

Workplace Experiences of Mexican Male Migrant Workers

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[Abstract] This narrative research reports the experiences of five Mexican migrant workers considering the lifelong learning framework. Storytelling gave the participants the opportunity to share their life stories and workplace learning experiences. They were recruited via referral and snowball sampling from a Texas border town where there is an established migrant worker community. The research question guiding this study included: What can be learned from the workplace experiences of a group of Mexican male migrant workers? Data were collected through a series of conversational interviews and field notes. Through narrative analysis procedures, four major themes were identified: (1) resiliency and work ethics, (2) on the job learning, (3) struggles of migrant work, and (4) achievements and life satisfaction. The labour of migrant workers is vital to the growth of the U.S. economy and the stability of different workplace areas such as construction, agriculture, and factories. Migrant workers are extremely resilient and sacrifice a lifetime of work away from their families. They are a great example of what it means to be a self-directed learner. Their narratives illustrate the need for engaging in lifelong learning to keep up to date in the workplace.

[Keywords] Migrant workers, Mexican migrant workers, workplace learning, lifelong learning

Introduction

Geographical proximity has been a critical factor for the high number of people of Mexican descent to come to the United States to live and work. Historically, the U.S. federal government has invited Mexican laborers to come to work through programs such as the Bracero Program in the 1940s. Mexico is a neighbour with large states such as California, Arizona, and Texas; thus, the number of Mexican migrants keeps growing each year. Migrant workers form 17.4% of all workers in the U.S. labour force; they are traveling employed individuals working away from their place of residence (Costa, 2020). Latino migrant day laborers report that their primary purpose in the United States is to work and send remittances to support family members in the country of origin (Negi & Iwamoto, 2014, p. 369). Furthermore, Budiman (2020) reports that in 2018, 11.2 million immigrants living in the U.S. were from Mexico, accounting for 25% of all U.S. immigrants. Therefore, this narrative research focuses on the workplace learning experiences of a group of Mexican migrant workers considering the lifelong learning framework. The research question guiding this article is: What can be learned from the workplace experiences of a group of Mexican male migrant workers? As explained by Costa (2020), the term ‘migrant worker’ is not only limited to field workers, but includes working in different areas, such as construction and factories.

Background and Context

The term *bracero* comes from the Spanish word ‘brazo’ (arm) and symbolizes the physical labour required to participate in the Bracero Program (Garcia, 2021). Mexican men were expected to do physical labour, work long hours, and leave the country once the job was finished (Schraff, 2008). Thus, the Bracero Program allowed Mexican men to travel to the United States as seasonal employees to do physical labour such as work the fields and build roads. It is estimated that more than 4.5 million Mexican men were granted a bracero contract. Around the 1950s, the Bracero Program helped the United States to increase agricultural production and keep a low pay for workers in the program. It is estimated that bracero workers only made around \$7,500 annually, working long hours and with very few days off (Schraff, 2008). Despite the benefits that the labour of Mexican men brought to the U.S. economy, in 1954 Operation Wetback emerged as an immigration law enforcement initiative created by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service Office. Local farmers and business groups were concerned with the effects of undocumented Mexican immigrants living in their communities. Operation Wetback aimed to deport Mexicans regardless of immigration status and allow U.S. Border Patrol to arrest and deport millions of Mexican workers.

Advocating for Mexican workers, activist Cesar Chavez sought higher pay and better work conditions for them. In 1962, Chavez created the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which exposed the injustices that bracero workers were facing. Similarly, for about three months 15,000 men, women, and children from Starr County participated in what is known today as the Melon Strike of 1966. The workers from Starr County were experiencing harsh working conditions and very low pay. The strike demanded that the wages be raised, and melon workers closed all the packaging facilities during the harvest season (Rivera, n.d.). The strike was for better wages and better work conditions. It changed workers’ rights in Texas. However, in the early 1980s, the pay for fieldworkers still did not have a significant increase. Some companies pay them below minimum wage knowing that they will not speak up for fear of deportation or fear of losing their jobs. However, it is estimated that 60% of the earnings of Latino migrant workers stay in the United States, and 40% is saved or sent to their families in their country of origin (Duquette-Rury, 2020). Mexican migrant workers contribute to supporting the economy of both their home country and the United States. Likewise, Viveros-Guzmán and Gertler (2015) argue that with their labour, migrant workers help food prices to stay steady; if there were no field migrant workers, the prices of vegetables and fruit would increase.

Although it has been more than fifty years since the Bracero Program officially ended, the United States’ economy still depends on labour migration (Cohen, 2011). Migrant workers, predominantly Latino migrant workers, tend to take positions that no other demographic accepts (Garcia, 2021). For the most part, the positions involve physical labour. Also, those positions require traveling and relocation to a different place and leaving the family behind. Thus, families get separated due to economic reasons; “decisions to migrate among parents of young children are most difficult yet are often undertaken by the desire to improve life prospects for those children” (McGuire & Martin, 2007, p. 178). But migrant workers leave their homes to be able to provide for their children and create new life opportunities for them. McGuire and Martin (2007) argue that there could be cases where migrant workers lose some of the family traditions due to being away from home for too long. Missing quality time with the family can negatively affect the children because they grow up without their fathers (Vega, 2021). The migrant workers miss out on their children’s childhood and family time by being away from home.

Concerning the language barrier, Viveros-Guzmán and Gertler (2015) explain that Mexican migrant workers with little English knowledge use body language to explain a task to one another. An interpreter is sometimes available during a work orientation or job training but that is not always the case. Migrant workers rely on bilingual co-workers to explain a task that needs to be completed (Gerdes & Wilberschied, 2003). Similarly, Spears et al. (2012) report that migrant workers tend to seek help from each other rather than ask the supervisors if the supervisor only speaks English. Budget constraints do not always allow for having a bilingual facilitator in the workplace (Duval-Couetil & Mikulecky, 2011). Unfortunately, Latino workers account for 13.8% of workplace fatalities (Floud, 2010). Construction employment is a high-hazard and low pay position for Latino workers (Menzel & Gutierrez, 2010). Ensuring the safety of their employees should be always a priority, especially when the employees need to use heavy machinery to complete a task.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning refers to the ability to continuously learn throughout life to join the workforce, participate in a democratic and inclusive society, and to enjoy a personally rewarding life (Chapman et al., 2006, p. 152). This framework is relevant to the study of the experience of the Mexican migrant worker to envision them as whole human beings, not just as labour workers who come and go. “Lifelong learning in the workplace is critically pertinent as workers are expected to engage actively with change and to be self-directed and self-regulating in acquiring new knowledge and skills” (Evans et al., 2023, p. 14). Migrating to a new country and working under unstable conditions certainly requires these skills. Furthermore, Delors and UNESCO (1996, pp. 20-21) explain lifelong learning through four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. Learning to know refers to having curiosity about learning, the foundation of lifelong education. This is the innate human need and desire to learn about the world around them. Learning to do involves taking action after once knowledge has been acquired. Here, adults gain knowledge to perform a task. learning to live together, the focus is on relationships. Adults grow and prosper when they can interact and live in harmony with others. Learning to be, centers on individual responsibility to attain shared goals. Every person has the duty to contribute to the community.

Methods

Narratives and stories served as the method for data collection and for reporting study findings. ‘Stories draw us into an experience at more than a cognitive level; they engage our spirit, our imagination, our heart, and this engagement is complex and holistic’ (Clark & Rossiter, 2008, p. 63). Storytelling gave the participants the opportunity to share their life stories and workplace learning experiences. They reflected on life choices, learning experiences, motivation, and challenges.

Participants

Five male Mexican migrant workers were recruited via referral and snowball sampling techniques (Patton, 2002) to participate in the study (Table 1). These referrals were from the same Texas border town where there is a migrant worker community. The referrals, made by a key informant who lives in this community, were helpful to get started since the focus was on recruiting seasoned migrant workers to gather substantial data for the study. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1*Migrant Workers*

Pseudonym	Age	Years as Migrant Workers	Work Status	Education
Armando	60+	35+	Retired	Middle School
Cesar	60+	35+	Retired	High School
José	60+	30+	Retired	Middle School
Juan	60	30+	Active	Bachelors
Mario	60+	35+	Active	Middle School

Data Collection

Data were generated through conversational interviews and field notes. This type of data collection created opportunities for “flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The participants were able to express themselves freely in their native language, Spanish, and the researchers were able to follow the conversation and be active listeners and observers.

Conversational Interviews. A list of questions guided the interviews, but the topics evolved as the conversation progressed and based on the stories shared by the research participants. As Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016, pp. 109-114) explain, “plática (conversation) honours the participants as co-constructors of knowledge, allows for connections between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry, provides a space for healing, reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity. “

These pláticas took place in Spanish to allow the participants to express themselves freely and with confidence. The narratives that appear in this article were translated into English by the authors-researchers who are both bilingual in Spanish-English. A careful discussion took place each time that a story was translated to make sure that the meaning was not lost. The narratives were trimmed up to avoid repetition of ideas. Punctuation was added where needed for clarity purposes.

Each individual plática with the Mexican migrant workers participating in the study lasted 90-120 minutes with an extra 30-minute-follow-up conversation for clarification purposes. The topics of the conversations included an exploration of the participants’ journey as migrant workers, workplace challenges and achievements, strategies for success, and other information offered by the participants. Sometimes, the participants brought artifacts to the interviews and used them to relate their stories. For example, they brought letters, pictures, and objects they associated with their families, the workplace, and their journeys as migrant workers.

Field notes. These served to record observations and interactions to be used later during the analysis process. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe field notes as observations of the setting, actions, participant behaviour, and the conversation, as well to examine ideas, state concerns, and ask new questions. Field notes also help to document aspects such as tone of voice, word choice, and the deeper meaning beyond the stories shared by the participants. These notes allow for reflection and to make sure appropriate questions for clarification were asked to the participants during the follow-up interviews.

Analysis

Five steps suggested by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) guided the analysis process. Data analysis was a cyclical process, going back and forth the different steps for analysis allowed for accuracy of findings. (1) Getting to know the data involved listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts several times for coding. Building individual profiles of the study participants was helpful to get to know the data. (2) Focusing the analysis meant looking at the data through the lens of the study framework and keeping the research questions in mind. Creating a Microsoft Excel matrix helped to establish connections with the different aspects of the research question and the study framework. (3) Categorizing information, inductive and deductive analysis allowed to identify initial categories by clustering similar codes together. (4) Identifying patterns and connections within and between categories was essential for data reduction and to include meaningful data in the report of findings. Initially, twenty-five categories were identified and a second round of analysis looking at how these categories were interconnected revealed four major themes. (5) Interpretation, bringing it all together, this last step involved listing the key learning points to bring meaning to the reader.

Ethical Considerations

IRB approval (protocol number 8368) was granted by the Institutional Review Board at Texas State University. The study participants were informed about the scope and objectives of the study, as well as the nature of their participation. They were debriefed on the nature and purpose of the study as well as the voluntary nature of their participation. Consent was established by reading and explaining the procedures to collect data. They were presented with the following two sentences: 'If you agree to form part of this study, you do not have to answer any question you do not want to, your participation is voluntary, and you can stop your participation at any time. Your name will not be mentioned in any publication and your information will be kept confidential'. All references to potentially identity-revealing details were removed from the data and the report of study findings.

Findings

The main goal of this narrative research was to learn from the workplace experiences of a group of Mexican male migrant workers. Thus, analysis of the data uncovered four major themes: (1) resiliency and work ethics, (2) on the job learning, (3) struggles of migrant work, and (4) achievements and life satisfaction.

Resiliency and Work Ethics

To succeed as migrant workers, the study participants mentioned that they needed to develop a capacity to adapt to the new work conditions as well as have a strong sense of work ethics. Besides traveling to different locations to find jobs, the migrant workers also had to accept different types of jobs to be able to continue being employed. Armando describes this reality as follows:

I have had many types of work. At one time, I worked in road construction. Also, I have been a truck driver, a dump truck driver, and a driver of many other types of machinery. Later I went out to the refineries, working in different types of work: metal sheet installer, insulation, scaffolds, and much more. I am proud because of all kinds of work I have done, picking and shovelling cement, and construction. Let's say I have worked a little bit of everything, labour-wise.

Their reliance to succeed in the workplace came from their motivation to provide for their families and earn enough money to send back to their home country. Juan speaks of the different types of jobs he has had, safety and communication, as well as work ethics and what it meant to him:

I have worked in many types of jobs. For example, in the construction industry, power plants, refineries, and mines, all jobs had physical labour involved. Feeling safe and having good communication at work helped me stay calm and continue working in such places each day. I continued working with these two hands because I needed to feed my children. I left my job as a professional in Mexico, because here in the United States you earn more. Making sure I did a good job in everything I did was one of the ways I took care of my job, and by taking care of my job I knew my family would be safe. Because it meant that the bills would be paid, and they would not lack food or clothing.

In addition, Mario explains that work ethics is reflected in the type of communication and relationships they can establish on the job. Functioning as a cohesive team was important:

I've worked in construction, putting ducts in buildings...also, as a dishwasher when I just started coming to work here in the United States. Later I worked in the insulation, nuclear, gas, and oil plants. For me, the most important factor in any job, but especially as a migrant worker, is knowing how to work as a cohesive team. We try to have good communication with colleagues when we are working and follow the safety rules.

The stories shared by the five study participants illustrate resiliency and work ethics as they needed to constantly be on the move and learning something new. They were flexible to adapt to new work conditions each time and travel as far away as needed. They would go wherever there was a possibility to have employment.

On-the-job Learning

Accepting a new job meant having to learn new protocols and how to use new machinery. The study participants shared how they learned workplace policies and how to get the job done. Often, they had orientation sessions where a supervisor or a team leader would explain the work. These instructions were always in English. José shared that:

Every company has new machinery, or they do something different. Usually, they gave us an instructor, and we learned quickly. This type of training very rarely was given in Spanish. We needed to ask for help from colleagues who understood a little more English than us. There were times when I helped the rookies that entered the workplace. I shared my work knowledge with them as others did with me when I was a rookie many years ago.

Similarly, Cesar mentioned that most of the time as co-workers they would learn from each other, they learned on the go. He explained how safety rules were important:

The most important thing is safety and awareness. Typically, on a new job, you learn safety measures in a shop run by a supervisor. It is difficult to understand if you do not speak English. I asked my co-workers to explain to me when I didn't know how to do something.

Also, I had to help new co-workers... The bond that is created with colleagues is very rewarding. Most of us come from different countries but share similar backgrounds, being away from families and wanting to raise children.

Mario speaks about the process of obtaining training and a license to use specialized machinery. He also mentioned the importance of learning about safety rules.

When we are going to use new machines, they will provide training. They tell you the basics, sometimes they play a video on how to use the machines. Of course, those videos are in English. After the training, you can use the machine. Sometimes they give you the opportunity to drive them yourself... Later they test you and give you a license to use that machinery. They also give you a physical exam and the rules you must follow. Many safety rules are learned on the go.

As one work opportunity ended, the participants mentioned that they had to be active and find the next new place to work. For safety purposes all five migrant workers discussed that they needed to be trained by their peers or supervisors when they needed to use heavy machinery. Some workplaces had a licensure exam that allowed them to use the equipment only if they had passed the licensure exam.

Struggles of Migrant Work

A recurrent theme in the stories relates to the need to leave their families behind and the sense of loss that brought to their daily struggles as migrant workers. Being away from home, they missed important family time. Armando describes these feelings:

The times I had to work at night I couldn't call my family because, during the day, I slept and rested to have energy at night. And they already slept at night because they had to go to school, and my wife also had to go to work. Not being able to live with the family anymore was something quite sad. Apart from losing valuable time with my family, a challenge I faced was not having better jobs during the first years in the United States. Also, it was stressful not knowing when the job ended. Often, we were laid off from work without timely warning.

Each of the participants mentioned that having a steady job was not something they felt they had. Their jobs could last between a few months or a couple of years. In addition, Mario and the other participants mentioned that not knowing English put them in disadvantage. Not knowing English, they had to learn how to order a meal at a restaurant or how to ask their supervisors for clarification about a work task. Mario explained that:

Living in the United States for many years, I could never learn English, not well enough to have a conversation. Speaking English would offer better positions and more pay. Migrant working is not easy, it is not only hard labour, but also feeling lost in a new place, getting used to the routine, and missing the family. Many times, you don't know what can happen to you far from home or the people you are going to meet. They can treat you well or mistreat you. But you must risk it to progress financially and reach your goals.

Feeling lost at every new job location was a common experience. The five participants mentioned a sense of confusion and reliance on their co-workers to help each other. As Jose explains, long work shifts, safety, and extreme weather conditions were other challenges they faced:

The 12-hour shifts were hard, but sometimes I had to work 16 hours. That was when I was younger. But lately, it's been 12 hours, six or seven days a week... The work was different each time. I travelled almost to all the states of the United States. Apart from being a heavy job due to waking up very early, having long days, being in danger at work, and being away from family, we also sometimes lived in semi-critical conditions. Working under extreme weather conditions was hard, especially the heat.

The participants also mentioned aging as a challenge since the job conditions remain the same but growing older means not having the same stamina for the job. For Juan, migrant work was not the journey he wished for when he was young, but it paid the bills. He added that,

I have worked in many types of jobs...the construction industry, power plants, refineries, and mines. But now, my body does not feel the same...When I was young, I had no problem...Job trips are far away. The need for work makes you go to places you didn't even know existed. Going to various places does not mean that you can go exploring. The days are occupied by working 10 to 12+ hours a day.

By definition, migrant work is seasonal, this means having temporary jobs. Not having a steady job was stressful for all the study participants. Working long days, being in danger at work, and being away from family, living in semi-critical conditions, and working under extreme weather conditions were some of the challenges mentioned by all the participants in the study.

Achievements and Life Satisfaction

All five participants spoke highly of their children and felt proud of their accomplishments. In particular, Armando spoke about feeling pride in his job and how his children have been successful by earning an education.

My youngest son is an engineer, my oldest daughter is an assistant principal at an elementary school, and my middle daughter is a great mom to my four grandchildren. It makes me proud to see the family I have been able to raise. My work as a migrant helped me raise them... My great pride is having achieved the goals I had in my employment and at home as a father. Educating my children was the most important thing...above all, they know how to fend for themselves...they no longer needed me!

Similarly, Cesar shared that the sacrifice working under harsh conditions paid off and he is grateful for the job that helped him, and his family move forward. Cesar also talks about his achievements and goals for his children and grandchildren:

Working as a migrant worker is not easy. It takes a long time to get used to. You miss your wife, children, house, bed, good food, everything! But I am grateful for all I was able to do with my work...I thank God that my children were able to learn English and were able to

learn to weld. They are hard workers, a value I instilled in them. Welding is one of the best-paying jobs in the area...I hope that my three children raise their children with adequate values and give them an education.

José explained that he started from zero and he was able to achieve different things for being a migrant worker. He said:

I am proud of what I have achieved regarding my family and my work. My biggest goal in this life was to raise my family. Thank God my two sons are successful. They are better men than me when I was their age. With my work, I was able to provide a house and essentials. My children are educating their children with the principles that I gave them. They are teaching them to study and to be respectful. Being away from my kids was hard when they were little, so I'm glad my children have jobs where they can be close to their kids...I feel satisfied with what I accomplished... I built a house, bought cars and trucks, and supported my children and wife.

All five migrant workers referred to their children as a point of pride and life satisfaction. Juan describes his children as being good people and studious. He gave them the advice to study hard and work harder to be able to move forward in life:

My children are good people and quite studious. Thanks to their good principles and dedication, they can fend for themselves. This is a source of pride! It is progress and a step up in the ladder...My legacy is that they have studied, they have financial security and a better chance in everything they do... I wish my three sons will educate and provide for my grandchildren as well.

As migrant workers, the study participants face tribulations and life challenges, but all are proud of their jobs and what this line of work allowed them to build for their families. Mario explained that:

I am proud of everything I have learned and everything I have achieved as a migrant worker. I feel proud of my wife. I am proud of my daughter, now a kindergarten teacher. I am proud of my two sons, who have very nice careers. I am pleased that they are happy in their careers and will not have to work under the same conditions as I did.

Achievement and life satisfaction manifested in different ways in the narratives shared by the study participants. Their narratives illustrate pride in their work and happiness for what the future they were able to forge for their children and families.

Discussion

This narrative research focused on the workplace learning experiences of a group of Mexican migrant workers considering the lifelong learning framework. Thus, study findings revealed four major themes: (1) resiliency and work ethics, (2) on the job learning, (3) struggles of migrant work, and (4) achievements and life satisfaction.

Despite the hardships, they all showed remarkable resiliency and commitment to their families. Three principles of adult learning were observed in the actions of the migrant workers adapting to the new work environment (Mackeracher, 2004). These are: (1) the ability to draw on life experience to assist with learning, (2) a tendency to be internally motivated, and (3) a willingness to learn when transitioning into new roles. The migrant workers used their prior work experience to understand their new roles. They drew on the skills they had previously acquired and applied them to the new context. They took initiative to understand and learn about new tasks. They accepted the challenge of learning new skills, despite the unfamiliarity of the environment. This willingness to learn was essential for the migrant workers to successfully adjust to new work settings.

Regarding on-the-job learning, the migrant workers had a need to learn quickly and apply the new knowledge immediately as part of their adaptation to a new work environment. “Informal learning recognizes that the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the work setting does not occur from organized programs alone” (Jacobs & Parks, 2009, p. 141). Lifelong learning and adult learning principles were observed in the stories shared by the study participants. Learning takes place at all stages of life and in all life contexts (Laal, 2011, p. 472). All study participants mentioned the need to learn on the job and adapt to new roles and work responsibilities. Motivation to learn new work procedures was an essential factor. Having a positive attitude was crucial when they needed to learn new skills depending on the recent work role they had transitioned into. They also needed to be able to adapt to different work environments and be willing to accept different working styles. Jacobs and Park (2009) mentioned that informal learning occurs in the actual work setting and is based on a sense of self-directedness and self-efficacy. The migrant workers kept learning and made sure to be qualified to take on the next job.

The struggles of migrant work faced by the study participants were many. Lack of work stability, working long hour-shifts, being in danger at work, and being away from family, living in semi-critical conditions, and working under extreme weather conditions were mentioned by the study participants. Being a migrant worker impacts the whole family, especially if they are left behind in their home country (Taylor & Ruiz, 2017). Since the father becomes an absent parent figure and the wife is left behind with children. She becomes a *married single mother* (Latvalla, 2011). As stated by the study participants, this situation puts pressure on all family members and creates emotional challenges to them when away from home. Likewise, the study participants had difficulty communicating in English and adapting to everyday life situations requiring the use of English (Zavodny, 2000). Training to acquire new skills and mastering new machinery was rarely offered in Spanish, their native language.

Lastly, study findings highlight life satisfaction as an outcome of 30+ years of labour as migrant workers. According to the participants the benefits outweigh the challenges. Focusing on the positive is what helped them to keep going. This study has shown that although migrant work is difficult, the participants found satisfaction in their lives due to their resilience and benefits to their children. They were happy with the goals they were able to reach and the children they raised.

One of the principles of lifelong learning speaks to finding pleasure in life and being able to enjoy a personally rewarding life (Chapman et al., 2006). Study findings suggest that life satisfaction for the participants included acquiring material possessions, becoming grandparents, raising good children, and leaving a legacy of good men and women. After many years in migrant work, they found pleasure in life to enjoy the product of their labour and the satisfaction of having a family that loves them and that keeps on going.

Major achievements for the migrant workers included educating their children, children learning English and learning an occupation or a profession, children becoming self-sufficient and being able to fend for themselves. To this effect, Gomez (2016) mentioned that Latino men take much pride in the kind of jobs they do and how they educate their children. Their high aspirations for raising their family made it possible for the migrant workers to create opportunities for interrupting the status quo and the cycle of hardships due to lack of options to start to create social change (Freire, 1972). The participants set a positive example for their children and grandchildren, showing that hard work, dedication, and a positive attitude can lead to achieving one's goals. They come out as champions, not as victims.

Conclusion

This narrative research focused on the workplace learning experiences of a group of seasoned Mexican migrant workers considering the lifelong learning framework. The narratives shared by the study participants illustrated their resiliency and work ethics, the continual learning they engaged in while on the job, the struggles they faced as migrant workers, and the achievements and life satisfaction they have experienced. The five Mexican men who participated in the study had 30-35 years of experience as migrant workers and three of them had recently retired.

In relation to lifelong learning, the study participants actively engaged with change, were self-directed in acquiring new knowledge and skills, and were continually learning to adapt and survive at each new job. Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be as explained by Delors and UNESCO (1996) were lifelong learning pillars present in the narratives presented in this article. The migrant workers acted on their desire to learn for survival and adaptability purposes. Gaining knowledge to perform the different tasks required for each new job and their love for their families propelled them to learn and help each other. Building relationships and helping each other to succeed on the job were equally important.

For many generations, migrant workers have struggled and their contributions to the U.S. economy and society have been undervalued. For two of the study participants who are still working as migrant workers, the struggle continues. Like their stories, other migrant workers are experiencing harsh work conditions and isolation from their families. Their contributions to the U.S. economy and society have been undervalued. The labour of migrant workers is vital to the growth of the U.S. economy and the stability of different workplace areas such as construction, agriculture, and factories. Migrant workers are extremely resilient and sacrifice a lifetime of work away from their families to be able to provide for them. They are a great example of what it means to be a self-directed learner. The narratives provided in this article clearly illustrate their need for engaging in lifelong learning to keep up to date in the workplace.

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