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# Challenges With Academic Achievement For Esl Students At The Elementary Level From A Teacher's Perspective

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CHALLENGES WITH ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT FOR ESL STUDENTS AT THE  
ELEMENTARY LEVEL FROM A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

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ELEMENTARY LEVEL FROM A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

English language learners (ELLs) are currently one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. As growth of the ELL population has surpassed predictions over the years, there a great need to adequately train teachers to effectively serve these students. This pilot study sought to understand the challenges with academic achievement for ESL students at the elementary level from a teacher's perspective. This case study research was conducted to answer four research questions: 1) What current challenges do teachers have with serving ELLs? How are they currently addressing these challenges? 2) What (if any) current instructional strategies are currently effective with ELLs? 3) Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population?

The researcher conducted initial data collection using an electronic survey, then conducted follow-up interviews. A total of 10 elementary teachers participated in the survey and 2 took part in the follow-up interview. The results of this study revealed six major themes: 1) teachers do not understand how to implement language acquisition strategies, 2) lack of professional development for language acquisition instructional strategies for teachers, 3) ELLs have the greatest struggle in reading comprehension, 4) tactile activities and visual representations are effective instructional strategies for ELLs, 5) intervention time was effective block, 6)

scaffolding was an effective strategy for ELLs. These findings, as well as, the curriculum and professional development analysis support the need for professional development for teachers to deepen their understanding on the process of language acquisition for ELLs. Based on the results of this study, the researcher recommends future research to elaborate further on the emerged themes.

Keywords: English language learners, language acquisition, language development, professional development

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

English language learners (ELLs) are currently one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education report by Passel & Cohn (2008), “the English language learner student population is expected to grow rapidly. The projected number of school-age children of immigrants will increase from 12.3 million in 2005 to 17.9 million in 2020” (p.1).

While students have difficulties with language acquisition, teachers face the challenge of how to serve them effectively. According to the 2007 National Assessment of Education, “fourth-grade ELLs (English language learners) scored 36 points below non-ELLs in reading and 25 points below non-ELLs in math” (p. 10). The gaps among eighth-graders were even larger – 42 points in reading and 37 points in math. Shulman (1987) explained that there are seven categories that teachers need to master to effectively practice in the classroom. Out of the seven, content and pedagogical & curriculum are essentials. Without the knowledge of the “how” or “why” in instruction, teachers are left with no appropriate instructional strategies to adequately teach their class. This study explored deeper in understanding the needs that teachers may have regarding professional development in second language acquisition. In addition, the researcher sought to understand the many challenges faced by educators regarding ELL students.

A study presented by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST, 2003) found a link between achievement levels compared with levels of instruction. The prominent areas in which English learners are studied includes the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As also mentioned in the article, “NEA believes the

federal government needs to do much more to assist states and school districts in improving the quality of assessments for ELL students, providing native language and improving the quality and validity of accommodations” (CRESST, 2003, p. 3). The lack of academic preparation has been one of the greatest challenges for English language learners (ELLs). Another area that needs to be redefined is instruction for this special population. In 2001, 91% of public school teachers were given a survey by MetLife Foundation on resources for diverse needs. Among the results, 59% of the teachers thought that they lacked programs on or knowledge of how to serve students with “low-income status, limited fluency in English, or learning disabilities” (Rebora, 2011, p. 1). In essence, educators lack the appropriate training to specifically target the instructional needs of these sub-populations.

As growth of the ELL population has surpassed expectation over the years, there is still a great need to adequately train teachers to effectively serve these students. Brown (2007) mentions “Service[s] that provide program or direct, immediate material help to people in need” (p. 279). Students in this district lack appropriate services to assess and instruct in ways that improve language acquisition. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 requires that all schools and districts provide high quality instruction to ELLs to ensure progress towards language proficiency. In addition, schools must also place highly qualified teachers in all classrooms where academic instruction takes place (McMurrer, 2008).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there has been an increased number of English language learners in many independent school districts. In viewing the top ten districts presented, five of the ten highest concentrations were in Texas. Close to 200,000 students in Texas comprise this population. In 2009, Walker-Dalhousie found that 42% of all public school classrooms have at least one Limited English Proficient (LEP) student in their class (p. 338). One



reason is the increase of refugees arriving in the United States from other countries. In addition to these numbers, the study site Independent School District (ISD) has close to 16,000 ELLs from a total number of 57,000 students (28%), and nearly 19% of the 5,000,000 students in Texas classified as English language learners (ELLs). Consequently, there are far more students needing ESL instruction as a greater influx of second language learners enroll in public schools. The rapid increase in population of ELLs has many teachers and administrators struggling to meet the needs of all students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This moderate size independent school district is located in an inner suburban city located with the city limits of north Texas. The district currently serves over 57,000 students, which makes it the second largest district in north Texas. In Texas, the state education agency collects data and shares an annual report of student performance by distributing the Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR). This extensive report provides a disaggregated classification based on student academic performance, demographics, and programs. The information shared is based on performance on individual schools, districts, and regions in the entirety of Texas. In reviewing over the 2012-2013 TAPR for the study site, 44% of the student population were considered ELL, while district was at 22%, and state at 17%. In the 2017-2018 school, the same elementary schools increased to 49%, the district was at 29%, and the state was at 19%. With the continued trend of the increasing population of students enrolling as an English language learner (ELL), it is imperative that teachers are provided with the appropriate training during various times of the school year. In doing so, teachers need to learn how to appropriately address the specific needs that ELLs may have to improve their second language skills.

Currently in Texas, teachers are not required to have their ESL certification to teach in public schools. However, it is up to each individual school district to choose if they want to opt-in as a requirement for teachers to have their ESL certification. In addition to not requiring teachers to have their ESL certification, it is also not mandatory that schools provide specific coursework for their teachers pertaining to language acquisition as part of their yearly professional development training. Texas Education Agency (TEA) state regulations are different compared to surrounding states. This research is needed to identify and understand the challenges educators have when instructing English Language Learners. In doing so, teachers can have adequate training and effective practices for their students to succeed in their academic studies. More specifically, the study will contribute to improved opportunities for student language acquisition.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to identify the challenges that teachers have when serving English Language Learners. This study aimed to:

- Understand the challenges teachers have teaching English Language Learners.
- Identify what support teachers need to effectively teach English Language Learners.
  - Specialized professional development trainings targeting language acquisition strategies.
  - Curriculum materials

With the listed goals, this project explored the academic needs of English language learners and how to provide them with the needed refined instruction to be successful in their education. In addition to this goal, the researcher sought deeper insight on areas school leaders need to emphasize so ELLs can progress in their second language acquisition and raise academic

achievement. By identifying the challenges that teachers face when instructing ELLs in the classroom, the researcher will provide a framework of ways to address, in particular, targeted strategies and curriculum materials.

Kotter (2012) explained, “*Vision* refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future” (p. 71). A clear vision of where the research is heading will provide a pathway on how to implement these approaches across one district. To find the effect of targeted strategies, researchers may track students’ level of proficiency in English to see if they have successfully moved to the next higher level. This study, however, focused on teacher perceptions of their implementation of second language acquisition strategies.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research questions used to guide the study through survey, interview, and curriculum/professional development analysis were:

- What challenges do teachers have when instructing ELL students?
- How do teachers currently address the challenges with struggling ELLs in their classrooms?
- Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This pilot study was created to explore the understanding of difficulties teachers have when instructing ELLs at an elementary school. In studying this area of research, the main goal was to understand teachers’ beliefs about how to effectively serve their English language learner population. Cummins’ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive

Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition and theories that served as the theoretical frameworks for this study.

Cummins' framework (1984) of second language acquisition is distinguished into two counterparts of cognitive demand and context embeddedness. First are the basic interpersonal skills, which is how language is used in everyday communication. The second is the academic language which is used in the development of literacy. Similar to Cummins, Krashen introduces the theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This refers to the both subconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning. Krashen (1982) states,

The result of language acquisition ... is subconscious...are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired. Instead, we have a 'feel' for the correctness. Grammatical sentences 'sound' right, or 'feel' right, and errors feel wrong, even if we do not consciously know what rule was violated. (p. 10

Both of these theoretical frameworks are used to provide the conceptual framework for this study. These theories allow the researcher to further investigate the root challenges that teachers face when providing instruction for ELLs.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope**

Limitations of this study included many factors such as the number of participants being interviewed as well as the number of participants taking survey. The limited number of participants did not allow the researcher to draw more generalizable conclusions. This study is therefore, presented as a pilot that will benefit from more fully implementing surveys and interviews. The data collected are limited to only one study site. They may or may not accurately reflect other schools in or out of the school district. The information collected from the interview portion of the study was conducted with two participants. The small pool of ESL teachers who

volunteered to interview suggest their responses are preliminary, but may inform a framework for future study of other sites in the district.

### **Rationale & Significance**

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established the standards that schools must provide quality language instruction in effort to improve second language acquisition. Under this act, children are intended to be provided with highly qualified teachers to instruct areas of academic content. The act also sought to ensure that all children are provided an education no matter their background. However, the greatest challenge of this act was how to instruct ESL students properly. According to Chisman (1993), ESL instruction “is so disorganized and complex that no one really knows how it works” (p. 1). Therefore, the information collected from this research can provide school administrators more understanding of challenges that teachers face with servicing the ESL student population. These initial findings may also provide information for future planning of professional developments and areas of focus in curriculum building.

### **Laws & Regulations**

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Educational Statistics, Table 1.1 below shows the population of students attending public school and the percentage of ELLs within the total.

**Table 1.1** Descriptive statistics of students attending public school and classified as ELL in 2009-2010

Top Five States in the United States	Total Public School Population	Percentage of ELLs
California	6,263,438	28%
Texas	4,850,210	15%
Florida	2,634,522	9%
New York	2,766,052	7%
Massachusetts	957,053	5%

As shown from Table 1, Texas has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of ELLs attending public schools. With the rapid growth of ELLs, many districts are finding ways to meet the needs of ELLs as well as be in compliance with state and national regulations. As required by federal state laws, all classrooms and instructional programs need to provide services and accommodations for specifically for the ELL population.

According to the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Chapter 89, the state commissioner rule explains that all districts with ELLs in their classrooms must provide programs of either bilingual education or English as a Second Language (ESL) at their schools. In addition to providing services to accommodate ELLs, districts must also implement the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) as part of the required curriculum amongst all subjects. The ELPS and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are an integral part of curriculum when providing instruction for ELLs.

In reviewing U.S. educational policies in the 1970s, language programs were practically nonexistent. Up until 1974, the United States Supreme Court case of *Lau v. Nichols* ruled that public schools must provide supplemental support to the population of limited English students. Justice William O. Douglas explained, “There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education” (Lessow-Hurley, 2005, p. 129). Due to this ruling, minority children of San Francisco were able to receive additional support in language acquisition. This paved the way for ESL programs across the nation to begin forming alternatives to better accommodate all children.

As previously mentioned, in 2003, the *No Child Left Behind Act* was created by President George W. Bush stating that all schools must be held accountable for the progress of all students. NCLB Act of 2001 was created “to ensure that all children have the fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education, and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state 4 academic assessment” (NCLB 2001, cited in Simpson et al. 2004, p. 68). Furthermore, they need to boost academic achievements for all children no matter what programs they are in. For ELLs, they are to meet adequate yearly progress in language proficiency. Districts that fail to comply are in danger of losing federal funding.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Bilingual Education*: Program in which students develop literacy in their native language while also becoming competent in the English language.
- *English language learner (ELL)*: A person learning English as a second language.

- *English as a Second Language (ESL)*: Program of which students are provided with linguistic accommodations to become competent in the English language.
- *English Language Proficiency Standard (ELPS)*: State standards used to assess English language learners
- *First language (L1)*: The first language that a child learns. This may include other terms such as native language, primary language, or mother tongue.
- *Intervention*: When teachers and staff form a meeting to determine if the student needs extra services.
- *Newcomer*: A student who has just arrived to a new country.
- *Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS)*: This is a system used in Texas Education to collect data on student demographics and academic backgrounds.
- *Second Language (L2)*: This is the second language that is being targeted after acquiring an L1.
- *TEA*: Texas Education Agency
- *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)*: State standards used to assess students in all academic subjects taught in public schools.
- *Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)*: A Texas state test to measure the proficiency levels of ESL students. Students are measured holistically in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- *Home Language Survey*: A form filled for school enrollment that consists of general demographic information of the student



## **Conclusion**

Children of immigrant families are a growing population in the United States over the past few years.

The recent increase in immigration accounts for rapid and substantial demographic changes in the United States' school-aged population. An estimated 25 percent—one-in-four—children in America are from immigrant families and live in households where a language other than English is spoken. This has significant implications for schools and the current discourse about the role of teacher quality and effectiveness in improving educational outcomes. What is rarely discussed in these debates, however, is what teacher quality means for different types of students. (Collins & Samson, 2012, p. 1)

The accelerated growth of newcomers to the school district has been dramatic in just this year alone. The Independent School District serves over 57,000 students of which almost half are considered or were once identified as an English language learner. Those schools in the second largest district in north Texas need to have a strong foundation of language instruction to better serve the incoming students who represent diverse language demographics.

In order to provide the fullest amount of resources and services to ELLs, teachers need to provide the maximum effective instruction for them. To complete this task, studies must continue to take place to understand how teachers feel about their instruction practices with ELL students. This study was used to research the framework of ESL instruction at an elementary school level through the lens of a teacher.

## **Overview of the Study**

This study is outlined in five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research topic and the origin of the research. This includes research questions and the rationale behind the study.

Chapter Two provides a literature review of studies about ELL education and explores key theories from Jim Cummins (1981) and Stephen Krashen (1994) on second language acquisition framework. Chapter Three provides details of the quantitative and qualitative research design and methods used to obtain data collection. Chapter Four provides the results of the data collection and its analysis. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the findings, which includes conclusions from the researcher and recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focused on the perspective of teachers on the challenges of instruction with ESL students in an elementary setting. The aim of this literature review is to explore areas of ESL instruction that have already been researched and ways to improve language acquisition instruction. Though there have been many studies over the years regarding ESL instruction, there is still an unclear understanding how to better serve the needs of this special population.

According to Brown (2007), “Language is a fundamental part of total human behavior, and behavioral psychologists examined it as such and sought to formulate consistent theories of first language acquisition” (p. 26). According to the NEA Educational Policy and Practice Department (2008), “by 2025 nearly one out of every four public school students will be an English Language Learner” (p. 1). To further research on this special population, this study is particularly concerned with the instructional challenges that educators face with the English language learner population at the elementary level. The compiled research explored both areas of relevancy of and themes about ELLs and second language acquisition.

#### **Second Language Acquisition**

Second language acquisition as noted by Noam Chomsky (1959), is the process of which language is built upon innate abilities. Chomsky theorized that the Language Acquisition Device or known as “LAD” is part of the brain of which serves as a device for learning language (p. 27). He argued that that children are born with already a set rule of language. When principles of language are hard-wired at birth, any specific language structures are built within exposure to the environment.

In 2014, Salmona conducted a study on how second language classroom instruction contributed to language acquisition in students' native language. In her study at an English immersion kindergarten classroom, she discovered students that had a strong foundation in their native language (L1) were able to transfer more easily in their second language (L2) compared to those that did not. Salmona (2014) explained, "if students do not have good strategies in their language, they will not have good strategies to transfer to the new language" (p. 53). Moreover, the study demonstrated the importance of understanding first language and how to bridge the same concepts to develop a new language.

### **Development of Communication Skills**

Jim Cummins (1981) initially began his research on language acquisition with bilingual Swedish immigrant children learning English as a second language. During his research, he noticed that the children who were proficient in their first language (L1) allowed them to acquire English as "developmental interdependence" (1983). In other words, development in a second language progressed at a faster rate when first language (L1) helps facilitate it. According to Cummins (2000): "Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible" (p. 56). Although children may seem to be fluent in both languages, Cummins (1984) explains that even though non-native speakers may "appear" fluent in their second language, educators cannot assume that a high degree of accuracy was achieved in language development.

This research was then guided by the Language Acquisition theory created by Cummins (1981) regarding development of communication skills. Cummins believed that second language acquisition consists of two different ways of comprehending another language. Two main aspects of his theory are the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive

Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1981) explains that language development comes in two different forms. The first distinction is the formation of everyday language known as, the “basic interpersonal communicative skills” or BICS. BICS occur when humans acquire communication skills in their L1. As language development begins to form, humans begin to acquire specific language of “cognitive academic language proficiency” or CALPS. This development usually occurs in an academic setting, such as during schooling.

### **BICS**

The Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) as Cummins (1981) explain is the social aspect of communication. This type of language skill is needed in social situations. For example, when a child is in the lunch room, playground, or in a social event. English language learners when placed in these types of scenarios will most likely excel in language as it requires less cognitive thinking. However, a great misconception about this is that children are progressing in second language acquisition, but they are lagging behind in academic language. In relation to this study, teachers may find it to be a challenge to differentiate language gains. As Cummins (1981) explains, BICS occur when communicative interaction in situations outside of the classroom. Teachers that do not have the appropriate knowledge of language acquisition may have the misconception that ELLs are making progress in language. However, this is not the case.

In another study presented by Hu (2015), she researched the perceptions of how English Corners on U.S. campuses were viewed by English learners. English Corners at a community college level is a place where students are able to gain practice in the English language with classmates that are native speakers. As explained by the researcher, oftentimes many international students receive much pressure in the U.S. due to the language barrier that they

encounter. As an effect of this pressure to speak English, many students often become anxious or stressed during the process of language acquisition. In relation to BICS, Hu (2015) explained an effective English Corner will help bridge the social conversation into academic language. As a result of this study, the researcher concluded that 40% of the participants chose not to participate in the English Corner due to their lack of confidence in social English and that the benefits did not seem as rewarding as attending regular ESL classes.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is very important as it is known as the language of survival. When students are able to master the concept of basic conversational language, they sometimes become overlooked by teachers. It is a challenge to many teachers to design instruction as they lack the understanding of how to bridge the foundation of social language to academic language.

### **CALP**

According to Cummins (1981), the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency is the academic language of learning. Unlike BICS, which are more quickly learned, CALP takes more time to process. Many children need extra support as provided by direct teaching.

In short, this type of language is substantially different from the English we use in everyday spoken interactions and it is, therefore, not only a lot more difficult to understand, it is also much more challenging for ESL students to carry over and produce that language in their written assignments or 'to use' during discussions. (Meyers, 1993. Teaching to Diversity)

In another study conducted by Garcia-Bonery (2011), she presented how the relationship of academics and interventions were contributing to implications for special education. During the study, the researcher utilized three types of testing factors. They were based on Response to

Intervention (RtI) tiers, Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Together, she created a research design in which English language learners (ELLs) were the population being researched upon. As a conclusion of the study, Garcia-Bonery (2011) found there was a strong tie between CALPS Spanish and RtI tiers. This proves that students that are labeled ELL in special education classes often are overlooked and not provided interventions. Garcia-Bonery (2011) stated, “The RtI framework when implemented properly can potentially reduce the referrals to special education by providing the instruction in the general classroom” (p. 50). This study raises the question if schools are adequately addressing the needs of ELLs by properly training their school specialists to identify if a student has a learning disability or is it language.

In another similar study conducted by Otaola (2008), his research centralized on the relationship between CALP and the use of instructional bilingualism strategies. To his surprise, there was not much of a difference between having the additive support and not having it. This was proven through the analysis of pre- and post- English test scores. As Otaola (2008) described in his conclusion “Additive bilingualism has not interfered with the normal acquisition of knowledge” (p. 103). Similarly to what Cummins (2000) stated, students that are able to use their L1 to transition into their L2 have a higher advantage compared to students that only focusing on the target language.

Teachers of language learners need to be aware that being fluent in social language does not translate as being fluent in academic language. These students may speak well in social conversations; however, they need the academic vocabulary to fully develop language acquisition. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) put a greater emphasis on the

learner showing proficiency in reading, writing, and communicating at an academic level. The learner is able to demonstrate the ability to think critically beyond the basics of social language.

### **The Iceberg Model – Common Understanding Proficiency (CUP)**

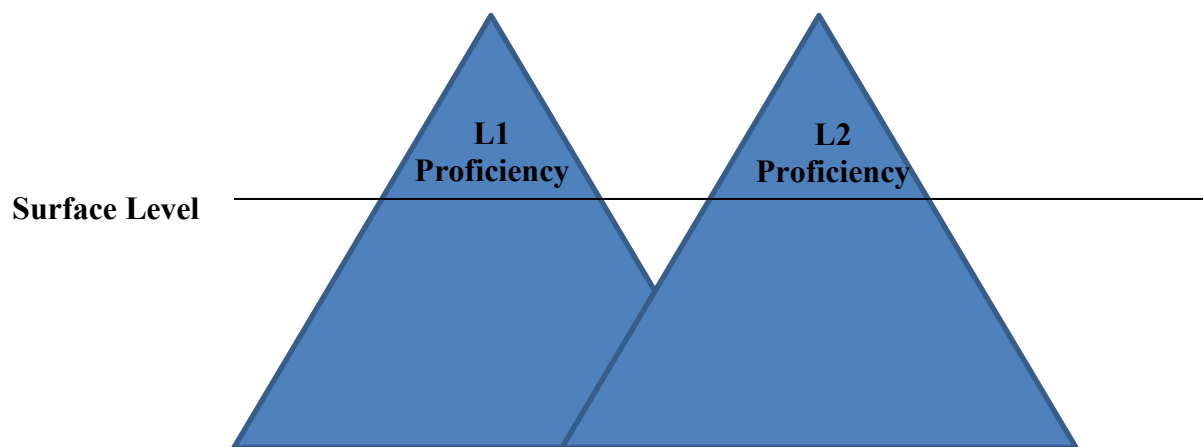


Figure 2.1 Common Understanding Proficiency (Cummins, 1981)

This model as represented by Figure 2.1 is Cummins' (1981) *Common Underlying Proficiency* (CUP) theory. This theory as explained by Cummins is the understanding that proficiency in L1 transfers directly into the learner's L2. For example, when a student is able to grasp the skills and concepts in their first language, they are able to carry these skills into their second language learning without starting over again. Cummins (2000) stated that language development in second language are considered factors based on first language attributes. If a student has a solid foundation in the L1, then transition to their L2 becomes more transparent and comprehensible. However, if the student is having to learn both concepts and language, then learning becomes more of a difficult task. In connection to this concept, an assimilation hypothesis project carried out by Liu & Perfetti (2003) tested Cummins' CUP theory. The data collected from this study show that the human brain does make a substantial connection from first language to second language. The more proficient the learner is in their native language, the more proficient they will become in their second language.



It is important to understand that not all students will receive the same foundation of education in their native language. It would be useful for teachers to understand students' L1 background to more successfully target strategies when building instructions for their ELLs. This study provides some understanding of how these teachers perceived the misconception that all ELLs need the basics of language learner.

## **L2 Learning Theories**

In effort to understand further in the roots of human cognition, a clear understanding on the basis of historical views will be viewed upon in relation to learning. Language learning is a process in which rules are applied and constructed. Prominent theorist Stephen Krashen (1982) explained acquisition occurs when speakers are learning subconsciously through natural situations. By the 1980s, Krashen (1983) proposed five main hypotheses of second language acquisition. The five hypotheses are: The Natural Order Hypothesis, The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, The Monitor Hypothesis, The Input Hypothesis, and The Affective Filter Hypothesis.

### **The Natural Order Hypothesis**

Krashen (1982) explains the theory of Natural Order as when learners acquire new language in an order that is predictable. In any given language, the learner's L1 will provide reinforcement of order in their L2 in grammatical structures. For some, this order tends to reflect on the learner's L1. If certain morphemes or phonetic sounds are similar in both languages, then there will be a high implication of second language acquisition carried from L1 to L2 (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Fathman, 1975; Makino, 1980 cited in Krashen, 1987). Krashen (1994) states, "the existence of the natural order does not imply that we should teach second languages along this order, focusing on earlier acquired items first and acquired items later" (p. 53). For English

language learners, not all students learn at the same rate. Some acquire grammatical structures earlier or later than others. Teachers must understand that the traditional structure of instruction may not necessarily help the student with language acquisition. There's no explicit, predictable order that follows the same approach for all ELLs. The results of this study may guide educators to choose the appropriate instruction for differentiated learning.

### **The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis**

One of the most widely known theories revolved around Krashen's (1982) Acquisition-Learning theory which states that there are two distinct systems that result from the subconscious process of language learning. They are "the acquired system" and "the learned system" (p. 179). The "acquired system" comes from the subconscious mind in natural communication. The "learned system" is the conscious process of formal instruction.

Teachers in these scenarios need to understand that there are two different aspects of language acquisition. ELLs will acquire language both in a formal and informal setting. As Krashen (1982) stated, "Language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning" (p. 55). Furthermore, language is only acquired in natural conversations and informal settings.

### **The Monitor Hypothesis**

Krashen (1994) also focused on the use of monitoring among different learners. In the Monitor Hypothesis, this theory in particular focuses on using the conscious rules as a way to filter language. The learner monitors their learned knowledge by applying rules acquired. As the student is consciously applying language rules to language acquisition, they must also become self-monitoring for the output. When the learner is producing speech, the internal conscious monitoring begins to make its corrections. They must learn to think and say their dialogue of

communication, all while self-editing mistakes. As Krashen & Terrell (1988) explain, when a learner monitors their language, it is not as effective as explicit teaching. He explains that explicit teaching must form in order to strengthen their monitoring skills. The “monitor” acts similar to the editor when correcting the second language. It brings in three different types of conditions. They are: Time, Focus on form, and Know the rule (Krashen, 2003). First, the learner must have time to acquire the rules and must have sufficient time to learn and apply the rules of speaking. Second, the learner must focus on the form. When a learner is speaking at a fast pace, they don’t self-monitor and control of their own speech. They need to focus on the form of utterances and how to self-correct language. The third condition is the knowledge of rules. Learners cannot make an effort to self-monitor without first learning the rules.

### **The Input Hypothesis**

The Input hypothesis relates to the understanding that learners comprehend language when the communication is beyond their level of competency. Furthermore, this hypothesis explains the “how” of second language acquisition. Krashen (1985) explains, “Humans acquire language in only way – by understanding messages, that is, by receiving comprehensible input” (p. 2). The main concern with this theory is in the “acquisition” rather than the “learning” aspect. Krashen (1985) explains this concept with the equation of  $i + 1$ . The “i” represents the level of language and the “1” is the newly presented information. Language acquisition is able to take place if the comprehensible input is brought at a slight level above than level of current competence. ELLs acquire second language by first understanding the message that is being conveyed to them. This is the comprehensible input. However, when the same message is brought to the next level learning, the student is able to activate prior knowledge to have comprehensible output. For example, the English language learner understands the statement of

“Put your homework on your desk.” The teacher may then provide new information by asking the student to “Put your book on your desk.” The student here can understand new content by using their schema of prior knowledge.

### **The Affective Filter Hypothesis**

Krashen, in this theory, hypothesizes that the process of second language acquisition needs to incorporate other variables. These non-linguistic variables manifest the influence of second language acquisition. These variables are: anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. Though these variables may not affect language learner directly, they do, however, contribute to the positive effects of it. Learners that experiences these certain emotinos are more likely to be successful while transitioning into their second language. For example, when a student is placed in an environment that is low stress, the learner has lower anxiety and becomes comfortable to acquire new language. Studies have shown when students are self-confident, they become more receptive of the environment where they are learning. These types of learners have a higher chance of acquiring language versus their peers who do not hold the same personality or qualities (Krashen, 1974). On the opposite end, if the learner feels anxious in any way, they become less receptive to new information.

### **Proper Identification of Academic Challenges**

One of the most difficult tasks that educators face when servicing ELLs is understanding the difference of whether problems stem from an issue in language or because of a learning disability. Early research conducted by Garcia & Tyler (2006) indicated that both areas share very similar traits. Studies have shown second language learners may “take seven to ten years to become proficient in academic English, who in many cases are misdiagnosed as having a learning disability” (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013, p .1). As this misunderstanding has been quite a

controversial issue among school staffs, educators need to fully grasp the difference between the two. In doing so, educators need to carefully distinguish the attributes of each student's behavior on a case by case situation.

In 2011, Amanda Sullivan from Arizona State University conducted a study that explored the placement of ELLs in a special education program. The results from the research indicated, "ELLS may be inappropriately identified for special education without adequate consideration of disability eligibility criteria or the influence of cultural, linguistic, and experiential factors" (p. 328). This finding indicates that ELLs may not have the appropriate identification that accurately reflects their abilities.

Disproportionality is problematic because of the possibility that students are receiving inappropriate labels and services. If the validity of educational decisions can be ensured, relative risk of identification for special education eligibility would be less of a concern because the assumption that students were receiving inappropriate service would be bypassed. (Sullivan, 2011, p. 328)

In relation to ELLs, many teachers who do not understand the process of language acquisition would refer the student to test for learning disability instead. This inappropriate labeling of a student may be eliminated if teachers are informed about the differences between language acquisition patterns and learning disabilities.

### **Assessing ELLs' Academic Performance**

One of the greatest challenges that many teachers have is understanding how to properly identify what programs ELLs need and the best type of assessments to evaluate learning. Llosa (2011) found that there were two things that were hindering the success of language learners. First, standards were not kept consistent among teachers. In his research, he found that close to

60% of teachers had different interpretation of the same standards. Another conclusion from the study was that teachers lacked judgement to correctly identify language learners and the progress they have made since learning a second language. This research is helpful to understand that growth measurement among students can differ from one person to another. One teacher may say a student is progressing at an acceptable rate, while another teacher may say there is no improvement in growth at all.

Ortiz (1985) stated that one of the most important concepts educators need to understand is to never refer an ELL for testing if there is lack of diagnosis from a professional. As mentioned before, many teachers that do not have knowledge about language acquisition sometimes may make the mistake of having a student tested for a learning disability. The misdiagnosis may not completely be the fault of the teacher, for example, there may not be personnel available for adequate testing (Fielding-Barnsley & Susan, 2002).

### **Acculturation and Assimilation**

Learning the English language is not only area where ELLs struggle, they are also trying to adapt to a new cultural situation. This experience also contributes to the challenge that English language learners face in language acquisition. Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits (1936) defined culture as “the phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p. 14). Krashen (1982) explained further, when immigrants are placed in a difficult environment, they are more likely not to attain language due to their levels of stress. Liu (2009) conducted a comprehensive study with 49 Chinese international students learning English in the United States. This study aimed to understand whether culture immersion played a role in higher or lower levels of English proficiency and showed that students who were more

immersed in American culture through either extracurricular activities or interpersonal relationships were more proficient in oral speaking compared to their peers (Liu, 2009). As a teacher, it is important to build a sense of community and belonging in the classroom. When a student feels that their environment is nonthreatening, they become more comfortable to speak their minds without the worrisome of correct English usage.

### **Theories of Motivation**

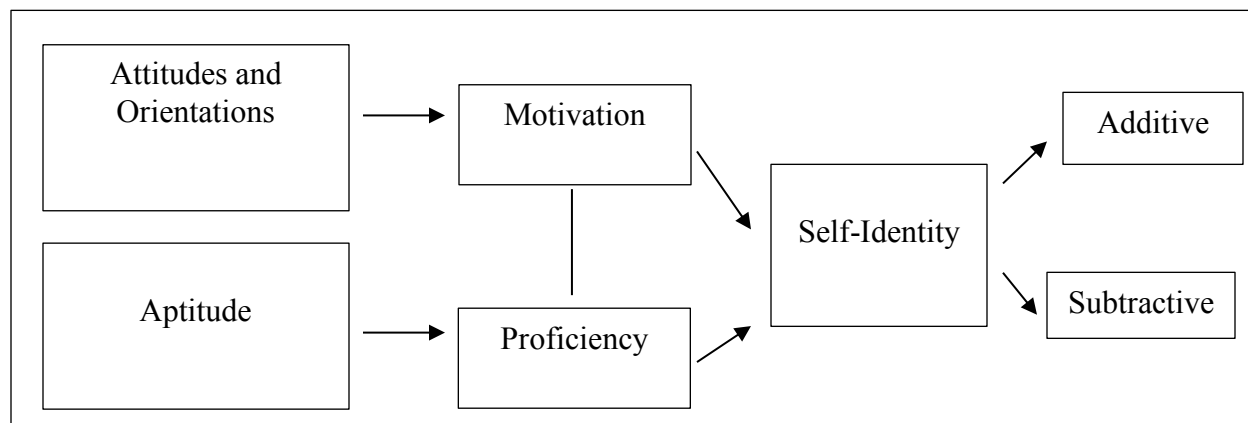
Aside from the external factors that contribute to the process of language acquisition, internal factors may also have the same effect on ELLs. Gardner (1985) proposed the idea of how motivation is directly related to the performance of learning a second language. He relates learning a language in conjunction with motivation and attitude. In 1972, Gardner and Lambert began a research investigating between the factors of motivation and learning a foreign language. They posed the research question “How is it that some people can learn a foreign language quickly and expertly while others given the same opportunities to learn, are utter failures?” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 1). Their results defined how closely related aptitude and motivation are to successful second language acquisition. This finding shows that when students are given the needed support to achieve a goal, their natural ability will come in play as well. As a teacher of language acquisition, it is important to provide the encouragement for ELLs to learn English, while also sustaining their engagement throughout the entire process.

Lambert (1974) proposed the social-psychological model (figure 2.2). In this model, Lambert (1974) explained that a learner’s motivation with language acquisition consists of both motivation and attitude. He suggested that the development of a second language is based on one’s self identity. A student who is transitioning to a second language must involve, “both cognitive (language aptitude and intelligence) and affective (attitudes and motivation) factors”

(Khalid, 2016, p. 4). As a teacher of an English language learner, he or she needs to understand the internal influences of language acquisition. A child may be deemed as progressing slowly in learning a new language, however it may be that he or she does not have the motivation or attitude of wanting to learn.

### **Lambert's Socio-Psychological Model (1972)**

**Figure 2.2 Source** Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. (Mansoor, 1993, p. 23)



In a similar study, research conducted by Dörnyei, Csisér, & Németh (2006), focused on children from Hungary and researchers sought to understand how motivation is linked with learning a second foreign language. These Hungarian learners studied English in a school where no contact of English was within range. Motivation for these students came from “integrativeness, linguistic self-confidence, and the appraisal of the classroom environment” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 125). The researchers found learners that had the most positive motivation were actually based on where they were geographically located.

### **Collaboration with Teachers**

All teachers need to have an understanding of language acquisition and not just solely the ESL teacher. Both content teachers and language acquisition teachers need to work together to



meet the needs of ELLs. DelliCarpini and Alonso (2014) explained, “it is no longer acceptable for teachers of other subjects to have little to no knowledge of the issues related to the education of ELLs” (p. 175). They contend it is important that teacher collaboration takes place. To do this, teachers will need plan, discuss, and implement lesson plans and strategies geared toward their ELL students. As William (2006) mentioned, “humans have a natural tendency to want to work together and solve problems more efficiently and effectively” (p. 13). When teachers are able to work together and collaborate, they are providing positive energy to their classrooms. A collaborative community allows teachers to reduce working in isolation and increase commitment in making significant changes to their student achievement.

In 2014, DelliCarpini and Alonso conducted a study to find the challenges of collaboration between content-based teachers and teachers of language. All 33 participants were either teaching mathematics/science in a regular class or a class specifically geared for ELLs. One of the most noticeable conclusions that surfaced was the lack of understanding of how to implement collaboration. The participants expressed that they didn’t understand how to collaborate in teaching, as none of them were never to exposed to the experience.

Another challenge was the lack of time for collaboration among the teachers. Due to the constant demands of teaching, teachers expressed that they have no time to seek collaboration opportunities with other colleagues. DelliCarpini (2009) pointed out that many teachers find that the culture in which they work is mostly isolating. Yet when they do work in isolation, “mainstream ELA or the ESL classroom can fail to capture the interconnectedness of language development and content knowledge and result in a disconnected approach to academic language development” (DelliCarpini, 2009, p. 86).

In relation to this study, collaboration is one of the areas of which can be a challenge when servicing ELLs. In the classroom, the mainstream teacher may be using one technique, while the ESL teacher may be using another. Without a uniform collaboration, it is difficult for ELLs to grasp the idea of transferring from their L1 to L2.

### **Preparation for Teachers**

One of the greatest ways to increase student achievement is to first provide teachers with the appropriate tools to teach their students. Each child learns differently and as a teacher, we need to provide the instruction that is geared towards their specific needs. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the legislative reform to call Educate America Act in which was a plan to reform education by the year 2000. One of the key areas of this restructuring was providing continual and professional growth for all teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This focus continued until 2001, when No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law. One of the key aspects of this law stated that all teachers will provide contributions to their professional learning in order to improve academic achievement to all their students. As mentioned by Kaplan & Owings (2004), “Research confirms that teacher and teaching quality are the most powerful predictors of student success. The more years that students work with effective teachers, the higher their measured achievement” (p. 1). When teachers are able to attend trainings that allow them to apply their knowledge into the classroom, they are able to increase the quality of instruction and strengthen their skills as an educator.

To help reform instruction or enhance teachers’ skills and their instructional practices is to continually provide them with professional development. When teachers are able to build a connection between what they learned in a training to how they are teaching in a classroom, it allows them to become more innovative in their profession (Campbell, 2012). When teachers

have the opportunity to learn and have consistent experiences in activating new knowledge, they become more effective in the way they are instructing their students. Richardson (2003) stated that professional development would be most effective if they were:

Statewide, long term with follow-up; encourage collegiality; foster agreement among participants on goals and visions; have a supportive administration; have access to adequate funds for materials, outside speakers, substitute teachers, and so on; encourage and develop agreement among participants; acknowledge participants existing beliefs and practices; and make use of outside facilitator/staff developers. (p. 402)

This means that if schools were to continually foster teachers' professional growth, teachers would be able to make a difference nationally in students' educational opportunities.

As mentioned previously, schools in Texas do not require teachers to have training focusing on just ELLs. As found by Ballantyne (2008), approximately 30% of teachers have ELLs in their classrooms have gone through training in the United States. Almost 60% of teachers in general feel they need more training specifically for language acquisition (p. 9). To adequately prepare teachers for the emerging population of ELLs, school leaders need to be held accountable to provide professional development periodically throughout the school year. As described by Lyndon & King (2009), a professional development is considered effective only when it is driven on research best practices, related to school goals, and include constructive feedback to participants.

In relation to this study, many teachers face inadequate training as an additional challenge. When they are not properly trained in specific strategies and skills for ELLs, it hinders their ability to be effective teachers. In an exploratory study conducted by Tyson (2017), he examined how classroom instruction has a direct effect of professional development. The

structure of this multi-case study was designed using semi-structured interviews in which the results were then cross-compared (Tyson, 2017). Teachers were given an electronic survey to measure the quality of their current professional trainings. The second group of participants were administrators. They were interviewed by the researcher about how they selected the types of training for their campuses and what components influenced their decision in doing so. As discussed by Tyson (2017), the results of the study showed that many teachers were found to be satisfied with the training they received, particularly professional learning community type training. Professional learning communities include periodic meetings where campus colleagues meet to develop a sense of togetherness in sharing ideas and perspectives. While the results showed that teachers were satisfied with the training they received from their campus-based trainers, they did not detail how the training influenced instructional practices.

In an earlier study conducted by Wenglinsky (2002), he examined the quality of professional developments by using a multilevel structural equation model focusing on the results of an eighth-grade math assessment. In this research, he concluded that due to the type of professional development received by teachers, there was a better outcome in student achievement. Thus, the type of training received by the teachers was a strong indicator about why students performed better in compared to previous years.

### **Teacher Qualifications**

One of the components of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 stated that, in order to reform education in America, all teachers must be considered “highly qualified”. Highly qualified teachers as explained by the lawmakers meant that any teacher who has met the qualification of state certification and has shown competency in the subject matter is able to teach in public schools. Due to the NCLB, many studies have found a substantial improvement

in the education system. In 2007, the Maryland State Department of Education established a change in the process of how they recruited teachers. An effect of the new establishment of this law was seen in one the school district that, in 2012, saw an increase of highly qualified teachers from 65% to 93% (Maryland Teacher Staffing Report, 2014; Annual Performance Report – Maryland Department of Education, 2013). With the increase of hiring qualified teachers, school leaders in the state of Maryland began to see the shift in academic gains. This reform was not only found in the accountability ratings of Maryland, but for all states across the nation. In a similar study, Hayes & Salazar (2001) specifically studied how teacher certifications were related to ELLs' academic performance. Using the instructional design of English Immersion classrooms as the study site, Hayes & Salazar (2001) concluded with similar results in comparison of the accountability ratings from Maryland. Students that had fully certified teachers outperformed their peers with teachers only holding temporary certifications. Teachers that had an ESL endorsement on their certification made an even more noticeable impact.

In a contradicting study led by Sharkey & Goldhaber (2008), the researchers explained the idea behind the components of defining “highly qualified” teachers. Both researchers explained that even though teachers may have the required certification to teach, that does not mean they are effective with their instructional practices. Decker, Mayer, and Glazerman (2004) also led a research study to analyze possible differences in student achievement between traditional certified teachers and teachers that came from the program Teach for America. Collecting data from 17 schools and close to 2,000 students across the nation, the results concluded that students taught by teachers who were prepared by the alternative program made substantially higher gains than those taught by traditionally certified teachers. These findings

may lead to an understanding that not all certified teachers make a higher impact on student performance.

### **Conclusion**

As discussed in this chapter, there were many theoretical perspectives of how second language acquisition has advanced over the years. Though some of views did not directly address how students transition from their L1 to L2, the viewpoints however inform understanding of the learning styles of ELLs. These theories included cultural assimilation and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Additionally, the more notable ones included Cummins (1981) BICS and CALPS and Krashen's (1984) Hypotheses.

The English Language Learner population has become overwhelmingly a focus area in many school districts. Due to this influx of the English language learner enrollment, it is now a requirement that all teachers are ESL certified by TEA (Texas Education Agency). With ESL certified instructors, students may now be served in alignment with the state's standards and requirements. Collins & Samson (2012) stated, "Research shows that a high-quality teacher can have a significant effect on student outcomes; thus improving the policies that stipulate teacher knowledge and skills for working with ELLs is one way to improve the educational outcomes for these students" (p. 7). The current literature review supports the understanding of the need for teachers to have a clear view on the process of language acquisition. Additionally, the studies also suggest educators need to engage in and correlate their training to address the challenges of ELLs. In doing so, the study has provided a foundation of guiding educators how to find possible solutions for the problems discovered.

In Chapter 3, the methods and research design are presented. This section outlines the data collection procedure, participants and the instruments used to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3 also includes a detailed description of how the researcher employed qualitative methods used in the investigation.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the study. This research design was proposed to use a pilot case study design to understand the challenges teachers have with instruction to ELLs. The qualitative analysis data came from a collection of the survey along with two follow-up interviews.

This chapter will specifically aim to describe the overview of the process of this study and how it was implemented. Specifically, this section explains the rationale for the methodology, the participants invited, and how privacy was protected.

#### **Research Questions**

The primary research questions used to guide the study through survey, interview, and analysis were:

- What challenges do teachers have when instructing ELL students?
- How do teachers currently address the challenges with struggling ELLs in their classrooms?
- Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population?

#### **Setting**

The site used to conduct this study was in an inner city independent school district, part of a suburb of Dallas. The selection of participants was focused to one elementary school with approximately 500 students, 2 administrators, and 32 staff members. This research site was chosen due to the high number of classified English language learners. Out of the 500 students that attend this school, approximately 48% of the students are currently receiving either bilingual



or ESL services. To be qualified for services, students must first have listed a home language other than English and be tested for language proficiency. After the family completes the application, the student is placed in the appropriate program with the approval from their parent/guardian. The high demographic of second language learners has provided the researcher motivation to further investigate this particular sub-population.

This is currently the researcher's ninth year as the Vietnamese Cultural Heritage Program teacher for this school site. The researcher is a support teacher for identified Vietnamese students from grades kindergarten to fifth grade. The researcher was able to gain access to the setting as she is a staff member at this campus.

### **Participants**

Participants invited to be part of this study included 32 professional staff members at one elementary campus. All staff members that were invited to participate in the survey have served ELLs or bilingual students in the last two years. The restricted timeframe ensured the data was relevant to current the student population.

Beginning September 2018, all staff members were notified by email (Appendix A) regarding the purpose and rationale of the study. In this email, it stated the type of questions provided, the confidentiality provided by the researcher, the reason why the study needed to be conducted, and the time that would be required by each participant. Within the scope of this initial contact, an invitation was sent to staff members regarding the web-based survey. In a second email, the same eligible participants were invited to a face to face follow-up interview. Within this email, the researcher provided the details on the interview structure, how the collected information will be used, and how their personal information would be kept confidential.

### **Introduction to Research Study for Participants**

After the initial introduction, the researcher sent each participant the link by using Google forms as the web platform. Teachers were given a two-week time frame to complete the survey. All responses were collected by the closing of the survey. All participation in the survey was to be completed voluntarily.

By administering the survey online, the data collection at the close of the survey allowed the researcher to analyze the data with less possibility of errors if it were to be administered by paper. Dillman, Tortora, and Bowker (1998) stated, “The main purpose of respondent-friendly design principles for web surveys is to decrease the occurrence of measurement and nonresponse error in survey” (p. 3). However, these researchers also explained there are some potential drawbacks to having surveys completed online. As explained by Dillman, Tortora, & Bowker (1998), “Respondent-friendly design will take into account the inability of some respondents to receive and respond to web questionnaires with advanced programming features that cannot be received or easily responded to because of equipment, browser, and/or transmission limitation” (p. 3). The researcher determined the campus’ technology is compatible with the web survey and is readily access for all participants. The approximate number of participants pooled was to be from 20-30 staff members on campus.

### **Surveys**

The survey was constructed by the researcher using Google forms and consisted of 10 questions that related to staff members and their ESL students. The questions included areas of strength, weakness, perception, and needs from teachers. The answer choices were created on a Likert-type scale. By providing these questions, it has helped answer the research question as to

what the challenges teachers have when teaching ESL students. To protect the identity of individuals, teachers only needed to provide the grade level they teach in the survey. This helped the researcher draw conclusions at the end of the research without any identifiable information from the participants. Participants had two weeks to complete the survey electronically online before the survey closed. To ensure the confidentiality of the survey results, all responses were collected by a password protected private laptop.

### **Survey Data Collection**

The main aim of this study was to understand the challenges that teachers have when instructing English language learners. It is important to understand their difficulties to further enhance the needed support to help ELLs strive academically in the future. After the IRB application had been requested and approved, the survey link was sent via email to all qualifying participants. The first round of participant's responses was collected as soon as the survey closed in the two-week time frame.

The researcher analyzed the data collected from the survey results and compiled the data by placing the results on a chart showing the totaled numbers of each response. After, the researcher wrote down the names of teachers who volunteered to participate in the post interview in a separate chart. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to input the data collected from the survey. This part of the research took place at the end of September 2018. All responses collected were coded with pseudonym to ensure the privacy of each participant, even though they only listed the grade level they were currently teaching.

### **Interviews**

Patton (2002) explained the goal of interviews are "to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341).

To do this, the researcher emailed a separate invitation to ask for volunteers to participate in a post semi-structured interview. The interview consisted of four open-ended questions, conducted face-to-face, in a private setting. The time varied based on each participant's responses; however, it did not last longer than 30 minutes. The interview was recorded on an Apple I-PAD using the memo recording option. All audio files were stored and encrypted with a protected password.

As soon as the survey responses were collected, participants that were willing to be interviewed were contacted through email for availability. The interviews took place over no more than fifteen minutes. The interview took place during the teachers' allocated off period. The final interview was completed by the end of September 2018. All participants were asked the same four questions, in which these questions were formulated prior to the distribution of the survey. The purpose of this interview was to understand more about the teacher's perspective in instructing ELLs. In addition to the interview being recorded by an Apple I-Pad, the researcher also took notes simultaneously when asking questions. The participants' identity was protected by using codes to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were completed within a week's time. After, the researcher began to transcribe the interview into a Word document and to the data analysis of coding.

### **Curriculum & Professional Development**

As part of the guiding research question of this study, the researcher also examined the district's current English language framework. In doing so, the researcher analyzed the areas of curriculum and professional development that the school district had to offer. In this process, the researcher began to review over the district's curriculum design for elementary English language arts lesson plans for grade kindergarten to fifth grade. The materials collected to analyze were based on in-house created curriculum materials to be used by teachers across the district. During

the analysis of the lesson plans, the researcher looked for accommodations and instructional strategies that explicitly support the learning process for the English language learner population. This includes a separate section in the lesson plans that states something similar to “linguistic accommodations for ELLs”.

After evaluating the curriculum, the researcher then reviewed over the professional development offerings in the fall semester. As each school in the district has its own choices of professional development, the researcher only looked at the campus used for the study site. To complete this analysis, the researcher reviewed over the topics for each offered training along with the agendas for each. The researcher specifically looked for topics that pertained to language acquisition, ELL student population, and linguistic accommodation trainings.

### **Participant’s Rights**

Participation for this research was on a completely voluntary basis. Participants were able to withdraw at any time without penalty. The informed consent form given to participants included privacy, the scope of the research, and how the data collected will be used. The data collection at each stage was used without any identifying information. The interview was coded using generic labels in the transcription process. This allowed confidentiality and privacy of the participants. The researcher also included member checks of the completed transcription. Completion of the study along with the results were distributed to all participants and other stakeholders on campus. The files of the data will only be retrieved electronically on an encrypted file with only the researcher having the password to open. The files will be kept only for a year, then they will be deleted from all databases.

## **Analysis**

To begin the data analysis procedure, all surveys and interview responses were collected and grouped accordingly. This was done after the survey closed and after all interviews had been conducted. The researcher then proceeded on the analysis of the data. Using the information presented by the participants' initial surveys, the researcher began to categorize the results using a table or chart to visually view the results.

Coding analysis took place during this time using the transcripts of the interviews. This was completed by using the *Atlas.ti* Qualitative Data Analysis software. This program assisted with the coding and the theme recognition throughout the interview. As mentioned by Creswell (2008), he explained that by recognizing repeated patterns and themes, it allowed the direction of the content to formulate into a conclusion. To help ensure the validity of this thematic analysis, each participant was given a transcript of the interview. They acted as a member check to ensure accuracy and clarify any misinterpretation. After the researcher has formulated the findings, the results were provided for the participants. A meeting will be held with other members to debrief the findings.

## **Coding**

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcription. During this step, the researcher read the entire transcript, making notes of impressions and ideas. Then, the researcher went back to underline and highlight any relevant words or phrases to be organized into codes. The researcher first looked into see how each response overlapped and placed it with an initial coding. From here, the researcher further classified codes that were similar into themes. During this process, the researcher discovered the

themes of; student impact, increase opportunities for professional developments, administration support, and issues from instructional strategies.

### **Storage of Data**

The data collected will be stored for one year. All surveys, transcripts, and audio files will be placed in an electronic file on a private computer. All audio recordings on the I-PAD were be deleted as soon as it has been transferred to a flash drive. The flash drive was encrypted with a password only the researcher has knowledge of. After, all recorded audio files was be deleted completely from all databases.

### **Potential Limitations**

One of the challenges that the researcher faced was having limited number of participants take part in the survey and follow-up interview. There were many reminder emails that was sent to the staff during the two-week time frame. While it would be helpful to have a greater number of participants in the study, the researcher was however able to collect data needed to begin analysis.

With the research only being conducted at one site, it may not accurately reflect the perspective of the general population of teachers in the district. As there are forty-one elementary campuses in the study district, having the research collected at one site may not provide a clear answer to the research questions. However, with the research being the first study to be conducted on ELLs at this site, it can serve as a model for future studies. It will provide and encourage additional studies to be conducted across the entire district.

Another limitation was the general demographics of the student population at the research site. The campus that was used for the research has a high population of children with low socio-economic status. Students that are near or at the poverty line may demonstrate greater limitations

on their language acquisition from L1 to their L2. Students that come from families that are at higher socio-background may have fewer challenges. According to Aikens and Barbarin (2008) they found “ELLs living under middle-to high SES conditions usually enjoyed greater access to literacy materials and had more highly educated parents who actively directed their children’s education” (p. 96). In contrast, ELLs that come from lower socio-economic background acquire language more slowly and have higher reading deficits (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Despite these limitations, this study has provided a deeper understanding of the ELL population in the study district. The results of this research can provide goals for future studies.

### **Conclusion**

This research was designed to understand the different types of instructional challenges teachers have with English language learners and an evaluation of the current English instructional framework. The data collected from the survey and interviews were used by the researcher to analyze common themes. The evaluation from the curriculum materials and professional development offerings were used to understand if the current English language framework was supportive for the English language learner population. The results and findings of the data collection are discussed in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data collected for this research were based on a short survey and a follow-up interview with 2 participants. The findings reported by certified ESL classroom teachers at an elementary level indicated the challenges when instructing students of English learners. The first part of the survey collected the demographic information of the participants. The second part of the survey was geared specially towards the academic subjects of which teachers felt the most challenged to teach. A follow-up interview was conducted in a more open-ended environment where teachers were able to speak on their views of the academic challenges and areas of need for the English language learners. In conjunction to how Creswell (2008) explained, “A qualitative type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; as broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective; biased manner” (p. 46). This was helpful when conducting the interviews as part of this research. By having the post interview, the teachers were able to provide their responses more freely compared to the online survey. The responses that the participants gave provided the researcher a more in-depth understanding of what specific challenges they were dealing with in the classroom.

This research was conducted at an elementary school in Texas, where the majority of student population was either bilingual or English language learners (ELL). The criterion of the survey required that the participant be an ESL certified teacher at the school. The goal of the study was to understand areas in which teachers were having challenges when instructing English language learners. The two research questions that were addressed in this study were:

RQ1: What are the current challenges do teachers have with serving ELLs? How are they currently addressing it? RQ2: What current instructional strategies are effective with ELLs? RQ3: Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population? To answer these questions, the data were obtained through an online survey, semi-structured post interviews, and researcher analysis of curriculum and professional development.

The follow-up interview was designed to focus on the following questions: RQ1: Tell me your experience on educating ESL students. RQ2: What specific challenges do you face when instructing ESL students? The goal of this study was to find the specific areas of challenge that teachers have when instructing their English language learners. This chapter will begin first by reviewing the theoretical framework, and then it will transition to the themes that was evident by the participants' responses.

### **Revisiting the Setting**

This pilot case study was conducted at a suburban elementary public school in north Texas. According to the 2017-2018 Texas Academic Performance Report, the district serves a population of 57,029 students ranging from early childhood to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. At the research site, there is a total of 497 students. Approximately 49% of the students are listed as an English language learner.

After IRB approval, the first round of emails was sent to all 32 qualified teachers in the school. In the email, the letter stated the background of the research, purpose, and the link to the survey. The response rate to the survey were 10 out of 32 qualifying participants. Next, the researcher identified the participants that indicated an interest to take part in the post-interview.

Due to participants' scheduling conflict during the work day, the interview was conducted after school in the teachers' classrooms.

Table 4.1 Participant Information

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>English as Native Language</b>	<b>Speak another language</b>	<b>Years of Teaching</b>	<b>Current Teaching Assignment</b>
100%	68% -	100%	100% -	100% -	30 yrs 33 %	K-5 100%
Female	60+ 33% - 50-59	Caucasian	Yes	No	15 yrs 68%	

### Survey Data Results

Survey data was collected by first gathering each participant's background information.

Table 4.1 above shows the data collected based on the general demographics of all the participants. In the first three columns, the participants were listed as all females, age range above 50, and were Caucasian.

*Finding #1: Participants reported that they have extensive years of teaching experience.*

Based on the collected data from the participants' personal backgrounds, all reported that they have had more than 15 years of experience in the teaching field.

*Finding #2: Participants reported that all of them have taught multiple grade levels from early-childhood to fifth grade.*

In the last column from Table 1, the data presented showed their current teaching assignments. As shown, all participants currently teach multiple grade levels.

The next two questions asked whether English was their native language and if they spoke another language besides English. This was an important factor as it may or may not have impact on teaching language acquisition. According to Shin & Krashen (1996), teachers that have prior bilingual education training have a higher sense of the processes of language acquisition. Their attitudes and beliefs allow the instruction for ELLs to become more aligned versus teachers that have no bilingualism background. Do note some participants may have chosen not to answer all the questions regarding their demographics.

Table 4.2 Responses to Questions

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>
I have difficulties with ESL students because of the language barrier with the student.	66.7% Agree 33.3% Strongly agree
I have difficulties with ESL students because of the language barrier with communicating with their parents.	33.3% Does not apply 33.3% Agree 33.3% Strongly agree
I have difficulties in teaching ESL students American culture.	66.7% Disagree 33.3% Neither agree or disagree
I have difficulties in teaching ESL students classroom routine.	33.3% Does not apply 33.3% Neither agree or disagree 33.3% Disagree
I have behavior and discipline problems with ESL students.	66.7% Neither agree or disagree 33.3% Disagree
Science is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.	33.3% Agree 33.3% Neither agree or disagree 33.3% Disagree
Social studies is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.	66.7% Agree 33.3% Disagree
Reading is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.	66.7% Agree 33.3% Disagree
Math is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.	100% Disagree
Writing is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.	66.7% Agree 33.3% Strongly agree

From Table 4.2, the presented data provided the questions along with the percentage of agreement or disagreement for each area of challenge. The first three questions involved with

language barriers with the student, parent, culture, classroom norms, and discipline. The next five questions addressed difficulties found by teachers in different subject areas.

*Finding #3 Math was the only subject all participants agreed that it was not a difficult subject to teach.*

As presented from Table 4.2, Math was the only subject that all participants agreed was not a difficult subject to teach. In understanding why Math was considered as the subject easier to teach than others, perhaps it is one of the languages that is shared among everyone. However, as students begin to advance to higher levels, academic language becomes harder to comprehend. Henry and Baltes (2014) argued that language affects students in many ways when learning mathematics. As DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera (2014) explain, language plays a critical part in the roles of teaching and learning. Concepts and skills are taught in math using language as the primary medium to transfer information. As the complexities of mathematics vocabulary and polysemous word increases, the achievement gap begins to grow. ELLs begin to drift behind their peers causing an impact on their performance.

Moschkovich (2012) describes that when teachers teach mathematics, they need to pay special attentions specifically to the ELL students. Even though some ELLs can solve math computations without difficulty, they are limited to exposure of academic vocabulary. Teachers need to understand that they need to explicitly teach math concepts using language that is comprehensible to ELLs.

*Finding #4 Approximately 68% participants reported that the subjects of reading, writing, and social studies were difficult subjects to teach.*

As presented from the table above, all three subjects were presented as areas of challenge for teachers to teach their ELLs. In looking at all three subjects, it can be concluded it is harder

to teach these content areas because ELLs lack proficiency in the English language. Without the basic foundation of the English language, ELLs are unable to comprehend academic content without first understanding vocabulary meaning.

With the integrated skills required to learn reading, writing, and social studies, it makes it even harder for ELLs to master all three subject areas. Many research studies have shown that reading and writing is a process that is interconnected. It is not a subject in which there is distinct division between teach the two. As mentioned by Ferris and Hedgcock (2005), reading is the foundation of writing (p. 31). These are two skills that develop together and build upon one another.

*Finding #5 All participants reported different perspectives on the difficulties of teaching science.*

In reviewing the data collected for the statement, “Science is a difficult subject to teach ESL students”, it is interesting to see that all the participants had differing views. Unlike the other subjects, science is a subject that has both reading and math imbedded into the content. As mentioned by Medina-Jerez & Clark (2007), ELLs “are expected to acquire skills such as discussing, analyzing, reading and writing in ways similar to those of practicing scientist” (p. 53). However, to truly grasp and understand the concepts of science, ELLs first need to be proficient in the basic level of English. Like previously stated in chapter two, Cummins (1984) explained that language learners take 1-2 years to acquire social language. For academic language, the span of time can be around 5-7 years. For science in particular, ELLs can take even longer due to the technical terms that are associated with specific content area.

### **Study Themes**

In the follow-up interviews, there were two professional staff members that participated in this study. The researcher used the digital recording of the interview and the transcription to

make notes of emerging themes. In addition to the collected data from the survey, the transcript from the interview was also reviewed to understand the common themes shared by both participants. For member checking of the interview, a copy of the transcript was also provided for the participants to review. The intention of this step was to provide an opportunity for the interviewer and the participant to revisit the dialogue.

In analyzing the data collected, there were common themes discussed between both participants. In relating back to the literature review presented in chapter two, one of the common factors that emerged was determining if the student was truly grasping the English language academically or socially. As mentioned by Cummins (2003c), The Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) requires conversational ability in situations where words and sentence structures are simplified and based on other physical body cues. The Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) uses academic vocabulary of the English language in both oral and written text.

Table 4.3 Interview Themes

<b>Themes</b>
1. A current challenge at the campus was that teachers do not understand how to implement language acquisition strategies.
2. Teachers constantly struggle with lack of professional development in instructional strategies for language acquisition.
3. Participants explained one of their current challenge was being able to teach ELLs reading and understanding content materials.
4. Participants reported ELLs showed higher improvement in understanding content while using visuals in learning new materials.
5. Participants reported success with the intervention block with small groups.
6. Scaffolding was an effective strategy for ELLs.

**Theme 1: A current challenge at the campus was that teachers do not understand how to implement language acquisition strategies.**

*“Good instructional strategies for our ESL students are also good for our all of our students.”*

In the follow-up interview, the participants expressed that all staff members would greatly benefit if they were trained specifically on language acquisition strategies. This not only benefits English learners, but also students that are monolingual. As the participants explained, they find that using strategies geared towards ELLs are also appropriate for whole group instruction. ELL children at an appropriate age should receive the same instructional practices as English learners so they have a strong foundation to build knowledge. Good instructional practices will also help clarify any initial misunderstandings.

Both participants expressed that many staff members have very little understanding the lasting impact of ESL strategies for students. Many staff members are not given the opportunity to fully engage in ESL training that allows them to be exposed of the many positive effects it has on their students. Both participants feel that when trainings are provided, it is only provided for ESL teachers, rather than all staff member including counselors and other specialists. Another challenge that schools is overcoming a shortage of qualified teachers that are adequately trained to provide instruction for ELLs. Liagas & Synder (2003) explain that there are approximately 42% of classrooms across America have at least one ELL. However, only 3% of these teachers have certification in ESL or bilingual education. The shortage of qualified teachers not only affects levels of achievement for students, but also their transition into the English language. In contrast, according to the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES, 2001), many staff development programs offered by state agencies lack information about the training of ELLs. It is a concerning problem as the survey suggested there were only eight hours of professional



development pertained to language acquisition each year. This causes many teachers to lack the updated training for the students they serve and supports the finding that teachers need more training to better support their ELLs.

**Theme 2: Teachers constantly struggle with lack of professional development in instructional strategies for language acquisition.**

*“Challenges are finding the time to provide different materials, finding different materials quickly...”*

Another theme that came from the participants’ follow-up interview showed concerns of the need for more trainings on language acquisition. As the school currently has a high population of English language learners, it is critical that the yearly professional development focused on understanding more about the different approaches when instructing ELLs. As one participant mentioned:

I just don’t see why our district does not put more emphasis on language acquisition professional development. Language acquisition strategies are actually very helpful for all our kids and not just for ELLs. I know as an ESL teacher, I’ve been to many team trainings that explicitly teach language instructional strategies. You know what, those same strategies can be quite beneficial for some of our students that need the extra support.

The participants in the study suggested that many teachers have had many challenges in providing the appropriate instructional practices for their students. Both participants expressed that some subjects are more difficult to teach than others. However, it’s the lack of trainings that become a challenge for them and affects the way they are teaching their ELLs.

In reviewing the survey results, many participants felt that there were many different subject areas that are quite difficult to teach ELLs. One participant explained, “the challenge that I personally face would be that I feel that I am not adequately teaching them all the language concept idiosyncrasy and nuisances in the time I’m allowed”. The participants reported that this was one of the major challenges when accommodating teaching styles geared directly to language learners. With an average classroom size of 17-20 students, there is not enough time to differentiate instruction for all students. It is even a greater struggle when teachers do not have the appropriate tools to use for instruction. As stated by Kinhead (2007) on the perspective of improving professional development:

Through focused reflection and dialogue, and working within with context of daily classroom practices, coaches draw out individual potential, eliciting greater growth within the individual/team that could not be accomplished by the teacher alone. (p. 10)

As explained by Kinhead (2007), teachers cannot work alone in educating students. It takes a team to work together. Together, a teaching team is better able to achieve more student growth and acceleration in academic learning.

Also mentioned in the follow-up interview, the participant indicated that there were many teachers at their campus felt that they need additional tools to teach their ELLs. They lack the needed training that focuses on the process of language acquisition and development. If school leaders don’t provide the appropriate training for all teachers, the ELL population will continue to see little to no academic growth. The participant noted:

I have been teaching at this campus for a very long time. I feel like sometimes the district is too focused on testing scores, that they simply forget the end goal. I find that every school year when we do have trainings, it does not pertain to our campus demographics.

It does not zero in the specific needs of at our campus. This is a constant challenge we have throughout the school year.

This participant along with the other interviewee noted strong feelings about regarding their trainings at their campus. They shared that it does not adequately address the needs that the campus staff is yearning for.

**Theme 3: Participants explained one of their current challenge was being able to teach ELLs reading and understanding content materials.**

*“When teaching reading in small groups, some of the stories we read are not connected to ELLs. This makes it even harder to teach to comprehension.”*

The teachers clearly stated during the follow-up interview that ELLs have many challenges when reading. Both teachers felt that it is a constant struggle every time new material is taught. One participant pointed out that because there is a lot of scaffolding when teaching ELLs, it hinders their ability to move on to the level as their peers. This participant went on to explain:

I think one of the reasons why our ELLs have such as hard time with reading comprehension is not having prior knowledge. As many of my students come from a variety of different background, they do not all have the same of life experiences.

Both teachers in this study acknowledged that reading comprehension is one of the greatest challenges they have when teaching to ELLs. One of the participants explained:

Reading is both complicated to learn and to teach. All children struggle to be fluent readers and not just ELLs. I have had many experiences with ELLs when they are first introduced to reading in English. And the number one challenge for them is being able to answer comprehension questions after reading.

The other participant also felt very strongly about having difficulties with teaching reading comprehension as well. She shared that ELLs must first learn and understand vocabulary words first before actually moving on to reading a book. She explained this type of technique is used as a time for pre-teaching. In doing so, it helps prepare ELLs to the concept to teach ahead of time.

**Theme 4: Participants reported ELLs showed higher improvement in understanding content while using visuals in learning new materials.**

*“This may sound like a given, but all ELLs need some type of visual representation when learning.”*

When asked about what instructional strategies are currently working with their ELLs, both participants said tactile activities and visual representations. They explained that over the years they have been teaching in education, the number one effective tool to use teach ELLs is to add visuals to everything that is being taught. This participant expressed:

This may sound like a given, but all ELLs need some type of visual representation when learning. This is not just limited to our ELL population, but for all students. By having some type of hands-on materials with pictures, it goes a long way for ELLs and their path of learning.

Much like what was said, this participant explained that visuals are effective when learning any type of language. She considered it as valuable resource to use when nothing else is available. The participants felt that when teaching a new concept, visual representations help ELLs to better understand the materials as well as retain it. This participant reported:

I have seen much growth this year from one of my students. This student that I had previously in my class had such a hard time remembering things when I taught it at school. To help, I sent home lots of picture vocabulary flashcards every day. By the end

of the grading period, this child surpassed his peers. He is now actually one of my highest students in my class.

Both teachers found that visuals are quite effective. They explain that the growth in their ELLs have always been positive when visuals are used while learning in the classroom or during small groups.

**Theme 5: Participants reported success with the intervention block with small groups.**

*“One of the instructional strategies that’s working is utilizing our intervention time.”*

Another theme that came from the follow-up interview was the types of instructional strategies that is currently working. The participants indicated that having the intervention block during the school day helped tremendously in supporting ELLs. Though this is not an instructional strategy, it is important to note that the allotted time for intervention allows focused instruction. One participant mentioned that, because of this set time, all students are able to have the extra help they need. As explained by both participants, intervention time is when all students are placed in small groups to provide enrichment, review, or retaught materials. All learning during this time is based on concepts that have already been taught. No new learning is taking place.

One participant expressed that when small groups learn together, ELLs are able to feel more comfortable. One teacher explained:

There was a newcomer at the beginning of this school year that had no knowledge of the English language whatsoever. During class time, I noticed that she is always quiet and never really tried to talk or ask questions. However, when she is at my small group table, she asks many questions and participates well with her classmates. When I noticed this, I helped her to slowly build her confidence in a whole group setting. Only a few months

later, she not only has many conversations with her peers, but also is able to achieve high scores in many of her assessments.

Participants noted that because many ELLs come from cultures that do not encourage speaking, it is somewhat hard to break them out of their shell. By having the students taught in small groups, teachers are able to focus more specifically on their academic deficiencies.

**Theme 6: Scaffolding was an effective strategy for ELLs.**

*“ELLs respond very well with on-going scaffolding. Especially when new content is taught.”*

The last theme that was coded during the follow-up interview was the use of scaffolding. As mentioned by both participants, ELLs need constant scaffolding. It is an effective instructional strategy that helps language learners to be immersed in academic learning. One participant explained:

I use scaffolding a lot. This is one of the strategies that I have used since the beginning of my teaching career. It works very well with my ELLs. Scaffolding comes very naturally as it helps my students build a foundation when introducing a new lesson. It helps connect prior knowledge and build a more authentic setting for all my students.

The impact of scaffolding is very powerful as mentioned by the other participant. The teacher explained that sometimes many teachers don't understand the impact of this instructional strategy, especially for language learners. The usage of scaffolding as explained by the participant is one of the methods that the teacher uses to address the current challenges when servicing ELLs. As expressed by the participants, they noted that if all other language strategies fail, then this is the one that always works.

### Curriculum and Professional Development Analysis

To understand on how the current English framework was supporting ELLs language acquisition, the researcher looked at two different components of the curriculum. First was the current district's lesson plans and second was the professional development offerings at the study site. During the process of curriculum analysis, the researcher reviewed first and fourth grade lesson plans for the subject of English language arts. After, the researcher looked for standards that the state has mandated and how it connected it theories of language acquisition.

Table 4.4 Instructional learning strategies embedded in lesson plans

Grade Levels	Texas State Standards for English Language Arts	Connection to ELL research recommendations
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehension skills               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Multiple texts and genres</li> <li>○ Author's purpose</li> <li>○ Make inferences</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cummins (1981)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emergent Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Krashen (1982)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Meaningful interactions of learning in a natural setting</li> <li>○ Five hypothesis of language acquisition</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gardner &amp; Lamber (1972) theories of motivation</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehension skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personal connections</li> <li>○ Retell, paraphrase, summarize</li> <li>○ Infer themes</li> <li>○ Figurative language</li> <li>○ Organizational patterns</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

The researcher found that even though the lesson plans don't directly state "language accommodations for ELLs" it does however provide the instructional strategies that are relatable to teaching language development. For example, during week 7 the targeted skill was on "Making Inferences". In this lesson plan, the district provided a phonics lesson, introduction of vocabulary lesson, and a guided reading time. All these instructional strategies align with the research on helping ELLs with language acquisition. This is a good summary statement.

The second component of this process was reviewing over the agendas for trainings directly focusing on ELLs.



Table 4.5 Evidence of instructional strategies in Training Sessions

Training	Focus	Outcomes for instruction	Researcher recommendations for further training
1	ELLevation  Language and learning strategies (etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilization of tools</li> <li>• Understanding of how to navigate the offered tools</li> <li>• Transferring the newly learned strategies to the classroom instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to have follow-up trainings to ensure usage</li> <li>• Provide feedback from staff on how the program is effective or ineffective.</li> </ul>
2	Sheltered Instruction  Instructional strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide teachers with instructional strategies to use with language learners</li> <li>• To increase learning engagement in the classroom for all subjects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide short follow-up training sessions that reviews over each strand of sheltered instruction</li> <li>• To continue to revisit the training throughout the school year</li> </ul>

During the fall of 2018, the study site had two trainings revolving around language development. The first training was on the implementation of the software of ELLevation and the second was on Sheltered Instruction. Even though Ellevation was considered a web platform where ELLs informational profiles are stored, it does however provide instructional strategies for teachers to use. Some of the instructional strategies included: language and learning strategies, differentiated levels of support from teacher, and targeted tips for common mistakes made by ELLs. The second professional development training that was offered was based on the model of Sheltered Instruction: A Guide for Teachers of ELLs by John Seidlitz (2018). This training was specifically tailored for teachers of ELLs. However, one drawback of this training was it was only offered twice in the semester and only for ESL teachers.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges teachers face when serving ELLs. This chapter explained the participants' responses to the online survey, the follow-up interview, and the researcher's analysis on the current curriculum framework. The data analysis revealed six themes: lack of understanding of language acquisition, lack of professional development, struggles in reading comprehension, tactile and visual representation strategies, intervention time, and scaffolding. The next chapter will present the analysis of the data, implications, limitations, recommendations for both action and for further studies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand challenges teachers have when instructing ELLs at an elementary level. This research was used to identify common difficulties that contribute to the learning of English language learners.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- What are the current challenges that teachers have when instructing ELLs? How are they currently addressing these challenges?
- What current instructional strategies are currently effective with ELLs?
- Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population?

The conceptual framework used to help guide this study was based on the Language Acquisition theory created by Jim Cummins (1981). In this theory, Cummins (1981) focused on two different methods of acquiring a second language. The two main aspects of this theory were Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Another theorist discussed with the understanding of human cognition was of Stephen Krashen (1983). Krashen's theories were predominately revolving around the five hypotheses of second language acquisition.

It is important to understand that Krashen's theories helped changed the concept of teaching language. In relation to this study, the implication of these theories allowed teachers to better understand how ELLs transitioned from one language to another. The approaches that Krashen (1983) provided enabled teachers to improve their methodologies in educating students in the process of second language acquisition.

This study was used to identify the external factors that contributed to the challenges of teachers instructing English language learners. Meyer (2000) explained:

Every teacher who teaches through English to English learners is a teacher of English language and literacy skills, as well as a teacher of subject matters such as math, social studies and biology. The more conscious teachers are about the linguistic forms and patterns they use while teaching, the more successfully teacher talk can be adapted to linguistic needs of English learners. (p. 234)

It is imperative that teachers of all subjects understand the importance of how language acquisition works. It is evident that as the population of ELLs is growing in the United States, educators need to provide the appropriate education to bridge the language gap for children. In the next section, the findings from 3 types of data are presented. The first data set reflects the surveys, then the themes that emerged from the follow-up interviews, then finally the curriculum and professional development evaluation by the researcher.

### **Survey Results**

Through the initial data collection and analysis of the survey, the data collected revealed the challenges teachers face when teaching ELLs. According to the results of the survey, the participants expressed that the subjects of social studies, reading, and writing were the subjects that the teachers had the most difficulty teaching. Upon analyzing the subjects, it is important to understand that all three subjects shared similarities because of the heavy content in English words. On the opposite end, 100% of the participants disagreed that math was difficult to teach. It can be understood that math and its computation is used worldwide, making it less of a challenge for English language learners compared to other academic subjects.

### **Follow-Up Interviews**

The researcher conducted the semi-structured interview with two certified teachers at the school. The questions of this interviews were intended to better the understanding of challenges of instructing ELLs from the perspective of a teacher. The questions on the interview sought a deeper understanding about different factors that make it difficult to teach language learners. After the follow-up interview was completed, the researcher coded the transcript. During this process, the researcher reviewed the transcript to organize and categorize emerging themes. As a result, there were six major themes that were identified. The six major themes were: lack of understanding of language acquisition, lack of professional development, struggles in reading comprehension, tactile and visual representation strategies, intervention time, and scaffolding. The next section addresses key findings from evaluating the curriculum and teacher training.

### **Curriculum and Professional Development Evaluation**

In the process of reviewing over the curriculum created by the school district, the researcher evaluated from two different grade levels. During this stage of evaluation, the researcher looked for key information that pertained to language acquisition strategies or linguistic accommodations for ELLs. In addition to this step, the researcher also looked for strategies that pertained to the transition from native language to target language.

The second part of this evaluation process involved the researcher reviewing over professional development trainings that were offered for teachers in the fall 2019 semester. During this stage, the researcher looked for trainings that involved specifically for English language learners, language development, or content that included linguistic accommodations. To complete this task, the researcher looked through the study site's professional development training agendas from August to December. As a result of this evaluation, the researcher

discovered two specific trainings that involved specifically for the English language learner population. The first was on how to navigate the computer software ELLevation and the second was on Sheltered Instruction.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This study focused on answering two research questions that guided this research. Questions 1: What current challenges do teachers have with serving ELLs? How are the teachers currently addressing it? Question 2: What instructional strategies are effective with ELLs? In attempt to answer these questions, the researcher relied on two parts of the data collection process. Question 3: Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population? The first part was using an online survey, while the second portion was an open-ended interview with the participants. The third part included evaluation on the current English framework from the researcher's perspective.

**Research Question 1:** What current challenges do teachers have with serving ELLs? How are they currently addressing those challenges?

With the small number of participants responding to the surveys, the overall collected data expressed similar themes among the responses. The researcher-designed survey contained ten questions based on the levels of difficulties for instructing ESL students. Participants were asked to choose from the choices of “strongly agree” to “strong disagree”. Participants also had the option to answer “does not apply.”

According to survey results, teachers considered that reading was one of students' greatest weaknesses. Many teachers from the post interview expressed that even though students had a Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), their Cognitive Academic Language

Proficiency (CALP) was not up to grade level. Francis (2006) stated that even though ELLs may have demonstrated proficiency skills in conversational English, it is not an indicator for mastery in reading comprehension. This was a significant finding as many teachers sometimes overlook that students have made improvements in English basing on their everyday social language skills. However, when students lack proficiency in academic language, it is considered false mastery.

Another challenge that teachers face when serving ELLs was not having the appropriate training for supporting language acquisition. As mentioned by one of the participants during the follow-up interview, the participant stated that there was not enough professional development that specifically teaches strategies to use with ELLs. The teacher explained that language acquisition strategies are very helpful for all students and not just for language learners. The participant shared, “Language acquisition strategies are actually very helpful for all our kids and not just for ELLs. I know as an ESL teacher, I’ve been to many team trainings that explicitly teach language instructional strategies. You know what, those same strategies can be quite beneficial for some of our students that need the extra support”. The participant further clarified that it was a constant challenge for herself and her colleagues to be adequately prepared to teach their students. In addition to this, most of the obstacles that the teachers described were that not all staff members are utilizing these skills for all students. They believed that many teachers do not employ intentional teaching practices when servicing ELLs.

Challenges in teaching ELL students are being addressed through the current framework of what is already in place at the school. As expressed by one of the participants during the follow-up interview, the use of visuals aids and scaffolding are effective techniques for ELLs.

The participant reported that with the instruction that is being used in the classroom, teacher would differentiate learning materials to meet needs of their language learners.

Participants also indicated that the intervention time block was helpful in addressing their school's instructional needs. As explained by the participants, the intervention block was a time when the classroom teacher and other support staff members stay in the classroom to provide small group instruction. Although this may not be considered a specific teaching technique, intervention blocks do influence ELLs and their learning. Participants noted that during this intervention time block, all students in the classroom were placed in small groups to either extend, reteach, or to practice concepts previously taught. As indicated by the participants, the small group interaction was helpful in the sense that it allowed direct support for ELLs.

**Research Question 2:** What instructional strategies are effective with ELLs?

As mentioned previously, the response to this question was formed from the post-interview. To answer this question, there were two themes that emerged from coding the transcripts. The first theme that emerged mentioned about current effective instructional strategies. *Tactile activities and visual representations are effective instructional strategies for ELLs.* As explained by one of the participants, "By having some type of hands-on materials with pictures, it goes a long way for ELLs and their path of learning". The teacher continued, "Strategies that we are currently using for students that need improvement in their skills can be changed to fit for ELLs".

In addition to the themes, the data collected from the researcher's evaluation also expressed areas of which the current curriculum and professional development trainings were effective to instruct language learners. According to the review, there were multiple embedded strategies that indicated language acquisition L1 to L2 bridge for ELLs. Even though the lesson



plans in grades first and fourth did not explicitly state “linguistic accommodations for ELLs”, it however provided strategies that were coherent to assist language transition. As mentioned by Shank (2001), English language learners need to have access to all services, accommodations, and extra support that they can get. Educators need to be better equipped to help their language learners to progress in language acquisition.

Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) defined the process of scaffolding as a way to have a child reach a goal by having the teacher as a guide and ongoing support system. The second theme that emerged from responses to the second research question was *Scaffolding was an effective strategy for ELLs*. The teachers described this instructional strategy helped assist ELL students to better focus on academic work, while also moving slowly from one language development stage to the next. This implied that the students are making academic gains and the instructional strategy was considered effective toward ELLs. A limitation of this response was that it did not determine whether the scaffolding technique was effective for a particular subject or for all subjects.

**Research Question 3:** Is the current English language framework (curriculum and professional development) providing the needed support for our ESL student population?

To evaluate the current English language framework provided at the study site, the researcher reviewed over the district’s elementary English language arts curriculum and the professional trainings offered at the study site during the fall of 2018. In reviewing over the English language arts lesson plans for first and fourth grade, there researcher concluded that there were an abundance of materials that indicated differentiated instructional strategies. Though it was not specifically labeled instructional strategies for ELLs, it did however show different ways of how a skill can be taught to a wide range of learners.

According to the Texas state standards of academics, skills that are taught from the primary grades are reintroduced in the upper grades. For example, in first grade students are expected to “retell texts in ways that maintain meaning” (TEKS, 2017). However, in fourth grade, students build on the standard by being able to: “retell, paraphrase, or summarize texts in ways that maintain meaning and logical order” (TEKS, 2017). Even though the skills may be targeted slightly different, it has the same core content. As previously mentioned in the literature review, Cummins (1981) explained language learners are more likely to develop in their L2, with a conceptual foundation in their native language. Similarly to the state standards, children who have been previously taught a skill are able to refine it in the years after the instruction.

The third part of this analysis involved in the evaluation of professional development trainings offered in the first semester of school. In reviewing over the types of trainings offered, the researcher found two that pertained specifically to instructional strategies for ELLs. The first one was the implementation of the web service of ELLevation and the second was called Sheltered Instruction: A Guide for Teachers of ELLs training. As mentioned previously, even though ELLevation is a platform to store information on ELLs the site offers a wide-variety of instructional strategies for teachers to use to build language development. The Sheltered Instruction training that was offered by the school for ESL teachers revolved around best practices for ELLs. As explained by Echevarria, Vogt, & Short (2017), “Sheltered instruction is: a means for making content comprehensible for ELLs while they are developing English proficiency. Sheltered classrooms integrate language and content while infusing socio-cultural awareness” (p. 6). This training targeted specific knowledge for how language acquisition works and how teachers are able to provide the best teaching approach towards their ELLs.

## **Thematic Findings**

In reviewing the transcript of the follow-up interview, there were many themes that emerged during this process. The responses from the participants shared similar discussions of themes. Both participants indicated that many teachers must be adequately equipped with the tools to provide instruction to ELLs. Many of the findings included: challenges in implementing language acquisition strategies, lack of professional development, and ELLs struggling in reading comprehension. Although the teachers expressed many concerns, there were however some strategies that are currently working with ELLs. These strategies included using tactile activities and visual representations to teach new concepts, and the use of scaffolding instruction.

## **Implications**

The six major themes that emerged were:

1. A current challenge at the campus was that teachers do not understand how to implement language acquisition strategies.
2. Teachers constantly struggle with lack of professional development in instructional strategies for language acquisition.
3. Participants explained one of their current challenge was being able to teach ELLs reading and understanding content materials.
4. Participants reported ELLs showed higher improvement in understanding content while using visuals in learning new materials.
5. Participants reported success with the intervention block with small groups.
6. Scaffolding was an effective strategy for ELLs.

**Theme 1: A current challenge at the campus was that teachers do not understand how to implement language acquisition strategies.**

One of the greatest challenges of ESL instruction for teachers was being competent in using the tools and strategies to better serve their students. Many times, elementary teachers are involved in a constant struggle on learning how to provide language acquisition for their English language learners (ELLs). This study investigated certified classroom teachers at an elementary level on their own difficulties on serving ELLs. The participants expressed that teachers and campus staff do not have the appropriate training to serve their ELLs. Samson and Collins (2012) stated “To date, there has been relatively little attention paid to the essential standards, knowledge, and skills that general education teachers ought to possess in order to provide effective instruction to ELLs placed in their classroom” (p. 2). In other words, teachers do not have the working knowledge to carry out the role of language development for second language learners. Participants also reported not all teachers have adequate training and strategies for ELLs. Both participants felt that their experience in teaching ELLs was not adequately addressed through trainings provided by their district. Participants noted that even when trainings are provided directly towards instruction for ELLs, it is only exclusively for ESL teachers. This leaves other staff members to not be informed on instructional strategies on language development.

**Theme 2: Teachers constantly struggle with lack of professional development in instructional strategies for language acquisition.**

Similarly, another theme that emerged from the interview which was that teachers don't have the appropriate tools given to them through trainings and professional development. The teachers believed that due to the lack of training, they have a great struggle trying to teach their

ELLs. They felt that if they were given more opportunities for trainings on language development, they will understand how to address their ELLs academic needs more appropriately. Daniel (2014) explained that teachers of ELLs should be equipped with many methods and tools. If that occurs, they are better able to be a culturally sensitive instructor that uses the appropriate pedagogical tools for their students. They stated that teachers who work with ELLs need to not only be knowledgeable in language acquisition, but also understand how to make content comprehensible for their learners.

Participants also noted that many of the professional developments and trainings are not addressing the needs of ELLs. They felt that the trainings that they do receive during the school year do not focus on the language development. The participants shared that this challenge has been an on-going in their district.

**Theme 3: Participants explained one of their current challenge was being able to teach ELLs reading and understanding content materials.**

Another theme that emerged focused on ELLs. Participants reported that reading comprehension was one of the greatest struggles for ELLs. They indicated that this has been a long-time challenge for ELLs, especially when new material was being taught. The participants responded that many ELLs have difficulties in understanding reading content because of their limitations with prior knowledge. Miller (2002) stated building background knowledge or schema is important as it provides a connection for the reader. It allows the content being read to be more accessible to the student, than to be reading it in isolation. The teachers explained that reading is the foundation or gateway to other subjects being taught. Without it, ELLs become more lost as rigor is increased in content. Participants also reported that their current challenge is being able to teach ELLs reading and understanding content materials. This is important as it

aligns with teachers not having the appropriate tools to teach, while in effect, caused students to increase in academic struggles.

**Theme 4: Participants reported ELLs showed higher improvement in understanding content while using visuals in learning new materials.**

Participants indicated that one of the most effective instructional strategies to use with ELLs were tactile activities and visual representations. Both participants reported that by relying heavily on visual aids, students were able to comprehend materials at a more rapid rate. They mentioned that often teachers assume that this is a given instructional strategy, however not all teachers use this simple technique in their lessons.

ELLs often have difficulty processing auditory information and so instruction that is supported with visual clues is more beneficial to them. Web sites, magazines, commercial photos, and hand drawing can provide visual support for a wide variety of content. Many teachers also use whiteboards, PowerPoint slides, or smart boards to help provide additional visuals. (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 42)

To explain further, the participants reported ELLs showed higher improvement in understanding content when using visuals while learning new materials. Both participants reported that comprehension of materials taught using visual aids have shown much higher academic gains and improvement in scores. This was especially true when students were being assessed during district-wide testing.

**Theme 5: Participants reported success with the intervention block with small groups.**

As reported by the participants, another theme that emerged was the intervention time block is an effective framework for ELLs. As explained by the participants, this intervention time is a scheduled time during the day where students are placed in small learning groups. This

theme was important to note as it answers one of the study's research questions. The current implementation of this small group time helped alleviate the challenges that teachers are facing when servicing ELLs. As indicated by one of the participants, the teachers felt that the intervention block was a quite effective framework, especially towards the learning of ELLs. During this time, all students are placed in small groups to either reteach, enrich, or extend a concept that was previously taught. It is important to note, that while students are being pulled for small groups, no new concepts are being taught during this time.

#### **Theme 6: Scaffolding was an effective strategy for ELLs.**

The last theme that emerged from the coding process was that the participants reported scaffolding was considered an effective strategy for teaching ELLs. As explained by the study participants, the use of scaffolding was an effective tool when using to teach language learners. Through scaffolding, ELLs are able to acquire language while also meeting academic standards in the content being taught. Participants mentioned the use of scaffolding provided a foundation for ELLs to connect ideas in a meaningful setting. According to Gibbons (2015), scaffolding is considered a temporary support that enables the student to carry out a task that they are unable to complete independently. The teacher reported that ELLs responded well to this teaching technique as it is developmentally appropriate for each individual student.

#### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this pilot study was the number of volunteers that participated in the survey and post interview. A total of 10 staff members participated in the online survey, and 2 for the follow-up interviews. With the limited number of participants, the data collected may not show an accurate representation of the challenges that teachers may have with the English language learner population.

In addition to the limited number of participants, the demographics of the student population can also be considered a limitation. As more than seventy percent of the student population at the school was on free or reduced lunch, the socioeconomic status of the students (SES) may play an important role in language acquisition. Santrock (2004), explained that socioeconomic as “the grouping of people with similar occupational, educational, and economic characteristics” (p. 583). As this research was limited to only one study site, the data collected may not truly reflect the ELLs population districtwide. Different social class and background may create different implications of ELL challenges for teachers.

Another key limitation of this research was the age group of the students. As this pilot study focused primarily with elementary school students, different age groups may have different results. This may include years of education the student may have had previously prior to the study. The data collected from this study also revealed that teachers had challenges in multiple subjects. However, if the study was conducted in a high school setting, participants there may experience different difficulties in instruction. This may include difference in subject matter, class time, and availability instructional resources.

Expanding the study to grades K-12 may also provide a clearer picture for researchers to understand the challenges that teachers have across district and even at a national level. By collecting data from teachers in all grades levels across district, the results will allow an in-depth view of how to better support the ELL population. The study can also provide a comparison among primary teachers versus secondary teachers and how different age groups affects instructional strategies. Nationally, the additional research may provide educators the opportunity to focus more on what instructional strategies that are currently working and what is



not. By doing so, many teachers will be able to make a direct impact on their ELLs at a more rapid pace.

### **Recommendations for Action**

After a thorough analysis of the data collected, it is recommended that school leaders continue to promote the understanding of second language acquisition. By promoting continual learning of instructional strategies, teachers are able to effectively serve their English language learner population. The findings of this study indicated that many teachers struggle to find the necessary instructional tools to help their students' transition from L1 to L2. By playing an active role in helping ease the level of challenges of what teachers face, the implemented instructional strategies will possibly help close the achievement gap at the school.

Many teachers who participated in the survey and the follow-up interview indicated challenges among all academic subjects. These findings suggest a need to increase in reforming how professional development is scheduled in the district.

While U.S. policy initiatives increasingly reflect an understanding that effective teaching and school leadership are critical to the quality of education that students receive, there is often less recognition that teacher professional development is a key element of school reform. Without a strategic investment in high-quality professional development, it is unlikely that any effort to improve teacher effectiveness or to turn around low-performing schools will succeed. (Wei et al., 2009, p. 1)

As mentioned by the participants in the follow-up interview, professional development is a key component in providing quality instruction for the ELL population. However, effective trainings are pivotal for the reform of language acquisition instructional practices. Professional development provides educators a way to deepen their skills and enhance their current strategies

as a teacher. As explained by Borko (2004), teachers must have a good grasp of the content they are teaching to provide the necessary instruction for their students. With continual, relevant professional development opportunities, educators will be able to broaden their instructional skills even further. Therefore, this study serves as guide of how administrators can better plan for future in-service professional development for teachers and staff.

When considering ways to improve current framework, administrators may also use the results of this study to shape future evaluation for staff members. In the current staff evaluation used by the school district, there is no area of measurement of instruction specifically geared toward ELLs. To better service ELLs, it important to take this in consideration when establishing professional guidelines for teachers. By doing so, it will ensure for purposeful instruction along with best teaching practices for all students.

While this research provided initial findings, it can only be considered as a starting base for future studies. There is still a significant need to investigate further. Based on the results of this study, there are many areas that the district needs to address to meet the instructional needs for ELLs.

1. Re-evaluate the current curriculum that is being used for ESL classrooms and pull-out programs at the elementary level.
2. Encourage classroom teachers to participate in trainings that pertain to cultural sensitivity and how they can better serve children coming from diverse backgrounds.
3. Increase professional development trainings specifically geared for language acquisition and how different instructional practices are helpful for all students including monolinguals.

4. Create a campus wide initiative to use linguistic accommodations even outside of the classroom. This may include special classes and other programs that service ELLs.
5. Advocate for policies that require all teachers have an ESL certification attached to their state standard teaching credentials.
6. Develop a more in-depth language acquisition professional development for all staff members.
7. Encourage district level leaders to provide more specialized services for ELLs such as a newcomer academy or special afterschool program.
8. Develop and implement specific tools embedded in lessons plans for ELLs.
9. Enhance second language acquisition instructional strategies by increasing trainings from different sources for all teachers.
10. Help support classroom teachers (administrators and lead ESL teachers) by providing on-going classroom visits with feedback.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study highlighted some of the challenges teachers have when instructing English language learners. With the clear perception from the teachers' responses to the survey and follow-up interview, it will provide campus administrators a wider lens on this critical issue. By having a clear perception of the challenges teachers are facing with English language learners, it will improve the achievement among other students in the same grade level.

The survey included questions that were directed toward the general population of ELLs, however it did not go in-depth on why the subjects of math, reading, writing, science, and social studies were difficult to teach. Studies that further elaborate on how to teach different subjects will provide a deeper understanding about the challenges of teaching each subject. As an

example, future surveys may include a breakdown of specific skills geared toward each subject area and open-ended response banks for teachers to use. This will help narrow down future studies into more specific themes accumulated between different participants.

There are many other areas to explore on this topic of research. Because the results of this study were developed based on a small group of participants, the researcher suggests that by looking into various elementary campuses in the district, other researchers may discover more other teacher experiences with ELLs. To take it a step further, future studies may also include secondary campuses that contain middle and high school ESL classes. By having data from both primary and secondary campuses, other researchers can discover challenges that teachers have in different grade levels. Their results can provide an improvement in secondary teaching.

Finally, demographic differences among ELLs may also be considered for future studies. The researcher recommends that researchers can compare demographics of socioeconomic status along with different ethnicities and learn more about the influences of those. Viewing a variety of demographics will allow studies to identify how different backgrounds play a role in the learning process.

### **Recommendations for future research**

1. Investigate further in each subject area to understand which part was more difficult to teach compared to the others.
2. Conduct the study at various primary campuses within the district.
3. Conduct the study at various secondary campuses within the district.
4. Compare different socioeconomic status and different ethnicities of ELLs in comparison with their academic challenges.

## **Conclusion**

English language learners in elementary schools come from diverse backgrounds and a wide range of prior educational experiences. Students trying to learn a second language are faced with many challenges every day. One of their most notable difficulties is learning how to bridge their first language (L1) to their second language (L2), while also learning academic content. Many general education classroom teachers are faced with difficulties when striving to appropriately serve their ELLs. This study was conducted to better understand the challenges teachers face when instructing English language learners at an elementary level. The data collected attempted to portray the common factors or challenges that teachers face at the elementary level when instructing ELLs. The findings from this study describe the challenges that teachers report when instructing ELLs. It is important to understand that teachers need appropriate support and guidance to better educate their students. From this study, one can conclude that there is a current need for trainings in language acquisition. They will not only help teachers become better educators, but also enhance the overall academic achievement of language learners.

The teachers that participated in this study helped highlight the instructional practices that are determined essential when serving language learners. In addition to identifying the areas of difficulties, the participants also shared current instructional strategies that are considered effective for ELLs. The presented results from this study also provide the understanding that teachers and staff urgently need to address these challenges in ELL instruction. As ELLs are becoming one of the highest subpopulations in the school district, it is critical to make their needs a priority. By providing teachers the tools and strategies they need, ELLs will be better

equipped for language development. In the long run, appropriate instruction will enable ELLs to be better prepared for their future academic learning and pathway in education.

In an effort to provide high quality instruction for ELLs, administrators from a district level need to ensure teachers are properly trained to use correct instructional strategies. Here in the study district, ELLs are becoming one of the most dominant subpopulations. It is important that educators to continue to explore second language acquisition strategies through trainings and professional development. Understanding the challenges that teachers perceive with instructional ESL strategies and their effectiveness is a first step. More training will improve instruction and ensure that the student population will continue to close the achievement gap with their monolingual peers. Better instruction allows ELLs to continue to strive further academically and emotionally. In addition to this outcome, when educators are able to validate the effectiveness of existing instructional strategies, they can more consistently use those methods that are working for ELLs. This not only will help support ELLs in their second language but will also limit the number of students that show deficiencies in academic gains. The positive growth will allow teaching practices to be differentiated to fit the needs of the student population lessen the achievement gap.

Implications of this research may also support the growth in language acquisition trainings for educators state- and nationwide. As the participants in this study have revealed, they believe that having more language development trainings for teachers would encourage improvement in academic gains between ELLs and general education students. With the growing number of ESL students enrolling in public schools every day, it is important to ensure a progression of steps to provide quality instruction for all students. This study also suggested that ELLs will continue to benefit linguistic accommodations in instruction of all subject areas

particularly from the subject areas of: reading, writing, science, and social studies. The findings also suggested conclusively that though mathematics may not be a subject that is difficult to teach, future studies may investigate further to the reasoning behind it.

In conclusion, the researcher is hopeful that the study has provided one perspective to guide future research about language acquisition. Insights gained through this research will provide educators qualitative data from the perception of teachers at an elementary level. The results obtained will help benefit development of continual monitoring of instruction for ELLs. It is the responsibility of teachers, administrators at the campus- and district level to provide the appropriate services to all English language learners. As defined by the regulations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, schools are held accountable for meeting the needs of all learners, including ELLs placed in a general education classroom. The results of this study are significant to the contribution to knowledge of language learners. The explanation of the challenges that teachers have when servicing ELLs can have a powerful impact on educators. The results of this research explained factors that not only make a difference in successful language acquisition, but also allow teachers to understand how to deliver meaningful instruction. When teachers are unable to provide best instructional practices for their students, students suffer negative effects on their achievement over time. Teachers need to have the appropriate skills and tools to provide lessons that are comprehensible to their language learners. ELLs in general experience many distinct difficulties relating to language acquisition. In order to create improvements to the education for ELLs, educators must first understand their academic and cultural challenges.

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## Appendix A

Online Survey (Google Form)

Researcher Created Survey:

*Challenges with Academic Achievement for ESL Students at the Elementary Level from a Teacher's Perspective*

Students (Approx. # of ESL students service): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender (check one):  Female  Male

Age (check one):  20-29 years old,  30-39 years old,  40-49 years old,  50-59 years old,  60+ years old

Race (check one):  Caucasian/White,  African American/Black,  Hispanic,  Biracial,  Other

Is English your native language? (check one):  yes  no

Do you speak a second language? (check one):  yes  no

How many years have you been teaching (including this year)? \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level of Students Whose You Work Primarily with (check all that apply):

Preschoolers/Pre-Kindergarten,  Kindergarten/1st grade,  2nd-3rd grade,  4th-5th grade

## Section A

Mark (X) in the appropriate box to indicate the response that best describes your opinion.

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does not apply
1. I have great difficulty with ESL students because of the language barrier with the student.						
2. I have great difficulty with ESL students because of the language barrier with their parents.						
3. I have difficulty in teaching ESL students American culture.						
4. I have difficulty teaching ESL students classroom routine.						
5. I have behavior and discipline problems with ESL students.						
6. Science is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.						
7. Social studies is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.						
8. Reading is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.						
9. Math is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.						
10. Writing is a difficult subject to teach ESL students.						

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

*Introduction:* I am a doctoral student through the University of New England. I am studying on the challenges teachers face when instructing ESL students. Your participation will be useful for the school and district's instruction for English language learners. I will ask you a series of questions. When you answer, I will be recording your response on my iPad device.

Is English your native language? (check one): \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

Do you speak a second language? (check one): \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no

How many years have you been teaching (including this year)? \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level of Students Whose You Work Primarily with (check all that apply):

\_\_\_\_\_ Preschoolers/Pre-Kindergarten, \_\_\_\_\_ Kindergarten/1<sup>st</sup> grade, \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade, \_\_\_\_\_  
4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade

1. Tell me about your experience on educating ESL students?
2. What specific challenges do you face when instructing ESL students? What current challenges do teachers have with serving ELLs? How are they currently addressing these challenges? What (if any) current instructional strategies are currently effective with ELLs?
3. Are there any additional comments?
4. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and valuable comments for my study. The information collected will contribute greatly for the future of ESL students at our campus. Feel free to contact me any time with any questions or comments you may have. You may also review the dissertation before or after it has completed.

## Appendix C

### University of New England

#### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** *Challenges with Academic Achievement for ESL Students at the Elementary Level from a Teacher's Perspective*

**Principal Investigator(s):**

Julie Xu, Doctoral Student, [jxu@une.edu](mailto:jxu@une.edu)

**Introduction:**

Please read this form in its entirety. You may also request the form be read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study. If you choose to participate, document that choice below.

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study now, during the project or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you wish to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to collect survey data from current certified ESL teachers at one elementary school campus. The findings of this study will assist the understanding of challenges that teachers have for the language learner population at the campus.

The online survey and optional follow-up interview are used in this study to collect information on challenges with academic achievement for ESL students at the elementary level from a teacher's perspective. After completing the online survey, you may volunteer to have a short follow-up interview as indicated in the survey.

**Who will be in this study?**

All certified classroom ESL teachers (approximately 35), will be invited to the initial pool of participants. The follow-up interview will include those who volunteered to participate a post-interview. Only one teacher from each grade level will be asked to interview. If there is more than one volunteer, then the researcher will choose the person with the earliest survey submission.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire using the site *Survey Monkey*, created by the researcher. This survey should take less than 10 minutes. The first part of the survey will ask you to provide general responses about your demographics. The second part of the survey will ask you questions about your difficulties with instructing ESL students using a rating scale to indicate your responses.

You may also choose to participate in a post-interview with the researcher by responding to a second invitation. This portion should last no more than 15 minutes. The first part of this interview will ask you to provide general responses about your demographics. The second part of the interview will include four open-ended questions about your experience and challenges with instructing ESL students.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

There are no known risks to this study other than becoming tired of answering questions. However, if you feel that you can no longer proceed in the survey or interview, then feel free to discontinue by closing your browser window or stopping the interview.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

The online survey should take less than 10 minutes and the follow-up interview should take less than 15 minutes. The findings of this study will assist the understanding of challenges that teachers have for our language learner population at our campus.

**What will it cost me?**

There is no cost to participate in this study.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Your identity will be protected throughout the study. Only I, the researcher, along with the University of New England Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the research committee will have rights to access the data collected. If you choose to participate in the post interview, your name will not be shared with anyone else. The transcript of the interview will only be identified as a number (i.e. Participant #1, Participant #2).

This survey is designed to be anonymous, please do not include any information anywhere on the survey that may individually identify you or anyone else.

After the online survey has closed, the principal investigator will collect data from the internet using a private computer, internet connection, and office space. The data will then be transferred to an Excel spreadsheet encrypted with a password, only the principal investigator has knowledge of.

The data collected will be stored for one year. All surveys, transcripts, and audio files will be placed in an electronic file on a private computer locked in the office of the principal investigator. All audio recordings on the iPad will be deleted as soon as it has been transferred to a flash drive. The flash drive will be encrypted with a password only the principal investigator has knowledge of. After the data analysis, all recorded audio files will be deleted completely from all databases.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the university.

- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with a co-worker.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty to you. You will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may come to a conclusion.

**What other options do I have?**

You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researchers conducting this study is Julie Xu, Doctoral Student and William Boozang, Ed.D., Faculty Mentor. For more questions or more information concerning this research you may contact them at (972) 358-5353 or [jxu@une.edu](mailto:jxu@une.edu) and/or (508) 446-7685 or [wboozang@une.edu](mailto:wboozang@une.edu).
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

You may print/keep a copy of this consent form.

**I understand the above description of the research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I understand that by proceeding with this survey I agree to take part in this research and do so voluntarily.**