asking them to answer an online demographic survey using

QuestionPro. Questionnaires in Spanish and English are provided as part of Appendix 1.

Like Horrigan (2001) and Wrigth (2005), some authors have noticed that the emergence of

various virtual communities has opened the opportunity to conduct online surveys successfully.

As explained previously, a survey was conducted to explore the different digital literacies of various transfronterizx college students. This survey is an adaptation of two previously conducted surveys: (1) Ajayi's (2016) and (2) Mendoza's (2017). Ajayi's (2016) survey focuses mainly on the digital practices of students outside of the classroom. Furthermore, Mendoza's (2017) is a demographic survey I created to study the general demographics of the transfronterizx students at Sun University who were or had been ESOL students in the program. These two surveys were selected to create a new one because both provided features that helped me understand the digital practices of transfronterizx college students. The survey included information regarding the ways they identified themselves in terms of gender and ethnicities/nationalities, their ages, their parents' education, the times when they crossed to Juarez, the times when they contacted people from Mexico using digital literacy practices, the different electronic devices they possessed, and the digital literacy practices they interacted with during the day.

The survey was distributed electronically through the QuestionPro software offered by Sun University because it offers (1) email distribution and social network integration via Facebook and Twitter, (2) mobile-compatible surveys for easy access, (3) real-time reports, and (4) easy export to Excel. Besides, offering surveys online represents other advantages like having multimedia capabilities, and also, this may give the perception that the survey may take less time to complete than doing it by hand, which might produce higher efficiency (Boyer et al., 2001). This survey was distributed early during data collection as it served as the first preliminary analysis of the data. The survey was completed by 43 transfronterizx college students enrolled in the ESOL program at Sun University.

3.7.1.2. Observations and Fieldnotes

I conducted observations as a participant, as an observer, and as a "participant-insider/participant-outsider" proposed by Creswell (2014). This study's observations followed an observation protocol, which included a heading, the date, and a division distinguishing between the descriptive from the reflective notes. Furthermore, although I focused on observing those practices reported by participants as they completed the online survey, I was open to the possibility of observing other digital practices not previously informed by the participants as they might not have been aware of their practices. Please see the appendix 1 for a sample of the observational protocol template.

Before starting the weekly observations, I scheduled such observations with the instructors, and I explained to them that these would be occurring during the fall semester. As explained in the acknowledgment letter, I reminded them that I would be taking notes and pictures about their ESOL activities and observing some of their group activities (without interrupting their ESOL classes) during these observations. At all given times, I had with me an e-copy of a list including those students who had consented to participate as part of the study to avoid addressing, observing, or including in any way those students who had not consented. During each of the face-to-face observations, I wrote detailed field notes. I focused on how transfronterizx ESOL college students build their communities and their identities in the ESOL classroom. I paid particular attention to the practices, primarily their digital literacy practices, participants used when they were looking to belong to their different communities. I focused on interactions among consented participants. Face-to-face observations occurred once a week for 1.5 hours in each classroom selected, for a total of 4.5 hours weekly. After each of the

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observations and when the class ended, I held informal conversations with participants to conduct member-checking of what I had observed.

Immediately after I started receiving participants' consent, I started writing fieldnotes. I wrote detailed field notes that described the different activities and assignments that they encountered during the semester. I wrote about the many instances they were glancing at their cellphones and tablets, how they used their electronic devices, the different digital literacy practices they completed within their communities, how they talked about their communities, and how they interacted with each other in the ESOL community.

3.7.1.3. Collection of Artifacts

I collected the different pictures taken during the observations. I took pictures of participants using three different shots: (1) shoulder, (2) backward, and (3) close-up of activities, including faces. I took these pictures to have additional documentation of how these participants interacted socially, responded to classroom activities, and used their digital literacies. I photographed their activities to have a detailed record of what participants did during their classes, which provided me with additional data. These artifacts complemented the rest of the data sources.

3.7.2. Focal Participants

I conducted three in-depth individual interviews, a shadowing session, and six study sessions with each of the focal participants. Below you can find a description of each of them. During week 2, and after participants had completed the online survey, I approached some of the general participants to invite them to participate as focal participants. I invited as focal participants students enrolled in the lowest ESOL level because I would spend more time with them, given the number of hours they spent in the ESOL classroom.

I explained to them that if they decided to participate, they would need to complete another consent form and that for this additional section, they would be compensated in a monetary manner (90.00 dollars total for each of the focal participants) for approximately 14 hours of participation in the study. The Graduate School at the university funded the study.

3.7.2.1. Observations

Whereas the study focused exclusively on six previously selected transfronterizx ESOL college students, I had access to additional participants as I observed a total of three different ESOL classes, their contexts, their agents, and their interactions; one of the classes included all focal participants, and the other two ESOL classes included the general participants. All observational protocols were stored electronically.

3.7.2.2. In-depth Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenological interviews help researchers to understand the uniqueness of individuals, their meanings, their interactions, and their contexts. Phenomenology is essential to understand specific individuals' social realities in a respectful way, which leads to the development of knowledge (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In this study, I conducted phenomenological interviews as these helped me gather information about the topic, participants' meanings of their practices, and their identities as transfronterizx ESOL college students.

As Seidman (2013) suggested, conducting phenomenological interviews as part of a study's qualitative process remains a suitable option as these in-depth interviews help the researcher and the study participants become more aware of their own experiences. Each set of phenomenological interviews included three interviews of about 60-90 minutes each. I conducted, recorded, and transcribed all interviews. All interviews took place within Sun University's boundaries at the interviewees' convenience. The topics included but were not

limited to the history of migration, languages used in F2F contexts vs. online settings, history of digital devices and Internet use, and current activities with digital mediums. Please, see the appendix 1 for the interview protocol.

After consented to participate as focal participants, I scheduled three semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013) with each of the six focal participants. I audio-recorded and later transcribed each of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the participant's language of preference (Spanish, for the most part).

3.7.2.3. Shadowing Sessions

I also scheduled two shadowing sessions (2.5 hours approx. each one) with the focal participants as a group. These shadowing sessions informed me about their digital practices outside of the ESOL classroom. During these shadowing sessions, I interacted with them as they conducted their daily activities on campus (e.g., visiting the library, eating, socializing). I wrote field notes detailing focal participants' use of digital literacies.

3.7.2.4. Study Sessions

I scheduled six study sessions during the semester with the focal participants. During these study sessions, I organized the students to help them complete their different ESOL assignments. During these study sessions, I helped them review ESOL material, answer questions they had about their classes, answer questions about registration, advising, and services at Sun University. Additionally, we practiced their English oral skills by discussing different topics. Sometimes the topics were directly linked to what they were assigned in class and selected by their ESOL instructor, and others, we would select a topic to talk about. Each of the study sessions lasted for about 2 hours, where I had the opportunity to conduct additional observations, take pictures, and write field notes shortly afterward. Having these additional

sessions with the focal participants helped me to gain a better understanding of how they used

their digital practices for language learning. I wrote field notes detailing the interactions among

participants. These interactions provided data about digital literacy practices and how

participants looked for belonging in their many communities.

3.7.2.5. Collection of Artifacts

I asked focal participants to upload their ESOL assignments to a Google Classroom

portal, which served as a repository for collecting data. This password-protected portal enabled

students to upload their electronic assignments. For confidentiality, students were not able to

access or see what other participants uploaded. Additionally, I invited focal participants to

upload their social media sites entries by taking screenshots (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter,

Facebook). Artifacts also included pictures and screenshots directly taken by the participants,

which they shared with me online, real-time exchanges like text-chats with participants, and their

ESOL electronic assignments they also shared with me electronically. These screenshots were

also uploaded to the Google Classroom portal.

These digital artifacts were electronically stored during the process of the study. These

digital artifacts included but were not limited to photographs, computer messages like Facebook,

Instagram, and other social media entries in the form of screenshots, reflective journals written

by me retelling their real-time digital exchanges with them, regular electronic assignments

written by the participants, and public digital entries relevant to the topic. The electronic

assignments constituted part of their daily activities in the ESOL classroom and were not guided

by me, as the researcher. Like the observations, all electronic artifacts were stored electronically

in a password-protected cloud service provided by the university.

3.8. DATA ANALYSIS

This dissertation included a few techniques from Grounded Theory (e.g., constant comparative analysis and systematic coding procedures). I used Dedoose for data analysis. This software allows the users not only the codifications of qualitative data but also the integration of different bubble downloadable visualizations. This allowed me to quickly identify the themes which were more salient as part of the data.

I used techniques from Grounded Theory for the analysis of the present data because this procedure is "helpful to develop the higher-level understanding that is grounded in, or derived from, a systematic analysis of data" (Lingard et al., 2008, p. 459). Moreover, these techniques were relevant for the present analysis because they allow having sensitizing concepts – background assumptions- from part of the researcher, cycles of simultaneous data analysis and collection, and a flexible adaptation of the data collection procedures if these might enlighten the emerging theory (Lingard et al., 2008). The analysis started immediately after I collected the surveys. The fieldnotes taken during observations in the classrooms, the study sessions, the shadowing sessions, and the transcripts of the phenomenological interviews were analyzed in a similar way.

As suggested by Corbin and Strauss (1990), every item collected since the beginning of the study was considered provisional because "each concept earns its way into the theory by repeatedly being present in interviews, documents, and observations in one form or another –or by being significantly absent" (p. 7). Immediately subsequently, concepts were analyzed and grouped into different categories, which formed the study's themes. The authors note that merely grouping concepts under a broad heading do not create an actual category.

Using descriptive statistics, data from the surveys was downloaded from QuestionPro and quantified to obtain the participants' demographic information and specific trends in their digital literacies practices (e.g., Blackboard, email, and social media sites for academic and non-academic purposes).

I transcribed all phenomenological interviews and study sessions to analyze them using the software mentioned above, Dedoose. The field notes from observations, informal conversations, and e-artifacts enabled me to upload them directly for analysis. This software allowed me to create a variety of themes that could be linked to one another to form broader categories, which were later used to write memos, and of course, the different sections of the findings of the present dissertation. Not surprisingly, the process of finding themes, reading insightfully, writing memos, and revisiting sections, also known as member checking, with general and focal participants, was continuous. On Dedoose, I created an identifier, such as this one (921-1039), for each of the analyzed excerpts for all different phenomenological interviews, study sessions, observations, informal conversations, and e-artifacts, which I used when writing the findings. All identifiers were individual and unique, which means that if, for example, an excerpt included more than one theme (e.g., identity and technology), each of them was given an individual identifier. Dedoose, additionally, allowed me to create charts that helped me to visualize the most salient themes for participants. For a sample of such charts, please see the picture below.

Codes	Here and there	Identity	Nepantla	Otherness	Perspectives about	Physical appeareance	Safe space	Social Networking Sites	Technology	Totals
Here and there				1	1	3	1			6
Identity										
Nepantla										
Otherness	1					1				2
Perspectives about	1					1			1	3
Physical appeareance	3			1	1					5
Safe space	1									1
Social Networking Sites										
Technology					1					1
Totals	6			2	3	5	1		1	

Illustration 1. Dedoose sample of themes co-occurrences.

Through this process of constant analysis and reflection, I highlighted many themes. For example, themes that were continually arising as part of the data were: *using cellphones in the classroom, access to technology, ties with the family, Nepantla, and commuting to Sun University.* By writing the memos and having constant conversations with my mentors and the participants (e.g., member's checking), I understood the meaning of these different themes better. Furthermore, by engaging in this cyclical process of data analysis, I was also able to select the most salient examples from my data.

This cyclical process of data analysis started by reading the literature and my data simultaneously. From the literature, I was able to highlight key terms which I used to create the first themes on the data using Dedoose. I created themes like *social networking sites, identity*, and *literacy practices.* After reading the data several times and adding other sub-themes to Dedoose, I was able to start writing memos which summarized the most salient examples from the data. By recurrently doing these processes of reading, writing, and analyses, I was able to create other sub-themes like *navigational and social capital, college experience, identity in relation to language, identity in relation to citizenship, identity in relation to education, and learning English.* Dedoose

allowed me to visualize which were the most salient themes, and also, the ones with more occurrences. This is how I decided which themes to use as categories for my Findings Chapters.

3.9. RESEARCH ETHICAL ISSUES

No ethical research issues were experienced during any of the phases of the study. Before conducting such research phases, all participants voluntarily signed a consent form explaining not only the purpose of the study, but the risks involved, benefits, costs, and reasons why they have been selected for participation; besides, each of the consent forms included a section explaining the importance of maintaining confidentiality (individuals and data), and how this was addressed. All participants had the right to resign at any given moment without reprimands. Nevertheless, it was worth reminding the reader that there was a potential likelihood that all participants were/are/will be my students in at least one of their ESOL classes, as previously explained in the Research Context section.

3.10. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF DATA ANALYSIS

I used triangulation to ensure the validity of the research findings and those of the data analysis. Mathison (1988) explains the concept of *triangulation* as: "A strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a truthful proposition about some social phenomenon can be made" (p. 13). In the present dissertation, different data sources (interviews, observations, and surveys) were used. Besides, following Cueva Esquivel's (2017), I implemented member check procedures. Each transcribed interview was given to the original respective interviewee to make deletions, additions, or clarifications.

In my case, I constantly compared back and forth all the different data sources that I had access to. I was able to verify if what the participants were telling me as part of our many informal conversations and interviews corresponded to what I was observing during my several

hours of classroom observation. Equally important, by paying attention to the screenshots focal participants provided me as digital artifacts, I could also connect and better understand their physical and virtual communities as transfronterizx ESOL college students. Because I performed these triangulations on several occasions, I created a more in-depth and more reliable analysis that illustrates how all different data sources complemented and sometimes contrasted. In my analysis, I also looked for differences across the participants. This analysis procedure allowed me to find some nuances in how transfronterizxs used their digital practices and experienced their identity as ESOL students and transfronterizxs.

3.11. LIMITATIONS

One of the possible limitations as part of the dissertation is that, unquestionably, when dealing with in-depth interviews, the information analyzed was continuously filtered by my views not only as a researcher but also as a transfronterizx myself, which, although might be perceived as an asset, it could also be considered a bias. Some of the interviewees' responses might have been mismatched between the surveys and the interviews, as previously suggested by Hamann et al., (2017). Furthermore, because of the constant interaction through the various participant observations, several private information pieces were revealed but, given the many ethical and professional considerations guiding the study, could not be included as part of the memos/reports. Another possible limitation is that I did not conduct more virtual observations, as I had initially planned. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, some participants who took part in the present dissertation were my students in the past, given the ESOL program structure from which participants were observed. Another limitation is that I only observed them while at Sun University. Thus, although I did learn about out-of-school digital practices through my interviews and informal conversations, I did not have direct access to observe the participant's

out-of-school literacy practices. Last, because I only used qualitative approaches, generalizability should be also considered a limitation, although generalizability is never the goal of an ethnography.

Chapter 4: Identity and Digital Literacies among Transfronterizxs

To better understand how participants' identities were constructed, I performed several observations, informal conversations, study sessions, interviews, and analyses of different digital artifacts. Through this recurrent data collection and analysis processes, I explored transfronterizx ESOL college students' identities. The findings allowed me to reiterate the importance of understanding the dynamic social, cultural, and virtual processes in which transfronterizxs, participate in. The chapter presents information regarding not only the complex identity-making processes that transfronterizx students go through as they are becoming ESOL college students, but it also presents information on how their digital literacies, and those from their loved ones, play a significant role in their daily lives.

The findings are guided by Gee's (2000) theory of identities, by Guerra's (2004; 2016) theories of culture and identity, and Moran's (2019) theories of becoming and belonging. In this chapter, I analyze the identities of these border-dwellers, drawing on the authors mentioned above. I add insights to the findings by utilizing the construct created by Guerra (2004) on transcultural repositioning. Guerra uses transcultural repositioning as an ability of transnationals to continually reposition themselves physically and emotionally as members of the societies they belong to. To do so, they productively use (or not) specific affinities (e.g., language, traditions).

Guerra's construct helped me understand how students' digital literacies are frequently present in their lives inside and outside the ESOL classroom. Transcultural repositioning also helped me to understand how digital literacy practices allowed the participants to live in a constant in-betweenness where their communities, despite being geographically divided, were constantly united emotionally and virtually.

From Moran's (2020) theories of belonging and becoming, I also draw on Bourdieu's (1986) construct of capital. She presented how young refugees challenge their ethnicities as they navigate their different identities. Similarly, this study's participants are in a constant process of becoming and belonging as they navigate their multiple communities, including their ESOL community and their virtual communities. Using these perspectives, the authors mentioned above understand identity as a dynamic process guided by a sense of (non) belonging and becoming. I took this stance as I try to understand the constant dynamic changes in the participants' lives. Regardless of the many identities that TECS showed during the dissertation, the one they frequently referred to, was their identity as ESOL students, or as they referred to themselves, *Los de ESOL.* They referred to themselves with the label imposed by the institution. Therefore, although Sun University as an institution imposes the label ESOL for them as a community, following deficit perspectives (Gutiérrrez & Orellana, 2006) which highlight students' linguistic deficiencies, instead of their assets. Nevertheless, for TECS, calling themselves Los de ESOL was not only an identity statement, but an assertion of belonging to a safe community.

4.1. BELONGING TO LOS DE ESOL AND OTHER AFFINITIES

Participants engaged in various activities to be part of Los de ESOL, which highlighted their affinities among them. These affinities helped TECS to re-make their identities. Gee (2000) states:

> An affinity group comprises people dispersed across a large space (maybe in different
> countries). What people in the group share, and must share to constitute an affinity group,
> his allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the

group's members the requisite experiences. The process through which this power works, then, is participation or sharing (p. 105).

Affinities then consist of who the person is and their distinctive experiences. For TECS, for instance, one of their most salient affinities was that they heavily relied on technology to navigate constantly (physically, emotionally, and virtually) their different communities. Besides, their affinities included a variety of shared experiences (e.g., translanguaging). Similar to Gee's (2000) perspectives, Moran (2020) talks about this type of identity as *similarity;* she emphasizes the creations of communities and the solidarity that members of such communities can express. To summarize the many affinities I found as part of the data, I present below a chart, including the most salient ones.

Table 3. Affinities among Los de ESOL

TECS' Affinities
Crossed the international US/Mexico bridge often
Identified themselves as Mexican or Mexican-American
Were knowledgeable about proper documentation to traverse the border physically
Were knowledgeable about proper documentation to attend school in an American institution
Had educational experiences on both sides of the border
Used mostly Spanish to communicate during the day
Were in the process of learning English
Were empathetic with other TECS
Used social media sites to communicate with people in Mexico daily
Were enrolled in at least one ESOL credit-course at Sun University
Were privileged**[3]

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[3] A section of what privilege entails for the present dissertation is included below.

As transfronterizxs, they all have an array of complex experiences crossing the US/Mexico border constantly. As has been noted earlier, because of the intensity in which these participants experience life on both sides of the border, they must be considered transfronterizxs and not only transnationals (de la Piedra et al., 2018). One of the affinities among TECS was that they identified themselves as Mexican or Mexican-American because those are the labels and Discourses (Gee, 2000), which are commonly used as they interact with others. As I observed them, I frequently noticed how some of them, like Fabi, Berenice, and Sonia, referred to themselves as Mexicans. However, the three were US citizens or had dual citizenship. Because they had been raised in Mexico and were familiar with the cultural practices and the educational system in Northern Mexico, they identified themselves as Mexicans. Given the different characteristics that I ascribed to transfronterizxs (e.g., crossing the border often if not daily), I use this term, although none of my participants self-identify as transfronterizx in the survey. I used this term because it represented one of the affinities, crossing the international border frequently, for the participants. This term is more commonly used across academia and not necessarily as part of the communities TECS currently navigate.

The participants in this dissertation enacted various discourses, which they commonly found as part of the social communities in which they participated. For instance, they identified themselves as *fronterizos* because they are continually crossing the US/Mexico border back and forth to attain different purposes. In his second interview, Samuel shared with me that he was fronterizo because he was living on the border and now crosses very often to attend school. Although Samuel could always physically cross the border and knew the meaning of the word *fronterizo,* it was not until he started his daily commute to Sun University that he realized

what it meant to be a border-dweller. He continued (4064-4254[4]), "Conscientemente siempre he sabido que es la frontera, pero más bien lo analicé más cuando ya estuve cruzando para venir para acá [Sun University]." Thus, the experience of mobility that came with the decision to attend the university allowed him to realize that in his process of becoming a transfronterizx ESOL college student, he was part of a community -the transfronterizxs- who often crossed the US/Mexico border to commute to their daily activities.

Besides, whereas the vast majority (53%) identified themselves merely as Mexican or Mexican-American, they would also all fulfill the category of transfronterizxs as it has been explained in other sections of this dissertation. According to the demographic survey, the participants presented themselves as follows:

Table 4. How TECS identified themselves on the demographic survey

Ways in which participants presented themselves	Percentage according to the demographic survey
Mexican	32%
Mexican-American	20%
Chican@	5%
Fronterizo	15%
Border-crosser	6%
Juarense	20%
Paseño	0%

It is worth mentioning that although the option *select all that apply* was available for participants in the survey, they just selected one. I immediately noticed that although many of

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[4] I kept all examples written in Spanish as originally told by participants to avoid loosing the meaning participants' wanted to portray.

them specified that they had been born in El Paso during conversations, none of them identified themselves as Paseño. They were the ones labeling themselves as Mexican-American. Most of them (61%) crossed daily for educational purposes, and 21% of them labeled themselves as border-crossers or fronterizxs. As transfronterizxs, these participants are perceived by some institutions and members of other communities (outside the ESOL community at Sun University), sometimes as *the others* (Vila, 2002), and sometimes as an amalgamation of two in-between entities conjointly, Mexican and American (Anzaldúa, 1987). Based on the survey and our general conversations, although focal participants identified themselves exclusively as "Mexican," many of them (four out of six focal participants) were US citizens, also. They had dual citizenship. However, as we had more in-depth conversations, they were mostly identifying themselves as "fronterizxs" because TECS recognized they had not only the privilege of freely traversing two countries but because, from their perspectives, they were doing it to gain better educational and professional opportunities than those they could be granted in Mexico. It is relevant to explain that fronterizx and transfronterizx represent the same meaning in this study.

For example, Berenice (507-805) shared with me during one of her interviews, "Te puedo decir que sí soy fronteriza; o sea sí cruzo todos los días. Apenas estoy empezando yo a hacer mi vida acá (Estados Unidos). Yo espero que no pase algo y ya no venga nunca acá a la escuela." For Berenice, for example, the term fronteriza and transfronteriza represent exactly the same. By understanding what a fronterizx entails been, Berenice situated herself as an active member of such a community; because she crosses the US/Mexico border daily to attend college. She situated the meaning of who can be a fronterizx or not based on the border-crossing practices. For Berenice, belonging to the fronterizx community required physically crossing the border daily, just like she did. However, I regularly noticed how significant it was for

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participants to physically traverse the border and virtually and emotionally to continue their lives as transfronterizxs.

Similarly, Denisse shared (4656-4718) in one of her interviews: "Yo me identifico como una persona fronteriza principalmente por vivir en la frontera. Ya antes [de la entrevista] había pensado en eso de 'soy fronteriza' por los medios de comunicación que siempre mencionan mucho esa palabra 'fronterizo.'" In her case, Denisse appropriates Discourses (Gee, 2000) that circulate in the media. Denisse recognized that she fits the most basic description of who a fronterizx is as she lives in the borderland, as the Discourses found in the media communicate. In other words, her perspective of who belongs or not to the fronterizx community reproduces the Discourses she has been listening to in the media throughout her life saying that fronterizxs are those who live in the borderland. She also shared with me during her first interview (5647-5738): "Hay muchas ventajas al ser una persona fronteriza como el poder convivir con las dos culturas y el poder comprar cosas de las dos culturas". As transfronterizxs, participants were able to belong to more than just one community and just one culture and articulate what they perceived as the benefits of this duality, as Denisse explained.

Likewise, during his first interview, Samuel mentioned that even though he has always been aware of the life at the border, it was not until recently that he genuinely thought about what entails to be a *fronterizo* in his own words (4064-4254):

"Me considero una persona fronteriza por el hecho de vivir en la frontera, y aunque conscientemente siempre he sabido mucho de la frontera nunca había llegado al punto en el que dije 'soy fronterizo'. Creo que lo pensé más bien al estar cruzando todos los días".

From our discussion, it seemed like Samuel and other transfronterizx ESOL college students, although they are aware of the terminology (labels) given to them as active members of a

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community, do not necessarily directly identify themselves like that. For Samuel specifically, even though he has had the privilege of crossing to the United States his whole life, it took him the drill of crossing daily for attending college to label himself as a fronterizx thoroughly. From his explanation, Samuel used to consider himself like one just because, geographically, he has always lived on the border; however, enacting the life of a transfronterizx ESOL college student made him realize what belonging to this community entails and privileges.

For example, Samuel started becoming fronterizx, transfronterizx for the present dissertation. He started to consciously make such an identity by starting to pay attention to his daily activities (e.g., checking the line at the bridge on social media sites, crossing the international bridge). During these daily activities, Samuel narrates during our interviews, he started identifying himself as a *fronterizx,* demonstrating the significance of these activities for his identity-making processes.

Samuel acknowledged the privileges that come with becoming part of the communities he belongs to as a transfronterizx and a college student in the US. Samuel positioned himself as an active member of a community of students who, in order to obtain a college degree in the US, decided to commute as border-crossers of the US/Mexico borderland. As part of this process, Samuel managed to identify himself, not only as a *fronterizx* but one who possesses the privilege of physically freely traversing the border if he wants to. He realized that whereas he can attend classes in an American university, not every person living on the border can do so. In the example below, Samuel observed how he avoided talking about Sun University and his daily commute to his Juarense friends because he did not want them to feel bad about it. Unlike his friends, who were enrolled in a Mexican university, Samuel, as a US citizen born in Texas, had

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the opportunity to attend an American university, pay in-state tuition, apply for financial aid, and continue living back in Mexico.

Samuel explains (6282-6617):

"He visto, por ejemplo, compañeros míos que se agüitan porque yo en lo personal, cuando voy y estoy con mis amigos, que hablamos de la escuela o cosas así, o que conozco a alguien, yo siempre trato de evitar el tema de que estudio en Sun University, porque al mencionarlo mucha gente a veces siente como que a lo mejor yo lo estoy presumiendo, o simplemente se agüitan porque a ellos les gustaría tener el acceso para estudiar acá y no pueden porque la UDF [Universidad de la Frontera] pues está padre, pero la verdad no es nada comparado con las universidades que hay aquí [en Estados Unidos], entonces creo que les puede agüitar un poquito."

Los de ESOL*,* as this excerpt from Samuel's interview showed, were aware of their privileged position at the border. Here Samuel fully understood that whereas he had the privilege of crossing, using SENTRI to El Paso, not everyone who surrounded him could freely cross the international bridge. For Samuel and many other TECS, privilege was demonstrated by having access to material resources (tuition, financial aid, SENTRI) and sociopolitical resources (crossing the border, SENTRI). Furthermore, Samuel was also aware of the differences in education that access to a visa and citizenship afforded him. As in the example mentioned above, "al mencionarlo mucha gente a veces siente como que a lo mejor yo lo estoy presumiendo." In his case as a US citizen, Samuel was attending college in the United States, which was what he decided to do; and even though other transfronterizxs who are non-US citizens are also able to cross the US/Mexico border using a (student) visa, this privilege is not a given for every person

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living on the border. Los de ESOL were aware of the affinities they shared in terms of their possibility of mobility across both nations.

Besides, another affinity among Los de ESOL was that they had educational experiences on both sides of the border, and, at some point in life, they all attended Mexican high schools and had Spanish as their native language. Inside and outside the classroom, Los de ESOL mostly used Spanish to communicate. For the vast majority of these transfronterizx ESOL college students, their first educational American experience was attending college, although a few attended schools in the United States previously because of exchange programs or earlier schooling (e.g., elementary, middle school). In this sense, they all shared having experiences attending two different educational systems and using two different languages to learn and to become (Moran, 2020) in these educational institutions.

An additional affinity among TECS was that they commonly referred to themselves as *Los de ESOL*. Furthermore, as members of the Los de ESOL community, they might be recognized as a closed group with always-together members. To illustrate, Berenice shared with me during one of the interviews (44-267): "Nos quedamos haciendo tarea, pero así de que todos juntos Los de ESOL; nos quedamos en la librería o de que aquí en el ESOL lab. O la semana pasada que nos fuimos a la tienda de disfraces a hacernos locos, pero todos juntos." As an affinity group (Gee, 2000), the social distance among the ESOL community lies in its members being intimates who are always together and caring for each other. It is not surprising that TECS tended to take the same classes and socially communicated almost entirely in Spanish, inside and outside their ESOL classrooms. TECS was in the process of adapting to, firstly, a new educational system, and secondly, new linguistic repertoires, which include English and college-academic language. Relevant to this affinity as Los de ESOL is mentioning that whereas for

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participants belonging to this community represented similarity and an essential bond as they were all becoming TECS, for Sun University as an institution, ESOL students' label represented those who had limited English to belong to its community.

Gee (2000) explains that, for instance, I-identities are based on the labels which certain institutions (e.g. education, religion, government, etc.) have the power to provide to individuals. To illustrate, TECS are considered transfronterizx ESOL students because they cross the international bridge to attend an American educational institution (Sun University); in this case, after they applied to the institution of Sun University and they were accepted by such institution, they were entitled as Sun University college students. Additionally, because they received their secondary education in a language which was not English, they were coming from Mexican high-schools, Sun University required them to take the ACT Compass-ESL exam which will soon place them in one of the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses offered by the university, which is one of the reasons why the institution labels them as ESOL students. Sun University provides the label of ESOL students to this community based on their limited English. However, although they replicate these deficit discourses calling themselves Los de ESOL, for them it represents a safe space where they share many affinities.

Another critical affinity for TECS was the constant use of social media sites. TECS primarily engaged in WhatsApp and Messenger to continually communicate with people who were geographically located in Mexico. According to the survey, almost all of them (93%) engage in at least one form of digital communication with people from Mexico daily. They primarily use social media sites to communicate, especially WhatsApp and Messenger. As part of their belonging as transfronterizxs, it was common for all participants to rely on WhatsApp over other social media sites. TECS even used WhatsApp to make phone calls, given the many

different possibilities that WhatsApp afforded, including but not limited to making phone calls through the Internet, video chats, and text messages. To illustrate, Fabi mentioned in one of her e-assignments (1398-1583), "Text messages on WhatsApp are more practical and comfortable. You can carry on the conversation for hours without affecting your time or activities since answering a message would take seconds. For me, it is essential." In her assignment, Fabi was comparing making a call and communicating via text message through WhatsApp. Although Fabi mentioned how she uses both, she explained the different advantages that messages have for her over calling someone. She explained how she used them to communicate mostly with her parents and boyfriend, who live in Juarez.

In the lives of transfronterizxs, saving time was an essential skill because their constant journeys were emotional, virtual, and physical. Consequently, interacting on Social Media as a digital literacy practice represented an essential asset as part of their affinity group as they were able to continue in constant contact with their loved ones while continuing with their crossings. Interacting on Social Media was unquestionably an identity affinity for all participants, which all of them took for granted that Los de ESOL should have. It was a practice that, in Gee's (2000) words, you negotiate to sustain an identity because you are one of them, in this case, one of the Los de ESOL community. In other words, you belong to the affinity group of transfronterizx ESOL college students at Sun University. I will develop the theme of digital literacy practices further in the next section.

Moreover, they shared another affinity because they were all learning English and were currently enrolled in at least one ESOL credit-course at Sun University. As part of their ESOL classes, they all must make use of their digital literacy practices, primarily to access the Blackboard platform. This platform serves two primary purposes in their classes: First, it serves

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as a repository system where students can download lessons and materials, and second, it allows students to submit their assignments electronically by a given time (usually the end of the day - 11:59 pm). I will develop digital literacy practices for learning in the ESOL classroom in the next chapter. During the time I spent with the participants at Sun University, I noticed how they all shared similarity (Moran, 2020), or many affinities (Gee, 2000), as they were becoming TECS, and mainly in their processes of learning English. I started noticing how they commonly identified themselves as persevering and full of aspirations. For example, in an e-assignment where students needed to talk about challenges during their lives, Denisse (1789-1987) explained: "I believe that my perseverance and persistence helped me to enroll (to Sun University), survive, and get a perfect grade this semester and I do not doubt that these qualities will help me to achieve other goals in my daily life." Denisse wrote this during her very first semester at Sun University. Like in the previous example, Denisse also had a positive perspective about taking the best out of every opportunity faced. She explained that registering at Sun University was hard at the beginning, mostly because of visa problems because she was Mexican. However, it was her perseverance that allowed her to continue in the process.

As they were learning English, TECS faced many challenges that included not knowing the language and navigating various institutions, like the U.S. Customs and Border Protection - CBPs and Sun University. However, they were up to such challenges as they had various aspirations linked to learning English. Consequently, even when the institution labeled TECS as needing to improve their English and academic skills in general, TECS always remained optimistic about their experiences as part of their ESOL program. To illustrate, in one of his e-assignments, Samuel (1832-1966) shared how by looking at the bright side, they can always make the most of all the opportunities they are faced with. "In my opinion, one need to seize the

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opportunities, there are always different challenges, and one always needs to see the positive side." Samuel, experiencing a variety of challenges as he is learning English at Sun University, gave him a way to express his desire to remain optimistic despite his daily struggles. Samuel's sense of aspiration provided him with the attitude to remain taking advantage of the opportunities he is granted to obtain a college education in the US. Samuel's search for opportunities in the United States allowed him to positively face all the challenges he encountered in his process of becoming a TECS. Therefore, despite the many discourses that institutions (e.g., Sun University) had about ESOL students, their affinity for learning English exceeded the institution.

Privilege represented another significant affinity among TECS. Privilege meant access to social and economic resources. However, participants demonstrated that how they experienced privilege varied among each other. All of them were privileged because they had the means to secure documents to cross the international border, commute, and attend an American institution, but some differences were still evident. A privilege many of them shared was that, for the vast majority, they were not the first member of their family obtaining a college degree. According to the survey they completed, more than 70% of their parents possessed a college degree. This is significant because it showed participants had access to an economic capital that other juarenses may not have had. In Mexico, pursuing a college degree is not as common. According to data from the INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática) (2015), just 18.6% of the total Mexican population had earned a college degree.

Another feature of privilege that they shared was their documented status. As members of this affinity group, Los de ESOL, were able to physically navigate both sides of the border. As presented earlier, they all had access to proper documentation, which enabled them to cross the US/Mexico border continually, and therefore, they belong to the transfronterizx community,

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which often commute to attend school in the United States. Whether some of them crossed the border with a student visa and others as US citizens, all of them equally could cross as needed for educational purposes. Many of the present dissertation participants even had SENTRI privileges, which helped them cross the border even faster. Having SENTRI privileges allowed TECS to belong to a closed community where privilege was more notorious.

Equally important, another feature of privilege among TECS was that they all possessed smartphones with access to the Internet. For the present dissertation, I am considering their social class as another indicator of affinity based on an array of their demographics in the survey. As part of the completed survey, all participants reported that they had access to smartphones with connectivity features and other electronics, which helped them navigate their lives as transfronterizx ESOL college students. They all reported having an electric heater or shower, a refrigerator, TVs, washing machines, and many of them (83%), laptops, and tablets. 65 % of the participants reported having a desktop computer. It is also worth noting that 26% had a place to stay during the week in El Paso, while they also had a place to stay in Juarez. For these reasons, their affinity as privileged was also compelling in their processes of identity-making.

However, as a heterogeneous group, TECS experienced their privileges differently. For instance, although all the participants commuted to Sun University, some like Pablo and Sonia, had the opportunity of living in the United States during the week. In their case, although they were regularly able to transculturally reposition themselves to experience their lives in Mexico by regularly using their digital literacy practices to communicate with their loved ones, they did not have to plan extensively daily to commute to school. Others, like Berenice and Denisse, had to plan their commute as they crossed on foot carefully. Furthermore, others, like Samuel, had

SENTRI privileges. As illustrated before, although all participants were privileged, they experienced such privileges differently.

In one of the artifacts (an e-ESOL assignment), Sonia (1031972-1051319) stated: "When you go from high school to college, it is one of the most drastic life changes, and even more when you move from your hometown to new city you have never lived in." She had to explain how her life was different from her life when in high school. Like other transfronterizxs in the present dissertation, Sonia lived on the US side of the border during the week and went back to Mexico during the weekends; she expressed during several occasions how moving to El Paso to continue with her education had been a significant change for her. As they narrated them during our interviews, their experiences as Los de ESOL went beyond just learning another language and adapting to college in a new country; their experiences as transfronterizx ESOL college students also included commuting to school to access education.

Another feature of privilege among TECS, especially among the focal participants, was that they had attended English classes before taking classes at Sun University. Some of the participants had similar experiences related to the process of learning English before entering college. For instance, all of them have had previous experiences learning English from a certain point in their lives. To illustrate, Pablo and Samuel had experiences learning English since elementary school, Sonia and Fabi, during middle school, but Denisse and Berenice started high school. Some had access to private English lessons, like Fabi and Denisse, whereas others did not. In Juarez, not every person can afford to have access to private lessons.

The six focal participants' previous experiences in learning English included the use of their digital literacy practices. Fabi, for example, shared with me during her third interview (4138-4396): "En la clase de inglés el maestro me encargaba de tarea ver videos y luego escribía

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un ensayo. Veía uno de gramática y uno de National Geographic, y luego veía otro de dónde yo quisiera de lo que yo quisiera." Fabi attended private individual lessons in Juarez before starting college. In this sense, although their experiences learning English were different from each other, all their experiences equally granted them the experiences of exploring a new community where English was used. Their experiences varied because some participants started learning English in formal settings (e.g., formal classrooms in Juarez) earlier than others. In this community, TECS made use of their digital literacy practices, as Fabi's example showed, as a means of navigating this new community where English was the norm. Just like in the classroom, their levels of privilege were different and based on different circumstances. Therefore, whereas some of them were more advanced in English, others were more knowledgeable of digital literacy practices; but conjointly, they used them both as they were becoming TECS.

4.2. DIGITAL LITERACIES AND IDENTITIES

For transfronterizxs, having access to technology and their digital literacy practices represented a vital asset in their lives. Thanks to these practices, they can communicate, share emotions and experiences, learn, and simultaneously navigate different communities. Because their identities are linked continuously to more than one place, transfronterizx students rely on digital literacy practices and their many digital literacies as a mediating tool that lets them experience their varied communities differently. In this section, I present data that emerged during interviews, observations, conversations, study sessions, and artifacts where focal participants explained how crucial digital literacy practices are in their lives.

During our last study session, I directly asked the students to talk about technology in their lives. Samuel (2698-2957) told me: "La tecnología nos ayuda a explorar el mundo por ejemplo usando Google Maps, que te metes y puedes ver las Islas Canarias así en 3D. Además,

por ejemplo, podemos usar los aviones para viajar y explorar el mundo. We can do everything with technology, everything." With this translanguaged affirmation, Samuel asserts his position as an active user and supporter of their digital literacy practices, such as Google Maps. His digital literacy practices help him connect the many communities he needs to continually traverse as a transfronterizx ESOL college student. However, digital literacy practices, like using Google Maps, allow him to belong to these communities, even momentarily (e.g., visiting the Canary Islands virtually) as he can do "everything." For TECS, their cellphones, as symbolic and material artifacts, were identity artifacts because they allow them to position themselves, in this case, as people who go places and can do "everything".

Like transfronterizxs' identities, the nature of the online communities is also dynamic and elaborated, which can be why Samuel had the perception that technology enables us to do whatever is needed. Here, Samuel positions himself as a knowledgeable person of the ample possibilities that the Internet, and technology per se, has to offer. This resembles how his classmates perceive Samuel as a knowledgeable person (e.g., because he was older and his English skills were more advanced than the rest of the focal participants) who is strong-willed and capable of finding solutions by himself. I believe that his perspective about the multiplicity of options provided by the Internet resonates with how others within his ESOL community perceived him because, given his ample knowledge, he could perceive the use of technology as something more relevant in their lives as TECS than others.

4.2.1. "La Tecnología nos Interconecta": Digital Literacies and Social Media Sites for TECS.

For transfronterizxs, communication enables them to constantly continue attached to their dynamic communities on both sides of the border. To illustrate, Pablo and Berenice agreed

that they could communicate across borders with their loved ones because of technology. When

we were discussing the role that technology was currently playing in our lives, Pablo (7-94)

shared: "Technology helps us to communicate and to investigate other things. Nos

interconnecta." Similarly, Berenice (105-169) said: "Technology helps us to communicate, and it

is a need in this age." Just like the focal participants have been highlighting, I had also observed

how they were continually contacting each other through Messenger and WhatsApp, and they

were constantly connected through their social media sites.

During their last study session, all focal participants noted that their cellphones were

essential for them to continue in constant communication with their family and friends across the

border. During my observations, I noticed how participants tended to have their phones handy (to

check notifications, read texts) even if having their cellphones available during class was not

allowed by their ESOL instructors. In late November (1539-1591), as I was observing class A, I

wrote:

I noticed that many of the participants were paying attention to their cellphones, perhaps

because they were waiting for the oral presentation rehearsals to start. A cellphone rang while the

first team was rehearsing their oral presentation. It was Ernesto's cellphone, but he did not leave

the room to answer. He instead just sent a text message. "Can we please put our cellphones on

silent or vibration?" Miss A kindly asked them. Participants continued paying attention to the

rehearsals.

I observed that their learning journey included incorporating particular typical dynamics

among them (e.g., having their cellphone available and close to them at all times). After a few

observations in the ESOL classrooms, I noticed the significant role that cellphones played for

TECS. As Sonia's next example illustrates, their cellphones granted them access to their

communities back in Mexico. During our sixth study session, Sonia shared (1006-1304): "For me, technology is very important because of my boyfriend and also my family porque puedo estar al pendiente de ellos. Sin tecnología no sabría que está haciendo mi mamá o si pasó algo. Es que mi mamá la verdad es bien preocupona y como por todo lo que está pasando (referring to shootings in El Paso on August 3, 2019)." For these transfronterizx college students, smartphones and other electronic devices were part of their daily practices. Similarly to Sonia's previous example, Fabi shared with me during her second interview (8106-8138): "Mi mamá me manda mensajes siempre y me dice: '¿Ya llegaste al salón? ¿te llevaste chamarra? [risas], ¿traes dinero para regresarte?, ¿te falta mucho para salir?' O a veces me manda mensajes en medio de la clase y me dice: '¿Qué quieres comer?' [risas]. Glancing at her cellphone and answering texts back for Fabi was a crucial digital literacy practice shared among her community of belonging to her family in Juarez. Through this constant communication using her smartphone, Fabi simultaneously belonged to different communities: her family, Los de ESOL, students at Sun University, and transfronterizxs. For TECS, using their cellphones allowed them not only to stay connected with their communities on both sides of the border but to fully belong to these communities by performing practices that they would naturally do when on the other side of the border (e.g., communicating with family members frequently, checking assignments).

Given the multiplicity of features, services, and apps their smartphones provided to TECS, they used them for various practices. For example, gathered from the survey data, 76% of the participants highlighted having an app to listen to music, and 89% of the participants highlighted having an app to stay organized and manage their time. However, most importantly, they shared that 92.75% communicate daily (using digital literacy practices) with people in Mexico. In other words, their belonging to their communities in Mexico was fostered by their

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constant communication with others who were also part of such communities (e.g., family and friends). Thanks to their digital literacy practices, TECS strengthened their roots and sense of belonging to their different communities.

In our sixth study session Berenice (4392-4729) expressed: "Es muy raro que yo ponga muchas historias [en redes sociales]; o sea, no es como que esté posteando o suba fotos o así todo el día. En Facebook es todavía más raro que en Instagram que suba estados; en Instagram más o menos y en WhatsApp sí pongo un poco más. Pero sí uso todo [todas las redes sociales] uso Snapchat, Twitter, todo, pero nomas veo."

TECS's practices varied when navigating their offline communities and their online communities. Paying attention to Berenice's previous example enabled me to understand how TECS' belonging to their different communities, within their social media sites communities, were as complex as their identities. Here, although Berenice accepted that she was using various (social media sites), she stated that she did not post as often. Berenice, using her digital literacy practice of navigating social media sites, represented a different type of belonging to each one; for instance, posting more often on WhatsApp than in others. Berenice's example demonstrates how TECS had elaborated meaningful and diverse identities as part of their different physical and online communities. To illustrate, in several interactions with Berenice, I noticed how frequently she presented herself as a determined and gregarious person; she had a very bubbly personality. Nevertheless, she stated that she performed a passive behavior while interacting on social media by only playing stories instead of creating them. Thus, while she would frequently state her opinion as part of her offline communities, she would not as part of her online communities.

When trying to belong to her online communities, Berenice presented herself more conservatively than outside the virtual community. However, these contradictions let me perceive the complexities and tensions that the participants are involved in as they are looking to belong to different communities by enacting their multiple identities while using their digital practices (e.g., navigating social media sites). It is worth mentioning that these processes include the combination of knowledge and willingness as they navigate the Internet. Said this, TECS possess the required level of knowledge to, for instance, play stories using a variety of social media sites; nevertheless, some of them -like Berenice- decide not to present themselves in such a way actively. Thus, although they use technology and their digital literacies to mediate their making of identity as TECS, their positionality shifts and should not be considered static at any point. This finding demonstrates that depending on the community they are navigating and their level of belonging to it, they will be presenting themselves differently.

As noted earlier, their digital literacy practices were essential for their lives as border-crossers. As Pablo explained, technology for transfronterizxs was crucial because it interconnected them. Thus, their digital literacy practices mediate how they, as transfronterizxs, are interconnected within their many physical, emotional, and virtual communities and how they use their hybridized identities to belong to endless communities. From this sense, Pablo was assuring his memberships to different embedded communities of his own; these communities of belonging (Guerra, 2016) included, for instance, Los de ESOL, college students living in El Paso, people from Juarez, transfronterizxs, and Mexicans. Berenice, similarly, states how technology not only mediates communication but how it has become a need for communication. Their constant changes of identity represented how they look to belong to these communities. Fabi, for example, during her first interview shared with me (8600-8753): "Los jueves que salgo

hasta las 6:00 de la tarde, mi novio se queda conmigo para no irme sola en la calle -porque ya es noche- y luego mi mamá me dice por mensaje: '¿Ya vienen en el camión?' o así." Here, Fabi demonstrates how although she comes to El Paso alone to pursue her education, she is still connected to her communities in Juarez as she relies not only on her boyfriend, but also on her digital literacy practices (e.g., texting her mother back and forth) to navigate her life in El Paso. Said this, although she presents herself as an independent college student who crosses the border daily to pursue an education in the United States, her belonging to the community of those she loves (e.g., boyfriend) and are physically in Mexico (e.g., family) remains an essential aspect of her life even when in El Paso, in this example, because of her needs to feel safe. Fabi's sense of safety is mediated by the digital literacy practice of texting her boyfriend, who accompanies her while commuting back to Juarez; her digital literacy practice of communicating with her mother allows and highlights her family connections as they are traversing both cities.

Similarly, Samuel, who self-presents as independent and is perceived by Los de ESOL as wise and knowledgeable about life because he was older, also shared his safety concern. During the first interview, Samuel shared with me (11389-11683): "Hay veces que es pesado el estar volviendo a Juárez. Vienes con la idea de aquí (en El Paso) que estás seguro, estás bien. Es raro, la verdad que te pase algo aquí. Y en Juárez, como no es así, en cuanto cruzas (el puente internacional) ya te vas guardando el teléfono, vas guardándote la cartera muy bien. Entonces básicamente eso, la inseguridad". Like Fabi's example also demonstrated, TECS experienced safety differently on both sides of the border, and they use digital literacy practices that allow their communication with communities in Juarez, in this case, to feel safe when crossing to Juarez. Thus, they present themselves with an identity as border-crossers when they physically traverse their communities from Mexico to the United States. Nevertheless, also, they present

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themselves differently, with a more careful identity, when belonging to their communities back in Juarez. Similarly, they present themselves with another identity as TECS whose digital literacy practices are successful for communication; this latter allowed them to continually communicate back and forth with their loved ones mediated by their virtual communities (e.g., via Messenger/WhatsApp).

I promptly noticed that TECS relied so heavily on social media sites due to its immediacy. During our first study session in October, we decorated their language lab for Halloween, and I took pictures during our study session. I had mentioned to them that I would be posting them on their lab's Facebook page. The participants were expecting that I posted their pictures immediately. That way, they would be able to see them. I wrote as part of my fieldnotes (7184-7358): "'What's the name of the Facebook page because I can't find it,' Denisse, one of the focal participants, said. At that very moment, I realized that they were expecting that to happen immediately." As participants became TECS, they started considering technology's immediacy as an essential element in their lives. In the previous example, this immediacy would allow them to see their pictures as engaging in campus activities.

TECS frequently made use of their smartphones and their digital literacy practices to navigate their new communities better. Another example demonstrating the relevance of the immediacy of technology, mainly social media sites, was re-told by Samuel during his second interview (6657-6982): "El primer día que me vine solo a Sun University fue interesante. Yo traía mi Google Maps. Entonces ahí me decían los horarios de los camiones. Por ejemplo, tenía mucha duda en cómo se pagaba en los camiones porque sabía que era una maquinita pero no sabía qué onda, y hasta me puse a ver un video en YouTube para saber". Samuel's example here shows how the immediacy of information that YouTube provided allowed him to successfully

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navigate his traverse to Sun University the first time he had to do it independently. TECS took advantage of digital literacy practices (e.g., using Google Maps or YouTube) to navigate their lives on both sides of the border. In their everyday lives, time was of the essence, and immediacy was presented by the participants as an essential quality of digital literacy practices. Also, I showed evidence of Samuel's knowledges about the multiplicity of uses of his smartphone and how they managed their digital literacy practices to become part of their newer communities better (e.g., as members of the El Paso community). More importantly, it demonstrated how he used different digital literacy practices while on each side of the border. Their transfronterizx digital literacy practices to, for instance, navigate the public transportation while in Juarez than while in El Paso differed. While in El Paso, Samuel could access the bus' WiFi or the city's WiFi and find information that allowed him to navigate their new communities better. This immediacy of social media sites regularly allowed TECS to connect and digitally traverse their physical and virtual communities.

4.3. DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES WHILE COMMUTING TO SUN UNIVERSITY

Digital literacy practices were continuously present among participants as they frequently commuted to Sun University. Digital literacy practices were particularly important for participants as they were becoming TECS because they enabled them to navigate their multiple communities and thus use their different identities to show similarity and belonging to such communities. For instance, for the participants in the present dissertation, commuting to Sun University encompassed a variety of practices including, but not limited to, appropriately managing their time, preparing materials for amusement, and constantly verifying their best option digitally to physically cross the international bridge to/from Mexico to The United States or vice versa. To complete these activities, they continuously made use of their digital literacy

practices. As they were on their frequent commute to Sun University, their multiplicity of identities was present. They used their identities as border-crossers, tech-savvy, and the US or Mexican citizens as they were becoming TECS.

Table 5. Digital Literacy Practices for Commuting to Sun University

Digital Literacy Practice	App/Platform
Managing their time appropriately	Alarms on their cellphone
Downloading movies/series in preparation for long waits at the international bridge	Netflix
Checking their best option to cross the international bridge physically	Facebook Groups
Checking the public bus schedule in El Paso	Google Maps
Watching videos as tutorials to pay for the public bus	YouTube
Texting family members to verify when they have crossed the International Bridge	WhatsApp

To commute to Sun University, it was vital for them to appropriately manage their time because they could spend hours (by foot or by car) to cross the border to attend school physically. They would continuously verify which their best option was to physically cross the bridge by interacting with others on social media sites. Because many of the participants had to spend a few hours in their daily commute, they would prepare different ways to entertain themselves while crossing, as shown in the examples below.

Berenice, like other participants, heavily relied on her digital literacy practices as she commutes daily to Sun University. Her commuting resembled the stories of many other participants from the dissertation. She would get to the Mexican side of the bridge by car; her parents, usually her mother, would drive her. She walked the bridge to cross it physically and then took the public bus to finally get to Sun University. Unquestionably, this sort of commuting

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required a firm commitment from all the participants and sticking to a tight schedule to be on time in class. When Berenice related her commuting experience during one of her interviews (7634-7792), she emphasized the importance of participating in digital practices as a way to facilitate their border crossing: "Antes de venirme [a El Paso] para cruzar, veo como están las líneas. Hay un grupo en Facebook, que sube la gente [información de] los reportes [de los puentes internacionales]. Luego ya cuando cruzo [a El Paso], me fijo en una aplicación de Google Maps, a ver a qué horas pasan los camiones, cuál camión es el que va a pasar más cerca o el tranvía si viene cerca". In this example, Berenice presented us with various digital literacies that she engaged in as Sun University commutes. She conveyed how vital is her virtual membership to the *Reporte de Puentes* online community is to her as it allows her to appropriately manage how much time it will take her to get to Sun University in El Paso. This Facebook page is entirely devoted to informing the community members about the waiting time at the different international bridges (Juarez/El Paso). Participants generally provide pictures and videos to illustrate how long the waiting line is and, therefore, provide users with an estimate of expected wait times. For TECS, participating as members of this virtual community was vital as it provided them with information that helped them to better plan their days as they were commuting. Not only Berenice but many participants who did not have SENTRI privileges participate in this *Reporte de Puentes* community. Equally important, she highlights how, thanks to these digital literacy practices, she can also verify the bus schedule to take her to Sun University.

Berenice's constant transcultural repositions were mediated by her digital literacy practices while committing to Sun University. In the example above, Berenice's practice of digitally checking the line at the bridge before being driven there required not only sufficient

knowledge about the many virtual communities or communities (e.g., *Reporte de Puentes*

Group) she could participate in; but most importantly, a deep understanding of how to

transculturally reposition herself by using technology and her digital literacy practices as

mediating tools. Berenice transculturally repositioned herself by checking from Juarez in

advance how the waiting time was at the bridge. She was aware that she would manage her time

better if she could verify what was happening on both sides of the border, thanks to the Facebook

mentioned above group. Berenice (1176-1344) also shared with me during her second interview:

"Ahora que cruzo todos los días (a El Paso), la tecnología juega un papel muy importante porque

ps uso Google Maps cuando ando acá y le aviso a mi mamá 'Oye, que ya crucé.'" As shown in

this example, without her cellphone Berenice would not be able to let her mother know that she

was safe, and she would find it more difficult to physically navigate her community in El Paso

where she needed to take the public bus to get daily from the bridge to Sun University.

Berenice's examples are representative of the lives of many other TECS because as they prepare

for their daily commute, they engage in many of the same digital literacies Berenice presented.

Instances like checking Facebook groups, setting the alarm, or notifying family members that

they have crossed the international bridge, demonstrate how their lives are constantly attached to

more than one community. They made plans in one country for their activities in another

country. This said, their digital literacy practices frequently serve as mediating tools to

continually reposition themselves as these allowed them to continue performing their activities

on the other side of the border.

  Although all of the focal participants were transfronterizxs, they experienced their

physical and virtual crossings differently. For instance, Pablo and Sonia, who continue coming

back to Mexico during the weekends and holidays, spent the rest of the week living in El Paso.

The rest of them, the other four focal participants, experience their lives as transfronterizx college students by crossing daily by car and walking the U.S./Mexico international border bridge. As they continued this journey across their multiple communities, they were involved in this "dually-linked process of 'becoming other' to both home and their host national-cultural contexts" (Hornberger, 2007, p. 2). For example, Pablo and Sonia were more frequently exposed to their community of people attending school in El Paso because they lived in the city and had more face-to-face time to belong to this new community. Pablo and Sonia living in El Paso enabled me to see how their cultural communities were always merging in their identity-making processes as they were becoming TECS. Although they moved to live in the United States to attend school, they were still virtually in constant contact with their fellow ESOL classmates and loved ones in Mexico. Nevertheless, Sonia and Pablo's digital literacy practices differed from the rest of the focal participants as they did not struggle to cross the bridge daily, which entailed specific digital literacy practices (e.g., checking the Facebook groups). It is worth noting that during the weekends, or when they had to travel back to their city, they also engaged in these digital literacy practices just like the others did.

The following excerpt illustrates how thanks to their digital literacy practices, TECS are constantly going back and forth from their diversified physical and virtual communities. "Sí, Miss; yo estaba haciendo línea a pie (en el puente) pero vi el mensaje de Fabi y de volada me brinqué (la división de automóviles y peatones) y me subí a su carro. Si no ps no hubiera alcanzado a llegar." (Berenice: 676-844). When Berenice and Fabi entered the classroom that day, they were both out of breath; "sorry Miss, we were at the bridge," Fabi told us in English. It was evident that both of them had been running to make it to class on time. Berenice, later on, explained to her classmates and I in Spanish that as she was making a line to cross the bridge by

walking, she received a message from Fabi, who had previously seen her from her car as she was also trying to cross the bridge to come to school. It was evident that thanks to their digital literacies, and of course, previous experiences physically crossing the border, they were able to contact each other via Messenger to make it to class.

This scenario shows how TECS are aware of their virtual communities' advantages and what entails crossing the U.S./Mexico border daily. They both knew that it was faster to cross by car during that time than by walking. Their dynamic responsiveness (Moran, 2020), which Moran defines as how transnational individuals respond to certain expectations or demands from others, allowed TECS to cultivate their belonging to different communities (e.g., Sun University students and transfronterizxs) simultaneously mediated by their digital literacy practices. In the previous example, their contact via Messenger added to their knowledges on how to navigate physically crossing the bridge faster. These digital literacy practices permitted TECS to belong to their community as transfronterizxs, but conjointly, to their community as college students in the United States. The example shared by Berenice helped me to see how TECS were continually making use of their virtual communities as a means to mediate their lives as transfronterizxs. Fabi and Berenice made use of their digital literacy practices to communicate with each other easily and physically crossed the border together to attend their classes at Sun University.

During my observations, I noticed behaviors that surrounded TECS' digital literacies. Some of these behaviors included a repetitive glance at their cellphones, an imminent need to charge their electronic devices, as well as frequent calls to update and refresh their apps. At first glance, this may be just a habit of any young adult; however, after analyzing my data, I realized that these behaviors resulted in their habits as young people and their lives as TECS. As I noted earlier, TECS used their cellphones to navigate their different communities, to join their

communities simultaneously, and to traverse them. Through their digital literacy practices, TECS could continually connect with their many communities on both sides of the border, demonstrating their ways to look for belonging within these communities. To illustrate, one day, as the focal participants were having a conversation about the importance of updating apps and cellphone systems, Berenice shared that she had been avoiding updating her iPhone. She said she did not want to be without her phone at any moment; she ended up updating her phone during that session, and for her amusement, it did not take long. "Because I noticed that they were constantly charging their phones as soon as they entered the classroom and lab, I decided to ask them what the reason behind it was. Sonia [106-222] replied: "Si me quedo sin batería ahorita pues me duermo en el camión en vez de ver una serie" and Berenice immediately after added: "si no cargamos los teléfonos nos quedamos en el puente porque ¿quién nos recoge?" To communicate with their loved ones on both sides of the border, TECS primarily used WhatsApp. To get from Sun University to the international bridge, most participants take the bus/trolley to the bridge. Because the focal participants cross the international bridge by walking, it is crucial for them having their cell phones charged at all given times; they walk the international bridge from El Paso to Juarez as part of their commuting activity by themselves, and when in Juarez, they called their relatives and close friends (parents and significant others, primarily) who will then pick them up after they have crossed the bridge.

During the second interview, Berenice (8714-9293) shared with me: "Mis papás ya están todos modernos, porque antes nomás tenían sus galletitas[5] los dos. Ya ellos bien emocionados, se creen la gran cosa con su WhatsApp y nos dicen (a mí y a mis hermanos): 'Agrégame a WhatsApp'. Y pues entonces ya para todo cuando no estoy con ellos es de que 'me llamas a

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[5] Slang in Mexico for older phones; not smartphones

WhatsApp', y 'sí, nos avisas por WhatsApp'". Berenice's close relationship with her loved ones by using the digital literacy practice of contacting them via WhatsApp was common among all different participants. During an informal conversation, Nardea, one of the general participants, shared with me (441-595): "WhatsApp es más amigable con el tiempo de las personas porque si quiero lo reviso y si quiero no y si tengo tiempo. Lo revisas cuando no tienes nada que hacer o así de que tienes cinco minutos y pues lo revisas. Puedo preguntar así de que 'oye, ¿qué dejó de tarea (la maestra)?'" Similarly, Sonia shared with me during one informal conversation (4-63): "Uso WhatsApp para estar en contacto con mis amigos y familiares, es lo que uso en vez de mensaje de texto. Es la aplicación que todos usan en México para comunicarse y se me hace más fácil y que gastas menos en utilizarla, aparte de que puedes compartir muchas cosas, como fotos, videos, documentos y así". Sonia explained to me that what she really liked about WhatsApp was its convenience of usage through Wi-Fi; she further explained that she always used her Wi-Fi at her house, apartment, Sun University, and when available to avoid spending her own smartphone data.

With the previous statements, TECS shared that their constant glancing at their phones constituted a way to regularly contact people who also belong to their different communities. Thus, by using the digital literacy practice of constantly glancing -or replying if possible- to texts, primarily WhatsApp messages, they could continuously cultivate similarity and belonging to such communities. In other words, their comments made me realize that it was not that they were not able to stop using their electronic devices, but by the contrary, that it was thanks to these digital literacy practices that they were constantly interacting with, that they were able to continue fulfilling their activities as transfronterizxs.

Carlos, however, highlighted (0-51): "Con mi familia es de mensajes y no Whats[6] porque de iPhone a iPhone los mensajes jalan[7] muy bien, pero en general uso Whats porque hay muchos amigos de allá[8] [que] es la única manera de localizarlos. Si traen Samsung y no tienen saldo, siempre hay Wi-Fi para mandar un Whats". Like Sonia's previous example, Carlos emphasized how although he had equal accessibility to text messages than other texting services (e.g., WhatsApp), not all within the communities he belonged to were in the same position. This finding remains valuable because it demonstrates nuances among uses of digital literacy practices to distinct circumstances. For example, whereas all highlighted their preference to use WhatsApp, not all perform this digital literacy practice for the same reason (e.g., not spending their data). Therefore, while the primary purpose was to communicate across borders, their belonging to their communities still included specific nuances. However, in short, as previously stated, TECS repeatedly made use of their digital literacy practices because these allowed them to belong to their different communities simultaneously easily (e.g., by continually checking their phones to keep in touch with their loved ones on the other side of the border).

4.4. DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES AS A NEXUS TO CONNECT THEIR DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER

For TECS, digital literacy practices represented a critical component to continue with their daily communication with friends and family members on both sides of the border. Similarly, Fabi (3550-4210) mentioned how she also uses WhatsApp with her sister to communicate with her parents:

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[6] Short for WhatsApp
[7] Slang in Spanish for work (messages work well)
[8] Back in Mexico

Mis papás no usan redes sociales pero con mi hermana sí me comunico por WhatsApp, y

luego me dice: "¿Dónde estás?", yo a veces específicamente no sé decirle dónde estoy.

Porque yo sé que realmente quien me pregunta dónde estoy no es mi hermana, sino mis

papás que me vienen a recoger [a Sun University]. Yo sé que le dicen: "Oye, muéstrame

exactamente dónde está", entonces tomo una foto de donde estoy y luego ya se está

mandando. Normalmente no mando ubicación sino más bien la foto así que "estoy aquí

exactamente".

This previous example showed how part of their lives as transfronterizxs is using their

digital literacy practices, taking a picture to highlight a location, to navigate various

circumstances as they are trying to traverse different communities at once. In this scenario,

Fabi's sister serving as liaison with their parents to communicate from one country to another, in

this case, Mexico and the United States, allowed Fabi to successfully communicate with her

parents while at Sun University, in order for them to know where to pick her up after she

finished school. Fabi relied on her digital literacy practices to navigate this new life as a college

student while she is frequently physically and emotionally in two different countries and to live

two different lives as a daughter and as a student. In this previous example, Fabi's sister works as

a liaison because there is a need to locate her physically, Fabi, in a space (campus) that is

unknown to her and her parents, who have to pick her up after classes. In other words, Fabi's

practice with her sister of working as a liaison for her family allowed her to continue belonging

to this community, her family, while becoming a member of other communities (e.g., Sun

University, TECS). Fabi can fully connect her communities (family/school/U.S./Mexico) by

digitally sharing her location. For Fabi, using WhatsApp represented evidence of the digital

literacies that she and her sister managed. However, simultaneously, it also represented a

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mediating tool to connect all her physical and virtual communities, as evidenced in the act of

taking a picture to share a physical location in the U.S. for her parents in Mexico. Equally

important, Fabi's sister's liaison role allowed Fabi to continue establishing her belonging as a

Spanish speaker user of WhatsApp while also belonging to Sun University, a community that

privileged the use of English when learning this language. This example highlighted how

although Sun University as an institution communicated Fabi the message of acquiring English

to belong to its community, conjointly, Fabi kept her Spanish to belong to other communities

(e.g., her family) advantage of being bilingual. As part of their dynamic responsiveness (Moran,

2020), TECS did not feel pressured to avoid freely using Spanish while at Sun University after

they had started their English classes. This liaison process permitted Fabi to constantly

transculturally reposition herself by using their digital literacy practices to communicate with

different communities to where she belonged; she then used her digital literacy practices better to

navigate her life as a transfronterizx ESOL college student, but also to sustain communication

with her loved ones.

TECS made use of their digital literacy practices to stay close to their loved ones on the

other side of the border. As part of their in-betweenness, TECS uses their cultural, social, and

linguistic repertoires to embrace specific communities' belonging. Therefore, to better

understand TECS' identity-making processes, one must understand their constant in-betweenness

(Anzaldúa, 1987). As part of these processes, TECS had to learn to navigate such communities

and learn to appreciate the circumstances in which staying or leaving one community over

another could represent a benefit or a struggle. TECS used their digital literacy practices to

alleviate their constant in-betweenness. During one of our conversations after class, Sonia told

me: (2-1)

"A veces siento feo de irme y pues ya ni sé si ir [back to her townhome] porque no hago nada de tarea y me siento mal; llego el domingo y ahí estoy haciendo todo. Esque ya medio me estoy acostumbrando a estar acá [en El Paso]."

During the study, only Sonia and Pablo were living in El Paso during the week; and whereas crossing constantly and frequently could be perceived as an advantage, this also represents an excellent commitment for these transfronterizx ESOL college students. For Sonia, in specific, it represents the eternal internal struggle between wanting to be with loved ones and keeping up successfully with her academic responsibilities. Anzaldúa (1987) observes how, despite what many cultures might expect from women, they have the choice of becoming self-autonomous by educating themselves. For Sonia, this constant in-betweenness gives her the bitterness of physically being divided from her family during the working week, but also the opportunity of getting a college degree in the United States. I highlight that these transfronterizxs are only physically apart from their families as they heavily use available technologies (e.g., texting, video-calling) to remain close and fully belonging to their communities in Mexico (e.g., their families).

Participants' desire to belong to new communities enabled them to use their newly strengthened linguistic abilities in English to listen to types of music that they had not been exposed to earlier in their lives. In other words, as they were becoming TECS, they used the digital literacy practice of finding music on the Internet, which enabled them to become members of other communities, such as the community of people who listen to music in English. Samuel (2100-2398) shared: "Últimamente, no sé, creo que es por tanto ambiente [en Sun University], que ya he escuchado como que de repente mucho rap o cosas así, cosas que escuchan más acá [en los Estados Unidos]. Se me ha pegado de repente y digo: 'Voy a buscar

unas canciones.' Samuel used their digital literacy practices to look up music on the Internet, granting him belonging to a new community and like in the previous example, learning English for TECS represented accessing other communities, which they accessed by using their entire linguistic repertoires, including the new linguistic features acquired in the ESOL classes, as a tool for belonging. TECS are in a constant sense of wanting to belong and become thus "discourses of belonging manifest processes of identifying as desired members of a community or as its unwanted aliens, identifying with their target communities or with communities left back home" (Caldas-Coulthard et al., 2016, p. 101). In the previous example, I illustrated Samuel started developing new discourses as he was becoming present in other virtual and social communities in which he had not been able to participate before becoming the desired member of this new community as now he possessed the linguistic knowledge to participate as part of the community. For Samuel, realizing that he was able to listen to a different genre in English and that he was able to explore such a new genre for him was an opportunity of amplifying his understanding of the "American" culture using English as a mediating tool. In Samuel's case, he explored other pop-culture music genres -rap music- as he started becoming a transfronterizx ESOL college student. In this sense, Samuel was taking his experiences of learning English outside of his ESOL classroom as a way of exploring new cultural practices (e.g., rap music). For Samuel, the digital literacy practice of finding music on the Internet granted him access to another community, allowing him to increase his identity. By using language as a tool, Samuel was able to present himself to the Sun University community as a transfronterizx ESOL college student who successfully navigated other communities, for example, music genres that were novel for him. Thomson (2007) highlights, "recognizing the influence of popular culture in our own lives is the first step to harnessing its educational potential" (p. 83); consequently, Samuel's

attention to rap music as a consequence of his interactions with people and cultures from *de este lado,* was helping him not only to develop his literacies outside of the classroom but conjointly, those used inside of the classroom as well as he was able to increase his vocabulary and listening skills in English.

Consequently, Samuel's example demonstrates how in the process of becoming a transfronterizx ESOL college student, he developed a new, additional identity where he can respond linguistically differently to situations. This also demonstrated how, as a transfronterizx ESOL college student at Sun University, he could construct varied hybridized identities that he associates with being/not being a community member (e.g., the rap music community). Consequently, TECS' hybridized identities.

Another way TECS connected their different communities on each side of the border was by using digital literacy practices, which included Sun University's official platforms and means of communication. During his second interview, Samuel shared with me (9176-9335): "Yo uso Blackboard porque es donde recibimos nuestras tareas, donde hacemos quizzes; quizzes principalmente, además mis tareas, y puedo ver mis calificaciones en tiempo real." This example demonstrated how their dynamic responsiveness (Moran, 2020) led TECS to use their digital literacy practices to navigate their lives as college students. In this sense, although Sun University had imposed on them the use of Blackboard as their official educational platform, they could use it for various tasks that were not necessarily imposed on them (e.g., checking grades immediately). As part of their digital practices, all participants learned to use their official university's email to appropriately communicate questions and concerns with their ESOL instructors while not in the classroom. They needed to use their official email for communication purposes with instructors and the department's director.

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Although TECS used their digital literacy practices, other non-digital literacy practices, like taking hand-written notes, were also observed during my ESOL classrooms visits. During observations, primarily when observing the focal participants, it was evident that Pablo and Samuel recurrently tended to take e-notes about class' materials and teachers' explanations when taking notes. In contrast, all the female focal participants took hand-written notes during the observation periods. Fabi (8593-8856) once stated,

> Personalmente yo prefiero no usar la tecnología durante la clase, a menos que sea el
>
> traductor o bueno sí, nada más yo creo que el traductor o que no esté buscando algo en
>
> Blackboard en ese momento, pero para tomar notas a mí me gusta tomar mis notas en el
>
> cuaderno.

Similarly, Denisse openly emphasized how although she misses turning-in hand-written assignments as she used to back in Mexico, she also notices how advantageous it is to submit her assignments via Blackboard; she highlights having an exact time to submit the homework makes it easier.

Dennise claimed (8241-8619):

> La verdad sí extraño mucho escribir, pero creo que el entregarlas por computadora
>
> facilita más todo eso para nosotros. Pero sí extraño como que escribir y entregar algo y
>
> que lo revisen y así, pero no, sí es mucho más fácil en computadora, por lo de los
>
> tiempos, por lo de tener una hora exacta a la que la tenemos que entregar y por todo eso.

As they were becoming TECS, the participants learned to apply their previous literacy practices to a new context and a new format. Furthermore, by constantly using their transformed literacy practices to digital ones, the participants could re-shape their online identities. From Denisse's example, it was evident that they bridged their literacy practices of taking hand-written notes

learned and practiced in Mexico with novel digital practices learned in a new educational system added when attending an American educational institution. Denisse explained how learning these new digital literacy practices mediated their college-needed educational platforms and apps' navigation. Examples like the previous one highlight how digital literacy practices served as mediating tools to shape TECS' identities.

On the one hand, they must adapt to using new digital literacy practices promoted by the university. However, on the other hand, they recognize that learning these digital literacy practices is beneficial for them as they navigate their many physical and virtual communities. The implementation of new digital literacy practices in their lives led them to constantly make their identities in their virtual communities and their physical communities as they were looking for belonging. In other words, their digital literacy practices helped them navigate their different communities even if they were not physically present as part of a given community.

I must highlight that these transfronterizx students find it easier to submit their assignments online, but that this transcultural repositioning lets them continue participating in their classes, and their English learning processes, by accessing everything online. As stated earlier, transcultural repositioning allows transnationals to move rhetorically to their many imagined worlds where they can live experiences in different social worlds (e.g., countries, contexts), different languages (English and Spanish, here), and their different ways of understanding their constant co-construction of identity (Guerra, 2004). In other words, participants can experience everything that they have been learning linguistically, culturally, and educationally on both sides of the border, thanks to technology. In Dennise's example above, she restates the benefits of using Blackboard as part of her ESOL class as she can have more flexibility in terms of timing. For TECS, time is an invaluable resource because of their constant

commuting, and it cannot be misused. For Denisse, by the time she needs to complete and submit her assignment, she is already back in Juarez as part of her daily commuting activity.

Nevertheless, she can still participate as an active member of her ESOL community back in the United States thanks to her digital literacy practices. She transculturally repositions herself as a member of her community as a college student at Sun University in the U.S. while also participating in other communities (e.g., virtual, Juarez). In Mexico, Denisse's literacy experiences included taking notes and completing assignments by hand; as she started attending college classes at Sun University in the United States, Denisse broadened her literacy skills by using other digital media Blackboard platform- to complete assignments. This situation enabled her to continue her education even when she was out of the United States, and she was back to her townhome in Juarez. Denisse's example remains meaningful because it presents data on how participants were constantly traversing their many communities thanks to technology; by using Blackboard, email participants could virtually and emotionally move back and forth from their hometown in Mexico to Sun University in the United States.

Additionally, Denisse's example also remains relevant because it shows how her previous literacies changed to digital literacies as she started her process of becoming a transfronterizx ESOL college student. It was interesting to notice that for all observed classes, whereas assignments and in-class activities were submitted electronically, mostly all their exams had to be hand-written. As they were becoming TECS and were adapting to new digital literacy practices (e.g., the constant use of Blackboard), they could continue utilizing their previously learned practices from Mexico (hand-written notes) as part of their new community, the ESOL classroom. Digital literacy practices like constantly using Blackboard allowed TECS to

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transculturally reposition themselves as they could access their community at Sun University

while in Mexico, or vice versa.

4.5. DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER ESOL PEERS

Transfronterizx college students equally developed their online social relations with Los

de ESOL than those which were face-to-face. In the present study, TECS frequently used social

media sites to communicate with one another to let others know how the line at the bridge was or

if they would make it or not to their ESOL class. Students in all classes commonly reported

communicating with each other about their crossings. This resembles the findings from another

study, Pearson and Hussian (2017). In their study, the authors also noted that participants were

likely to be attached to social media sites mainly to be aware of where and when were their

friends at.

To understand the importance of digital literacy practices to communicate with other

TECS, I should remind the reader what commuting meant for TECS' lives. Commuting

sometimes represented a struggle for the participants in this dissertation. Some extensively talked

about the time consuming and stressful daily crossing activity, and others shared stories of

surveillance practices by Customs and Border Protection agents. However, their perseverance

and commitment to pursue their dreams (e.g., obtaining a college degree from an American

university) made their continuous commuting valuable. Fabi, for instance, shared in one of her e-

assignments (154-225): "As a border traveler, I am sure that we have complained [about how]

the long line at the bridge can be so tedious and stressful. But I think that if we start to look at

situations from a positive perspective, we will always take advantage of the things we label as

bad." She shared how important it is to change the perspective one could have about challenging

circumstances (e.g., crossing the border daily to attend college). These words about crossing the

border daily is a dare she takes daily to continue her degree's path despite the challenges that institutions like the Customs and Border Protection Agents - CBPs may present. These experiences do not deviate TECS from accomplishing their goal of pursuing a college degree in the United States. These circumstances let us perceive how to belong to different communities (e.g., the community of college students in an American institution), TECS needed to overcome daily obstacles, and digital literacy practices were a tool to do so.

Again, from their perspectives as TECS, having continuous access to communicative elements and devices allow them to participate as members of more than one community simultaneously actively. For instance, TECS participated in their ESOL community, their Juarez community, their transfronterizx community, and their Sun University community, to name a few. This remains important because it helped me understand how they were becoming TECS as they still belonged to different communities. During our study session, where we discussed the importance of technology nowadays, the focal participants explained how their different digital literacy practices help them communicate with others. Samuel (437-584) said: "At Sun University, our community is the ESOL program, and we use technology to communicate. In ESOL, we are a community inside another community, which is Sun University." Pablo (592-810) expanded the point: "Our community depends on the context; sometimes is the ESOL program but sometimes is Juarez, so both. We have the community of Sun University, the community of the border, the community of El Paso. It all depends on the context." These are the communities they are connected to and how they feel interconnected through technology and their digital literacy practices. TECS were aware that their belonging was constituted not by being members of one community exclusively, but several simultaneously.

During one of the observations, Samuel immediately informed me, as I was the authority

figure, when he finished talking with Fabi. "Acabo de hablar con Fabi y está atorada en el puente

y Denisse siempre se viene muy pegado a la hora así que de seguro no alcanza a llegar, Miss"

(939-111; tenth observation in Miss B' class). As members of the same ESOL community,

Samuel was knowledgeable of the ways of crossing on Denisse. In the same manner, he was

knowledgeable about how he could contact Denisse because he was worried about her. This

time, Samuel noticed that many of his classmates were late for class and contacted them via

Messenger to determine if they were well and what was going on. Facebook, notably Messenger,

was commonly used among all participants for this type of situation. I noticed how by using their

digital literacy practices (e.g., contacting each other via Messenger), TECS demonstrated support

and solidarity as they used those practices to check how the rest were doing at the bridge. In this

example, as a member of the same ESOL community of TECS, Samuel was preoccupied with

his friends, acted as a mediator when informing me about his classmates' tardiness, and

demonstrated that he knew his friends, like when he showed he was knowledgeable of the ways

of the crossing of Denisse, "siempre se viene muy pegado a la hora."

An essential element to belonging to this community was showing compañerismo, as

demonstrated in the example above. The digital literacy practices Los de ESOL utilized aided

them to strengthen their bonds as members of the same group as transfronterizxs. In one of her e-

assignments, Denisse (1377-1622), for instance, shared: "Waiting on the bridge line [by foot] has

allowed me to meet new people and strengthen friendly ties. An example of this is that

sometimes I ran into friends, and it was a good time to talk. Moreover, mainly, meeting new

people has been something I enjoy very much." Denisse demonstrated that in the process of

becoming a transfronterizx ESOL college student, she has been able to create social bonds with

others under similar circumstances to hers, other transfronterizxs. During one of the interviews, she re-told how she has met people at the bridge who are also Sun University students and who became her friends later on. Long waits at the bridge allowed transfronterizx to catch up with their friends or make new friends, and digital literacy practices had an active role in strengthening those social bonds of compañerismo. The following chapter devotes a full section to providing details regarding compañerismo in the ESOL community.

Chapter 5: The Digital Literacies of Transfronterizx ESOL College Students

Digital literacy practices are social practices; social groups have their unique practices that are contextual to a time and place. This chapter discusses a specific social group called *Los de ESOL,* and I present their shared and collective practices. To understand how the study participants, Los de ESOL, used their digital literacy practices to navigate their ESOL community primarily concerning learning, I compiled information from interviews, study sessions, e-artifacts, observations, and informal conversations. In this chapter, I present information about how they used such literacies concerning their previous and current academic experiences, and as they were becoming transfronterizx ESOL college students at Sun University. I paid attention to their educational experiences in their ESOL classroom. As I have explained earlier in this dissertation, I refer to the participants interchangeably as transfronterizx ESOL college students or the short I created, TECS, and Los de ESOL*,* which was how they called themselves.

Fundamental for the present dissertation is the discussion of the educational experiences TECS have had during their lives. In this chapter, I present their experiences chronologically and their changes as they become acquainted with their lives in the United States. I start by presenting their educational experiences in Mexico, then I present their educational experiences in the United States. I must say that although the information I present here follows a chronological order, the participants have a dualistic orientation (Lam & Warriner, 2012) perspective meaning that they were continually comparing both countries (Mexico and US).

I present information about how they orient practices to their lives on both sides of the border. To analyze the data, I rely primarily on experts on transnational and transfronterizx schooling to let the reader better understand how the educational experiences of TECS constantly

led them to belong to some communities (e.g., Los de ESOL community). The authors' previous findings led me to gain a deep understanding of the many instances in which TECS were living their lives on both sides of the border. Most importantly, their findings helped me understand how TECS managed to live their educational experiences on both sides of the US/Mexico border. McKinley (2011) states, "They [transfronterizx students] must come to terms with their positions in the ebb and flow of life in the U.S.-Mexico border, the bilingual-bicultural tapestry that is the root of their experience. The repositioning for them is both physical and metaphorical, as they constantly challenge situations that are new to them, in a setting -at least geographically- that is familiar" (p. 2). In this sense, it is evident that the transfronterizx ESOL college students presented as part of this dissertation have been collecting varied and dynamic educational experiences, which granted them a unique perspective and access to several communities. These perspectives were not only about transnationalism but also about schooling in general. Given the focus of the present dissertation, I paid particular attention to the digital literacy practices for educational purposes.

5.1. DUALISTIC ORIENTATION: THE FIRST CHANGES NOTICED AS THEY WERE BECOMING TECS

It was worth exploring their lives before college because participants started a new life in the US and simultaneously started life in a new educational system. Moreover, TECS were aware of the differences between these two educational systems (Mexican and American); they could enumerate the similarities and differences. Lam and Warriner (2012) refer to this phenomenon as a dualistic orientation in transnationalism. The authors explain how transnationals constantly compare their social, cognitive, and cultural experiences on both sides of the border. The most salient differences that the participants frequently shared were: (1) the differences in terms of

economic resources between educational institutions in Mexico and educational institutions in the US, and (2) the types of digital literacies required as they were attending educational institutions on both sides of the border.

Dualistic orientation is evident in the following quote from Samuel, who said: "El sistema de enseñanza entre los dos países es muy diferente" (8379-8440). Samuel indicated that, according to his previous educational experiences, teachers back in Mexico do not try to teach you, or if they do, they barely do it. Samuel specified that many teachers in Mexico become teachers just because of the salary they might be able to receive, and although he is confident that some educators in the United States may be just the same, he has not experienced that yet. Although some participants like Sonia and Berenice found their previous educators in Mexico to be supportive in many ways, unfortunately, others like Samuel and Pablo had firm opinions about teaching in Mexico. As a transnational myself who studied most of her life back in Mexico, I should highlight that it was just in a few instances where I encountered an educator who was not passionate, knowledgeable, and caring about the students, just like in the US. With this in mind, I noticed how Samuel, like other participants, shared that the differences and similarities between the two educational systems went beyond language differences. Zúñiga and Hamann (2009) claim that it is because of these differences that identity-making and (re)affiliation to other communities new for them as transnational students tend to occur while in school. More importantly, the authors notice that the negotiations of identity frequently occur because schools on both sides of the border, the US and Mexico, are not necessarily ready to fulfill this mobile population's needs and understandings.

Samuel (242-307) highlighted as part of one of his assignments, "As an International Student, there were a lot of changes before and after I started studying at Sun University. An

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example could be the cultural shock I have experienced between Mexico and the USA." This statement remained for me as one of the most powerful the focal participants made for several reasons. On the one hand, participants experienced complex contradictions. For instance, Samuel identified as an International Student. Nevertheless, although he lived in Juarez and crossed the border daily to attend Sun University, Samuel is a US citizen. Whereas Samuel's social practices (e.g., crossing the US/Mexico international bridge daily) led him to consider himself an International Student, institutionally, his citizenship contradicted this view. As a cross-border myself, Samuel undoubtedly reminded me of Anzaldúa's wise words, "Being Mexican is a state of soul-not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both" (p. 84). On the other hand, Samuel's practices of crossing the bridge changed, as he was becoming a transfronterizx ESOL college student. One of the changes he faced was that although he used to cross primarily for shopping, he never considered crossing a struggle until he had to be on time to school, and the lines at the bridge were long. This was when he decided to apply for SENTRI privileges, which he promptly obtained. He started by highlighting the cultural shock he has experienced between the two nations. Despite that, Samuel had crossed to the United States his whole life. Another change for him was the meaning attached to physically crossing the bridge. Crossing the bridge for Samuel started to have a different meaning as a college student, although he had always been a transfronterizx. Examples like Samuel's helped me understand how TECS were always making identity, given the many communities they were starting to belong to simultaneously. In this sense, their identity-making was driven by numerous factors, including how they interacted within their communities and how they perceived and presented themselves as they were looking for belonging. Through these processes of becoming, the participants started to identify themselves as Los de ESOL.

During observations, interviews, and study sessions, the focal participants recurrently emphasized how different their schooling experiences were in terms of economic resources. Although only just two of them, Samuel and Pablo, had experiences attending private and public schools in Mexico, all participants were able to note how the resources, equipment, and tools in their Mexican schools were different from those they were currently using in the United States. From Fabi's experiences, Mexican schools did not provide them with resources to meet their basic needs, such as having a heater.

In one of the interviews, Fabi, for instance, noted (514-884):

"Siempre desde el kínder estuve en Juárez [en la escuela]. Entonces las escuelas donde yo estuve, en ese sector, tienen muchas carencias de diferentes cosas. Entonces, bueno, eso fue como que mi kínder y mi primaria, y luego en la secundaria entré a la Federal Uno. Pero en mi primaria era de que hasta cancelaban las clases porque no había calentón; ya en la secundaria fue distinto porque teníamos calentón hasta en los pasillos. Además, también había una impresora en la cafetería, pero era parte de la cafetería. O sea, tú pagabas en la cafetería [para usarla]. Y en la prepa, fue como que volví a la primaria, pero en la prepa porque entré al Bachilleres 19. Cuando yo estaba no había cafetería, había un puestecito, entonces nadie comía en el puestecito, bueno al menos yo no comía en el puestecito."

From the example above, it was noticeable that her dualistic orientation was present frequently, as Fabi's interpretation of their previous schools in Mexico varied from the ones she was having during the study at Sun University. She evidenced her dualistic orientation to compare her educational experiences from Mexico and the ones in the United States. She explained (3573-4046), "cuando entré a Sun University algo que me gustó mucho, fue que podía llenar mi

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botecito de agua. Y dije: 'Nos podemos ahorrar mucho plástico,' porque en Juárez tenemos

bebederos, pero no es lo mismo, porque como están afuera, se ponen las palomas, los pájaros y

no voy a beber de ahí por higiene." From her perspective then, it was noticeable that educational

facilities in Mexico and the United States were distant from one another as the economic

resources offered by the American institution she was currently attending were notably different

from what she had previously experienced. She acknowledged that whereas the schools she

attended back in Mexico were limited in resources, she positioned herself as different from

others from the same schools. She positioned herself as a more affluent student compared to the

rest of her classmates back in Mexico.

5.2. DIGITAL LITERACIES FOR TECS: THEIR CONSTANT DUALISTIC ORIENTATION

The more time I spent with the participants, the more I noticed that they constantly

needed to compare their previous school experiences with those they were living in while in

college. Their continuous dualistic orientations allowed me to understand better how many of

their current digital literacy practices were built on their previous (educational) experiences in

Mexico. For example, as I explored the digital literacy practices TECS used to engage in, Sonia

explained that the schools she attended back in Mexico did not have enough electronic devices or

equipment to offer to their students for educational purposes. Sonia reflected on the differences

that she had seen during her schooling in Mexico, and now at Sun University. One of the most

salient digital literacy practices highlighted by Sonia and many other participants was using their

own electronic devices for educational purposes. She highlighted that given the limited resources

that the schools could offer in Mexico, instructors constantly encouraged them to use their own

electronic devices, especially their cellphones, while in class to complete assignments. She noted

(286-746):

"En cierta forma sí se me hacía bien [usar los celulares] porque allá [en México] no teníamos libro o como algo que nos proporcionaran dónde pudiéramos buscar allí y pos no habían computadoras como para eso entonces no sabíamos de dónde sacar la información. Por eso sí era necesario [usar los celulares] pero pos muchos [alumnos] se desviaban del tema y no hacían eso; o sea, se ponían en las redes sociales y decían no pos después lo buscamos en la casa o lo terminamos allá, pero pos no hacían nada."

Sonia's example illustrates how, since earlier, during their lives, these transfronterizx students utilized their own electronic devices and digital literacy practices as a means of fulfilling their academic needs. Nevertheless, she noted that she would have preferred schools to provide them with any equipment that could help them complete the task instead of using their cellphones, leading to distraction. Sonia was then aware that although possessing digital literacy practices and equipment can be beneficial academically, this can also deviate students' attention given the multi-layered options that a cell phone provides. In the previous example, Sonia demonstrated how she and her classmates could complete their assignments by using their cellphones. She mentioned how they could strategically use their digital literacy practices to overcome the limited resources their Mexican schools used to offer them.

Nevertheless, she also mentioned that although some of them tended to use such digital literacies for their academic work, others just used their time to access their social media sites instead. As Darvin (2016) highlighted, technology has entirely changed our social communications and practices. For Sonia and her classmates, having access to online technologies and their electronic devices (e.g., cellphones) facilitated their educational practices back in Mexico and allowed them to stay in close contact with others through the continuous use of SNS.

Consequently, it is not surprising that many of the participants were carrying such digital literacy practices (e.g., taking notes on the phone, using the cellphone for research purposes and translations, taking pictures of lessons) to their college experience. Samuel, for instance, shared that in high school, he took Informatics. However, because the school's computers were not rapid enough to work, he would complete all tasks at home: *"En la escuela nos proveían computadoras para hacer todo lo práctico, pero no eran muy buenas computadoras, entonces yo todo lo que se nos solicitaba, agarraba la teoría y me lo llevaba a mi casa para hacer las prácticas."* During observations and conversations, I noticed that the focal participants continued practicing similar digital literacy practices than those mentioned in Mexico's experiences. For example, I noted that Samuel and Pablo would commonly finish their e-assignments at home, just as they would do during high school. I also noticed that they were not doing it because of a lack of resources at Sun University, but because they enjoyed spending time with their new community, their ESOL classmates. For Los de ESOL, learning English as part of this learning community meant also spending time with their friends. I will devote a section below to provide details about how the participants became very empathetic with their classmates as they started to see others as members of the same community.

As Sonia's example suggested, given their limited technological/digital resources in school, they were constantly encouraged to use their own electronic devices, which commonly contributed to the misuse of such devices during class time. It is then relevant to continue nurturing the digital literacy practices the participants were already bringing from their schools in Mexico, but simultaneously guide them to use them wisely for educational purposes and not just as a distraction.

5.3. CONNECTING THEIR MULTIPLE COMMUNITIES THROUGH THEIR CELLPHONES

Participants' lives and their digital literacies changed as they became TECS. One of how participants' practices changed was how they used their smartphones. Participants' educational and non-educational experiences in the US highlighted cultural, linguistic, and academic contrasts between the experiences they had previously encountered in their schools in Mexico. Their experiences changing from one educational system to another guided me to understand through the data collection stages and the analysis that the participants lived in a duality where they were simultaneously contrasting their experiences on both sides of the border but still bringing their knowledges and practices to their new context. For instance, participants brought from Mexico the digital literacy practice of using various apps on their cellphones to ease their lives. It was evident that their participation and belonging in their previous communities in Mexico and those in the United States were not precisely the same, which led them to present themselves differently on each side of the border as they were looking for belonging to these many communities. In this subsection, I briefly explain how Samuel interacted with his

cellphone to eat at Sun University. This example helps to understand how students navigated their new context at Sun University.
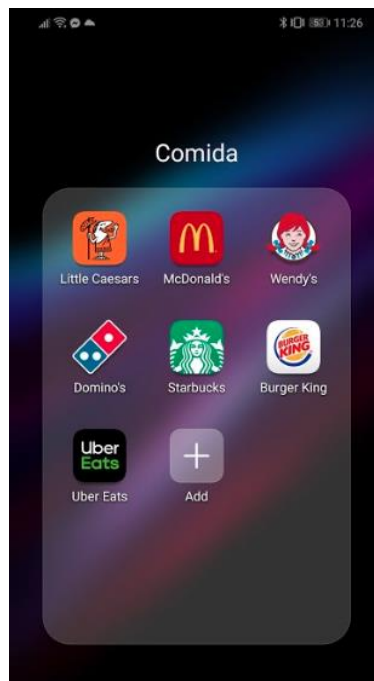
Illustration 2. Samuel's screenshot from his smartphone

As part of their participation, I invited them to share screenshots and pictures that they found relevant as part of their lives as transfronterizx ESOL college students. Samuel highlighted that having access to various food chains on campus and nearby was *cool* (participant's word). Sonia and Samuel emphasized how they both liked having access to Starbucks on campus. From the screenshot provided (*see illustration*), I noticed that one of the apps that Samuel had downloaded was Starbucks.

I chose this previous screenshot because it illustrates these transfronterizx ESOL college students' diversified and dynamic lives. It represents a combination of their cultural, linguistic, and technological knowledges. This picture presents the practice of shopping online, and by itself, it demonstrates how these participants' knowledges were linked to their digital literacies. Here Samuel showed how he was knowledgeable not only about the many food chains that were

close by his college campus but that he was also knowledgeable of the apps he could use when purchasing from those sites. This practice was relevant for me because it demonstrated how Samuel was not only bringing this practice from Juarez, as he had already installed some of the shopping apps before entering college; but it also showed how he performed this practice of shopping online more frequently while in El Paso given the Internet connectivity. Samuel explained that he liked having these food apps on his cellphone because he can earn rewards, which turn into free stuff. He shared (173-258): "Aquí (en El Paso) está padre porque todas (las aplicaciones) te dan como rewards que si juntas te dan cosas gratis". As he explained this to me, I noticed that he was knowledgeable of how to appropriately apply his digital literacy practices of shopping online to perhaps look at the offered items. I also noticed that he was knowledgeable of additional benefits of using such apps like collecting rewards. This translanguaged conversation occurred during a study session. Samuel shared with us that although he was quite familiar with all of them, he only used their corresponding apps when he was in El Paso because, in that city, the apps worked. Samuel shared (8-172): "Bueno aquí sí uso todas las aplicaciones porque de hecho sí funcionan (laughs). La de Starbucks por ejemplo ya la tenía desde antes, pero en Juárez nunca me funcionó". Connectivity issues in Juarez are much more common than in El Paso. This without considering the data plan they may/may not have. As they explained, in El Paso, TECS had a variety of hotspots that they could easily access, which allowed them to make use of their digital literacy practices more efficiently. Samuel's explanation allowed me to understand that his digital literacy practices included understanding the use of a food app and how to download the ones that would be useful for him, as he was becoming a member of the Sun University community.

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Furthermore, as we discussed how Samuel used his food apps, I discovered that the items listed on the apps were in English. Samuel continued (260-426): "Estas las tengo porque es lo que como aquí (Sun University). Si no están aquí, ps están muy cerquita que puedo ir caminando cuando estoy aquí. Y ya como y me regreso". As Samuel was bringing his digital literacy practices (using food apps) from Mexico, he was able to physically explore food chain places near Sun University.

However, on the other hand, I found this picture relevant to their context as transfronterizx ESOL college students because the settings of his cellphone were still in Spanish, as we can see from the word *comida*. For transfronterizxs, having access to these franchises is common on both sides of the border. This caught my attention because, as I mentioned earlier, participants shared that whereas the food items were listed in English, they could still see what the different places offered. I found this particularly important because all the focal participants attended their first semester as ESOL students during the data collection time. All of them were enrolled in the lowest level offered by the program at Sun University.

The fact that Samuel's heading was still *comida* in Spanish represented an essential instance of transcultural repositioning because whereas Samuel's cellphone heading was still in Spanish, he was using his -back then- limited English to explore the food options offered near campus to eat. I found this important to mention because although the ESOL program classified him as having limited English by registering him at the lowest level, he demonstrated that he could use his different resources at hand to navigate his new communities better.

Most importantly, he carried out his digital literacy of using a food chain app to purchase, explore food items, and collect rewards. I found this picture powerful because it represents a combination of their cultural, linguistic, and technological knowledges, which are frequently

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present in their lives as transfronterizx ESOL college students. Although the information presented here explained mostly how TECS used their smartphones to easily navigate their Sun University community for eating while in El Paso, it is worth reminding the reader that TECS heavily relied on their digital literacy practices linked to their smartphones as it was presented in the previous chapter. For example, they used their digital literacy practices as they were commuting to Sun University, communicating with their loved ones, taking the bus and riding it, and educational purposes, as it will be discussed below.

5.4. THE PROCESS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR TRANSFRONTERIZX ESOL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Transfronterizxs' learning processes are complex, and given today's required use of technologies for schooling at the college level, paying attention to how they interact with technology, and others is essential. For this reason, understanding the many digital literacy practices that transfronterizxs bring to their new ESOL classroom community is crucial to fully understand the dynamic processes in which they use their digital literacy practices to mediate their learning and social encounters within the ESOL classroom community. This section presents information about how participants used their varied digital literacy practices to navigate their dynamic language learning processes. As explained earlier, I interchangeably refer to participants as TECS and Los de ESOL, but both refer to the same group; however, one represents the way I call them, and the latter represents the way they call themselves.

5.4.1. The ESOL Program at Sun University

Situated on the American side of the US/Mexico border, the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program at Sun University allows transnational and transfronterizx students to improve their English language skills. The program mainly targeted their academic

needs at the college level. The program enrolls primarily incoming students from Mexico whose first language is Spanish, and whereas classes are taught in English, translanguaging practices among students and some educators are common. As explained in chapter 3, the program includes six different levels of English.

Prospective students who received a post-secondary diploma from a country where the mainstream language is not English must take an English language placement test before being allowed to take any of the courses. Consequently, all participants went through this process to be enrolled in one of the observed classes. Although all the excerpts from observations and study sessions occurred during my visits to their physical ESOL classroom, all their classes used a blended learning approach, meaning that their digital literacy practices were always present. First, most of the classes and study sessions were held at the campus computer laboratories, where each of the students had access to an individual computer. Besides, in all the rooms where I performed observations, participants had access to a screen and projector where their instructors presented lectures' relevant information. Because all students were sitting in front of their computers in these laboratories, they continually used their digital literacy practices. Their instructors repeatedly shared all ESOL instructional materials via Blackboard and web links. Besides, all in-class and out-of-class assignments had to be submitted online.

5.5. How TECS Use Electronic Devices and their Digital Literacies to Navigate Sun University

For Los de ESOL at Sun University, having access to technology and various electronic devices was necessary. The use of electronic devices in the classroom resonates, especially for these transfronterizx ESOL college students. Looking for an education in the United States, they must frequently rely on their digital literacy practices and access to technology to comply with

the practices related to returning to their hometowns back in Juarez (e.g., communicating with their parents as soon as they crossed the bridge).

As previously stated, all participants in this dissertation had access to various electronic devices, and particularly relevant to this project's purpose, 100% of the participants noted having a smartphone with access to the Internet. For them, continuing their education without access to technology would be almost impossible, as they cannot stay that late in school because they need to return to their homes back in Mexico. From my observations and constant interactions with them, it was evident that participants had access to electronic devices inside and outside their ESOL classrooms and that they continuously used them to acquire a new language.

Many of them (60.87%) had to immediately return to Juarez after classes due to extended wait times on international crossing points. Most importantly, access to technology and their digital literacy practices allowed these participants to transculturally reposition (Guerra, 2016) themselves, and to connect with their classmates virtually. This was relevant for me because they not only moved across spaces virtually, but they also mobilized their knowledges across communities in order to comply with the needs of the communities on the other side of the border. Crossing the bridge physically can be time-consuming. Thus, having the knowledge and the resources to access class materials and assignments at any time given the Internet's virtues helped TECS continue living their hybridized lives (as virtual and in-person students). In other words, these digital literacy practices allowed them to constantly transculturally reposition themselves and continue belonging to their multiple communities simultaneously. By continuing their education partially online, as they were transculturally repositioning themselves from Juarez to access their communities at Sun University through the Internet, the participants had time flexibility, which enabled them to feel less stressed about spending time crossing the bridge.

In this sense, participants were not only moving virtually across spaces to use their time wisely but simultaneously. They were able to use their previous knowledges and experiences to better navigate their communities, for instance, here, concerning time. Additionally, they managed the stress of waiting on the bridge by continuing their education via online platforms.

Although each of the computer laboratories where participants took classes was equipped with about 15-25 desktop computers, I noticed a couple of participants using their own devices (tablets or laptops) during all observations. When conducting general observations in the classrooms, just like when spending time with the focal participants, I promptly noted those who had their own laptops would rather use their own instead of the ones at the computer labs. During an interview, Denisse (2511-2957) stated:

> "Me parece muy, muy padre, porque por ejemplo si mi computadora no llega a servir, ya tengo la opción de hacer las tareas ahí; por ejemplo a veces que no la quiero cargar porque sí está pesada y luego cargarla en el puente y todo eso, sí se me hace muy fácil como que hacer la tarea aquí [en Sun University], llegar un poquito temprano y luego ya avanzarle, o en algún tiempo libre que tenga pues ya puedo avanzar en mi tarea en vez andar ahí perdiendo tiempo o así [durante las horas libres que tengo en Sun University]."

Examples like these give me a better perspective of how participants navigated their communities at Sun University. Furthermore, although many students at Sun University might be moving towards the use of campus equipment to complete academic assignments, the situation of taking advantage of campus resources remains unique for TECS. On the one hand, when they are back in Juarez, they might have limited or weaker Internet connectivity. On the other hand, they need to carry their electronic devices, probably by foot, while commuting to Sun University as they are crossing the international bridge. During an informal conversation (329-416), Javier,

one of the participants, told me he could not finish his homework on time because of connectivity issues. He stated: "Si lo hubiera acabado [el trabajo asignado como tarea] pero se fue Telmex y Telcel como por cinco horas en todo Juárez." Javier's example illustrated how participants more easily struggled with their connectivity when in Juarez than when in El Paso. In his second interview (4394-4766), for instance, Samuel told me: "Empezar a venir a Sun University fue muy pesado porque desde mis tres días de orientación hice tres horas en el puente." It seemed to me that their language education had been affected directly by their experiences of becoming transfronterizx ESOL college students. The previous examples allow us to understand how they are becoming ESOL students, and part of becoming ESOL students for transfronterizx includes using digital literacy practices to cross. From Denisse's example, we can see that although she possessed the economic means to have her laptop and bring it to school, this requires much more than just carrying it. It included carrying it through the bridge as she was walking to cross the International US/Mexico border, and then as she took the bus to get to Sun University, and doing it again during the afternoon as she was returning to Juarez. For these reasons, she decided to take her learning experience to another level and fully increase her membership as an active member of the Sun University community, where she made use of the services offered by the university (e.g., offering computer labs for students). Therefore, a way of belonging to the Sun University community for Denisse and many other TECS was using the services and equipment provided at Sun University (e.g., computer labs).

5.6. DOWNLOADING AND ACCESSING APPS ON THEIR CELLPHONES FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

In this section, I present instances where participants used cellphones as mediating tools for educational purposes, which enabled them to apply their digital literacies. For example,

participants used their cellphones as translators. During one of our interviews (1329-1569), Pablo

openly shared with me how he used his cellphone as a translator: "Cuando necesito usar el

traductor de Google en mi teléfono, lo uso. Muy rara vez uso el audio, solo cuando una palabra

es muy difícil de pronunciar; uso el traductor para ver como se ve la palabra." For Pablo and

many other participants, using their digital literacy practice of translating a word/phrase using

their smartphone allowed them to translate a word digitally and listen to how a word was

pronounced in English. Denisse (1846-1996) also mentioned using the cellphone as a translator:

"Antes usaba el traductor de Google en Google Chrome, pero ahora ya descargué la aplicación

[Google Translate] porque está más rápida y práctica." As I observed all the participants, I

noticed how as the semester progressed, many of them started downloading the Google translate

app, and other digital dictionaries (the Merriam-Webster dictionary), to translate words faster

and easier. Both Miss A and Miss C suggested that students use this e-dictionary over others,

including a thesaurus feature.

Sonia (557-579) shared during one of her interviews that she used the cellphone as a

translator: "Para una palabra que no entiendo luego luego uso el traductor de Google porque es lo

más rápido y lo más fácil." She explained further (286-746) that having a cellphone was even

more critical when she was in high school because they did not have the sources at school in

Mexico, like books or computers, which their new community of Sun University does offer to

them as ESOL students. The digital literacy practice of using the cellphone as a translator was

not learned while in college, TECS relied on the digital literacy practices they brought from

Mexico for their academic work in the ESOL classroom. Students also used their cellphones to

play Kahoot, a learning-based platform that ESOL instructors often used as an educational

technology tool. Talking with participants, I noticed that although many of them were familiar

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with Kahoot, they did not have its app installed. However, they relied on another digital literacy

practice (accessing the website directly from an electronic device by typing *kahoot.it*) instead of

using the app. For instance, as part of my field notes from class B, I wrote (2383-2608): "To play

Kahoot, five of them used their cellphones, and just Fabi used her laptop. All her classmates

noted that it was faster to use the cellphone; they were all familiar with the app because they had

previously used it." Besides, many of them used their cellphones to check Blackboard, a

mandatory repository system for all their ESOL classes. These activities were relevant for TECS

because they helped navigate different communities and helped them learn English. During an

interview (1279-1629), Denisse shared with me that she was not only using Blackboard as a

website but also using its app. "Sí, descargué la app de Blackboard y sí me gustó más porque es

como que más fácil ver el porcentaje de lo que llevo." Los de ESOL also used their cellphones to

continue in constant contact with their ESOL classmates as they had to collaborate for group

projects and presentations.

Additionally, others relied on their digital literacy practices and access to electronic

devices to efficiently navigate their educational demands. For example, Samuel (1185-1479)

shared that his constant use of the cellphone was because it was just easier to do everything

through it: "Yo digo que es como que más rápido en el teléfono." Samuel was familiar with

using various apps (including Google Drive, Gmail, Blackboard app, YouTube, and Microsoft

Office) because he regularly accessed them from his phone to continue in constant access to his

life at school rapidly. As has been explained earlier, all these digital literacy practices helped

TECS navigate their different communities successfully and, more importantly, they helped them

learn English. For example, Samuel told me in one of our interviews (2965-3003) that he used

OneNote frequently given its accessibility. "Yo uso la aplicación de OneNote; que es una libreta

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básicamente electrónica de Microsoft. Es como PowerPoint o Excel, y está muy padre porque

puedo tomar mis notas a gusto, escribir en todas partes." As Samuel explained, he has instant

access to what he records during his classes in the United States by using this application

wherever he is located. For Samuel, OneNote is a tool that efficiently allows him to

transculturally reposition himself by reorienting himself and using previous knowledges and

experiences to quickly access what he is learning in his ESOL classes and bring it back with him

to Mexico to continue learning English. He, and many other participants, used their cellphones to

use the Blackboard App's notifications feature that the application provides to the students. The

notifications allowed TECS to be aware of new posted materials and assignments, which allowed

them to be better prepared for their ESOL classes. Having access to technology and access to the

digital literacy practices described here helped the participants alleviate the stress of spending

too much time commuting to and from school on the other side of the border. To summarize the

different uses that TECS gave to their electronic devices, mostly for educational purposes, I

present the following table:

Table 6. TECS and their Digital Literacy Practices for Educational Purposes

Tool (hardware)	Digital Literacy Practice	Platform (software)
Cellphone/tablet/laptop	Translating	e-translator/e-dictionaries
Cellphone/tablet/laptop	Listening to word pronunciations	e-translator/e-dictionaries
Cellphone/laptop/desktop computer	Assessing their own and other students' learning	Kahoot

cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Checking class notifications	Blackboard
cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Finding materials	Blackboard
cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Checking grades	Blackboard
cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Turning-in assignments	Blackboard
Cellphone	Taking pictures for note-taking	Camera
Cellphone	Communicating with classmates and/or instructors for matters regarding ESOL class	WhatsApp, Messenger
Cellphone	Socializing Social Networking Sites (SNS) in English	Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram

cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Completing digital assignments	Web-based software: Google Drive/Microsoft Office/Onedrive Online Microsoft Applications
Cellphone/Tablet/Laptop	Note-taking and organization	Web-based software: Onedrive Online Microsoft Applications
cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Researching academic resources	Using a database: Opposing Viewpoints[9]
cellphone/tablet/laptop	Showing evidence and inform others	YouTube
cellphone/tablet/laptop	Finding authentic materials which helped to improve English skills	YouTube, Netflix
cellphone/laptop/tablet/desktop computer	Assessing their mathematical and logical skills online	Assessment and LEarning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS)
Cellphone	Shopping/ordering food while on campus or nearby	Food chain apps

5.7. NAVIGATING DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

One of the most used tools for TECS students was, unquestionably, Blackboard, which was required to complete their e-assignments in all their ESOL classes. This educational

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[9] Online database to access current social issues. Students at Sun University had full access to it.

platform is well known in higher education, primarily in the United States, as it serves as a learning management system. It is worth mentioning that all observed ESOL classes at Sun University heavily relied on Blackboard either as a repository for previous and current lessons or as a more dynamic tool where students are assigned to complete discussion boards, play/create videos access links. For ESOL students, Blackboard was a tool that helped them in their process of learning English. During observations (1631-1716), Pablo, Samuel, and Fabi constantly accessed Blackboard to retrieve the PowerPoint presentations and articles provided by Miss B, which were materials for learning English.

The participants involved in this dissertation reported no difficulties using Blackboard as an educational tool. Furthermore, although it was the first time they were using Blackboard, they had previous experiences using EdModo back in Mexico, another global education network where students can take quizzes and complete assignments. Unlike McKinley's (2011) findings that demonstrated that Blackboard's use represented a struggle for the transnationals in her study, the participants involved in this dissertation reported no difficulties using Blackboard as an educational tool. Crucial to this finding is that the participants from this dissertation, have had prior extensive computer experience. For instance, all the focal participants reported having previous experiences using EdModo, another educational platform. They used it in middle school and high school and reported that they would use it similarly to how they use Blackboard, mostly as a repository to find lectures, distribute assignments, and manage communication with students.

Other platforms that were important for their ESOL classes, and which they accessed and navigated easily during my time with them for educational purposes, were: ALEKS, Canva, Google Docs/Slides/Sheets, Kahoot, Opposing Viewpoints, Prezi, and YouTube. Whereas TECS

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also accessed other social networking platforms during the observations and study sessions, they used the ones mentioned earlier for educational purposes.

To begin with, Assessment and LEarning in Knowledge Spaces, known by the participants as ALEKS, is a Web-based, artificially intelligent assessment and learning system that enables students to remediate some of their courses to fulfill the requirements for college-readiness. For students entering through the PAA (Prueba de Aptitud Académica[10]), taking ALEKS helps students reinforce their logical-mathematical skills. All ESOL students must take the PAA, and if needed to also remediate their mathematical skills, they might take ALEKS. The institution's assumptions about ESOL students when they entered college, were then, that they were not academically ready to belong to the mainstream community without first enrolling in these courses. Since I started my observations (6315-6321) with the general participants, I noted that because the students were in a computer lab, many tended to use their spare time to check either their grades, performance, or assignments via ALEKS.

Some TECS used *Canva* to make diagrams and brainstorms. Although among the focal participants, Fabi was the one leading the use of *Canva*, other general participants also demonstrated being extensively knowledgeable on the use of such a platform. As part of their instruction, all ESOL students in the three classes observed had to do an oral presentation - individually or as a team- based on one of the essays they wrote during the semester. For these presentations, some of the teams used *Canva;* others who were not aware of other platforms used PowerPoint presentations or Publisher from Microsoft Office (1334-1385), which were the ones

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[10] The PAA is a test that assesses the skills and knowledge students need to do college-level academic work. This exam is completed by students in Spanish.

used by their instructors. Later, students presented these products as samples for their final speaking projects -the oral presentations. Fabi explained to her classmates that she liked it when she discovered *Canva* because of its many options to create presentations. The students who used Google Docs/Slides/Sheets did it due to these tools' affordances to be shared as a live feature where all team members could be working simultaneously without worrying about missing others' changes (1654-1729).

Instructors and students equally used platforms like Kahoot, Opposing Viewpoints, and YouTube. For the most part, I noticed that participants started mirroring their ESOL classroom community's practices by selecting such platforms to comply with their language classes' requirements. For example, Denisse (0-205) and Fabi (341050-370818), on their own, started using the platform *Canva* to complete other ESOL assignments, like creating mindmaps required as part of their pre-writing essay stages. See illustration 3 below**.** As part of their English learning processes, instructors requested participants to follow a specific process for writing essays. The writing process included first, creating a brainstorm, then the first draft, and, finally, the clean, final version of their essay. Therefore, for TECS at Sun University, using their digital literacy practices represented the means to complete their ESOL e-assignments and represented a way to demonstrate their belonging to their new ESOL communities. As presented in the pictures below, Denisse and Fabi started to use their digital literacy practices of writing in Canva to fulfill their requirement of creating a brainstorm, as part of the English writing process, although their instructors did not provide specific instructions on using this or any other software. To mirror students' final writing exam, during the semester TECS are given different options to complete their essays. For this assignment, the students needed to write an argumentative essay where they clearly stated their position, against or for. They were provided two different topics: (1)

Presidents around the world are doing a good job, or (2) single-sex education is beneficial for students. Topics were provided by their ESOL instructors. By using these different platforms in their participation as ESOL students, the participants expanded their repertoires of digital literacy practices. TECS used these platforms to read, write, speak, and listen in English, in a variety of ESOL activities. However, conjointly, they also enlarged their English language abilities as they had to navigate all the platform's settings in English -at least while at Sun University, where all the settings are by default set in that language-.
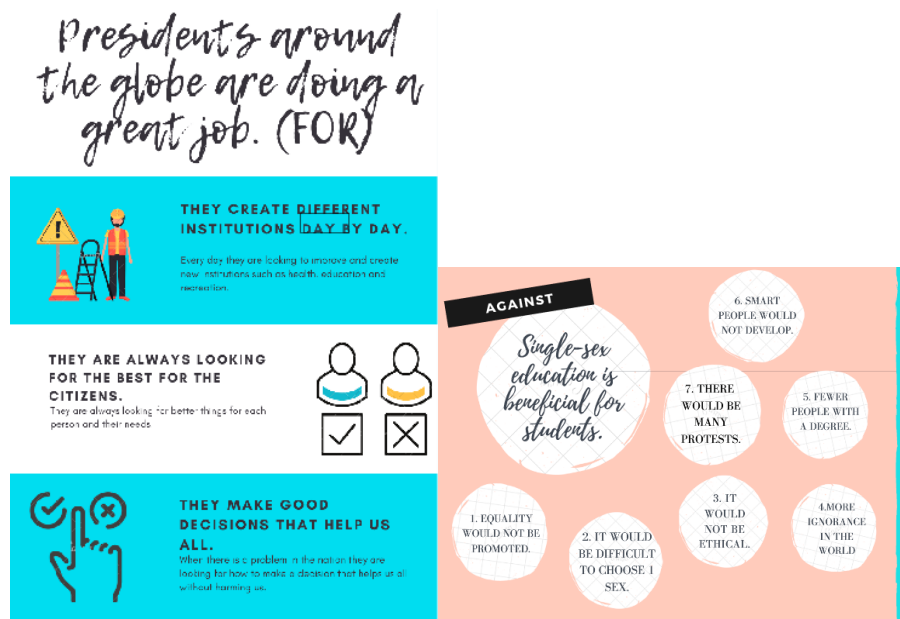
Illustration 3. Focal participants samples of their use of Canva

During our sixth study session, Pablo used his cellphone to find visual information on YouTube to build from the conversation all of us we were having as part our study session. The topic for the day was technology. As we discussed the many uses of technology in our lives, Pablo used his cellphone to share a YouTube video with all of us. "Now, technology is giving us more opportunities," Pablo shared (147-215) as he was accessing the YouTube video. The video was about future trips to the moon, which he used to exemplify the opportunities technology is

currently providing us. It was altogether in English, and he did not use captions. "Is this the first time you are watching it?" I asked. "No, many times," he said. His digital literacy practice of finding visual information on YouTube allowed him to explain himself better as he was building on the conversation using oral English. This example was vital for me because it demonstrated that he knew plenty of English, despite the level of ESOL he was enrolled in, especially when dealing with relevant topics for him. It also caught my attention because, during our study sessions and regular classes, he was usually the one who struggled the most with English in terms of reading, writing, and speaking.

Nevertheless, I noticed how by repeatedly playing YouTube videos, Pablo could expand his vocabulary and fluency in English, at least for topics that he found to be interesting. Pablo never mentioned using YouTube videos to improve his language skills during our study sessions; however, my observations evidenced it. Finding materials in English relevant to them personally (including songs, tutorials, and documentaries) was a common digital literacy practice among TECS, which allowed them to improve their English oral language skills (e.g., vocabulary), as Pablo's example demonstrated.

As they improved their digital literacies by engaging in various platforms, they were simultaneously encountering opportunities for polishing their English skills. For example, as they were navigating Blackboard, ALEKS, Canva, and Opposing Viewpoints, they developed their reading English skills because all the platforms' settings and content were in English. Consequently, participants needed to read English to be able to navigate them frequently. By digitally navigating these platforms, participants were constantly interacting with authentic materials, which helped them improve their English skills, whereas it was purposefully or not.

Fong et al. (2016) state, "learning a second language involves identity-negotiating processes" (p. 143); in the case of these transfronterizx ESOL college students, they enacted their social cultures through the replication of the use of particular digital literacies (e.g., creating a PowerPoint presentation), and the exploration of newer platforms (e.g., Canva). Having the opportunities to use these digital practices allowed TECS to approach their language educational experiences from an engaged-learning perspective than if they were in classes that did not afford the technology. Thus, whereas learning English was the goal for these participants, their digital literacy practices allowed them to position themselves as members of different communities (e.g., proficient users of a given platform) within their ESOL learning spaces.

5.8. THE CULTURE OF ESOL AT SUN UNIVERSITY

Studying on both sides of the border was, unquestionably, one of the more evident experiences which TECS constantly compared. Whereas the transnationals usually cross back to their home country during holidays or special occasions, transfronterizxs crossed more often (weekly, daily, or more than once a day). In a sense, the constant merging of cultures, languages, and educational systems was always present for them during our informal conversations, interviews, study sessions, and even in their ESOL assignments.

It was evident that even though participants were experiencing a new educational system, they were continually bringing with them their previously learned digital literacy practices. They also brought with them ways of relating to one another. They were able to demonstrate how empathetic they could be with other classmates. As part of one of her e-assignments, Fabi (1693-1899) shared: "I have always thought that every person is a world and many of them have opened their world a bit to tell me their situations despite knowing them, from ladies who start telling me their stories, to students who also cross every day and understand how tired it is

sometimes." Through these words, Fabi restated her empathy and resilience to continue crossing

to pursue an education in the United States. Just like Fabi, TECS constantly enacted their

belonging to the ESOL community at Sun University by creating bonds with others and showing

care and empathy through *compañerismo.* The list below englobed TECS' practices

demonstrating *compañersimo:*

- **Helping** each other with technology
- **Translating** for each other
- **Sharing** e-materials with each other
- **Teaching** each other how to navigate Blackboard (e.g., to find an assignment)
- **Printing** hard-copy assignments for each other
- **Logging-in** for someone else
- **Assessing information** using a digital visual aid (e.g., PowerPoint/Kahoot)
- **Solving technical problems** collectively.

List 1. Practices which demonstrate compañerismo among TECS

In their ESOL classroom community, they experienced a mixture of all the features

mentioned above in just one place. There, they were able to belong to various cultures (e.g.,

Mexican, American, border, college, and ESOL student), but simultaneously, they also belonged

to several communities where diversified linguistic repertoires like academic and non-academic

Spanish and English were accepted. Within these communities, TECS predominantly highlighted

the uses of these varieties on the U.S./Mexico border. Song (2012), similarly, reminds us that in

the transnational community: "[Students] negotiate these multiple and shifting memberships with

those communities they left behind, local ones, and ones they hope to become part of in the

future. This negotiation is reflected in their current linguistic practices in the forms of language

attitudes and language learning goals" (p. 508). Therefore, I will present examples of these

merging of cultures and experiences in these ESOL college classrooms.

In one of the artifacts (an e-ESOL assignment), Sonia (1031972-1051319) stated: "When

you go from high school to college, it is one of the most drastic life changes, and even more

when you move from your hometown to new city you have never lived in." The assignment prompt required her to explain in English how her life was different from her life when in high school. As other transfronterizxs in the present dissertation, Sonia lived on the U.S. side of the border during the week and went back to Mexico during the weekends. She expressed during several occasions how moving to El Paso to continue with her education had been a significant change for her. Their experiences, as they narrated them during our interviews, went beyond just learning another language and adapting to college in a new country; their experiences as TECS included also commuting to school to access education.

Nevertheless, as the participants demonstrated many similarities among themselves, some also demonstrated different perspectives on working on assignments in their homes outside Sun University. For example, during an informal conversation with Carlos, one of the general participants, he stated: "Pero por decir, estar en la biblio [de Sun University] con 40 cabrones que no sabes ni su nombre, pues no está chido. Nada como estar en tu casa haciendo la tarea solo y relajado." This example demonstrated that not only was there an assumption of equal access to technology about what others had, but perhaps, that Sun University did not represent the same type of safe space for all participants equally. Therefore, although they were becoming members of the Sun University community, TECS, just like Carlos' example, were still more heavily attached to other communities, like their Juarez community or their transfronterizx community. For example, Carlos distanced himself from those who spent their time at Sun University who represented members of the mainstream community in El Paso; he separated himself from the general population at Sun University, but not his very own ESOL community. Besides, Carlos's example illustrates how participants understood their ESOL classroom/peers as a community where they were granted membership because they all shared similar characteristics, struggles,

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and concerns. From Carlos' point of view, not all students at Sun University were equal, the reason why he did not feel comfortable spending additional time at the library where other members from the community of Sun University, but not his ESOL community, could be present. Consequently, *Los de ESOL* positioned themselves as a close group, close to each other. However, they positioned themselves as different from students who belong to what they considered the mainstream community at Sun University.

Another relevant feature of their culture in the ESOL community was having a sense of *compañerismo* [sense of fellowship]. This sense of compañerismo among the participants was mediated by various factors, including the shared experience of coming from Mexican high schools. This shared experience was something that also excluded them from the mainstream community at Sun University. Another factor was that they were becoming members of a community where they shared where they came from -Mexico/Juarez- and where they were standing as emergent bilinguals, and where they were going as college degree seekers. These factors then constituted powerful bonding among themselves. Moran (2020) explains that whereas young people tend to oversee their creation of friendships among certain groups, they commonly frame their friendships based on their ethnic identities (e.g., country of origin or language). For TECS, demonstrating compañerismo was not just a sign of their friendship; for me, it was a sign of how their similar experiences and their sense of empathy led them to navigate their community as transfronterizx ESOL college students.

5.8.1. Compañerismo.

Los de ESOL at Sun University had a bond that was manifested by shared practices and values. These shared values were observable through their collective and shared practices. For instance, one of the most salient values was unquestionably their sense of compañerismo, a value

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that helped me to understand their community as a unit. More importantly, this sense of compañerismo helped the participants navigate learning English as their second language, a new country, a new educational system, and new cultures. As they were committed to these processes, they learned to build strong communities with their ESOL classmates, supported, taught, and represented each other.

What must be highlighted about the ESOL community is that they managed to collectively navigate their new educational system. Although Los de ESOL were not native-English speakers, they played a crucial role in building each other's path to strengthen their English skills. As a community, Los de ESOL frequently helped each other transition into their college life, and therefore, into the constant use of English for instructional purposes. As I have shown earlier, culture for Los de ESOL did not isolate language. Their culture enabled them to collectively navigate their new experiences as a unit looking for a shared benefit, transitioning to college life.

In the ESOL classroom, compañerismo occurred when students helped each other use technology to translate for each other and provide materials. During my observations, I repeatedly noticed how students would help each other with technical issues. For instance, they instructed each other how to appropriately navigate Blackboard to find an assignment. For Los de ESOL at Sun University, demonstrating compañerismo provided the participants with opportunities to establish their affinity among themselves. Instances like the ones presented in this section illustrate how their socialization processes, added to the support they were willing to offer to other ESOL members, helped them navigate their educational institution. I analyze how these lived material realities enabled TECS to create this sense of compañerismo, as I am calling it here, where they make use of their digital literacies not only to remain connected to their

instructors but, more importantly, to their fellow ESOL classmates. Compañerismo in the ESOL classroom was particularly important because all participants experienced similar adaptation processes where their linguistic, social, and educational repertoires were all interacting and evolving.

To efficiently navigate their academic communities (ESOL classroom communities), the participants used their digital literacies. During the ESOL classes, I noticed that whenever the instructors used the Blackboard to write down something or specified that something they were showing on the projector was relevant, many took a picture of such information. This picture helped them as a visual of the content they were learning in English. While observing students taking these pictures recording relevant information, it was imminent to hear from some of them, "ahí me pasas la foto, ¿no?" Their academic knowledge then was undoubtedly developed by the different digital literacy practices they were continuously implementing during their ESOL classes (e.g., taking pictures for relevant information), but more interesting, they were also tightening their social capitals. The more deeply I observed their interactions and conversations, the better I understood the importance of creating friendship bonds. TECS at Sun University were always demonstrating signs of compañerismo and friendship. For the most part, I believe that they became not only classmates but friends because they all understood that as members of their classroom community, they were all experiencing similar changes and adaptations linguistically, socially, and educationally.

As part of the code of ethics that the participants created for their ESOL community, empathy was necessary to show belonging. To illustrate, Fabi had meaningful bonding experiences physically crossing the bridge to attend Sun University classes. As part of one of her e-assignments, Fabi (1693-1899) shared: "I have always thought that every person is a

community and many of them have opened their community a bit to tell me their situations despite knowing them, from ladies who start telling me their stories, to students who also cross every day and understand how tired it is sometimes." Through these words, Fabi restated her empathy and resilience to continue crossing to pursue an education in the United States. Here, Fabi emphasized that although crossing the bridge could be a struggle for many -including herself-, she fully understood that she was not the only person who had to encounter unpleasant circumstances while crossing the bridge, such as tiredness, impoliteness from others. Fabi's example above demonstrated how the participants could create and strengthen their bonds with others under similar circumstances thanks to their communities of belonging. They were able to belong to their supportive communities where access is granted because they all understand what other ESOL students must go through to take their ESOL classes at Sun University.

One common digital practice among TECS was communicating with others using WhatsApp. Berenice recalled (10472-10796) how helpful it was for her having a WhatsApp group with her classmates: "Ya venía tarde por la línea [del puente], y para mi clase tenía que imprimir una tarea y dije: '¿Alguien que me la imprima?', y pues de volada, o sea, nos comunicamos ahí de volada, se las mandé por correo y ya." She expressed how fast she could reach her classmates, and more importantly, rely on them to print and turn in her assignment, when she was late to class due to her commuting from one country to the other. This example made me realize how strong their bonds were. For Berenice's classmates who also were TECS, it was easy to understand the frustration of being late to a class due to the long wait at the bridge. Consequently, as soon as she reached for help, her classmates demonstrated their compañerismo by helping her immediately and printed Berenice's homework. This example demonstrated how TECS frequently performed various digital literacy practices to show empathy and

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compañerismo towards Los de ESOL. Here, on the one hand, Berenice used the digital literacy practice of communicating with others via WhatsApp, but also, her classmates used another digital practice (printing an assignment for her) as a response to her call-in-need.

Like Berenice's example, Leonardo also expressed a sense of compañerisimo with one of his classmates by using his digital literacy practice of logging in to Sun University's network using his credentials. During the first session of presentations (fieldnotes: 749-902), I noticed that Ramon, one of the students who was not presenting that day and was just part of the audience, was a little late for the class. Nevertheless, one of his classmates, Leonardo, had already logged him into a computer, so when Ramon got to the classroom, he was able to access the quiz immediately. Leonardo did not have Ramon's password; however, he knew that he would access the computer using his credentials instead of Ramon's.

TECS constantly enacted their belonging to the ESOL community at Sun University by creating bonds with others and showing care and empathy through compañerismo. By the end of the semester, all these ESOL transfronterizx students needed to present orally one of the topics from the essays they had written during the semester. These oral presentations helped TECS broaden their verbal communication skills in English and their presentation skills, their summarizing skills, and their use of visual aids. As part of these oral presentations, they would have to emphasize what they had learned during the semester in terms of grammar content, written, and speaking abilities in English. Three different teams (Yellow team, Pink team, and Orange team) presented about the topic of suicide, and all groups showed signs of compañerismo by letting their classmates know that they were there for them. However, the Pink team made a remarkable difference for all of us by sharing one of their Social Networking Sites (SNS), as I will explain below.

As their ESOL teachers instructed them, they all needed to use a visual aid for their oral presentations; most of them used a PowerPoint or a Prezi to fulfill this requirement. An additional digital literacy practice performed by the Pink team was sharing their personal SNS usernames to be followed on Instagram. The Pink team demonstrated compañerismo with their classmates by becoming empathetic of the processes their ESOL friends might be going through. Most importantly, they decided to step forward this empathy by demonstrating their support as they shared their accounts. The Pink team also used a PowerPoint presentation. However, what made them distinguish themselves from other teams was that when they finished their oral presentation, the speakers shared their Instagram accounts in case their classmates needed any emotional support anytime: "You can add us and talk to us whenever you need" (fieldnotes: 3.90). This scene was powerful for me because it allowed me to recognize that by using Instagram as a tool, they were also building the foundations to create meaningful social relationships with others who were in similar circumstances to theirs. Therefore, increasing belonging to another community, their Instagram community. They were starting to become empathetic of the situations of other transfronterizx ESOL college students just like them. A study about the use of Instagram among emerging adults (Stapleton et al., 2017) stated that out of Instagram's more than 400 million users, more than half of them are between 18 and 29 years old like the transfronterizxs studied for this dissertation. The authors noted that emerging adults tend to use SNS (Social Networking Sites) to engage in their identity-making around these ages.

Similarly, the Pink team's actions were relevant because they decided to share this part of their identity formations' milestones (creation and use of Instagram). However, more importantly, they decided to share it with others experiencing similar circumstances to theirs in many different respects. As I previously stated, the Pink team demonstrated compañerismo with

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their classmates by becoming empathetic of the processes their ESOL friends might be going through. Most importantly, they decided to step forward this empathy by demonstrating their support as they shared their personal Instagram accounts. Stapleton et al. (2017) highlighted that, currently, Instagram serves for emerging adults as approval-from-others and validation-from-others tools. This said, the Pink team's digital literacy practices of using Instagram among young people (e.g., college-age young adults) allowed them to show empathy and constant support through their SNS digital literacies. Therefore, this social act of becoming allowed them to open the path for a new community, Los de ESOL, who followed each other on Instagram.

Another way TECS demonstrated their compañerismo was by making their learning of English more accessible to their classmates when presenting digital literacy practices. To illustrate, the students had been instructed to create (digital) quizzes for their classmates to verify that they were paying attention to them as they were presenting. Maintaining the audience's attention was also part of their grades. The Green team, the Yellow team, the Orange team, and the Teal team used platforms like Kahoot, bringing their previously learned digital practices to the classroom, making their ESOL classes more accessible. Others, the Red Team, the Blue Team, the Black team, and the Purple team, just included questions as part of their original PowerPoint presentations. Nevertheless, whether the participants decided to use an audience-response system (e.g., Kahoot) or not (e.g., PowerPoint), they were using their digital literacy practice of assessing each other's learning using a digital visual aid.

During the oral presentations, all participants equally demonstrated their sense of compañerismo, whether they were presenters for the day or not. The examples below show how even when participants served as the audience for the day, they never stopped demonstrating empathy to their classmates. Not surprisingly, during these aforementioned oral presentations,

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many technical issues appeared while the students were presenting. However, whenever the students were having technical difficulties, TECS demonstrated their compañerismo by successfully finishing their presentations. For example, I observed the students from Class C when the Yellow and Orange team presented. I noticed that the ones sitting down as part of the audience helped the presenters and members of the Yellow and Orange teams access their oral presentations because they had been automatically blocked by the software (Office). As soon as this technical problem arose, TECS demonstrated that their community's relevant characteristic was solving problems collectively. In this case, they solved a technical problem together. "Click enable, click enable" the audience from Class C would promptly repeat as a chorus. For another team, the Blue team, the presentation just froze. "Pícale escape y luego ya," Arturo, who was part of the audience, told them.

Early in September, as I was visiting the focal participants' class, I noticed that the classroom's computer wired to the classroom's projector was not working. Miss B, the teacher, explained to them that they would not be able to use the screen that day for such a reason. I noticed frustration among some of the students because, on the one hand, the semester was just starting, and on the other hand, the ESOL level in which they were enrolled, level II, requires as many learning resources for students as possible. At this level, the students meet for six hours a week, and besides, they also complete mandatory lab hours at their ESOL language laboratory. One of the focal participants, Samuel, immediately enacted his compañerismo by his willingness to wire his laptop instead of the classroom's computer for the class. Samuel expressed (1529-1647): "Pueden usar mi laptop si quieren." This was important for me because I understood that Samuel was enacting their compañerismo skills by sharing their items (e.g., Samuel's laptop) to continue utilizing the university's resources (e.g., classroom's projector), but also that they were

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willing to share their knowledges. Because Samuel was very accommodating in this instance, the rest of his classmates could continue their English learning processes. Samuel expressed this sense of compañerismo because he would have been cut off from their learning opportunities without a visual aid like the rest of his classmates. In other words, this sense of compañersimo was beneficial for his whole ESOL class community and not just for him. Samuel helped them to get ahead in their process of learning English.

The previous practice of solving problems collectively demonstrated two relevant claims for the present dissertation. As part of their everyday dynamics, it was common for TECS to try to diminish the frustrations and stress among their ESOL classmates that learning another language could cause them. Second, it also demonstrated that Samuel possessed enough technical knowledge to know that another computer could easily replace it if their classroom's computer was not working.

As another way of showing compañerismo, TECS encouraged each other to practice English, although they communicated in Spanish most of the time. In order to expand their linguistic repertoires, I noticed how participants use a variety of techniques. For example, they built from their previous linguistic resources, but also, they continually reminded each other to practice English. All participants relied heavily on Spanish to verify instructions, talk about their routines and experiences, and talk through their assignments but were impressively caring about their opportunities for practicing English. For instance, during our study sessions, where we usually practiced conversational skills, all focal participants would immediately say "in English" in unison when one of them began to tell a story in Spanish. I could see that they put considerable effort as a group to support each other to move forward in their English development.

As a transfronteriza educator myself, listening to them using a variety of linguistic repertories was not surprising. One of the first things I noticed during observations was that they also tended to rely on translanguaging. Guerra (2016) reminds us, "in the midst of the complex linguistic, cultural and semiotic challenges our students face in their everyday lives, the need to be rhetorically savvy trumps all other language practices" (p. 41). Given the participants' dynamic lives in the present dissertation, it is relevant to highlight that depending on the context they were traversing, these transfronterizxs would emphasize using a specific linguistic repertoire, or mixture of theirs, over another, which will be developed below.

5.9. USING DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES TO NAVIGATE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

In addition to constantly demonstrating their senses of compañerismo, another observable characteristic among TECS was that they used their digital literacy practices to expand their linguistic repertoires. As participants expanded their linguistic repertoires, they had changes in their online-selves and the ways they expressed their cultural identities. Through observations, conversations, and varied reviews of the data, I observed that in the process of learning English, these participants were constantly making use of their transcultural repositioning. What was taking effect in their ESOL classrooms was, unquestionably, affecting the rest of their lives as transfronterizxs. During several occasions, I noted how these participants used their entire linguistic repertoires, including Spanish and "Spanglish", to communicate with classmates and myself, especially when verifying information.

To illustrate, participants made use of their SNS to expand their linguistic repertoires. During one of the interviews (8-455), Sonia shared that she sometimes uses both languages on social media. "Cuando subo fotos a Facebook a veces sí le pongo como que la descripción en inglés o algo así, pero nomás por payasa porque estoy acá [en los Estados Unidos]". She

continued, "con mis amigas en Snapchat ellas hablan espanglish (risa), so, sí hablan de los dos; a veces están hablando en inglés y luego a veces en español, ya como que medio les entiendo un poco más a las palabras que a veces dicen en inglés, pero sí hablo con ellas [usando los dos idiomas]". Because of the people she interacted with while online -peers and friends-, Sonia's digital practices tended to mix languages more deliberately. However, Sonia was already following these practices while interacting with others in her physical communities. As evidenced in the previous translanguaged excerpt, Sonia added the word *to explain* where Spanglish was the norm for her. In time, I observed that she started to incorporate more of these switches because her experiences and interactions started to change as she started spending more time in the United States. Sonia's original repertoire included only socializing in Spanish while navigating SNS. However, living in the United States during the weekdays with roommates born and raised in the United States, and attending Sun University, led her to enlarge her linguistic repertoires.

Another way in which TECS expanded their linguistic repertoires was by navigating job-seeking platforms. Samuel helped their classmates to navigate one of the school's platforms that were not used nor taught in any of their classes. During the third study session, Samuel taught his classmates how to navigate *CareerServicesOnline,* the official campus' website, to find a job sponsored by the Division of Student Affairs. This example shows how their digital practices were severely impacting their lives. Additionally, this example illustrates how by navigating the university's official platform, TECS could expand its linguistic repertoire in English by gaining professional vocabulary. During our fifth study session, Samuel shared with the rest of the focal participants how they could become more involved within their Sun University community by getting a job. He taught his classmates how by using their previously digital literacies

(navigating a website), they could expand their aspirations and financially contribute to their homes. Although the participants did not mention that they could expand their linguistic repertoires to include more professional and academic English, I observed it as I explored the webpage suggested by Samuel. Samuel learned how to navigate this platform because he had previously applied to various job postings using it. Another example in which participants use their digital literacy practices to expand their lexical repertoire was using the database Opposing Viewpoints to explore academic resources. They used this database suggested by the ESOL instructors to explore current social topics they developed as part of their academic essays.

Participants' digital practices helped them to gain access to other cultures. As they gained more English knowledge through their ESOL classes, participants could access and navigate other cultures in a new way. For instance, they were able to navigate social media using English, and they were able to listen to the music of other cultures outside their ESOL community. As different authors have noted (Fong et al., 2016; Holland, Lachicotte Jr et al., 2001; Gee, 2014), the many ways in which individuals position themselves in front of others, and perhaps are perceived by others, is linked to the discourses they, and others, use to identify themselves. In the case of these transfronterizx ESOL college students, learning English was used as a tool to position themselves as students who advance their careers and gain new experiences. Learning English for the participants represented endless educational, linguistic, and cultural adaptations to their lifestyles. Next, I present examples that illustrate the meanings that these focal participants gave to their English learning processes.

A digital practice that changed as TECS' English skills improved was how they navigated SNS. To illustrate, by increasing their English competency, participants could use English as a tool for navigating social media sites more profoundly and thus belong to other

newer communities for them. For instance, during one of the interviews, Berenice (154-1139) talked about how learning English allowed her to use Facebook in a new way. She said: "Así de que estoy en Facebook y antes me salían que las frases así bien dolidas, las frases en inglés, y yo pues 'ah, está en inglés' pues ya le daba (so, she skipped it); pero ahora sí ya me le quedo viendo y trato de descifrarlo palabra por palabra y si no entiendo una palabra la busco en el traductor. Y ya pues así ya sé que significa. Pero ya al menos las veo." From this example, I gathered that Berenice had reached a point where she reflected on her progress in English learning. In Berenice's case, she explains how she would use to skip those temporal notes displayed on her Facebook's wall if these were written in English; she states how she knew that these were *frases bien dolidas* (heartbroken/bittersweet phrases). *However*, because of her limited knowledge of the language, she would opt to skip them and avoid reading through them. Thus, acquiring membership in this new virtual community (Facebook's English posts) enabled her to refine her English skills by improving vocabulary and experience her interactions on Facebook otherwise. By taking the chance of carefully looking at and reading such phrases, Berenice was re-evaluating her membership to a new cultural community where she could now be accepted and recognized by other members of the same group as she would be able to interact with such posts by using Facebook's reactions (e.g., like/love/care/haha/wow/sad/angry). Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema (2016) highlighted: "As everyone has an understanding of the bases of the stereotypes by which others will judge them, they may consciously alter some of their linguistic realizations in order to try to ensure that others' decode' what they see as their 'proper' identity (p. 150). For Berenice, being able to participate in conversations in which she was not included before given their limited English enabled her to participate as a member of a virtual community and as a group-member who understands the English used in SNS. Similarly, the digital literacy practice

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of looking for music and listening to it was common among TECS. The previous chapter also highlighted Samuel's example of looking for rap music as a way to belong to a new community.

To sum up, this chapter presented information that answered the questions related to the digital literacy practices that TECS engaged in and which ones they used specifically for language learning. I presented various examples that illustrated how TECS used their many digital literacy practices to assure their belonging to their many communities on both sides of the border. Many of the examples and findings resemble the digital literacy practices found in the previous chapter, proving evidence of how important these are for TECS. Because they are continually traversing all their communities physically, emotionally, and virtually, they are simultaneously in Juarez or El Paso.

Furthermore, as presented in many examples of the section *compañerismo*, their multiple identities play a significant role in their language learning. For instance, TECS heavily valued the different practices (e.g., crossing the border daily, navigating new educational and linguistic systems) they had as they were becoming and belonging to their new communities. Therefore, by demonstrating support through *compañerismo,* they were showing some of their identities. Similarly, by constantly using Spanish and translating to each other, TECS could also emphasize their identities. Their varied linguistic repertoires allowed TECS to position differently and belong to different communities at once. For example, by translanguaging, TECS positioned themselves as members of Los de ESOL community, but also, as members of different social media sites. By using English, they positioned themselves as members of the mainstream community at their university, although, they constantly distanced themselves from it, as Carlos' example demonstrated.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

This dissertation's objective was to understand the digital literacy practices of transfronterizx ESOL college students as they traversed the different communities they belonged to. The findings revealed that participants were overly attached to their electronic devices, mostly the cellphone because these provided them with accessibility and immediateness to their multiple communities. Furthermore, the findings suggested that TECS presented themselves by highlighting certain affinities over others and looking for belonging to these many communities. Lastly, this dissertation demonstrated that although they shared many affinities (Gee, 2000), which enabled them to become and belong to several communities, the most salient affinities were as members of their Los de ESOL community. For example, their shared practice of compañerismo. This shared practice of compañerismo allowed TECS to demonstrate their belonging to Los de ESOL community and border-crossers community.

6.1. FINDING 1: TECS INTERCONECTADOS

Findings from the present dissertation differ drastically from Hawi and Samaha (2016), who found that smartphones' constant use can interfere with the academic and professional work. In the students' case in the present dissertation, their digital devices, especially their smartphones, allowed them to connect and navigate their multiple communities constantly and simultaneously. Their smartphones and other electronic devices served as mediating tools to dissolve the barriers they encountered geographically, educationally, and emotionally.

Brannon et al. (2017) suggest that from a sociocultural perspective, minorities -like the present participants- even though they present a dual identity, they engage in activities that are commonly attached to mainstream culture. In my study, although TECS were continuously connected to their communities in Mexico through a variety of digital literacy practices, they

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were simultaneously able to also participate and navigate their communities in the United States, primarily at Sun University. As observed by others (Leung, 2004; Pearson & Hussain, 2017; Yusof & Othman, 2018), it was imminent for participants to stay connected with others from their multiple diversified communities, such as their classmates and members of Los de ESOL community, friends, and family members on both sides of the border. The simultaneous connections with their different communities explain their frequent use of their digital literacy practices.

Findings in the present dissertation allow us to see the role digital literacy practices play in transfronterizx ESOL college students' lives. On the one hand, they used digital literacy practices to constantly connect with their multiple and dynamic communities. On the other hand, they also use their digital literacy practices to "achieve the safe expression of their identity" (Fong et al., 2016). This latter because the authors explained that while ESL students engage in these digital literacy practices, they can make their social identities. Similarly, findings presented in the ESOL chapter (chapter 5) suggested that TECS presented themselves differently while navigating their communities physically versus doing it virtually, like Berenice, who started navigating Facebook differently; she first navigated Facebook monolingually and then bilingually. Besides, as TECS were interconectados and belonged to different communities (e.g., in Juarez and El Paso), they understood safety differently. For example, safety to express themselves and their identities and having a cell phone for physical safety, as Samuel's example demonstrated in Chapter 4. In listening to what the participants shared during interviews, study sessions, and through their e-artifacts, I came to understand how participants repositioned themselves transculturally at all times as they were always attached physically, emotionally, and virtually to more than one place at a time. More importantly, I understood TECS's transcultural

repositioning not only to move virtually across spaces but that they mobilized their knowledges

and previous experiences to better navigate their different communities on both sides of the

border.

TECS used various social media sites to communicate with their loved ones as they were

on the other side of the border. Salient examples were provided as part of chapter 4, where I

presented various examples, mainly from Fabi. For instance, where her sister works as a liaison

for her whole family, and when she accounted for how often her mother contacted her during the

day. Archuleta and Perry (2017) highlight how family works as a source of socialization and

culture; the authors further add how family networks are especially crucial for Latinxs, and they

consider them an important asset because they provide access to food, information, and

transportation. Said this, continuing in constant contact with their family members on both sides

of the border was a practice that TECS continuously relied on as it helped them to strengthen

their belonging to such a community.

They also used social media sites to communicate with their ESOL community while

commuting to Sun University establishing bidirectionality. They communicated with other TECS

about the line at the bridge, to make sure their friends were well and were arriving on time to

class, and to offer their assistance if they needed a ride to avoid long lines. They also established

and continued friendships through the use of digital practices.

The participants also used social media sites to prepare for their academic ESOL

coursework. Participants also used Messenger to agree on what to wear during their oral

presentations at the end of the semester. The participants' preferred social media sites resembled

previous studies (Hamissi, 2013; Yusof & Othman, 2018), including but not limited to:

YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram; Messenger and WhatsApp were the two most used apps by

TECS. To prepare for their academic coursework, the participants reported using the social media sites to communicate with their classmates.

Because time was an essential element for TECS during their lives, they heavily relied on their digital literacy practices to constantly contact others on both sides of the border. de la Piedra et al. (2018) explain how transfronterizxs are located in a very particular point of comparison in the transnational spectrum. They are intensively involved in various practices on both sides of the border and are regularly moving back and forth from one country to another. For this reason, the timing was a crucial element for TECS as they were continuously traversing various communities physically, emotionally, and virtually. Given these time constraints, TECS heavily relied on their digital literacy practices as they were constantly acting through, they shared affinities to belong to their different communities, whether physically or virtually. For TECS, their digital literacy practices represented a way of letting their parents know that they were safe when crossing, that they had finished their classes, or that they were in their process of commuting. TECS notably used their cellphones and digital literacy practices to continue in constant contact with their family and friends while they were far. These practices provided TECS a sense of safety, both, in terms of being able to express themselves, and their identities, and feeling safe when having access to a cellphone for physical safety. Using their cellphones to "fulfill a need to care for others or for supportive communications, smartphones can improve emotional and psychological wellbeing" (Pearson & Hussain, 2017, p.19). TECS demonstrated how they cared about their loved ones, whereas in Mexico or the United States, by keeping in constant contact with them. As Moran (2020) explained, in their pursuit of belonging, TECS continuously used certain practices like showing love and care for their loved ones through their digital literacy practices.

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Like previous studies demonstrated (Haas et al., 2011; Monty, 2015), the participants in the present dissertation engaged in the use of social media (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook) to become active members of their multiple communities across the US-Mexico border (e.g., Los de ESOL, young people from Juarez, and cross-borders). Their frequent engagement in digital literacy practices enabled TECS to actively get to know various cultural communities, whether they can be physical members of such communities or just virtually. For example, their memberships of virtual communities, such as the Reporte de Puentes Facebook group, constituted a crucial membership that allowed them to navigate their lives as transfronterizxs. Thus, similar to the findings of the studies cited above, TECS recognized the importance of virtual communities as equal to those they can physically traverse. The participants in this dissertation considered the constant use of social media essential to continue belonging to their multiple communities on both sides of the border.

6.2. FINDING 2: DIGITAL LITERACY PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC WORK AND LEARNING ENGLISH

Opposite to Leung's (2004) findings, who stated that Internet use heavily interfered negatively with students' academic work, TECS frequently used their digital literacy practices to comply with their ESOL academic work. As presented in chapter 5, it was evident that students' digital literacy practices dealt directly with their processes of learning English. For instance, they constantly used Blackboard to check grades, complete quizzes, and assignments or practice class' materials. Equally important, they utilized other learning platforms like Kahoot and Opposite Viewpoints, which also helped them develop their English language skills.

Moreover, TECS also used their digital literacy practices (e.g., surfing YouTube) to engage with authentic English materials. As presented as part of the ESOL findings chapter 5,

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participants like Samuel made use of their digital literacy practices to amplify their linguistic repertoires. I found this to be particularly important because the participants did not state they used platforms like YouTube purposefully to practice English but to access novel content that was interesting for them. Nevertheless, from my observations and constant interactions with them, it was evident how these videos helped them improve their vocabulary. Jalaluddin (2016) highlights how beneficial it is for ESL students to watch YouTube videos like these to help students to be aware of the different English accents worldwide as they deal with authentic materials. Besides, the author states that using YouTube provides students' with opportunities for autonomous learning. By using the digital literacy practice of exploring YouTube, participants were expanding their linguistic repertoires in English, but they were conjointly then improving other essential skills, ultimately helping them navigate their academic community at Sun University. Last, like Hornberger and Link (2012) highlighted, transnational students, are unquestionably bringing practices to their new educational contexts. In the case of TECS, they brought their linguistic practices to their new communities and some other digital literacy practices (e.g., taking pictures of materials), enabling them to navigate their ESOL community better. TECS often engaged in translanguaging practices, for example. Garcia and Wei (2015) remind us that "translanguaging refers to the flexibility of bilingual learners to take control of their learning, to self-regulate when and how to language, depending on the context in which they're being asked to perform" (p. 80). Thus, through the use of multimodality and translanguaging when engaging in digital literacy practices, TECS could become more autonomous learners.

For the participants, communicating using all their linguistic repertoires helped them in their processes of learning English. Therefore, translanguaging also helped the participants in their processes of becoming and belonging.

6.3. FINDING 3: BELONGING TO DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

For the participants, identity-making processes (Moran, 2020) included adopting social traits and remarks previously not evident as part of their lives. Their constant negotiations of identity included realizing that their experiences differed from one side of the border to the other and that these were complex processes. Some of the communities TECS belonged to were, for instance: Los de ESOL community, their Juarez community, their El Paso community, their college students community, their transfronterizx community, their WhatsApps communities, their Messenger communities, and their Sun University community. Relevant to this finding was that these communities overlapped. For the most part, their becoming processes included creating strong social communities (e.g., their ESOL community) where they could experience their new college path with others who were in similar circumstances than theirs. Similar to the participants in the study by Wiggins and Monobe (2017), Los de ESOL negotiated their cultural and linguistic identities and pursued friends who aided in their belonging in their new contexts. Sáenz et al., (2018) also reminds us: "Relationships and networks play a critical role in students' successful navigation of a complex postsecondary environment" (p. 43). Thus, for TECS, building strong relationships with Los de ESOL community helped them to find another way to navigate their new context as part of Sun University collectively.

Song (2012) reminds us that in the transnational community, people: "Negotiate these multiple and shifting memberships with those communities they left behind, local ones, and ones they hope to become part of in the future. This negotiation is reflected in their current linguistic

practices in the forms of language attitudes and language learning goals" (p. 508). TECS, for

example, heavily relied on their use of Spanish even when they were navigating their

communities in the United States (e.g., Sun University and Los de ESOL communities). For

TECS, presenting themselves in a way that they appear similar to other members of a given

community by using their hybrid identities allowed them to belong to and traverse numerous

communities at once freely. To illustrate, Los de ESOL commonly used translanguaging in their

process of learning English as they were traversing their ESOL community.

As part of this dissertation, I presented information about how institutions influenced the

participants' identities and their belonging to TECS' communities. To present this information, I

drew from Gee's concept of institution-related identities. Here, I will discuss the institution-

identities concerning the findings presented as part of both of the findings chapters. Gee (2000)

explains that I-identities are based on the labels which certain institutions (e.g., education,

religion, government) provide to individuals given the power they have over them. Based on my

data, the most salient institutions in the lives of TECS were U.S. Department of Homeland

Security U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, an American educational institution, Sun

University, and their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Department. These

institutions commonly highlighted labels or messages for TECS, which group them as members

of a given community. For example, institutions like U.S. Department of Homeland Security and

the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency identified them as cross-borders, international

students, U.S. citizens. I, on the other hand, discovered that they were individuals who were in a

constant process of becoming as they live their lives by continually crossing the U.S./Mexico

border physically either by driving or walking. As I explained it earlier, Gee (2000) highlights

how Sun University as an institution, labeled the program -and students- ESOL following a

deficit perspective. Gee (2000) names this, and I-identity. Nevertheless, TECS ended up calling themselves Los de ESOL by adopting this same label. But, whereas TECS as a community used this label to belong to a safe space for them, the institution highlighted their deficiencies (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006) instead of their assets. Salient to the findings was that although these institutions were constantly providing messages that might have challenged the traverses of TECS, the participants continued navigating their many communities full of perseverance. Similarly, although some institutions continuously framed the communities where TECS were able to belong or not, TECS frequently found ways to belong to many more communities to those imposed by higher power levels (institutions), whether these were social, cultural, or economic.

For me, TECS, for instance, talked the way they did and used their digital literacy practices the way they did to belong to several communities fully. As a whole, these decisions guide them in their processes of becoming college students. For example, Moran (2020), reflecting on the identities of those who must traverse multicultural communities, as in the case of these transfronterizx ESOL college students, states: "I consider young people's performative acts beyond simple mimicry or adaptation, but rather as indicative of agency and participation in globally relevant mediums that help them to define a sense of self and belonging in the local context" (p. 92). Similarly, this study's participants often decided crossing the U.S./Mexico border to continue their education, converting them into perseverant border-commuters who, despite the challenges, continue crossing looking for education in the United States.

6.4. FINDINGS 4: TECS AFFINITIES

I frequently noticed how the participants shared various affinities (Gee, 2000), which led them through their processes of becoming as they were navigating many communities

simultaneously. Some of their affinities included how they presented themselves at Sun University, how they used their linguistic repertoires, how they used their digital literacy practices (e.g., social media sites), and their privileges; these affinities will be further developed below. The affinities TECS shared are relevant because these identity practices are not static. All their affinities highlighted that TECS could conjointly be present in more than one community at once, demonstrating how complex their identities were. Thus, affinities like constantly crossing the border, using social media sites, or translanguaging, helped them to create a cohesive group that was interconectado. But, simultaneously, these affinities also marked the difference with others in Sun University. To illustrate, in chapters 4 and 5, I presented instances where students preferred to be together as a community, and not relate to other students who were not part of ESOL (e.g., Carlos's example at the library). Therefore, when they named and performed these affinities, many times by using their digital literacy practices, they are making their identities by both: (1) belonging to ESOL, and (2) separating themselves from non-ESOL students. For these reasons, it was relevant exploring and understanding the complexities of their identities as they are frequently in the process of finding a way to belong as part of their multiple physical, emotional, and virtual communities. As Moran (2020) highlights, "Cultivating a sense of identity involves emphasizing similarities to certain people in certain contexts, and differences to others" (p. 51).

Guerra (2004) reminds us that transnational students are not only continually traversing different black and white physical and emotional spaces, but they are also continuously traversing grey physical and emotional spaces that must be accounted for as part of their stories. For TECS, for instance, they were not in Mexico or the United States, but continuously in both countries thanks to their digital literacy practices. TECS simultaneously were members of

communities on both sides of the border because they belong to many virtual communities. More importantly, TECS were heavily relying on tools (such as the Internet), which enabled them to traverse such varied communities online in just a second. Unquestionably, these constant changes and distinguished cultural contacts led them to make their hybridized identities as transfronterizx ESOL college students as they were in a constant process of becoming each time they traversed one of their communities physically, emotionally, or virtually. It is worth mentioning that although this dissertation presents information about their similarities, particularly identity-related similarities, it also highlights their differences as all participants uniquely experienced their transfronterizx lives.

TECS use their cultural, social, and linguistic repertoires to consistently demonstrate who they are and how they want to be perceived by others. Deters' (2011) explains that whenever a person, especially emergent bilinguals, is talking to an audience, this person is commonly not only exchanging information with the audience but conjointly, the person is making sense of who they are as part of that given context. As Gee (2014) would say: "Certain sorts of people take on certain sorts of identities" (p. 5). For example, one of the participants' most representative features was unquestionably the fact that they lived as part of -at least- two communities, physically, emotionally, and virtually highly often. Other meaningful affinities among TECS included their strong bonds with Los de ESOL, their constant use of translanguaging practices, and their constant use of their digital literacy practices to navigate and connect their multiple communities. Other affinities included how TECS communicated using social media sites, especially WhatsApp and Messenger, how they were resilient and perseverant, and the ways they identified themselves (e.g., perceiving themselves as Mexicans when they were American citizens). They also continue attending their ESOL remedial classes to

obtain college-readiness in English. This said, these transfronterizx ESOL college students enact their belonging (as transfronterizx, as ESOL student, as a college student, as Sun University student) by opting to follow certain practices, such as commuting to Sun University, attending ESOL classes, or continuously checking Blackboard to complete assignments, which assured them belonging to a community.

Similarly, they also demonstrated becoming and belonging by labeling themselves in one way or another given the mainstream labels (e.g., language learners) that societies have been imposing for decades. For example, they continuously labeled themselves as Los de ESOL. Nevertheless, their dynamic responsiveness (Moran, 2020) allowed TECS to demonstrate their agency by presenting themselves as Los de ESOL but giving them a different sense than only as language learners. This label for them represented similarity (Moran, 2020) and compañerismo, as it will be further developed below.

TECS' privilege was also commonly highlighted as part of the findings. I noted how TECS were knowledgeable of different digital literacy practices but had access to technologies and devices, which allowed them to use such digital literacy practices. I also highlighted how they were able to traverse their many communities emotionally, virtually and physically. Many of them highlighted their parents' education, which included college/university. Relevant to these findings is that Esposito et al. (2020) noted that worldwide, Mexico is considered as one of the countries where the socioeconomic disparities are more evident; the author highlights that Mexico's substantial portion of its population is currently living in absolute poverty while others are considerably well established economically. Given the access to an education in a higher education institution in the U.S., the access to electronic devices, the digital literacy practices

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possessed by TECS, their ways to navigate communities physically, and their parents' education, I considered them as affluent in comparison to the general population from Mexico.

6.5. FINDING 5: COMPAÑERISMO

As part of TECS' culture in the ESOL classroom, their sense of compañerismo was continuously and heavily represented by all participants equally. Furthermore, whereas their digital literacy practices sometimes mediated this sense of compañerismo, they demonstrated it without using digital literacies in other instances. Levy et al. (2013) stated that having a network with strong ties or friendships provide transnationals with emotional and social support and information. Similarly, compañerismo was frequently performed among TECS as they were all in the process of becoming college students in the U.S. They were then, all collectively, learning and teaching each other how to appropriately navigate Sun University, as a higher education institution, and the other communities to where TECS belonged. To demonstrate not only their belonging to Los de ESOL community, but most importantly, their compañerismo, TECS did the following. They helped each other with technology, translated for each other, shared e-materials, helped each other navigate platforms like Blackboard, printed assignments for each other, logged in for each other, and made learning more accessible for their classmates, and solved problems collectively.

In their ESOL community, TECS represented belonging and similarity (Moran, 2020) through compañerismo. They, for instance, negotiated their linguistic practices (Song, 2012) by supporting each other's learning; therefore, whereas TECS were avid supporters of their translanguaging practices and their heavy use of Spanish, they also took each available opportunity to say things "in English." Their compañerismo also allowed them to get closer to their Los de ESOL community simultaneously and distancing themselves from others who were

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from the mainstream Sun University community, like in Carlos's example. Like Relaño Pastor's study (2007), transfronterizxs tended to resist membership in certain social groups (e.g., Sun University mainstream community), but tighten their bonds with other Mexicans or from ethnicities which they considered similar to theirs.

Besides, their sense of compañerismo enabled TECS to rely not only on their educators but, most importantly, on their classmates of their Los de ESOL community. For example, they shared the photos taken of essential materials. Nevertheless, sharing pictures and class' materials was not the only instance in which TECS demonstrated compañerismo by using their digital literacy practices. For instance, they also contacted each other via social media sites to see if they had already crossed or to verify if someone could help them print class assignments, as in Berenice's example presented in chapter 5. These practices altogether nurtured their belonging to the ESOL community at Sun University.

6.6. CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation contributes to the ongoing research of digital literacy practices among transnationals. The present dissertation looked to understand the different digital literacy practices of transfronterizx ESOL college students in their processes of belonging to many communities. To do so, I used qualitative techniques including observations, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, analysis of artifacts -ESOL assignments-, and study groups, which served as focus groups. I concluded that the participants in this dissertation heavily relied on their digital literacy practices, primarily those linked to the use of their smartphones, as these granted belonging to more than one community at once. Their digital literacy practices allowed them to freely navigate their multiple communities digitally and emotionally constantly without having to traverse them physically. Although, given their

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geographical circumstances as transfronterizxs, they also commonly navigated their multiple communities physically. One of the relevant findings of this dissertation is that they regularly used their digital literacy practices to stay connected with their loved ones in their many communities. Besides, in their search for belonging to many different communities, they discovered various affinities (Gee, 2000) or similarity (Moran, 2020), which allowed them to become members of the communities they wanted to belong to. One of the most salient affinities for them included their compañerismo among Los de ESOL. Compañerismo was demonstrated continuously by caring for others, sometimes mediated by using their digital literacy practices, and others using other non-digital practices.

6.7. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Authors (Ajayi, 2008; Ajayi, 2011; Gee, 2011; Gee, 2014) constantly remind us of the importance of including multimodal texts. This is primarily important when teaching ESL (English as a Second Language), which this dissertation also encourages because the students are enlarging their linguistic repertoire, which can be favored mediated by digital literacy practices as shown here. Similarly, authors have suggested (Ajayi, 2011; Gee, 2003; Gee, 2011; Gee, 2014) the inclusion of texts that include ways to understand reading and writing from other perspectives, including the Internet, videogames, and various visual images and graphs. Because the participants heavily relied on their digital literacy practices and used them proficiently and effectively, I recommend integrating these digital literacy practices as part of the curriculum for transnational/transfronterizx students. For example, educators can encourage TECS to take pictures, share e-materials, and use their digital literacy practices freely while in the ESOL classroom, including the use of their cellphone. Educators can also ask their transfronterizx students about their preferred topics to be explored as content in the ESOL classroom (e.g., by

showing YouTube videos to be analyzed individually or collectively). As Battershill and Ross (2017) demonstrated, "Using new technology won't change the purpose of your teaching or substitute for your other activities as a teacher. Nor does it stand in for or replace the values you currently hold. It does, however, give you new ways to see those goals, facilitate them, and share them with students" (p. 11). Besides, I also suggest educators nurture the translanguaging practices transfronterizx students may be bringing to the ESOL classroom as these can promote a sense of belonging to their new communities. I highlight that by supporting and strengthening their outside-of-the-classroom practices in the classroom, we can help them to easily transition and navigate their new communities in the United States. By adding digital literacy practices to our current curriculum, we can establish communication, which is more meaningful for our students. Similarly, encouraging translanguaging practices in our classrooms can promote practices that mirror transnationals' non-academic practices, creating more meaningful and inclusive communities by encouraging students to continue utilizing their digital practices. In contrast, outside of the classroom, we can help them better connect all their communities and practices linked to these communities.

As illustrated, relying on students' digital literacies can open endless positive opportunities in our classrooms. On the one hand, because these transfronterizx college students are constantly traversing different emotional, online, and physical communities, they need to rely on various electronic devices, platforms, and applications to stay connected to their varied communities. Connecting to various communities for TECS is extremely important because they can assure their simultaneous belonging to several communities. For this reason, as educators, we must be aware that constantly using their digital literacy practices (e.g., glancing at their cellphone) communicates more than just being distracted during class periods. Like TECS

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performed compañerismo by supporting each other, it is our role as educators to know and value the many practices that allowed them to connect and belong to their multiple communities. By encouraging digital literacy practices, we will demonstrate awareness of our transnationals' practices promoting a more welcoming and respectful community for them.

Furthermore, using the digital literacies that they are already relying on in our classrooms can benefit educators and students, as many digital pedagogical materials and methods are soon-to-be the education trend. Also, by including digital literacy practices in our curriculum, we can foster the promotion and understanding of new literacy genres, which are more familiar for our students. Equally important, we can nurture peer-editing practices among one another. These practices will help them to improve their English reading, editing, and writing skills.

My study participants were constantly connecting their multiple communities inside and outside their ESOL classrooms. According to Dunton (2006), the micro-society philosophy claims that students can learn to their best when connecting their educational experiences with their community outside of the classroom. To illustrate, I presented various examples where the participants carried their digital literacy practices from Mexico to the United States. The present dissertation's findings inform equitable education by promoting the inclusion of translanguaging practices in the ESL classroom and the inclusion of everyday digital literacy practices to create a more welcoming community for transnational students. For this reason, I recommend the inclusion of diversified digital literacy practices among transfronterizx students, which can enable to not only bring their practices from Mexico to the classroom in the United States but also, to strengthen their belonging to their new community by demonstrating an already known way to navigate a community for them.

Authors have also noted the importance of empowering transnational students (Borjian, et al., 2016; Kim & Slapac, 2015). The authors explained that a way to empower transnational students in the classroom is for educators to rely on those previous knowledges that they are bringing with them from their previous educational experiences. I invite all educators, future educators, and administrators to consider the needs of transfronterizx students. Nevertheless, additionally, to remind them that they will always be bringing previous knowledges and (digital) literacy practices from their previous academic experiences in Mexico, which must be not only valued but incorporated as part of our daily practices in the classroom in the U.S. Allowing these transfronterizx ESOL college students to continue applying such practices (e.g., taking pictures from the board/textbook, completing tasks at home) can help to remediate the existent gap between the two educational systems where transnational, and especially transfronterizx, students might struggle. Furthermore, like Jalaluddin (2016) highlights, digital literacy practices like watching YouTube videos can create several beneficial outcomes for students, including their autonomy as learners, their awareness of different accents, their motivation for learning, and their critical thinking.

Additionally, it should be understood that whereas transfronterizx ESOL students heavily rely on their Spanish linguistic practices, they wanted to add languages. On the contrary, TECS eagerly learned English to graduate from a university in the U.S., get a job in the U.S., and become members of other communities. As presented in this dissertation, learning English for TECS was necessary to advance their careers. Whereas TECS heavily relied on Spanish inside and outside their ESOL community, they demonstrated their compañerismo by encouraging each other to use English when needed. For this reason, I highly encourage educators and others in charge of education to accept and value transnationals' translanguaging practices in the ESOL

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classroom. Translanguaging was essential for TECS' learning processes of becoming and belonging. As Garcia and Wei (2014) remind us, "dynamic bilingualism is like an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) with individuals using their entire linguistic repertoire to adapt to both the ridges and craters of communication in uneven (and unequal) interactive terrains" (p. 17). As findings demonstrated here, TECS made use of all their linguistic resources at hand to better navigate their multiple communities, which ultimately allowed them to belong to such communities. Finally, I want to remind educators that it is crucial to reflect on our practices as teachers to continue empowering our transnational and transfronterizx students.

6.8. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND RESEARCH

As I demonstrated in this dissertation, the digital literacy practices of transnationals and transfronterizx are frequently present and are essential tools as they navigate their different communities. For this reason, further research is needed to understand better the many practices and applications that digital literacy practices represent for transnational education. On the one hand, this dissertation builds from previous literature concerning transnationals' literacy practices (de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009; Lam & Warriner, 2012) as I present information about how transnationals' literacy practices are not exclusively practices of reading and writing texts in print, but also multimodal texts. Besides, I identified specific digital literacy practices that TECS used to communicate with their families and across the border, with people in other nations. In this sense, I contribute to the literature of transnational digital literacy practices not only but expanding the notion of texts in print (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009), but also by connecting in and out of school digital literacy practices. On the other hand, I also demonstrate how transnationals' literacy practices are meaningful because they are part of TECS's daily practices, but also because they help them cultivate meaningful relationships with members of the communities they belong to.

More importantly, my data expand the concepts of belonging (Guerra, 2004; Moran, 2020) and capital (Moran, 2020) with the notion of compañerismo. Data showed that by demonstrating compañerismo, TECS were constantly able to belong to communities like Los de ESOL community and transfronterizx community; they constantly made use of their social capital (Moran, 2020) to better navigate their constant traverse and learning processes. Furthermore, I also demonstrated how crucial is the role of digital literacy practices for belonging to different communities simultaneously. In Guerra's transcultural repositioning construct, we see the use of language and rhetorical performances as part of identity making. I propose the inclusion of digital literacy practices as part of this construct because these are important performances for identity making.

Further research is needed to understand the differences in positionalities while transnationals navigate their offline and their online communities. Through the various observations, interviews, and conversations with the participants, I noted how some of them, like Berenice and Sonia, had different identities while online than physically present. This reminded me of how Tagg (2015) questions people having plain identities while online; the author explains that on the contrary, posting -particularly anonymously- can provide the person with feelings of freedom and/or safety. Tagg (2015) is driven by the question, *are we ever ourselves on social media?* which is answered by how Berenice presents herself more passively while navigating SMS, in comparison to when she was physically present within her ESOL community. Although, this study identified the issue of multiple ways of positioning themselves among trasnfronterizxs, additional research focusing on the differences between identities negotiation in online and offline communities may shed light on identification processes in these different but complementary situations integral to transnationals' lives.

Besides, this dissertation also discusses how transnationals link their digital literacy practices of engaging in social media sites to further their English language learning. Haas et al. (2011) and Monty (2015) suggest that young people engage in the use of social media (e.g., Instagram) to become active members of certain communities (e.g., virtual communities,

communities for the youth) which enable them to actively get to know a variety of cultural communities whether or not they can be physical members of such communities. In essence, young people recognize the importance of virtual communities as equally relevant to their lives as those they can physically traverse. This dissertation contributes similar findings, where engaging in social media was vital to belong to different communities. I document, however, that as their English skills progressed during their first semester in the ESOL program, TECS navigated SMS in new ways. These new practices included translanguaging, relating to English-speakers, and taking risks with the English language in a way they did not before enrolling in their ESOL classes. Thus, it would be essential to study more in-depth in what ways ESOL students' engagement in SMS increases their linguistic repertoires over a longer period. This will allow researchers to better understand the trajectories of influence between out-of-school digital practices and English language learning.

Furthermore, research is also needed to understand further how using digital literacy practices in the transnational classroom can help students scaffold their learning as they adapt to new educational systems. Some authors (Black, 2005; Thorne & Black, 2007) explain that using online genres fosters the development of English skills for language learners who can draw on their personal and community experiences as they use multimodal texts. In this dissertation, I presented examples of how TECS constantly mediated their English learning by engaging in various digital literacy practices (e.g., using Google Translate). However, I recognize that the participants in my study live in an unusual situation, where almost 100% of ESOL students were Spanish speaking Mexican or Mexican-American students. I am curious to learn how these findings contrast to findings of research in ESOL contexts where multilingual students learn together in one classroom setting. Having a deeper understanding of the many digital practices, their roles to scaffold learning and navigate communities in a distinct context will add to the knowledge base on transnational ESOL students.

Other relevant directions to continue contributing to the literature could also include amplifying the knowgledges gained about compañerismo. Relevant to the findings of the present

dissertation would be to continue contributing to the literature by further explaining how compañerismo is mediated by different digital literacy practices in ESOL. Likewise, it would be important to continue exploring the benefits of organizing learning spaces that promote safety, both for students to express their identities, as well as, spaces where they feel physically safe. Moreover, it would be also relevant the further the conversations of the importance of the physical traverse for transnational students.

Last, this dissertation also furthers the conversation of the inclusion of new methodologies to understand transnationals' dynamic lives and digital literacy practices in general. Here, I included some netnographic features, as highlighted by Kozinets (2010; 2020). Given the current pandemic circumstances that have changed our ways of teaching, relating, and conducting research, engaging in newer methodologies like netnography can help us to understand language learning in online and offline contexts, as well as the intersections of these various communities.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Letter of Acknowledgement for Instructors

English for Speakers of Other Languages Program

May 15, 2019

Dear ESOL Instructor:

I am writing to request permission to visit your ESOL classes during the following semesters. I am currently doing my dissertation research as part of the Teaching, Learning and Culture (TLC) PhD program at Sun University. My research includes classroom visits to purposefully-selected instructors who primarily teach transnational students.

After your approval, I will visit your classroom and conduct F2F and online observations of your students. Please notice that all data gathered is about students' attitudes, social interactions, language preference, and use of technology, among other important topics. I will not mention your name, nor the name of any student in the report of my visit; I will provide all students with pseudonyms.

I will be contacting shortly to ask if your permission is granted, and to answer any questions you may have regarding my visit.

If you think this could be possible and you agree that I can:

1. *visit your classrooms to invite students to participate,*
2. *conduct observations,*
3. *take pictures of activities and students interacting during the ESL classes,*
4. *interact with the students immediately after you finish the class*

_____   _____
            Print Name   *Signature*

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. How would you identify yourself?

Male
Female
Other _____

2.   I would describe myself as (check all that apply):

Mexican
Mexican-American
Chican@
Fronterizo
Juarense

Paseño
Cross-border
Otro _____

3.   How old are you? –Mark only one option-.
18 years old
19 years old
20 years old
21 years old
22-25 years old
26 years or older

4.   What is your father's, step father or adoptive father's highest level of education?
Did not complete elementary school
Completed elementary school
Did not complete middle school
Completed middle school
Did not finish high school
Finished high school
Obtained a technical or technological degree
Obtained a degree from a university
I don't know

5.   What is your mother's, step mother's or adoptive mother's highest level of education?
Did not complete elementary school
Completed elementary school
Did not complete middle school
Completed middle school
Did not finish high school
Finished high school
Obtained a technical or technological degree
Obtained a degree from a university
I don't know

6.   Mark which of these things you have (check all that apply):
TV
DVD
Cell Phone with Internet connection
Refrigerator
Washing Machine
Electric Heater or Shower
Microwave
Stereo
Motorcycle
Laptop or Tablet
Computer

Car

7.   How often do you communicate with people in Mexico?
Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Once a year
Never

8.   How often do you travel to Mexico (including Juarez)?
Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Once a year
Never

9.   Social media allow me to combine languages and visual images to send my messages.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

10.   At school my professors use audio/video content that is distributed online to learn during classes.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

11.   My professors encourage me to use chat rooms, discussion boards, forums, etc. to share my knowledge with fellow classmates.
Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

12.   I use an electronic device to complete the following tasks: (Check all that apply)
Play games
Check the weather
Listen to music
Find location-based information
Engage in social networking
Check my finances
Find entertainment online/nearby
Read the news
Read about education

Read about sports
Pay bills
Shopping
Access my course schedule
Access my assignment grades
Review course announcements
See my instructors' office hours
Communicate with other students in a study group or team
Access course recordings
Review course materials
Engage in course discussions
Ask my instructors questions
Share documents with other students in a study group or team
Watch a video provided by my instructors
Read assignments/articles/textbooks
Check a fact on Google
Take course notes
Turn in assignments
Take quizzes

13.   Which applications/digital literacies do I use at least one per week (check all that apply):

Social Networking and Entertainment Apps	Facebook Instagram Kindle LinkedIn Netflix Skype Snapchat Twitter YouTube
Socializing and Staying Connected Apps	Dasher Messenger GroupMe Hangouts LIVE Viber WeChat WhatsApp
Studying and Completing Assignments Apps	BenchPrep Companion Brainscape Chegg CliffsNotes Study Guides Dictionary.com, Merriam-Webster, or Oxford Dictionary Duolingo EasyBib

	Evernote
	iHomework 2
	iTunes U
	Lit Charts
	Microsoft Office Mobile
	RealCalc Scientific Calculator
	Study Blue
	Wolfram|Alpha
Managing Your Time and Staying Organized Apps	Alarmy
	Dashlane
	Good Morning Alarm Clock
	G Suite (formerly Google Apps)
	Instapaper or Pocket
	iStudiez Pro
	MEGA
	OFFTIME
	Studious
	TinyScan
	Todoist
Finding Entertainment and Staying Current Apps	Feedly
	Foursquare
	Scribd
	TED
	Yelp
Listening to Music Apps	iHeartRadio
	Pandora
	Spotify
Finding Jobs Apps	Resume Star
	iResumes
	Resume Builder
	CareerBuilder
	Indeed
	JobAware
	Monster Jobs
	Simply Hired
Shopping Apps	Amazon
	Groupon
	Zulily

"54+ of the Best Apps for College Students in 2018" *Trade Schools*, *Colleges and Universities.* 26 Nov. 2018, https://www.trade-schools.net/articles/best-apps.asp#studying.

Add any other applications/digital literacies that you use and were not listed above (e.g. Google Drive, Kahoot, etc.):

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Fill this out prior to observing classes

Class period or time of class:

Topic or topics:

Placement of class or lesson within the unit of study:

Purpose (objectives):

Materials used:

How students will be assessed for this lesson:

Classroom Observation Protocol OBSERVATION DATA

Fill this out as you are observing classes

Description of the classroom:

Teaching aids/materials (per activity/task if appropriate):

Assessment strategies used (per activity/task if appropriate):

Time not devoted to teaching and nature of non-academic or procedural activity (e.g., management, announcements, discipline):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Session 1: Education and ESOL

1. Tell me about your previous academic experiences in Mexico.
2. When did you start using electronic devices and/or digitalized resources for academic purposes?
3. Did you ever find using technology in your classroom to be boring/interesting? Why?
4. Have you used the Internet to learn, read or talk in English?
5. What kinds of digital activities do you engage in to learn English?
6. Tell me about your experience as a college student here at Sun University.
7. Tell me about your perspectives –as a student- about the ESOL program.
8. What activities do you enjoy the most in your ESOL classes?
9. What particular activities (in the ESOL program) have helped you to learn English? What particular activities (in the ESOL program) have been less helpful?

Session 2: Life as fronterizx and technology

1. Why do you identify yourself as a *fronterizx/border-crosser*?
2. How would you describe a fronterizx/border-crosser?
3. How do you recognize other *fronterizxs/border-crossing people*?
4. Tell me about your border-crossing experiences – when did you first start doing that?
5. How do you stay in touch with your family and friends?
6. What role does technology play in your life as a fronterizx?

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7. What role does technology play in your life as an ESOL student?
8. Tell me about specific instances where you mix languages (English/Spanish) as you are engaging in any of your digital activities.
9. Tell me about the activities, which involve technology in your life that you cannot live without.

Session 3: Reflection

1. Are your educational experiences different here in the United States than previously in Mexico? How?
2. What advantages/disadvantages do you perceive in your life as a *fronterizx/border-crossing person*?
3. How important is technology for you as part of your daily routine since you are constantly crossing the border? In what ways?
4. How important is the use of technology in the ESOL classroom?
5. What would you suggest to your instructors to improve your educational experiences at Sun University?

Vita

Laura E. Mendoza-Fierro earned her bachelor's degree with a double-major in Psychology and Linguistics from The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in 2010. In 2012, she received her Master of Arts degree in Applied Linguistics with an additional TESOL (Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages) International Certification. During the UTEP's graduation commencement, her story was told by former University's President Dr. Diana Natalicio. Mendoza started her PhD in Teaching, Learning, and Culture during fall 2015, where she joined the Literacy/Biliteracy Strand.

Mendoza's passion for education, has led her to always work in positions related to education. From 2008 to 2010, Mendoza diligently worked as Research Assistant and Teacher's Assistant for different departments at her university. During Fall 2011, she started working as Instructor of Record teaching English as a Second Language and Spanish for native and non-native speakers for college students. She is still teaching at the college level. From 2014 to 2019, she additionally worked for the local Community College where she performed coordination duties.

For the last years, Mendoza has presented at several regional, national, and international conferences. Her experience has included presenting at the MEXTESOL International Convention, and the Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) Conference. Mendoza has published not only a book review, but also academic journals. During her time as doctoral student, Mendoza was recipient of several Honors and Awards including *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities* (2016), and the *Dr. Jorge Descamps Scholarship Fund* (2020), to name a few. She has also been honored as recipient of various grants including the *NBC Learning Project: Integrating Technology into the Classroom* (2013).

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