

# Helping or **hindering** language growth?

## A snapshot of Hispanic 'in-transit' learners in Trinidad

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This study was conducted at the University of the West Indies (UWI) St Augustine campus with English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (n=51) from twelve nationalities. It examines learner satisfaction among resident and short- and long-term in-transit ESL students.

### Introduction

Venezuelans currently fleeing from the political and economic hardship in their homeland often seek refuge in other Latin American countries and the Caribbean although a great majority head to the United States, some coming to Trinidad & Tobago in-transit to other destinations as an opportunity to learn English as a Second Language (ESL). The conceptualization of Trinidad for English-language learning corresponds with its strategic location. While it is acknowledged as a hub of economic activity across the two hemispheres, Trinidad has, interestingly, also earned its reputation as a site for illegal immigrants, a convenient location between the production and consumption of drugs, as well as a human trafficking destination.

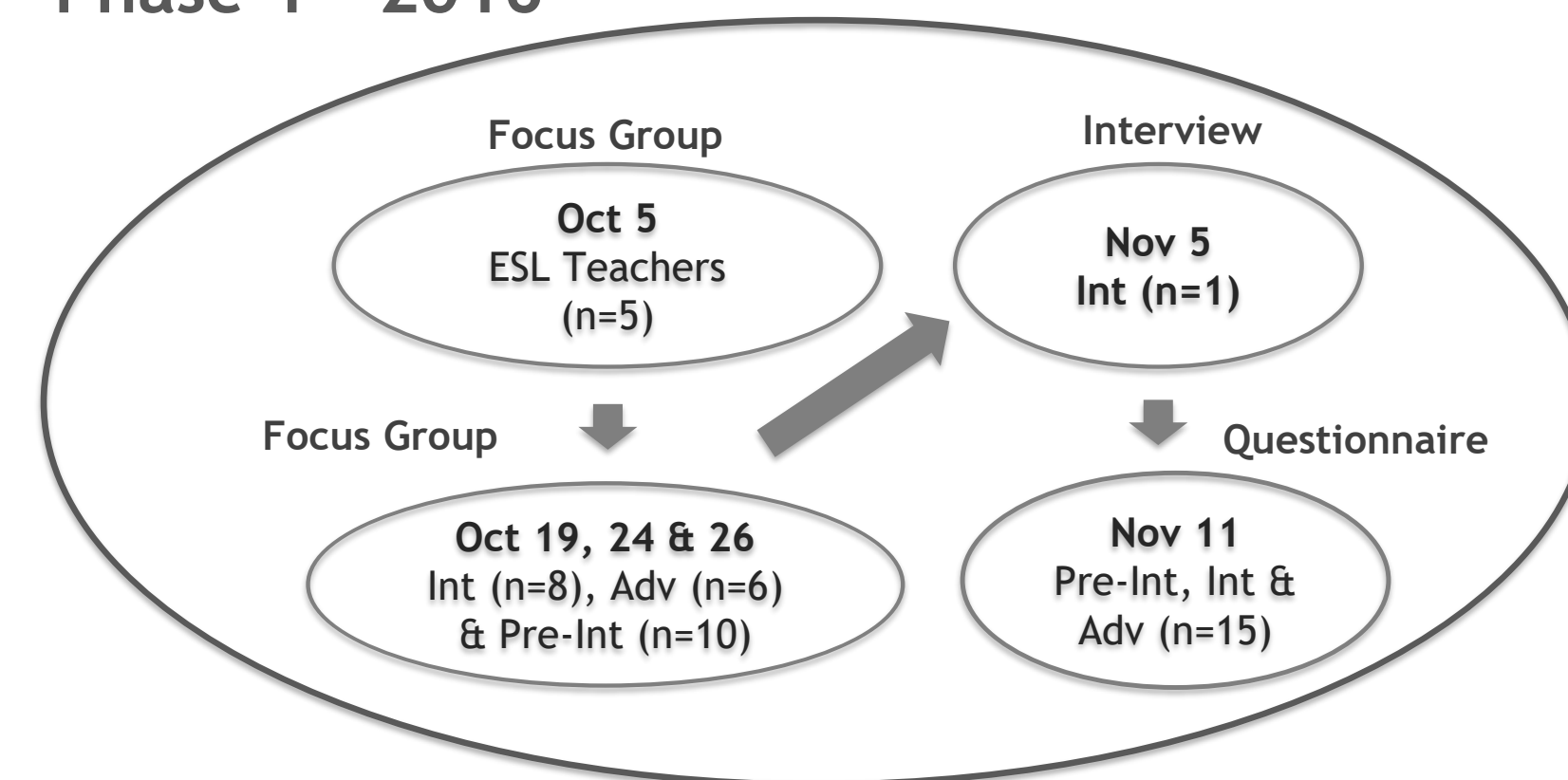
### Methodology

A socio-cultural theoretical framework was adopted to investigate learner satisfaction, and the collection, analysis and interpretation of data were guided by principles of a grounded-theory ethnographic approach.

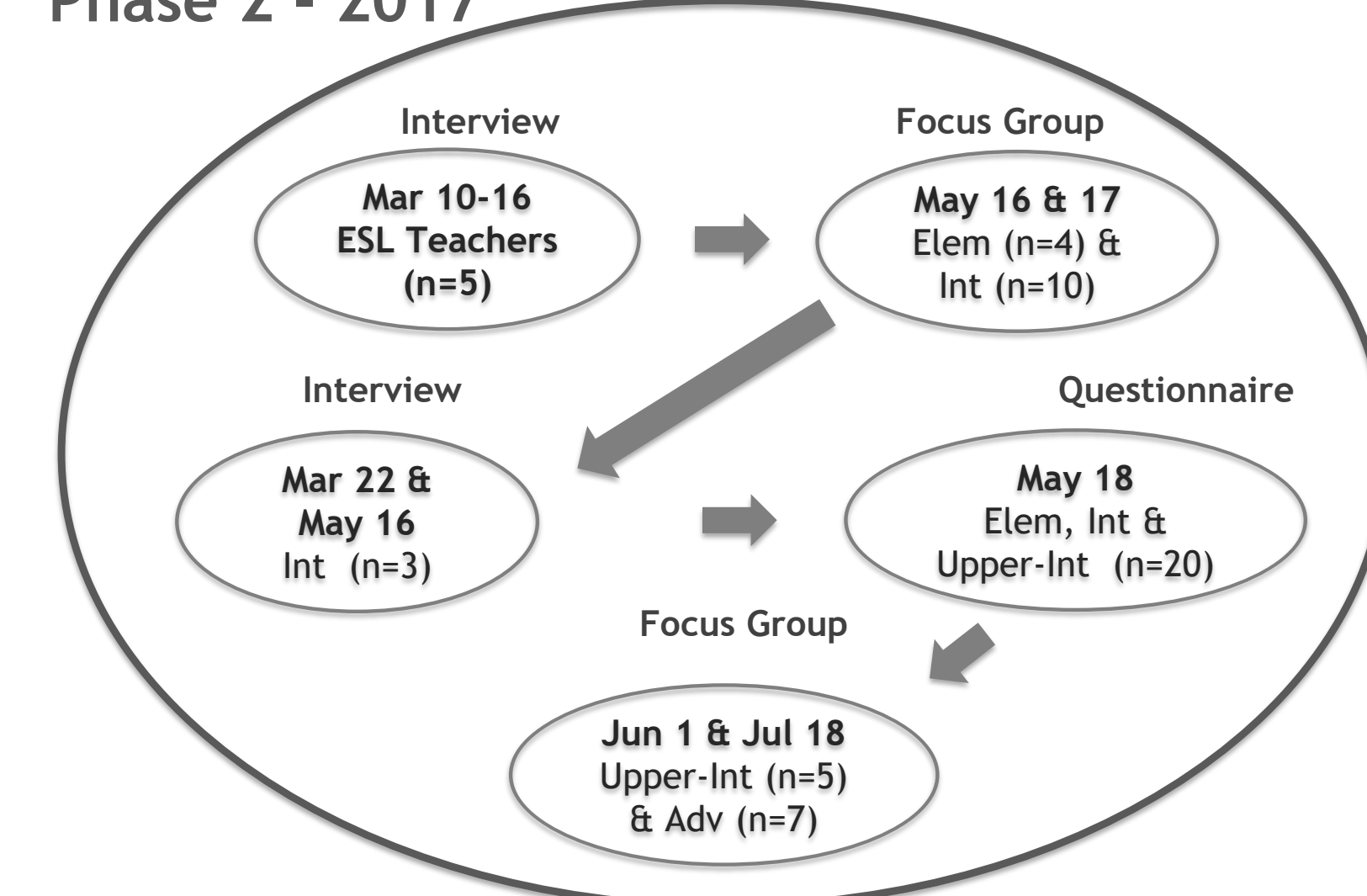
### Methods

In Phase One, data were primarily sourced through focus groups, and findings informed the design and distribution of questionnaires. Phase Two entailed a series of focus groups, modified questionnaires and individual semi-structured interviews.

#### Phase 1 - 2016



#### Phase 2 - 2017



Level of proficiency

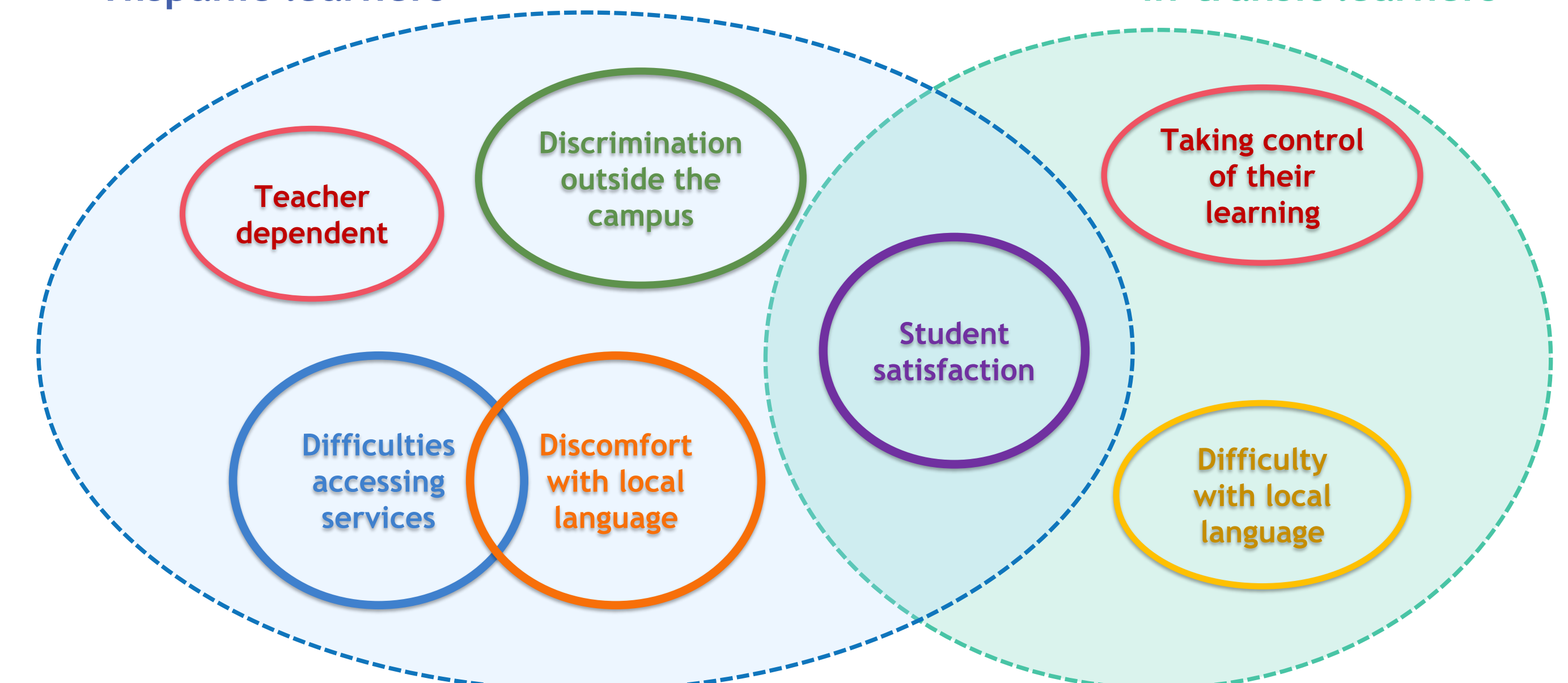
Elem= Elementary, Pre-Int= Pre-Intermediate, Int= Intermediate, Upper-Int= Upper-Intermediate, Adv= Advanced

### Findings

Findings showed that despite student satisfaction with the university ESL programme, Hispanic in-transit learners, in-particular those who spent fewer than six months in Trinidad, faced race and gender discrimination.

#### Short-term in-transit Hispanic learners

#### Resident & Long-term in-transit learners



Unfavourable and discriminatory attitudes towards Hispanic in-transit learners hampered their opportunities for interaction and integration and restricted their freedom to learn.

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*I think is good...the experience is good... because even in your own language you can go to another country and you are going to find that you cannot understand some expressions or some words...and is good to know...that develops your language*

*The professional quality of the tutors, who I rate as one of the best because they are very prepared people...the ability to teach, they have the patience, they have the ability to explain to you in different ways for you to understand things... people with a lot of experience...*

*Things I value... the infrastructure... the institute has all the necessary tools where the student develops himself*

*I like being here, at the CLL. You seem like a perfect teacher to me and my other teachers as well...*

*For me the British pronunciation is so difficult ... as I want to stay here, I need to learn it...*

*I think we need to practise with local people, because all the time we stay together and speak in Spanish... in the street is difficult*

*When I ask for clarification, Trini English speakers speak the same way, even a bit stronger, like shouting at you*

*The bad experience I had yesterday in immigration, I thought it was disrespectful, because I'm not a prostitute ... So, they told me, "This is your dad?" "Yes." "Do you have your birth certificate? Birth certificate?" "No." "How do I know he's your dad?"*

*I cannot be calm knowing that I have an appointment and my tranquility ends when I get to the immigration office. Knowing that I have to keep carrying papers to them blocks me mentally because it is extremely stressful, it's a waste of time, a waste of money ... You are a serious institute; but with all due respect ... this is not a serious country...*

*People who sell food make crude gestures. They make comments that we do not know English... it makes us uncomfortable ... it demotivates me because I think that I am not doing well in English*

*I am here only to study. I started using my shades and earphones every day on the streets, so they would stop calling me a whore and asking me how much I usually charge*

*And the landlady explained that men act like that because Venezuelan women are whores who come here to steal husbands from their wives*

*When I go out, men blow their horn and send kisses and stop their cars to ask, How much do you charge?*

*A man who was trying to force Consuelo into his car, was, at the same time, calling her a whore*

*I was having difficulty understanding what the tour guide was saying. He asked if we were from a mental place*

**Factors**

- Discomfort with local language
- Difficulties accessing services
- Teacher dependent / Taking control of their learning
- Student satisfaction
- Difficulty with local language
- Discrimination outside the campus

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