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Supporting English Learners in Elementary Classrooms: How Teacher Preparation Affects EL Achievement

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Supporting English Learners in Elementary Classrooms:

How Teacher Preparation Affects EL Achievement

By

Jordan Whitman

A culminating thesis, submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science of Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2023
Abstract

Due to an increasing number of English learning children entering the U.S. public school system (Tinkler, Tinkler, Reyes, & Elkin, 2019), there is a need for teachers to be prepared and feel confident in providing adequate English language instruction and academic content to support these young learners. There is also limited research on the effectiveness of instructional strategies that elementary teachers use to engage and instruct English learning students, including technology as a strategy (Chang & Hung, 2019). This study uses qualitative data analysis to examine instructional strategies and practices, as well as teacher’s own perceptions and experiences that support English learners in a Northern California public school. Six teacher participants, instructing grades kindergarten through fifth grade, were interviewed about their experiences in working with a high demographic of English learning students. Findings from this research indicate that both pre-service training and in-service professional development, in regards to English learners, is imperative for proper instruction in both second language acquisition and grade-level academic content. Findings also suggest that teachers rely on certain strategies and programs that help support EL students. By implementing change within credentialing programs and school district professional development opportunities, teachers can be better prepared to support English learning students.
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Finally, I want to thank my students. Past, present, and future: You are my inspiration to be a lifelong learner. To my English Learners: You are capable of achieving great things and I look forward to watching your successes unfold for you.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over 4.8 million students in the U.S public school system are labeled as English Learners, with this number growing each year (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Historically, this group of students have been underserved because of policies, practices, and theory that has not acknowledged the diversity that EL (English Learner) students bring to the classroom. In a society where bilingualism is more of an asset than ever, elementary classrooms should be a place where students learning English are supported in not only language development, but academic, social, and emotional learning as well.

As the researcher of this study, I used my own experience as a second-grade teacher as motive for exploring the topic of English Learners. Teaching for five years at a school site with a high percentage of EL students has prompted me to reflect on my own teaching practices and philosophies. Unaware of the above statistics as a new teacher, I sought to learn more about English Learners and what strategies support engagement and retention of academic content, but also improve second language acquisition for these students.

By designing a study that benefits English Learners and non-ELs just the same, I first sought to explore what was missing in the current literature. Talking informally with colleagues, preparing research questions for this study, and reflecting on my own teaching, led me to discover that many teachers feel unprepared and/or uninformed in regards to supporting English Learners. Teachers with EL students in their classrooms are aware of the challenges that come with instructing a diverse group of learners, but they are also aware of how their teaching practices directly impact the achievement of their students. This critical theme in understanding how teachers and other stakeholders are essential in providing equitable and effective content
instruction, as well as English language development, impacted the direction of this research and involved analyzing teachers' perceptions of ELs within their own practice.

**Statement of Purpose**

The review of literature revealed instructional strategies used by teachers to support English learning students in their classrooms, as well as some research-based programs designed to train teachers in strategy implementation. Previous studies examined how teachers have been prepared (or not) to provide adequate language and content instruction to second language learners. Considering the relationships between these main ideas found in the review of literature, the deficiencies were related to the limited exploration of the perspectives and experiences of in-service classroom teachers. These perceptions are integral for understanding how the educational system is supporting the academic and second language acquisition of English Learners.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of in-service teachers regarding their preparation in working with English Learning students. Teacher participants of this study shared experiences from academic, professional, and personal aspects of their lives to develop conclusions about how they have best supported students learning English as a second language in their classrooms. By examining the strategies and experiences of these teachers, it will be possible to conclude how teachers feel prepared to support the learning of this particular group of students, thus suggesting relevant courses, programs, and training that can continue to give current and future educators the tools to support their students.

**Overview of the Research Design**

This qualitative study was conducted at a northern California school that serves elementary and middle school students. During the 2019-2020 school year, this site served 703
students ranging in grades from TK (Transitional Kindergarten) to eighth grade. A total of 424 students were classified as English Language Learners (CA Department of Education). Six teachers participated in qualitative data collection in the form of in-person interviews that included open-ended questions about their experiences working with English Learners. The participants taught each grade level between kindergarten and fifth grade and had varying experiences in the field ranging from first year educators, to more veteran teachers.

As the researcher, I acknowledge the possible bias of this study, given that I have worked at the school site with participants as colleagues for the past several years. The qualitative approach to data collection was used to better understand the personal experiences of teachers which is highlighted in this research. This study sought to answer three main research questions (1) What instructional strategies do elementary teachers use/rely on to support their English learning students? (2) How do elementary education teachers feel they have prepared (or not) in order to instruct English learning students? (3) How do the personal experiences of teachers affect and influence their teaching practices and beliefs regarding English learning students?

**Significance of the Study**

Findings from this research study indicate that teachers need more support in order to properly and effectively provide access to grade-level content and development in English language acquisition for students learning English as a second language. It was discovered that teachers use the “tools” they have to improve their teaching and education of their students, but need support from credentialing programs during pre-service training, and from school districts throughout ongoing professional development opportunities. With more meaningful and authentic training regarding the education of ELs, teachers would feel more prepared and supported in their classroom instruction.
This study also showed that teachers’ personal experiences and backgrounds have an effect on their teaching practices surrounding English Learners’ development. Some of these experiences include pre-service volunteering or student teaching, teachers’ own bilingualism or second-language learning, and the teaching philosophies held by teachers around the importance of honoring bilingualism.

These findings add to the existing literature by extending previous strategies designed to improve the learning of EL students, as well as provide suggestions for improvements within credentialing programs and district designed training for teachers. This thesis gives clear examples of what changes can be made to support teachers, and thus their students - the future (bilingual) leaders of society.

The results of this research suggest that teachers, administrators, district personnel, credential program faculty, and others are involved in the support and education of future and current teachers. These stakeholders can take steps to modify and redesign courses, curriculum and continued training to better prepare teachers for working with English Learners.

Providing equitable access to appropriate grade-level content for students is essential to education. It is not a luxury, but a necessity for students to receive *equitable* education that meets the varying needs of individual students. Various instructional strategy usage, appropriate modifications to curriculum, and personalized relationships are all ways that teachers can promote a climate of honoring diversity, equality, and inclusivity in their classrooms. Striving to focus on the education of English Learners not only benefits this particular group, but all students alike.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review seeks to examine instructional strategies that are used by elementary general education teachers in supporting the academic and language development of English Language Learners in their classrooms. Furthermore, this study will analyze what systems and preparations are already in place for teachers to implement these strategies. Currently, there is limited research on why specific teaching strategies work for students whose native language is not English in an environment where they need to speak, listen, read, and write in English. Additionally, there are a limited number of existing studies that analyze the perceptions and experiences of teachers who are providing this instruction to students learning English. Due to the increasing number of English Learners entering the U.S. public school system (Tinkler., Tinkler, Reyes, & Elkin, 2019), there is an immediate need for change; teachers would benefit from feeling confident and prepared to implement the strategies proven to be effective for English learning students to understand and use both appropriate academic content as well as English language use. These factors are important in considering how academic achievement of English learners is related to teacher comfort, experience, training, and use of instructional strategies to support their students.

This review will first explore the historical context of English Language Learners in U.S. public schools in order to understand the issues that they face as second language learners. The review will then analyze various teaching practices, strategies, and programs that have been found to be effective in supporting English language learners. Teacher preparation and credentialing programs will be examined along with professional development opportunities for current teachers in order to review what training and support teachers have received based on the existing literature. Lastly, this review will examine the connections between providing equitable
learning experiences for English learners and social justice issues. The importance of this connection will show why these learning experiences are beneficial to both teachers and students of all backgrounds, as well as the U.S. education systems.

**Historical Background of English Learners**

According to the California Department of Education (2021), an English Learner, often referred to as an EL, is described as:

A student who enrols in a California school beginning in any grade level, transitional kindergarten through grade twelve, has a language other than English identified on the Home Language Survey, and upon assessment, obtained a level of English proficiency that indicates programs and services are necessary.

As parents enroll their children into the public school system, a questionnaire about home language is to be completed, regardless of the student’s age/grade level. The form is reviewed by the local school district to determine if assessment of the student’s English Language proficiency is needed. If a parent or guardian has indicated that the child speaks any languages other than English, the child will be assessed on their proficiency in English. This data provides the state, local school district, school site, and teacher with information needed to provide appropriate English instruction.

**English Language Learners in Schools**

The rise in the number of English Learners in U.S. schools is not a new phenomenon and has been frequently discussed in regards to achievement gaps and higher dropout rates, compared to their English-native peers (Genesee, Lindholm, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). Data from between the years of 1991-2003 show that students from non-English speaking backgrounds make up the fastest growing portion of the student population nationwide and while total
enrollment grew by 12% during these years, the number of ELLs grew by 95% (Genesee et al., 2005). More recently, the California Department of Education (2021), finds that as of 2020 Census data, more than 17% of students enrolled in California public schools (K-12) are classified as English Learners. Of those 1,062,290 EL students, 65.6% are enrolled in grades kindergarten through grade six (California Department of Education, 2021).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law, replacing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. NCLB was meant to be a positive step forward in deciding where students needed additional educational support, but revealed challenges for successful implementation by schools and educators. ESSA provides a more equitable blueprint for public school education and recognizes the diverse learning needs of students (U.S. Department of Education). With changes in policies, teachers and school administration should be provided with the information and training that is required to successfully implement these changes in classrooms.

**Issues in Educating ELLs**

In addition to the challenges that the NCLB policy gave educators, English Learners face challenges both in and outside of the classroom. Within the school environment, these students often struggle with subjects such as social studies (which includes geography, civics, history, and economics). This content may be unfamiliar or difficult to understand because of a lack in background knowledge or experiences related to immigration to the U.S. (Hinde, Popp, Jimenez-Silva, & Dorn, 2011).

Other issues for English Learners may include difficulty in English literacy development which includes phonological awareness abilities, vocabulary usage, and reading comprehension skills. If these skills are not being taught and practiced in the students’ native language, it is
likely going to be difficult to transfer to the second-language being learned (Genesee, Lindholm, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).

Bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) program models have also been researched to determine the academic achievement of English Learners, which addresses the ESSA policy. One- and two-way bilingual program evaluation studies have shown positive results on both EL students' native language and English proficiency, and in many cases, surpassing their English-native peers (Thayer, 2021). However, the most important aspect of this research is that the programs are long-term. If programs are not given the time and development needed to effectively implement it, neither the programs nor the students will be successful. (Genesee, Lindholm, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). With the number of EL students across the nation rising and considering the research that has shown positive outcomes regarding bilingual and ESL programs, there can be fewer challenges and more solutions to effectively supporting their academic success in our public schools.

**Instructional Practices**

There are several existing studies that review differing instructional strategies and programs related to supporting students learning English as a second language. For the purpose of this literature review, I will be examining a few common strategies, including use of narrative stories, integration of technology, use of Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama (VAD), and comprehension strategies. Then, I will discuss how research-based programs, including GLAD and SEAL, have been shown to support these practices, as well as the training and professional development required of these programs.
**Strategies**

The strategies listed in this literature review are only some of those that I have read, heard about, or used in my own teaching practice. The relevance and effectiveness of each strategy varies by study, and it is important to note that the consistency and amount of time among them is dependent on specificities of each strategy.

**Narrative Stories.** Research has shown that the use of narrative stories and storytelling are effective as an instructional strategy that supports English Learners. Texts and instruction in students’ L1 - meaning their native or first language, has proven to engage ELs in practicing retell skills, listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in their L2 (their second language) of English (Arvizu, 2020). The use of narrative stories, also known as read alouds, can have a powerful effect on literacy development, regardless of the language it is written or read in. Students typically enjoy being read to or reading stories that interest them, thus making this strategy both enjoyable and effective in learning. Narrative stories can be used in a variety of ways, and although this particular study focused on certain literacy skills and activities, it is worthwhile to understand the vastness of “narratives” as a strategy.

**Integration of Technology.** Although technology is becoming increasingly dominant in modern-day society and education, there is little research on its effectiveness in classrooms. A review of research studies has analyzed how integration of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) does have a large and positive effect on students’ learning and achievement of second language acquisition (Chang & Hung, 2019). The authors of the 2019 research analyzed 84 studies using TELL, however, the data was fairly dated (as far back as 1990). The meta-analysis included specific variables including sample sizes, treatment durations of studies, educational levels, technology and software types, and learning objectives. Overall, the research
by Chang and Hung (2019) found positive outcomes of how teachers integrated technology into their instruction to support EL students in a variety of uses.

**Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama (VAD).** Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama (VAD) is a combination of traditional vocabulary strategies used in tandem with drama activities. VAD is used to specifically teach English vocabulary to English learners (Kalogirou & Whyte, 2019). More traditional strategies used to teach vocabulary were used with a control group, which include: dictionary look-up, use of context clues, mnemonic devices, and memorization of terms. With an experimental group, the addition of direct teaching, multiple exposures, providing a variety of learning contexts, and differentiated activities to practice new vocabulary words, students showed higher retention in new vocabulary words than the control group. Furthermore, another element of VAD is to use the vocabulary skills within the context of dramatization, which involves acting out stories or definitions related to vocabulary. VAD has shown to be an effective strategy in supporting EL students’ L2 acquisition, as well as a fun and motivating way to engage students in their learning (Kalogirou & Whyte, 2019).

**Comprehension Strategies.** Comprehension is a term used for understanding written words in relation to reading books or other text. There are a plethora of strategies related to reading comprehension in education, including identification of the main idea and details, making inferences, critical reading skills, and use of context clues. A study showed that over 15 weeks, English learning students received instruction of the above comprehension skills, while a control group was given grammar instruction, translation and lecturing as a means of traditional reading strategies (Liao & Wang, 2018). The study by Liao and Wang concluded that the comprehension strategies used with the 15 EL students showed positive results regarding higher
self-efficacy and lower anxiety, in addition to better comprehending English text (Liao & Wang, 2018).

**Research-Based Programs**

**GLAD.** GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) is a program consisting of about 35 instructional strategies or practices that trained teachers use to teach academic language instruction and literacy. Academic content is taught through the intentional strategies targeting specific academic standards. GLAD strategies are beneficial to all students, but are specifically designed to support English learning students. Two of the strategies were examined during a particular study: the cooperative strip paragraph and story maps are both rich in language and require collaboration between the teacher and students (Domingo, 2019). GLAD is a well-known program by teachers and although it seems to be fading behind more recent research studies, some strategies are still common and frequently used in classrooms. However, the data collected from Domingo in a research study (2019) show that the two strategies analyzed provided inconclusive results. Of the 15 student participants, only three were English Learners so the data may not provide valid or relative results (Domingo, 2019).

Another research study examined the effectiveness of project GLAD strategies in students’ literacy and science learning (Deussen et. al, 2014). After reviewing the instructional model, Deussen et. al. (2014) describe the four main types of strategies of GLAD and how they were used to examine the impact of fifth-grade students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing, and science achievement. The main strategy types included: motivation strategies, input strategies, guided oral practice strategies, and reading and writing strategies. Although there didn’t seem to be any positive effect of learning improvement for native English speakers, the
study did show improvement in reading comprehension and vocabulary for English Learners (Deussen et. al, 2014).

**SEAL.** The SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language) model is very similar to GLAD, wherein research-based strategies (many that are based on GLAD strategies) are used by trained teachers to teach literacy, academic content and language acquisition. Hurwitz and Olsen (2018) describe the importance of using SEAL strategies with English learning students. The SEAL program uses social studies and science content to teach oral language skills, grammar and vocabulary, literacy comprehension, and more. Although the effectiveness of SEAL strategies continues to be explored, surveys from teachers have shown positive results of implementation in their classrooms (Hurwitz & Olsen, 2018).

Teacher preparedness is essential to student learning success and the SEAL model recognizes that as a starting place for teacher professional development and practice (Hurwitz & Olsen, 2018). Teachers are required to go through a two-year training on the program if the school district has implemented SEAL, by studying new strategies during each session, in addition to collaborating with coaches and team members during continuous professional development following completion of the training. Based on results after a two-year training period, a study showed teachers’ increased understanding of the needs of their students, and how to address those within diverse demographics of language learners (Hurwitz & Olsen, 2018).

**Teacher Training and Preparation**

From personal and professional experience, after receiving my Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Development, I was accepted into a year-long (two-semester) Multiple Subject Teacher Credentialing program. Although some states may differ slightly in the process of becoming a certified teacher, this is the general and most common route that individuals take.
With this context in mind, it is imperative to understand the preparation it takes to become an educator, as well as the continuous support it takes to adapt and modify practices, learn new curriculum, and continue gaining experience through day-to-day teaching experiences.

**Credentials Programs**

One of the strongest areas of research pertains to the pre-training experiences and courses in credentialing programs and student teaching settings. Research has indicated that teachers who are better prepared during their teacher preparation programs make the highest impact in student learning (Wissink & Starks, 2019). Furthermore, this correlation in student achievement is often parallel to teacher evaluations. Teachers who participated in research interviews revealed that they would have benefited from more specific training in their preparation courses designed around supporting EL students learn English (Wissink & Starks, 2019).

Although reports have shown consistent increases in English language learners in school settings, teacher preparation programs have not all conformed to supporting the growth and development of teachers who will likely be working with these students upon graduation. Research shows that pre-service teachers that engage in service-learning experiences with students who speak a language other than English are better prepared to support these learners in their own classrooms later on (Tinkler, Tinkler, Reyes, & Elkin, 2019). Without a diverse demographic of students to practice with and engage with, teacher candidates may not be prepared to work with students that are culturally and linguistically different than themselves. The service-learning experiences can help the practice teachers engage in a deeper understanding of their students’ linguistic needs, identities, strengths, and motivations (Tinkler et al., 2019). This connection and acceptance creates social justice and equity among the classroom community, which will also be referred to later in this review.
Teachers’ lack of awareness of culturally and linguistically diverse students in their care and guidance, can hinder the community aspect of a classroom environment. This community is essential to building trust, comfortability, respect, and many other qualities that create a successful learning environment. Similarly, teachers and school systems need to be inclusive to ethnically diverse students, address their needs, and use appropriate pedagogies that support students with diverse linguistic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. These ideals are based on the beliefs of classroom teachers reflecting on their pre-service programs and how they feel those programs impacted their perceptions of ELL students (Farren, 2016). Not only are the reflections upon training experiences helpful for teachers to move forward with better practices, but they also acknowledge some roots of social justice and equity issues that stem from the educational institution itself.

The backgrounds among students in U.S. public schools is no-doubt incredibly diverse in many ways. However, the teachers in these same schools may not often represent the identities, cultures, and language of their diverse students. Although districts and credentialing programs are working to further diversify the employment field, people of color and multilingual speakers are still underrepresented as educators. In a study conducted by Lammert and Steinitz Holyoke (2020), preservice teachers examined their own positionality and the effect on English Learners’ education, specifically literacy instruction. This study has “demonstrated that teachers’ inquiries can help them question their own biases toward racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities” (Lammert & Steinitz Holyoke, 2020, p. 26). Not only is this an integral part of equitable education, but it also allows teachers in credentialing programs to prepare for the diverse students they will likely encounter.
**Professional Development**

When intentional and comprehensive professional development (also known as PD) opportunities are provided to in-service teachers, they show significant improvements in a variety of teaching areas, especially for English Learners (Piazza et. al., 2020). A study done by Piazza and others (2020) examined 23 in-service teachers’ professional development activities over an 18-month period. The results showed that instructional practices of the teachers improved in several areas of instruction including: lesson preparation, building background, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment. These practices focused on the learning of EL students specifically. This study involved very rigorous expectations of teachers which included coursework, fieldwork, attending a conference, and participating in ongoing coaching. This type of professional development (also known as PD) can be time consuming for teachers and may not be possible beyond the extent of this study.

Teachers who work with English learners found that professional development opportunities were most helpful when given hands-on opportunities to practice their skills in their classrooms, engaged in real-time demonstrations among colleagues, and receiving individualized coaching (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). In a particular study, teachers became more effective in their lesson planning, instruction of vocabulary building and fluency, oral language development, literacy development, reading comprehension, as well as enhancing student engagement and bridging school and home with families. By participating in at least six hours of PD per month, the increased oral language development of English learners was attested to the comprehensive and well-organized planning of the professional development hours (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Although classroom teachers have historically had “enough on their plates” and are often stretched thin in their duties and responsibilities,
professional development should (and could be) a way to incorporate meaningful and useful tools into the teachers’ contractual day without adding more to their already long to-do lists.

**Social Justice and Equity in Education**

As the number of English Learners entering the U.S. public school system has risen, so have conversations by policy makers in regards to how local districts are meeting their legal obligations to support EL students. Research has shown that providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners can be achieved if a social justice approach is used. Meaning, school leaders that utilize an approach to educational equity through a social justice lens, create meaningful, long-term success for historically disadvantaged groups of students (Mavrogordato & White, 2020).

Although educational policy is decided at a federal level, it is local school leaders who are given the authority to decide how the policy is enacted. Educational leaders that have research-based knowledge of programs to support English Learners, have been found to have personal beliefs that often reflect that those same students are assets to the school and community, which can directly influence the implementation of effective support down to the classroom levels (Mavrogordato & White, 2020). By seeking opportunities to advance and improve social and academic outcomes for EL students, as well as other disproportionately marginalized groups, the effect of school leadership in regards to social justice is momentous for creating equitable, high-quality learning opportunities for all students.

Furthermore, Mavrogordato and White (2020) state that the positional authority of school leaders is essential to enacting educational policy through a social justice framework, but there is little research to analyze the record of this. Rather, most research in this area is of the policies themselves and whether they are complicit with the law (Mavrogordato & White, 2020).
To understand the connection between federal policy and actual classroom practices in educating English Learners, is to uphold social justice values and positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity. Stakeholders that emulate these qualities will not only reach English Learners, but all students, families, teachers, and community members in accessing equitable education.

**Social Justice and Community**

One of the most practical and common approaches to creating a climate of social justice and providing equitable learning opportunities in a school environment is to build community. There are various studies connecting community-building to educational social justice, regarding students of diverse identities. Local and school community can have numerous positive effects on students’ academic, social, and emotional development. These effects are not limited to English Learners, but for the purpose of this literature review, I will hone in on this particular group of students.

In a study analyzing the experiences of student teachers in preparation of a teaching career, researchers argued that to successfully engage all learners and provide equitable learning opportunities, it is essential that those teacher candidates enact professional pedagogies that acknowledge and value the diversity in linguistic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds of their learners (Farren, 2016). In order to have this understanding and knowledge of their students, it’s critical for teachers to familiarize themselves with their school and classroom communities. To do this, the student teachers were taught to engage their EL students in social interactions with “more capable peers…and help them to express meaning to one another” (Farren, 2016, p. 26). This community building technique not only helps engage English Learners in their own learning agenda, but it also engages students not classified as ELs, possibly
those within a different demographic. This research connects how teacher training plays a critical role in preparing preservice teachers for accessing all students, including ELs, in community-building and effective academic instructional practices.

Another study conducted by Tinkler, et al. (2019) examined service-learning experiences of teacher candidates and how relationships with students built community and understanding of students’ experiences, strengths, and needs as learners. Specifically, one teacher candidate reflected on their bond with a student regarding the challenges of being in America and how this interaction shaped their understanding of the students’ literacy challenges (Tinkler, et al., 2019). This kind of empathetic connection between teacher and student cultivates a relationship that allows teachers to understand the backgrounds, academic, social, and emotional needs of individual students. The authors of this study note that although traditional instruction techniques also have the potential to access these outcomes, the focus on classroom management and whole-class academic instruction tends to outweigh the needs of individual learners (Tinkler, Tinkler, Reyes, & Elkin, 2019). By acknowledging the connections between teachers and peers, students with diverse learning abilities can connect and make progress in each others’ education.

**Restorative Practices and Building Relationships.** As the value of community-building has, and continues to, become an essential part of teaching pedagogies, research and recommendations around these topics have shown growth as well. Forsberg and Leko (2021) describe the impact that relationships with adults have on a child’s development. These relationships can predict academic and social success, more mature social skills, and more positive reception to feedback. Restorative practices are defined as evidence-based strategies that focus on relationships and encourage social responses to conflict among peers (Forsberg & Leko, 2021). These strategies focus on community conferencing and conflict-resolution for both
student-to-student interactions, as well as student-to-teacher interactions. While many schools respond to behavioral problems with traditional punitive disciplinary practices, research has shown that those responses end up contributing to the achievement gap for students of color and those with disabilities (Forsberg & Leko, 2021). Additionally, the researchers state “school connectedness, which includes school bonding and attachment, school engagement, and school climate, may prevent antisocial behaviors and improve academic and behavioral outcomes” (Forsberg & Leko, 2021, p. 2).

Similarly, the universal human needs to belong, to have a voice, and to have agency all contribute to the dimensions of human dignity (Bailie, 2019). These needs connect restorative practices to social justice across cultures and disciplines and should be fostered in a safe community, such as school. When students feel strong bonds and levels of connection within a school environment, they are more likely to behave in class, thus creating a safe, trustworthy learning environment (Bailie, 2019).

Restorative practices serve not only to provide disciplinary measures (when needed) but also lead to many benefits, including: to improve the social and emotional trauma of students’ past, to provide access for students to achieve social justice, as well as show improvement in academic performance (Pentón Herrera, & McNair, 2021). Furthermore, Pentón Herrera, and McNair (2021) state that:

these experiences with the current challenges faced in the United States as individuals of color, immigrants, ELs, and undocumented people, we believe that RP and a restorative English education is not only recommended but essential to ensure ELs’ present and future success (p. 4).
Knowing what struggles many English Learners face, it is imperative for teachers to build relationships with students and community in a classroom setting. When the foundation of a classroom is built on positive relationships between adults and the children themselves, teachers can instruct better, students can learn better, and there will be fewer conflicts.

Rancy-Roney (2008) expresses that it is the job of teachers to form intentional communities of learners and reorient their beliefs regarding EL students to support them and see them as authentic and legitimate participants in constructing classroom knowledge even when English language is limited. The process of cultivating this community is a strategy in itself used to engage diverse learners in more ways than only academically. Not only are English learners able to grow academically and develop language proficiency in English, they will also be provided access to resources that support their physical, mental, social and emotional health (Rancy-Roney, 2008).

The impact that community building has been shown to have on English Learners is twofold: relationships between teachers and children can benefit the social, emotional and academic needs of these students, as well as the ongoing training, strategy support, and programs that enable these relationships are essential to EL’s advocacy in education.

Conclusion

Various research explains how instructional programs and strategies are effective in engaging and supporting English learning students in reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition specifically. There have been program models and research based strategies to support the effectiveness of English language development with use of those strategies in the classroom setting.
As emphasized in this literature review, there is ample evidence that pre-service teachers benefit from specific preparation and/or coursework in preparation for instructing EL students in their own classroom. Additionally, teachers currently in the field have shown to value professional development opportunities around strategies and supports to better support their EL students.

Lastly, in addition to the various strategies explored in this review of research, the relation that community building and social justice have within the educational environment stands out as one of the most important aspects of supporting students from marginalized communities, with second language learners as one particular group.

Currently, there are few studies examining the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding instructional strategies they use and feel are effective in supporting English language learners with grade-level content and language development. Though many teachers are taught to use instructional strategies, either in preparation programs or professional development training, there are few that analyze practices from the classroom teachers’ point of view.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the perceptions of current teachers with experience instructing students learning English as a second language and analyzing which strategies teachers use for this engagement and support and why. Furthermore, this research will examine what preparation teachers feel would have supported them in working with ELLs during pre-service coursework or in-service professional development training opportunities.
Chapter 3: Methods

There have been various research studies explaining the importance of effective practices to support English learning students in both their language acquisition, as well as mastery of grade-level content. However, little research has been done to directly examine the perspectives of teachers instructing these students as a means to share effective instructional practices, and their experiences with preparation to engage in these practices, with EL students. As the number of English Language Learners continues to rise (California Department of Education, 2021), more research is needed to determine what strategies and practices are most effective from the teacher’s perspective.

As the researcher, I have designed the following methods by considering the perspectives of teachers who instruct English language learning students. The data determined what strategies, program(s), practice(s), and other resources best support the students in learning English as a second language, as well as learning grade-level content. In this qualitative study, I interviewed teachers from a variety of grade levels regarding their experiences in these areas.

Research Questions

This study examined teacher responses about their own practices. It consisted of two 30-minute interviews, as well as a brief online survey. To this end, the interview and survey data was guided by the following research questions:

- What instructional strategies do elementary teachers use/rely on to support their English learning students?

- How do elementary education teachers feel they have prepared (or not) in order to instruct English learning students?
● How do the personal experiences of teachers affect and influence their teaching practices and beliefs regarding English learning students?

These central questions were used to focus the study around the importance of engaging strategies for ELL students and how they are implemented in elementary settings on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, the experiences in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers also directly impacts the effectiveness of these strategies and practices.

**Description and Rationale for Research Approach**

In researching teacher perspectives and experiences on instructional strategies, my qualitative study is represented by a constructivist philosophical worldview. According to Creswell (2014), the focus of a constructivist worldview is specific to understanding the factors that influence how people live and work. Creswell (2014) explains that “the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied,” (p. 8); researchers must use these factors in an attempt to understand the lives and perceptions of their participants. To recognize how the experiences of teachers have prepared them for successfully teaching English language learners, it’s imperative to use qualitative interviews to guide my study. According to Seidman (2013), “researcher[s] can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process…through the experience of the individual people, the “others” who make up the organization or carry out the process,” (p. 9). Researchers benefit from interviewing participants as a way to understand their stories, and showing that their voices have worth (Seidman, 2013).

The role of the researcher is significant in acknowledging how their own backgrounds and experiences may shape their research (Creswell, 2014). The explanations researchers make
of the data collected are affected by their own experiences. Throughout this research, I interviewed teachers, my colleagues, about their experiences related to supporting English Learners. As a teacher myself, I have my own ideas and beliefs about the topics discussed with others during this process. The underlying assumptions that I have provided are from an understanding of the participants, but also subjective to the meaning of what I make of the interviews, as interviewing is a mode of inquiry (Seidman, 2019, p. 8). This characteristic of creating subjective meaning from qualitative data is in line with a constructivist worldview, according to Creswell (2014).

For the purpose of this research, I will be using a phenomenological research design with my participants through interviewing. This approach to research is characterized by the “lived experiences of participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2019, p. 16). This design supports my research because I intend to understand teachers’ use of instructional practices in considering the specific group of English Learners in their classrooms. Furthermore, my project seeks to explore what preparation, credentialing programs, and/or professional development opportunities support teachers in implementing those practices.

**Research Design**

**Research Site and Entry into the Field**

This qualitative research study was conducted at a large elementary and middle school in Northern California, which will be referred to as Sunshine School. This site was purposefully selected because I have been a classroom teacher at the site for the last five years. In this time, I have created pre-existing relationships with the majority of the staff members that volunteered to participate in this study. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the school name and participant names. As of the 2019-2020 school year, this site serves 703 students ranging in
grades from TK (transitional Kindergarten) to eighth grade, including special education classes. In all, there are three African American students, three American Indian or Alaskan Native students, five Filipino students, 21 Asian students, 53 white students, 611 Hispanic or Latino students, and seven students that identify as two or more races. A total of 424 students are classified as English Language Learners, and of those, 397 are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged (CA Department of Education).

**Participants and Sampling Procedures**

A total of six teachers at Sunshine School were recruited for participation in this study during a staff meeting. The teachers instruct a variety of grade levels, ranging from Kindergarten to 5th grade. They also have diverse experience levels in their time as educators, spanning from early career to veteran teachers.

Table 1  
Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level (currently)</th>
<th>Number of English Learners (ELs) currently in class</th>
<th>Years in education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>25/25 students (100%)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>15/19 students (79%)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>16/22 students (73%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>23/23 students (100%)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>20/25 students (80%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>16/25 students (64%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above teachers were selected because of their backgrounds in teaching the demographics outlined above. All teacher participants have experience in working with a large population of ELL students. We have had conversations as a staff, and also engaged in informal conversations about the challenges in supporting our diverse groups of students. The purpose of selecting these particular teachers is to understand their experiences and how each uses their own skillset to instruct their students, which will support my understanding of the problem and attempt to answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The staff at Sunshine School were given a brief description of the study and asked to contact me (the researcher) if interested in participating. After this contact was made, either face-to-face or via email, verbal agreement was made before reviewing a written consent form. The consent form was reviewed and signed by all adult teachers participating in the study. Only after consent forms were reviewed and signed, did the scheduling of the interview begin. Each participant engaged in two 30-minute interviews, as well as completed one short online survey between each interview. The two interviews were scheduled about one week apart in most cases.

Methods

Prior to beginning interviews, permission to conduct the study at Sunshine School was obtained from the school principal, and the participants provided verbal and written consent (Appendix C) to participate in the study. The teachers were provided a brief description of the study, as well as sample interview questions. I then set up the first of two interviews with each participant, which was intended to last about 30-minutes each.

During the first interview, I began by asking teachers about their experience in education and teaching EL students, as well as how they support those students daily (Appendix A). These questions were designed to address the research question: What instructional strategies do
elementary teachers use and/or rely on to support their English learning students? The interview questions helped to answer this question by sharing what each teacher feels is effective and why, including strategies they have been instructed to use, as well as some that they have created or modified on their own. Before departing from the first interview, each teacher was thanked for their time and set up a second interview date. They also were given the online link for the survey and instructed to complete it before our second interview (Appendix B).

The second interview began with the second set of interview questions (Appendix A) which included follow-up from the online survey submissions. These questions were intended to address the research question about teacher preparedness and how equipped they felt going into the teaching profession, specifically in terms of working with ELLs.

**Data Analysis**

I collected data through qualitative interviews with participants. I audio-recorded each interview using my cell phone as a recording device. During each interview, I noted key terms and phrases related to strategies that teachers use or think would be helpful to use with students learning English as a second language. Following each interview, I immediately wrote analytic memos for each interview. I then categorized specific teaching practices or strategies that each participant shared, as well as how their own teaching preparations and experiences have positively or negatively impacted their teaching of ELLs. The expectation was that each participant would share their own teaching strategies used to engage and support English Learners, as well as how their preparation into teaching played a role in this area of instruction. It was important to understand the correlation in these areas.

In order to accurately collect and analyze the data, I used Maxwell’s (2013) three strategies for qualitative data analysis, which included writing analytic memos, categorizing
strategies, and connecting strategies. Analytic memos (can also be referred to as “memos”) are often used by a researcher as a writing tool in any capacity other than taking actual field notes (Maxwell, 2013). These notes can be as simple as marginal comments on an interview transcript, and be as in-depth as a complete analytic essay (Maxwell, 2013). Categorizing strategies are most commonly used by researchers to code their qualitative research. Coding is used to analyze what is important in the data and categorize what ideas, themes, or topics are forming in order to connect the strategies to the research (Maxwell, 2013). Lastly, Maxwell (2013) describes connecting strategies as the third and final tool for analyzing data collection. In connecting strategies, researchers must first use memos and categorizing strategies in order to find similarities in the data and organize it into categories, whereas in the final step of analysis, the researcher attempts to understand those categories of data in context and how the relationships between the themes relate to each other (Maxwell, 2013).

Memo writing was an important step in my research method following each interview. I began memo writing even before conducting interviews, during the process of using my previous research to guide my questions and comments. One intention for using memos was to reflect on the experience and relationship with my participants, which is a helpful technique as described by Maxwell (2013). With this in mind, I noted the participants’ tone, demeanor, expressions, and body language, as these characteristics often made an impact on the recording and/or transcripts and how the context was intended. Additionally, I used memo writing to record the time, place, and location of each interview, as well as notes on each participant to use in categorizing and connecting the data later on.

The process in categorizing my data began even before the interviews took place. I created a concept map during my research review that included themes, ideas, concepts, and
terms that I frequently came across, assuming that these were words I may hear during my interviews. Based on this map, I created a list of words and phrases and used these to create a baseline of potential codes. The potential codes included words such as: strategies, programs, training, professional development, support, practice, (specific strategy name(s)), (social-emotional program(s)/strategy name(s)). This list was created based on the research reviews, as well as my own experiences as a teacher. If interviewees used any of these words, or similar ones, I would ask a follow-up question or ask for further clarification, as well as note the term or phrase used. Rather than focusing on this list of words, I was more concerned about the participants’ own words and answers, often noting other terms of importance during the interview. After each interview, I read through and organized what stood out immediately, as well as jotted memos while they were recently on my mind. I then categorized or added key words from the interview and coded them accordingly, repeating this process after listening and transcribing the interview again later. I followed this process for each interview.

In order to prepare my data for coding, I first examined my notes and memos from the actual interview, as well as listened to the audio recordings several times. During the re-listening and reading of the transcripts, I continued making memos of words, phrases, and my own connections in the margins of the printed interview. This process helped me to “open-code” the data quicker, as I was more familiar with it at that point. Open-coding “involves reading the data and developing your coding strategies” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107) using the information that seems most important. I attempted to not let my own bias or ideas guide the terms that stood out, but rather used an open mindset to code common themes or categories. After open-coding the data, I then used focused coding to look for similarities in codes, and also attempted to merge multiple codes into a greater theme.
While engaging in peer-coding, I asked a peer to review the words and phrases I noted based on my interviews. This colleague then created a list of terms that came to mind and I used that information to create more memos and a concept map to make connections in my data. The main concepts that came from this process included teaching strategies used by teachers, and the preparation that they received or lack thereof for instructing ELLs.

As the final step in the analysis of my qualitative data process, I used connecting strategies to bring memo data and categorization of codes together into a narrative summary of my research. When the data had been segmented and categorized, I used the memos, concept map, and coding of the transcript data to understand what it all means. The relationship among all pieces of data allowed me to get a larger idea of each interviewee’s experience in working with English Learners, as well as their prior experiences to prepare for such a position, but also created a larger picture- I connected all interviews into two broad concepts: teaching strategies that are most useful in supporting English Learners and how teachers can best prepare to be supported in their instruction with English Learners?

**Validity**

I am a classroom teacher and colleague of the participants in this study. This may have influenced data collection because I have had both professional and personal connections with the participants over the past several years. Another bias that may have influenced data collection is my own experience in working with English Learners. The school site where I am employed and performed my research is one with a high demographic of ELL students. I have had personal experience in professional development opportunities to support my students, of which include mostly ELLs, and thus my own experience may have an effect on how I perceive the data collected from participants. Reactivity is also important to consider because my role as a
co-worker to my participants influenced the environment in which I collected data. I worked closely with most of the teachers that volunteered to be a part of this study, and their answers to my questions may be considered vague without the interpretations that I made about the answers regarding their own teaching practices.

According to Maxwell (2013), eliminating researcher bias is nearly impossible, therefore the researcher should rather consider how their values and expectations may influence the conclusions of the study. My own experiences in the field of education and working with English Learners throughout the past five years positively influenced how I asked and engaged my participants about their own experiences. My relationships with my colleagues as participants allowed for a more personal understanding of their experiences during the interview process. I believe that the connection we had previously built allowed for my participants to trust me and share experiences that they may not have without the previously created foundation. This kind of participant/researcher relationship may offer more accurate and valid findings as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Qualitative data was collected through audio-recorded and transcribed interviews, as well as a short online survey. Each participant engaged in two 30-minute interviews, and completed the survey between each interview. Although the actual time spent interviewing and engaging with participants during the study was, on average, about an hour in time, my relationships with my colleagues have been developing over the course of a few years. This intensive, long-term involvement allowed me to understand my participants and their mannerisms more quickly and efficiently during the interview process. For example, I was not only listening to and engaging in what they shared with me regarding their teaching practices and experiences, but I had also had a previously built relationship and conversations about these topics during staff meetings, check-
ins with grade-level partners, as well as during informal conversations and interactions. These observations and conversations “can help rule out spurious associations and premature theories” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Throughout my long-term involvement and interviews, I collected rich data to provide valuable and detailed information from my participants. I wrote verbatim transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews, as well as detailed notes on my interpretation of those interviews in order to provide a clear conclusion from each participants’ point of view. I examined and analyzed all data in order to “provide a full and revealing picture of what’s going on” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Lastly, I used respondent validation to confirm with participants that my conclusions were portraying an accurate perception of their responses. This allowed me to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants shared and to ensure the correct perceptions of their interview responses (Maxwell, 2013).
Chapter 4: Findings

This study was designed to understand strategies and practices elementary teachers use to support their English Language Learning (ELL) students. This project also attempted to understand how teachers are prepared to successfully provide instruction to ELLs. Data was collected through interviewing six elementary school teachers whose specialties ranged from kindergarten to fifth grade. Each teacher participated in two interviews, which occurred roughly a week apart. The data analysis process revealed three major findings, the first two of which were expected. First, strategies and practices that teachers used during engagement and instruction with their English Learners ranged from use of a research-based program’s concrete tools, to more informal strategies. Some of these practices included the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) model and Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) model strategies, the use of chants and songs, and the incorporation of the students’ native language within the curriculum and classroom environment. Second, data was collected on teachers’ preparation, both prior to their teaching career, as well as ongoing professional growth opportunities specific to working with English learning students. In addition to pre-service preparation, teachers reported the need for better in-service preparation. A third unanticipated finding showed that teachers’ own personal and professional reflections greatly impacted their teaching practices, philosophies, and pedagogies. Teacher participants shared how their backgrounds and connections to English Learners affected their instructional decisions and practices, including ongoing building of relationships with the students and families.

Common Strategies For Teaching English Language Learners

The six teacher participants involved in this study shared a plethora of strategies and programs they use to engage with their English Language Learners on a daily basis. The
strategies described by teachers are used within a variety of subject areas and across grade levels. The most consistent and discussed program was the SEAL Model. According to the program website, “SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language) is a powerful English Learner-focused approach to education rooted at the intersection of research and educational equity,” (SEAL Overview, 2021). SEAL was described by all six participants as a primary program used to support ELLs. All kindergarten through third grade teachers received two years of SEAL training, beginning at the start of their employment since the school district adopted the model roughly seven years ago. Fourth and fifth grade teachers have just started their initial SEAL training this school year (2021-2022), after years of resistance. Dave believes that upper grade (fourth and fifth grade) teachers were hesitant to accept the SEAL model because they think it would take away from other learning instruction time (e.g., phonics instruction); however, now that he has begun the training, he sees that SEAL strategies are instead woven into daily content instruction, rather than taking up a large chunk of daily instructional time. Most teachers trained in SEAL reported needing “refreshers” of strategies learned during their initial training years; this was especially true for the seasoned teachers.

Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) is another program which three participants were trained in, prior to being introduced to SEAL. Similar to SEAL, “Project GLAD is a professional development training for teachers designed to deliver content in the most effective way, according to research” (Frequently Asked Questions). In regards to his Project GLAD experience, Dave shared,

When I was a brand new teacher, about eight years ago, I did do, like a full series of GLAD. So that was on English Learners. But you know, that's sort of like, what’s the word I'm looking for…GLAD is like old news.
Similarly, Susan and Jonathan compared the two programs (as they were trained in both) as being similar in strategy type, even down to the names of the specific strategies. Sarah is a newer teacher who was exposed to GLAD strategies during her preliminary credential and student teaching program. While she was not formally trained in GLAD, she admits that the strategies she learned are very similar to those of SEAL.

Both SEAL and GLAD were described by teachers as providing concrete tools and strategies to help engage with, and access English learning students in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. Of these programs, SEAL was described as clearer and more specific in addressing the needs of English Learners than GLAD, but the connections between both programs are similar strategies and training methods.

All participant teachers shared several instructional strategies developed by these program models, as well as methods not attached to a specific program, that support their content instruction, language acquisition instruction, and engagement for ELLs. Of the SEAL strategies, four participants named *Chants and Songs* as an important and engaging strategy designed to teach content matter. Kindergarten teacher Isabel shared,

I think just like, anytime they're moving or singing really helps them process and learn the new vocabulary and they can learn songs so quickly. And when we go through it and process it and do the words and movements, I think it really helps them understand the content.

Chants and songs were also found to be effective in fourth and fifth grade classrooms, with teachers stating that when a classroom community is strong, these strategies can be engaging and effective in content teaching as well- “They're liking the songs,” a fifth grade teacher shared-“I
have little rappers in the class, so it's been great. I like it. So far. It is a lot more work. But it's been very helpful.”

Another SEAL strategy that most teachers named is the *Draw and Label*. This strategy entails the teacher sketching or drawing a main image with labeled parts, using picture cards and vocabulary related to grade level science or social studies content. Four teachers described the Draw and Label as a great tool for students to use and reference throughout the length of a unit. A teacher that is new to SEAL and in her first year of training said,

We actually just did the Draw and Label, and [students] were able to put sticky notes and really see and visualize what they're going to be doing. We kind of all work together and they are more hands-on than it would be with the regular curriculum, before it was just like me doing the notes with them.

This kind of engagement from students is why ELLs can get more out of the content than the “regular curriculum,” as this teacher shares.

Of the dozens of strategies discussed, many of which are not written about in this chapter, teachers shared some not listed by a program, but rather, based on their teaching practice. All six educators shared how their use of a child’s native language supports learning. Some teachers explained that the SEAL model emphasizes the importance of honoring and accessing bilingualism at school and specifically in the classroom. Four participant teachers are fluent in Spanish—the majority language spoken by students at Sunshine School—yet all participants shared the value they place on the child’s home language. Utilizing students’ bilingual backgrounds, translating documents for families, counting in a child’s native language, and offering and reading books in that language are some of the ways that a student's culture, family, and linguistics are honored. According to teachers, this strategy engages students, builds
relationships with teachers and peers, promotes feelings of empowerment about themselves, and 
views their bilingualism as an asset and strength. Although participants in this study have 
experience working in multilingual environments, it is important to recognize that not all 
teachers, schools, or districts have this opportunity. Susan reflected on her own experience being 
bilingual and how it has helped her as an educator. She shared,

I strongly feel that most people should be bilingual. And that is the piece that has 
helped me the most with English language learners. Especially since most of the 
English language learners are, their home language is the language that I kind of, 
pretty much speak [Spanish]. And the reason for that is that it's easy for me to 
immediately, you know, make the connection vocabulary-wise and to compare 
and contrast grammatical things, because I know where they're coming from. So 
that makes a big difference…And I think that if somebody is not bilingual, it's 
harder to come up with those kinds of connections. So that's a big piece where I 
feel lucky…And I spent more time thinking about how I wish we were all 
bilingual. That's a whole societal change that we need to make. I mean, we need 
to be teaching a second language starting from first grade all the way through.

Susan articulated what many other participants touched upon as well. The importance of 
connecting native language to instruction is important to teachers regardless of the linguistic 
differences and diversity of their students.

Finally, a practice most teachers found important for supporting their ELLs is simply put-
peer modeling. Peer modeling is exactly what it sounds like-classmates of English Learners 
whose native language is English can provide examples for ELLs to hear and practice speaking. 
When students collaborate on tasks, play games, or share conversation, they are also learning
syntax, word and sentence structure, and practicing their English language development in an authentic and relaxed environment. Teachers guide these interactions by providing opportunities for students. For example, Elena and Sarah shared that they strategically place students physically in desks or at tables by language skills. These intentional arrangements are made so students practicing English acquisition skills have exposure to the language being learned, the same language being spoken by peers in the physical vicinity. Jonathan shared that if EL students were to play among themselves using “broken English,” that cycle would continue of hearing and speaking incorrect English repeatedly, but if an English speaking child were present to correct a word, or use a sentence with correct grammar or sentence structure, that example is likely to be automatically received and heard by an English Learner. Teachers model these opportunities in their regular instruction, but also in isolated conversational opportunities.

When someone says something that, you know, needs to be corrected, that is grammatically incorrect, I will not correct them straight out. But I will repeat what they said. I'll repeat the correct grammar in my answer, or in my clarification of what they're asking. So it doesn't feel like a correction, but they hear it's not, you know, overt, but it is intentional.

Susan shared a frequent learning moment she provides her EL students. These interactions by both peers and teachers of English Learners are one way to learn the target language. Isabel reflected on a pivotal moment in her own academic and personal life- “I think also just being an English language learner myself, helps me remember how hard it can be for them and how confusing it is and how overwhelming it is.” She shared that one of the best ways for her to learn was when she was exposed to native English speakers in her elementary school, listening to her peers, trying, and eventually talking with them. This strategic practice can be implemented in
any classroom or school with both English speakers and English Learners. Teachers can pair students purposefully, or can engage with “buddy classrooms” to provide these experiences as well.

One way teachers support students in learning is to provide authentic, meaningful, and enriching learning experiences for all students, and to address the individual needs of each learner. The above strategies are some of the ways educators provide those opportunities for English learners and native English speaking students alike.

**How Teachers Prepare to Work with English Learning Students**

Teacher preparation programs vary based on grade level and subject matter, but for elementary teachers, this preparation may include seeking a bachelor's degree and/or a Preliminary Multiple Subject teaching credential program, which includes completing a student teaching experience. After teachers are hired to a district, there are professional development (PD) meetings and training that also vary by school district, and sometimes even by school sites. These PDs are offered before, during, and sometimes at the end of the school year and are mandatory for teachers to complete required hours as per their contract with the district. In interviewing the six teacher participants, I found that both pre-service (credentialing programs and training), as well as in-service (professional development training) experiences are inconsistent. All teachers provided suggestions for improvement in this area.

**Inconsistent Credentialing and Pre-Service Teacher Preparation Programs**

Participants’ credentialing program experiences were diverse, depending on factors including the college or university they attended, how long ago they were in the program, and whether the program was geared towards a bilingual authorization. Most teachers received at least one course specific to supporting English Learners, and some teachers received more if they
were in a bilingual authorization program. Although some teachers reported having some exposure to strategies to use with EL students, the courses did not place as much value on English Learners, and some teachers were disappointed in the content of the courses. More seasoned teachers had less opportunities to engage in English Learner specific curriculum. For example, two teachers who have been teaching for close to ten years, shared that there was not a specific course during their credentialing program that focused on supporting English Language Learners. However, within other courses, teachers were introduced to strategies for supporting these students. Susan reflected on her Math instruction course—“learning about how to teach math, the fact that we have manipulatives, I mean, it was brought up that manipulatives can help English language learners.” She then goes on to say that using manipulatives as a math support helps all students, not only English learners, and that there was no specific class that focused on ELs or strategies that helped them specifically.

Most teachers reflected that the most beneficial and practical aspect of their pre-service experience was student teaching in a classroom with English Learners. Having hands-on, authentic practice and observing mentor teachers model instruction with ELs was one of the best ways to prepare themselves for their own teaching career. Running small group activities, practicing instructional strategies, and engaging in hands-on experiences with the support of a mentor teacher was the most effective training they received.

An unanticipated, but common theme that arose from participants’ reflections was what would have been helpful while in a pre-service program. Participants were eager to share how training could be improved, with regards to supporting English Learners. Some teachers suggested that teacher credentialing programs require a course on English Learners, just as they do with Special Education. Within this course, teachers agreed that having a better understanding
of second language acquisition and development is an essential part of understanding the needs
of their EL students. Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers are experiencing differing levels
of English language development, and report that a basic timeline of that development would be
a key component of such a required course. Every child has their own individual learning and
language needs, but teachers find it helpful to have a basic timeline progression to know what
those needs are and how teachers can further support them. Isabel, thankful for her three-course
requirement on working with English Learners, shared a crucial take away from her coursework:

   There's so much research to show it takes at least three years just for [students] to
   be able to [orally] communicate, and for it to take like seven years to actually
   apply it academically. So I feel like it's really important for teachers and also
   admin to understand that it takes a long time. Doesn't just come like that.

Where Isabel shared the above experience regarding language development of ELs, Susan would
have liked “more in-depth theoretical learning about how the brain learns to read and
speak…developmentally by age.”

   Along with the theory of language development, teachers said they would benefit from
using theory in more hands-on ways. Real-life application of strategies provides teachers
experience with ELs. One example of hands-on training includes observations of grade level
teachers modeling instruction using SEAL, GLAD, or other research-based strategies proven to
be beneficial in instructing English Learners. As student teachers, using those demonstrations
and applying them in their own instruction with the support and feedback of the mentor teacher
would have been beneficial to add to their teaching practices “toolkit” prior to receiving their
own class of students.
The idea of a “toolkit” also stood out during a few participant reflections. About half of teachers found it would have been helpful as a new teacher to have a manual or “toolkit” of strategies, mini lesson ideas, and small group activities that spanned grade levels, as well as an English language development level. This handbook could include best practices or even SEAL and GLAD strategies that support English Learners.

**School District Support for EL Language Development**

According to the California Department of Education, the school district that Sunshine Elementary is part of, serves 4,415 students in grades Preschool-12th grade. Of these students, 2,099 of them were English Learners during the 2020-2021 school year (California Department of Education Data Reporting Office). Sunshine Elementary consists of 618 students, where 362 (59%) are ELs. This data is important to remember as teachers reflect on what resources and support are provided to teachers by the district. Every teacher participant shared about their training and use of the SEAL model, even the fourth and fifth grade teachers who only started their training mere months ago. Some teachers also reflected on the GLAD training the district provided many years ago, before the adoption of SEAL. To reiterate, the SEAL training begins as a two-year implementation process in which teachers attend training throughout the school year. At these gatherings, teachers are introduced to the strategies and often participate in demonstrations of the strategies. After the two-year training, there are Unit Development Days in which teachers collaborate with other teachers, but these days are not offered as consistently as teachers would like. Some professional development that teachers were required to attend were Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop (Lucy Calkins Curriculum), math curriculum training, and PD that “is geared toward low performing students, but not ELs,” one participant shared. Other helpful tools given by the district or school site include opportunities to watch a demonstration...
lesson of another teacher, a coach, or a trained facilitator. For example, SEAL and Writer’s Workshop training both included a program facilitator to model a lesson or strategy with real students. This has been viewed as a very effective use of time for teachers and all participants shared that they would like more of these opportunities.

The discussion about professional development opportunities for these six teachers led to conversations about what they want and need more of to continue providing the most effective learning opportunities for their ELs. The suggestions that follow include changes around training and meetings, better allocation of resources, and other considerations to account for while considering the needs of nearly half of the students attending school in this district.

Teachers are required to participate in PD a few times throughout each school year. The teachers involved in this study shared their thoughts about what the school district can do to improve the quality of these trainings and meetings to better support their English learning students. Half of teachers want the district to provide SEAL strategy refreshers. This includes receiving an overview of strategies, as well as a demonstration of how to use or modify these strategies based on different grade levels. Currently, the district does something similar, but not in a quick, “short-and-sweet” fashion. Meaningful professional development should be geared towards supporting English Learners and should assess the different needs at school sites and offer training opportunities based on those needs.

The equitable allocation of resources within the district was a frequent topic of frustration reported by every teacher participant. Teachers need support with materials and curriculum that is helpful, not making their jobs more difficult. Participants said it was the district’s responsibility to research, pilot, and invest in programs and curriculum that supports all students, not just native English speakers. When there is a new or updated curriculum, teachers want to be
properly trained and given ample suggestions for implementation and opportunities to practice that implementation. Teacher participants also shared that learning materials should contain bilingual resources, and most of these teachers requested bilingual books, not just for bilingual classes and not just in Spanish. All teachers suggested that weekly meeting time should be designed to support the preparation of teachers in their lesson planning. This means offering teacher-directed preparation time, as well as collaboration time with grade-level colleagues. Teacher participants talked about how these planning opportunities should also be provided equitably, and with credentialed teachers (P.E. teacher, music teacher, etc.). Dave shared, “I’m talking like simple stuff, like having credentialed specials at every site really does improve student performance, which improves the ELs’ ability.” This is not a new idea; Teachers involved in this study shared their anger and frustration regarding the inequities in the district for many years- “If qualified, credentialed, even graduate- and doctorate-level teachers can see these simple, yet effective changes that can be made to see a valuable impact in student learning, how can the administrative leaders not?” one teacher left the conversation with.

Other considerations that a school district might consider, according to the teachers participating in this study, start from the very beginning- the hiring of teachers and staff. Three teachers suggested providing training for new staff about the demographics of the student population. This, as well as a previously mentioned “manual” of strategies, especially for teachers new to the field, would be useful for not only the teacher, but for their students and families to better understand their child’s learning progression.

Ongoing and consistent observations of each other (seasoned and new teachers) were offered by most teachers in an effort to advance practices and strategies within the school site. This could be accomplished by supplying a substitute teacher, or even a school administrator, to
cover teachers’ classes for short periods of time. Many teachers would be grateful to learn from each other, they admitted.

Of the pre-service education and experience and in-service professional development opportunities that teachers discussed, it was clear that participants felt improvements across preparation were the most important. Although some universities and school districts provide meaningful and valuable opportunities for teachers, most teacher participants did not feel supported enough to fully engage with their English Learners.

**Teachers’ Reflections Influence their Work with ELLs**

Generally speaking, teachers are naturally reflective; they think about how a lesson goes and what they need to modify or do differently next time. As a result of this reflective process, teachers may change practices to best meet the needs of their students. The teachers involved in this study considered their experiences as impacting their current practice. In fact, some teachers say that the reason they became a teacher is because of positive experiences in their own education and that they want to “pay it forward” in a way. This reflection piece is often brought up by an outsider, which, in this case, surfaced during the interviews with teacher participants. An unintended turn during individual interviews, but one that felt compelling to describe is that of the personal reflections and experiences that teachers shared.

A significant life circumstance that one participant shared was that she was an English Learner while in elementary school. After immigrating to the United States from Latin America as a seven-year-old, she was pulled out from her general education class to learn vocabulary and receive English language development support. Referencing the time being “pulled out” of the classroom, she shared, “maybe it did teach me some vocabulary, but it wasn't as helpful as just being in the classroom and just hearing it and having like, a chance to practice it with my peers.”
This “strategy” was discussed previously as a tool that teachers use to support their ELs, and this experience from a teacher is an example of this. Furthermore, this teacher explained that her pullout classes ended in third grade, but she did not feel confident in her English fluency until the end of elementary school—“I was also an English language learner so I think it helps me, I don’t know, like, I feel really strongly about English language learners,” is a reflective quote highlighted to show how teachers bring their experiences into the classroom, into their teaching practices and philosophies.

Teachers’ bilingualism played an important role when reflecting on their work with students that are also bilingual. Over half of the teachers from this study are fluent in both Spanish and English and the few others know, or are learning, the language. Bilingual teachers find this helpful for connecting academic content and English language support for their students. This strength of bilingualism makes for a strong connection with students. The few teachers that are not fully bilingual made the point to translate materials and content where possible. Some teachers reported having trouble connecting to students’ background and experiences, but use these challenges to improve their teaching practices. All of the teachers used their experience, personal or from working with bilingual students, to advance their instructional practices and strategies for engaging their English Learners.

Finally, a key aspect of teachers’ personal experiences that supports and improves the quality of their teaching is around relationships. Building meaningful relationships with both students and families was identified by teachers as an important part of academic, social, emotional, and language improvements. Susan shared that relationships with her students’ families are important to her for many reasons, including building trust with them. She often hears from parents of English Learners that they want to push an English-only mindset onto their
children, but she encourages her families to understand the asset that bilingualism holds and that there is value in keeping their native language strong in their home setting. Susan supports this claim with:

I think educating the parents about that home language is really important.

Because you know, you've come as an immigrant to a new country, and you want to assimilate and you want your children to have, you know, the best possibilities and opportunities. And a parent will feel that, you know, ‘go English, go English, go English.’ And yes, but don't lose your home language. Because really the advantage is they have two or more languages.

Susan, and most of the other teachers, shared that they feel lucky if they speak the same language as some parents and students. She imagines that it would be difficult for teachers who have trouble connecting linguistically with parents and having a barrier, which other teachers that have that experience can attest to.

Building relationships and communication “is key in connecting with students,” as Elena says. When student interest is valued by the teacher, and when students are understood on a personal level, they want to succeed for their teachers, but also for themselves. Teachers can learn much from students by connecting with them, talking, having lunch together, and holding circle time conversations. These are some examples that teachers gave that directly connect their students’ academic, social, and emotional success and achievement. Teachers also shared how important it is to individualize instruction to meet the needs of their students. Most teacher participants talked about having high expectations for students, especially English Learners. Three teachers agreed that if they don’t, students won’t have high expectations for themselves so
teachers need to give them the opportunities to prove their accomplishments to themselves as well as their educators.

Teachers’ reflections as influencing their work with ELs was an unexpected theme for this project. This became an apparent concept during the second of the two interviews conducted. Some teachers shared, “after our first interview…” and then proceeded to share a thought, reflection, or question that they discovered after the first set of questions and conversations ended. This piece of the study was analyzed to be important to understand how teachers’ experiences, such as being an English Learner, being bilingual, and building relationships with students directly improved teaching practices that support students learning English as a second language.

**Conclusion**

Findings from this research indicate there are many strategies teachers use during instruction to engage and instruct English Learners academically, linguistically, socially, and emotionally. Findings also show that teachers’ credentialing and professional development opportunities are not consistent in providing adequate preparation in regards to supporting English learning students. The data shows that teachers have received some support, but using limited tools and strategies, and these teachers would like to see improvements and changes to curriculum and training designed specifically for supporting English Learners. Finally, the design and implementation of this study allowed for teachers to reflect on the interview process and questions between each of the two interviews and allowed for unanticipated findings (i.e., how teachers relate their own personal experiences to how they interact with and engage English Learners).
The first research question was, *What instructional strategies do elementary teachers use/rely on to support their English learning students?* The results from this study show several specific strategies used to engage ELLs in both content instruction, as well as English language development. Some of these strategies are part of SEAL and/or GLAD models, and others were teaching practices not housed within a specific program. Strategies were used across subject areas, grade levels, and during both instructional and non-instructional circumstances.

The second research question, *How do elementary education teachers feel they have prepared (or not) in order to instruct English learning students?*, explored teachers’ educational experiences during their credentialing programs, which included student teaching. This question also considered the ongoing training provided by the school district to continue supporting teachers in working with English Learners. The study highlighted inconsistencies in both of these areas of teacher preparation, and teachers offered suggestions for improvement to address these inconsistencies.

This study examined a final research question, *How do the personal experiences of teachers affect and influence their teaching practices and beliefs regarding English learning students?* After considering the methodology of this study, it was clear that teachers naturally reflected on the questions and content of the first interview, which allowed space for teachers to share insights during the second, follow-up interview. This study prompted teachers to consider their experiences with English Learners and how those reflections impact the instruction and support they provide students.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This research study aimed to analyze the strategies and practices used by elementary teachers to support the language development of their students learning English as a second language. It also identified ways that these teachers had been prepared to engage and instruct these learners in their pre-service programs and in-service training opportunities. Findings from this research have shown that teachers use a variety of strategies to instruct their ELs, specifically in English instruction, but also in academic, social, and emotional areas of learning. The data also pointed to a desire from teachers for more training, preparation, and ongoing support for working with this population of learners.

Both the literature review and research findings identified strategies and programs that teachers use to support ELs in their classrooms. SEAL and GLAD programs have both been found to be useful in the instruction of all learners, but especially English Learners. A previous study indicated that after receiving SEAL training, teachers showed an increase in understanding regarding the needs of their English Learners, as well as better knowledge of how to address the needs of those learners (Hurwitz & Olsen, 2018). Similarly, all six teacher participants in this study mentioned the beneficial outcomes that were received from their SEAL training. They named certain SEAL strategies as necessary in their instruction of ELs. Although the literature included studies using different strategy types, it should be noted that receiving training in certain programs or instructional practices is essential to teachers’ academic and English instruction.

Another important similarity between the academic literature and research findings is the impact of teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development training for teachers. The desire for more or better training has been a constant in previous studies, as well as
Experience in working with English Learners during pre-service programs has been found to be one of the most effective ways to support teachers in their instruction with ELs. Those that received some training or coursework pertaining to English Learners still yearn for higher quality experiences and ongoing training. Not only should these experiences be provided during pre-service education and training, but also during in-service professional development (PD) opportunities made available by a school and/or district. The literature suggests that when PD is offered, teachers show improvements in various teaching areas (Piazza et. al., 2020). This may seem obvious, however, teachers believe that sufficient training and ongoing learning opportunities are often cut short, or not offered at all. More consistent and authentic opportunities should be given to teachers in credentialing programs, and continued during their teaching careers to accommodate diverse and changing student demographics.

The final significant similarity found in both the literature and this research is the importance of building relationships with students, especially English Learners and their families. In order to provide equitable learning opportunities for these students, teachers should have an understanding of the diversity in English Learners’ backgrounds (linguistic, ethnic, and socio-economic) (Rancy-Roney, 2008). Not only is the connection between teacher and students meaningful, but connecting with families is essential as well because it allows parents and other family members to connect to what their child is learning at school. Parents have clear communication with their child’s teacher and can invite them to engage with and in the classroom and school community.

**Implications for the Literature**

The literature review revealed that instructional strategies and practices do support the language development of students learning English as a second language. SEAL and GLAD
trainings were found to provide teachers in both previous research as well as the research in this study, to be useful and effective in EL academic and language development progress.

The preparation, ongoing professional development, and personal experiences of teachers has been limited in previous research; these are essential considerations for providing better support and training for educators. After interviewing six elementary teachers about their experiences, I found that the current literature lacks data regarding pre-service and ongoing training for teachers, as well as teachers’ personal perceptions about improvements that can be made to these areas of preparation regarding English Learners. This project aimed to fill this gap through researching and analyzing teacher participants’ experiences and reflections about the instructional practices used to support their EL students. It successfully brought attention to the areas that teachers need support with and in which they would like to see improvements. These areas include, but are not limited to, university and educational institutions, local school districts and schools, and state departments of education.

Teachers participating in this research revealed that the importance of building relationships with students and families is essential to providing equitable education to their students. This was found to be true for teacher participants from previous studies as well, however, the research from the literature review specifically used Restorative Practices (RP) as a means of connecting community and relationships to the classroom environment and culture. Although Restorative Practices weren’t found to be used by teachers in this study, they did share emphasis of building meaningful relationships with students, which is a key component of RP.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

Classroom teachers can most directly impact the educational outcomes for students, and especially for English Learners. Teachers can find useful strategies and programs noted in this
study to use in their classroom for teaching content and language acquisition. Although this study focuses on grades kindergarten through fifth grade, the strategies noted by participants span more than just elementary-aged students and should be used to accommodate students with different learning modalities, in addition to ELLs and native English speaking students. Teachers should also be aware of the effect that building relationships has on children and their learning. The participants in this study explained that connections built with students and families create meaningful and authentic parallels between school and home. The findings of this study should encourage teachers to advocate for all demographics of students, regardless of who is in their own classrooms. Building resources, changing local policy, or adding district-provided professional development opportunities likely will not happen on their own; It is up to the educators to advocate for what they need to be successful instructors and to provide equitable learning experiences for their students.

An unexpected finding this project revealed was the abundance of suggestions and improvements given by teacher participants in regards to what can be done to better educate teachers within credentialing programs, as well as distinct initiatives to provide ongoing support. Teachers were also reflective with respect to the interview structure and questions. After engaging in the first set of questions, participants had a few days before the second interview, during which each participant shared a reflection on their own teaching practices or experiences concerning English learning students. I believe these unanticipated findings are significant to this research because it shows that classroom teachers are a key part of making improvements to curriculum, credential programs, district-led training, and more. Without these indispensable stakeholders reflecting and sharing the needs of their young learners, positive change may be unattainable.
Teacher credentialing programs and universities that prepare candidates for teaching careers should offer courses to support pre-service teachers. Teacher participants from this study either shared how applicable the course content surrounding English Learners was (if offered), or how desperately they needed something like it during their credentialing program. Course offerings and learning opportunities should represent demographics of the current student population, and should continue to evolve with the changes within policy, research, and practices. Schools that provide coursework designed to support English Learners should be actively re-evaluated for effectiveness, and those that do not yet offer any would benefit from providing theoretical learning about the stages of language development, as well as authentic hands-on student teaching experiences. Greater exposure to working with EL students during pre-service programs equates to more knowledge and preparation for teachers who are engaging with and instructing students during in-service teaching.

Without making changes to institutions, coursework, and professional development, inequities persist and hold English Learners back from their full potential. These historically disadvantaged students deserve educational equity in order to see significant long-term results (Mavrogordato & White, 2020). Some collegiate programs and universities seem to already be providing coursework to support future teachers, as reported through the experiences of teacher participants in this study. Some ways that teachers felt supported by their pre-service programs involved theoretical learning about English Learners’ linguistic development, introduction to strategies that support ELLs, and most importantly, hands-on learning opportunities with English Learners in a student teaching environment. Programs that are not providing these opportunities to their teacher candidates are not only failing the teachers, but future students as well. By changing required coursework, teacher preparation programs can better prepare teachers for not
only instruction in a classroom, but also in obtaining a teaching placement, because they will be better equipped to work with diverse learners.

School districts can be more aware of the professional development opportunities and training offered to teachers and staff to support instruction for English Learners. Schools and districts also have an opportunity to hire teachers that share the importance of working with English Learners and their knowledge about supporting these students. If districts value the learning experiences (and test scores) of their students, the prioritization of PD and training for teachers is clear: teachers and staff need to have access to sufficient resources for ELLs, which impact the learning growth of all students.

This study contributed to the promotion of social justice by emphasizing the importance of educational equity in regards to providing children what they need to be successful. Rather than providing all students with the same learning experiences, teachers use various strategies to promote equitable and engaging instruction for their students. Children are constantly learning from each other and should be involved in a classroom and school community where they feel valued. An emphasis in diversity, equity and inclusion in classrooms is crucial for fostering a love of learning and an interest in engaging and relatable curriculum. By honoring a students’ primary language is part of honoring who they are, which is essential for creating inclusive and welcoming environments. Students should see themselves represented in classroom curriculum, have languages respected, and feel celebrated as a starting place for a more globally understanding community and society.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

A major limitation to this study was the amount of time allotted for collecting and analyzing data. The interviewing process was completed over a two-week span in order to
accommodate coding and analysis of the responses. Future research would benefit from spending more time interviewing participants on the effectiveness of different strategies and experiences in supporting English Learners. This research did not allow for much time exploring the efficacy of credentialing programs; however, understanding pre-service preparation that teachers receive in regards to English Learners and/or what would be necessary to improve would be an imperative additional piece of research to explore.

In addition to time itself, another limitation was the sample size of participants. The interviews were conducted at one school site where the students attending the school are mostly native Spanish speaking students. All six teacher participants teach a high percentage of English Learners, which allows for ample information and experience in teaching this particular group of students. A future research direction may include choosing a variety of school sites with student demographics that are different from Sunshine School. The difference in student demographics may provide more diverse strategy examples and personal experience in working with English Learners.

Six teacher participants from varying grade levels were interviewed for this research project, which was helpful in understanding differences and commonalities in instructional strategy use, but only interviewing teachers limited my research because there are many other stakeholders that have experience with English Learners. Further research should include the perspectives of administrators, district-level personnel, and students - specifically those who are or have been English Learners - regarding their experiences in education.

A limitation that I had not considered prior to the design of my data collection was that of the method in which information was collected. Participants completed two oral interviews that occurred about a week apart, which provided ample details about English Learners. However, if
doing future research specifically targeting the suggestions for district and school site improvements, it would be beneficial to provide an anonymous survey with questions that may allow participants to feel more comfortable providing honest feedback without fear of administrators knowing what was shared.

My own bias and positionality affected my findings because I am a White female teacher with knowledge, understanding, and curiosity about students learning English as a second language. I do not personally have experience in second language learning, except as an adult, and I cannot relate to the experiences of EL students, or to the teacher participants that were English Learners. My personal feelings and beliefs regarding the need for equitable education of English Learners comes from my experiences working directly with them for the past five years. I also traveled to countries where I experienced that I was a minority that did not know the language being spoken around me. That experience allowed me to reflect on how students and families may feel within the local and school community. Lastly, the rapport that I have with the six teacher participants may have influenced the answers they gave or did not give. My own bias as a teacher may have affected how I understood or analyzed the way questions were answered.

**Conclusion**

As the rates of English learning students continue to grow in California public schools, educators need to be properly equipped with resources and prepared to provide effective instruction in both English language development, as well as grade-level academic content. The research outlined in this thesis demonstrates what supports need to be in place for teachers to feel successful in accommodating their students, those learning English as a second language included. Not only do teachers need to be given proper and adequate training prior to beginning their teaching career, but they need to continue to be supported by administrators and school
districts that are responsible for providing this education to students as well. With the aim of
calling on teachers, administrators, district personnel, state officials, as well as credentialing
programs and universities, this research is meant to serve as awareness of the impact of
meaningful preparation aimed at supporting current students and future leaders of society.

In designing this project, it was my hope to extend this opportunity beyond my own four
classroom walls to a greater community of teachers, administrators, and others interested in
supporting the future of our society. As the importance of valuing diversity in linguistics,
cultures, abilities, and other personal background characteristics becomes more pertinent, it is
imperative that English Learners receive the quality education they deserve. The more prepared
and supported teachers are, the better education they can provide for their students. This support
should begin in undergraduate programs, continue through teaching credential programs, and
extend to district PD and training. Teachers are essential to students’ academic, language, social
and emotional growth.

The research outlined in this thesis demonstrates what teachers already do with limited
support, how much they care for their students, and what they are willing to do more of to
improve. In an attempt to explore outside of my own teaching practices, what my colleagues do
for their students, and to learn more for myself along the way, I found that other teachers are
looking for the same tools I had been. During this process, I learned alongside my participants
about how we can support each other, and therefore our students, who are learning in English as
well as in their native language—an asset I admire.

While conducting this research as a second-grade teacher, it was impossible to reflect
about my own teaching practices and consider how they could be improved to support my
English Learning students. Teaching students that differ in culture, language, learning styles,
ability levels, and in many other ways over the past five years, has inspired me to improve my own practices, personal life, and advocate for equitable education for all students, specifically English Learners. I remain optimistic that teachers, administrators, credentialing faculty, and local education leaders will actively work to use the information in this thesis to better the educational experiences of English Learners.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Questions
Interview 1:

1. How long have you been an educator?
2. What grade do you currently teach? Have you taught any other grades?
3. What is your experience working with students who are learning English as a second language; and how many English learners do you currently have?
4. What do you do to support your English language learning students…this can be strategies, experiences, anything that you think is important for their academic learning?
5. During your credentialing courses and/or students teaching, did you receive any courses or training specifically in regards to supporting English learners?
6. What in-service and/or professional development opportunities have you been provided since becoming a teacher? (within your current or past school districts)
7. Do you think any training, preparation, or support would have been helpful for you prior to beginning your teaching career? During/ongoing?

Interview 2:

1. In your survey, you shared _______________________________________________________. Can you elaborate more on this?
2. Why do you feel this is effective in supporting ELLs with English language development skills?
3. Are there any other strategies or things that you do that you’d like noted in this research?
4. Is there anything that you’d like readers of this research about English learners to know?
5. [from first interview] Do you think any training, preparation, or support would have been helpful for you prior to beginning your teaching career? During/ongoing?
Appendix B: Google Form Survey Questions
Staff English Learner Survey Questions:

1. What is your name?

2. What grade do you teach?

3. How long have you been an educator? (Choose one)
   a. 0-2 years
   b. 3-5 years
   c. 6-10 years
   d. 11-20 years
   e. More than 20 years

4. One a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all prepared and 10 being that you could mentor others with English Learners), how comfortable do you feel instructing English Learners on a daily basis?

5. Name one strategy or practice that you rely on for engaging and instructing ELLs daily in your classroom? Why do you believe it is effective?

6. Is there anything else you’d like to add or come back to during our second interview?
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form
1. I understand that I am being asked to participate as a participant in a research study designed to study teacher preparedness and experience in supporting academic and language achievement for English learners. This research is part of Jordan Whitman’s Master’s Thesis research project at Dominican University of California, California. This research project is being supervised by Dr. Katie Lewis, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Dominican University of California.

2. I understand that my participation in this research will involve taking part in two 30-minute interviews, which will include questions about my credentialing experience, in-service professional development, and teaching strategies used in my classroom.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

4. I have been made aware that the interviews will be audio recorded. All personal references and identifying information will be eliminated when these recordings are transcribed, and all participants will be identified by pseudonym; the master list for these pseudonyms will be kept by Jordan Whitman in a password-protected device. Coded transcripts will be seen only by the researcher and her faculty advisors. One year after the completion of the research, all written and recorded materials will be destroyed.

5. I am aware that all study participants will be provided with a written summary of the relevant findings and conclusions of this project. Such results will not be available until May 15, 2022.

6. I understand that I will be discussing topics of a personal nature and that I may refuse to answer any question that causes me distress or seems an invasion of my privacy. I may elect to stop the interview at any time.

7. I understand that my participation involves no physical risk, but may involve some personal feelings about my own teaching practices and experiences, given the nature of the topic being addressed during the interviews. If I experience any problems or serious distress due to my participation, Jordan Whitman will provide contact information for counseling services.

8. I understand that if I have any further questions about the study, I may contact Jordan Whitman at jordan.whitman@students.dominican.edu or her research supervisor, Dr. Lewis, at katherine.lewis@dominican.edu. If I have further questions or comments about participation in this study, I may contact the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHP Office by calling (415) 482-3547 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 257-0165, or by writing to the IRBPHP, Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dominican University of California, 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, CA 94901.

9. All procedures related to this research project have been satisfactorily explained to me prior to my voluntary election to participate.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND ALL OF THE ABOVE EXPLANATION REGARDING THIS STUDY. I VOLUNTARILY GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE. A COPY OF THIS FORM HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME FOR MY FUTURE REFERENCE.

________________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature                                           Date